

June 10/91

EVENING SITTING

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 70

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lane that Bill No. 70 -- An Act respecting a right of access to documents of the Government of Saskatchewan and a right of privacy with respect to personal information held by the Government of Saskatchewan be now read a second time.

Mr. Pringle: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on this Bill 70, this freedom of information Bill so called, I would like to spend a few minutes talking about the PC (Progressive Conservative) government's nine-year record with regard to secretive and closed government. And secondly I'll then talk more specifically and in some more detail about the actual Bill.

It's important that I just briefly talk for a few minutes about the nine-year record of a secret government because the way this Bill is drafted and the flaws in this Bill and the shortcomings are such that nothing is really going to change in terms of how the government opposite operates. They're going to continue to operate in a secretive, closed manner because, as I will point out, the Bill deals mainly with exemptions to information that does not need to be shared rather than new information that should be shared.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier has often talked, when it's convenient -- it's been in throne speeches and budget speeches and what not -- about the need to take partisan politics out of this place; the Premier said that many times. Mr. Speaker, he talks about wanting to work more closely with the opposition. We have released two reports on democratic reforms in the 1990s, both of them dealing with freedom of information. In fact we've gone beyond that; we've even introduced a Bill last June, a freedom of information Bill which was on the order paper which also had the support of groups such as the federation of independent business, the Saskatchewan association of taxpayers, and many other organizations.

And some 6,000 copies of that report have gone out, and that democratic reform paper and that Bill, Mr. Speaker, would have continued with the successful tradition that the Saskatchewan governments prior to 1982 have had in terms of good democratic reforms and good democratic government. And, Mr. Speaker, democratic government, open and accountable, an accessible government, is in the interests of all Saskatchewan citizens. So the Premier could have approached us and he wouldn't have had a Bill that was so badly botched as the one that we've got before us today.

Mr. Speaker, this record I talk about in terms of this nine-year record of

secret and closed government, I think it would be fair to say that the PC Government of Saskatchewan has probably over the last nine years been the most secretive government ever -- I would certainly say in the history of Saskatchewan and maybe in the history of all of the provinces in Canada. The only government that comes close might be the current federal government in Ottawa. But this is a very secretive government.

This government is known for a number of other things. It's known for rampant patronage, big corporate friends. It's known for incredible waste and mismanagement which has been pointed out by the auditor on a number of occasions, and as well recognized by the business community to the point where there are hundreds of millions of dollars of waste by this government every year. And that's not stretching it; that's well-known in the minds of the Saskatchewan public.

And I hear tonight on the news that this Premier, after 10 straight deficit budgets, is now talking about the possibility of budget deficit legislation. And I find that amazing that this person who is responsible for 10 in a row somehow has finally come to the realization that the public of Saskatchewan wants their governments to live within their means, Mr. Speaker.

So this government's well-known for its waste and it's well-known for its incompetence. It's just incredible the mismanagement that's occurred in this province. And this is the only province -- again this speaks to the secrecy which this Bill is supposedly designed to counteract -- but this is the only province that I'm aware of where the auditor has written a special report, a special report talking about how his office cannot get access to important government information that he has a right to see by law. Therefore he's unable to do his job, and he says that the Government of Saskatchewan breaks its own laws by not providing information that he needs. And that's the frustration that we in the opposition have had in trying to get information and in trying to hold this government accountable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, citizens have a right to meaningful information about the records, the policies and practices of their government. That is their right. They also have a right to know about information that their government has about them and how that information is being used. And I would suspect that the minister responsible for this Bill would agree that citizens have that right. But the reality is in Saskatchewan, that right has been denied. Over the last nine years, the public of Saskatchewan has been denied basic and important information that the public has had a right to know, and they've been denied that by this PC government, Mr. Speaker.

They've even gone to the point, Mr. Speaker, of, as you know, of last week locking the doors to keep people out. Not only are they not sharing information, they're locking doors to keep the public of Saskatchewan out of this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: -- Order. I would ask the member to keep his comments

on the Bill that's before the Assembly. Order.

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, what I was attempting to say, Mr. Speaker . . . perhaps I didn't make myself very clear. I was attempting to say that this government over the last nine years has been so secretive and closed that it's been a major concern not . . . to not only the public of Saskatchewan but also to the Provincial Auditor. And then I tried to say that not only are they opposed to providing important information to the public, they even locked the doors so that the public can't have access . . .

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: -- I don't find that . . . I don't find that . . . Order. I don't find that relevant to this debate and I'd ask the member to refrain from that.

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, I will certainly respect your ruling; I certainly do respect the Chair. What I am very concerned about, and what these citizens of Saskatchewan are very concerned about, Mr. Speaker, is that this has been the most intolerant government in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: -- Citizens have a right to government information and they have a right to have access to their MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and they have that right to have access to this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and this building. This belongs to the people of Saskatchewan, and I'm saying that no government, no government, can lock people out of this building.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: -- I've asked the member twice -- this is the third time now -- to keep his comments relevant to the Bill. I will . . . if the member persists, I will take the next speaker. The member for Saskatoon Eastview.

Is the member for Saskatoon Nutana challenging the Chair?

Put it on the order paper. Put it on the record. Rise and put it on the record.

Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you're saying that the member . . .

The Deputy Speaker: -- Does the member have a point of order? Order, order. The Speaker's rulings are not challengeable.

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, I'll just quickly summarize and I'll respect

your ruling and I'll move on to my next point.

Mr. Speaker, over the last nine years, over the last nine years this government has run a closed and secretive government, and I will point out in what areas I'm referring to when I make that statement.

This government has been characterized by a lack of accountability. This government has not shared important information; they have not involved the public in decision making, and there are many examples of that -- the ward system being one, but there are many other examples I'll refer to.

This government is intolerant of those who disagree with it. This government is vindictive to . . . they're intolerant to their employees. They come here to talk to the Minister of the Family, who also happens to be the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission; they can't get a meeting with him, Mr. Speaker; that's a matter of public record. And, Mr. Speaker, that boils down to a government that is downright arrogant, and that was confirmed last week by the poll.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, five years ago we saw this Premier -- this PC Premier and this government -- five years ago saying, look, we're sorry; we're listening; we're going to be responding to your concerns. We've learned our lesson; we'll be most responsive; we'll be more open.

They promised freedom of information, Mr. Speaker. They promised freedom of information in 1982. They didn't support our freedom of information Bill in 1985 -- the private member's Bill. They didn't support our private member's Bill in 1990 on freedom of information. They promised a freedom of information Bill in 1986 and again in the 1990 throne speech, and they didn't deliver.

At the 11th hour of their mandate, we get this watered-down version of a freedom of information Bill. Five years ago this government said, Mr. Speaker, just trust us. Just trust us. Mr. Speaker, this Bill was brought in by the same minister who five years ago said, just trust us. That was the same minister, the Minister of Justice who was then the minister of Finance. And after asking us to just trust him, he was out in his budget deficit projection by \$800 million, Mr. Speaker.

Now here we have this government back again, saying trust us again because we've got freedom of information legislation before you. We've got plebiscite and referendum legislation before you -- despite the fact that last week they ignored some 123,000 Saskatchewan residents. Mr. Speaker, the public is not fooled. The public is not fooled. The petitions are still coming in today, several hundred. They're not fooled by this latest approach of so-called democratic reform, this Premier and his johnny-come-lately approach to democratic reform and freedom of information and openness.

Mr. Speaker, where are his conflict-of-interest rules that he's promised several times? If he really wants to bring in good, solid legislation,

where are his conflict-of-interest rules? He's promised three times and we haven't heard from him. Mr. Speaker, the only time he talks about conflict of interest, which is another democratic reform initiative, is when there's some suspicious deal involving one of his cabinet ministers.

Mr. Speaker, the voters of Saskatchewan have forgiven the Premier once. They trusted him once and they're not prepared to do it again.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, this freedom of information Bill, this watered-down Bill, will not fool the public of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that's been the most secretive and closed in all of Canada over the last nine years, Mr. Speaker. Not only are they secretive and closed in terms of the information they share, Mr. Speaker, they will not even allow members of the public -- their own employees -- into this Legislative Assembly. They locked them out, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

(1915)

The Speaker: -- Order, order. The Deputy Speaker has ruled that the reference to that one incident is out of order and I support his ruling.

Mr. Pringle: -- Well, Mr. Speaker, I respect . . .

The Speaker: -- Order. Order. Order. Order. I ask my friend, the hon. member from Moose Jaw North, not to holler at the Chair. I don't think that's in keeping with decorum, and I ask you to heed that please.

An Hon. Member: -- Point of order.

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could explain why talking about the members of the public who came here to demonstrate being locked out of the Legislative Building is not in order. Why is that not being allowed?

The Speaker: -- The incident itself, as it was ascertained by the Deputy Speaker, is not related to the Bill itself. Secondly, the government actually didn't lock them out. That is incorrect. However, the policy itself isn't relevant.

Mr. Pringle: -- Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm not making myself very clear then. What I'm trying to say is that it's just not acceptable that the public of Saskatchewan not have access to important information that they have a right to have access to.

The Speaker: -- Order. Order. I'm afraid you have competition from the member from Cut Knife-Lloydminster and the member from Quill Lakes. I would like to ask the two hon. members to allow the member from Saskatoon Eastview to continue.

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, what I'm trying to say is that it's just unacceptable for a government to withhold important information from the public of Saskatchewan, from citizens. That is information that citizens have a right to know about.

Whether it's the Saferco deal, or any other economic development arrangement, or any other sell-off where the public has not had information, it's more unacceptable for the public to be locked out of this facility, to be locked out of their Assembly. And that isn't acceptable because that isn't openness, and access, and democratic participation. People have a right to information and they have a right to access to this building. That was the point I was trying to make, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, well that is related directly to the Bill. I know the member from Rosthern, the Minister of Social Services, does not see access to this building as related to access to information. And I would say there's a direct link there, Mr. Speaker, and that both are very important. Both are very important.

And the concern I have about this Bill, the concern we have about this Bill, is that there are so many exemptions to sharing important information that nothing is going to change, Mr. Speaker. The power to withhold information is still going to be vested with the Premier and his cabinet. Nothing is going to change by this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, a very related point to the power of cabinet and the lack of proper information is the fact that Bill No. 5 has not been repealed. Bill No. 5, as you recall, allows the government, outside of the legislature, to reorganize government departments, Crown corporations, and agencies, without the consent, or even the discussion in this Assembly, for that major reorganization to occur. And consequently what has happened since 1986 -- and this is very much related to information -- is that not only the auditor, but the opposition and the community and the public, has not been able to track expenditures from one year to the next as governments are reorganized on a continual basis.

Economic Development -- I think it's called Economic Development and Trade -- has been reorganized at least eight times since 1986 to the point where the public doesn't even know the point of entry to access information about that department.

So when the government is keeping Bill No. 5 in place and on the books, and with a very restrictive freedom of information Bill, you just simply are not going to be able to access information. We have a major decentralization going on right now. We can't get answers to those decentralization plans; we can't get answers regarding the objectives, the costs. We don't accept the costs. There's been no studies tabled. We couldn't get answers to the PST (provincial sales tax) debate, to the PST plans, apart from the government's assurances that it was going to improve the economy in the face of all the opposition from business and consumer groups from across the province.

That's information. That's important information that the public has the right to know and they've been denied access to it. And I'm saying that

given this weak Bill, given that Bill 5 is still on the books, the government is still going to be able to withhold important information, or at least we're not going to be able to access that information as much as we should be.

But there are many other ways in which information is not available in ways that it was in the past. Late filing of annual reports -- a characteristic of this government has been late filing of annual reports and financial statements. The second day we were here back in April, I think we had some 90 annual reports tabled in one day. Some of those were a year or so overdue.

Well, Mr. Speaker, those late annual reports and watered-down financial statements are a way of denying the public of Saskatchewan access to important information that it has a right to, so it can determine whether or not the Government of Saskatchewan is accountable in spending its taxpayers' money wisely, particularly in the face of major public concern that this government has not been accountable for the last nine years. In the face of the auditor's concerns, who says that the debt is 2 or \$3 million higher than this government says it is, this government calls that an honest dispute.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the second Provincial Auditor in a row who's saying that this is the debt. In fact it's more like a half a billion dollars. Then we're talking about 5.6 or \$7 billion rather than 5 or 5.2; that's a big difference. The public has a right to know what the debt of this province is.

So basic information like that, Mr. Speaker, has not been shared. In Public Accounts, again because of the watered-down financial reports, financial statements, the fact that the government is not answering many questions . . . there are still many questions outstanding in Public Accounts. Crown corporations . . . I mean holy smokes! We're in a situation where the Crown corporations spend over 50 per cent of government expenditures and the Crown Corporations Committee has not met yet this session.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I said holy smokes because that's the strongest thing I can say and be parliamentary, but that is a major violation in terms of access to information. That is a major, major . . . well it reconfirms my view that this has been a closed and secretive government in the extreme. There's just no other way to put that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, that is an undemocratic behaviour. That is, to withhold the scrutinizing of a Crown corporations which spends over 50 per cent of the public money is undemocratic, blatantly undemocratic; as is it undemocratic to not allow people to come into this building; as is it undemocratic to have vacant seats, some 45,000 voters in the province with no representation in this House at the point that we bring in the biggest tax grab in history. That is undemocratic. As it is undemocratic, Mr. Speaker, at the fourth year and eighth month in a mandate to bring in the

largest tax grab in the history of the province and to undergo a major decentralization plan which is clearly a last-ditch effort with no mandate.

That is undemocratic, Mr. Speaker, totally undemocratic. You're ripping apart families; you're ripping apart government; the government is disintegrating across the province, Mr. Speaker. We all support decentralization. All of us can make claims. Any government can make claims as to some legacy they've left in terms of decentralization, but not 11th-hour decentralization that's designed to be a scorched earth policy, Mr. Speaker. That is undemocratic, blatantly undemocratic.

Now this Bill will not force the government to answer to . . . to behave in a democratic way in some other areas. This government is not answering questions. They did not answer questions with regard to the whole GigaText fiasco. They did not answer any questions related to their attempt to privatize SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) or SaskEnergy or the privatization of the Potash Corporation.

They did not . . . they're not answering questions on decentralization or Promavia. In fact the Minister of Economic Trade and Economic Development -- or whatever his title is now -- goes into Saskatoon and reprimands the Saskatoon City Council for not in blind faith being willing to commit several hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet he won't give them any details about why he wants them to commit that money.

Well that's how the provincial government has operated, Mr. Speaker. But that's not how the city of Saskatoon has operated and that's not how local governments have operated. That is not only undemocratic, that is blatantly arrogant and insensitive, and shows a disregard for working with another level of government.

But they're not answering questions, important questions -- and this Bill will not force them to do that -- on information relating to the trade offices, Minneapolis and Hong Kong. I don't know what those two trade ministers are doing. I don't know how much it's costing the public. I don't know whether they've been successful in anything; we have heard no announcements since they've been there. What do they do? We don't know. We still have not had information regarding many of the sell-offs. The Saskatchewan association of taxpayers tell me they're not able to access information, that is a listing of what companies are getting what amounts of money through SEDCO (Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation).

Now they take the position that those are public funds, and after the deals are made -- we're not talking about during the negotiation stage but after those deals are made -- that should be public information. We do not have access to that information. And particularly when so many deals are going down the tubes, the public has a much greater need to make sure that that money is being spent wisely and want to know where it's going.

So, Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I won't. I've made my point. You could pick your own examples. Any Saskatchewan citizen could pick her or his own examples about ways in which this government has not openly shared information and made it accessible to the public of Saskatchewan.

One area that certainly annoys the business people in my riding is the fact that most government tendering is not public and it's not open, and that is a major concern to business people, Mr. Speaker. As far as I can tell from this Bill here, there's no commitment to open the public tendering or no way in which information is going to be made available. There isn't even a record of much of the tendering that's being conducted by this government, Mr. Speaker. I don't even know what the rules are. I don't even know what the rules are, the position of this government is, with regard to tendering, and nor do business people. That's a major problem in this province. This Bill will not improve that situation for people.

(1930)

Mr. Speaker, as I said, one could go on and on. This Bill is seriously flawed. I think the way it's drafted it reinforces that nothing is going to change. It's geared more to me, as a citizen, getting personal information about myself -- which is important -- but it's geared more to that than it is to me as a citizen getting important information about how the government conducts its business.

What the public is concerned about is that they want to know important information from this government that this government has not been sharing with them. That's what freedom of information in all the other jurisdictions provincially and even in the federal government focuses on. It's opening up; it's opening up decision making, and it's opening up information of government business about government, public decision making. This Bill focuses too much on getting information about yourself as a citizen.

This Bill was rushed through; it reflects that. I won't say it's poorly drafted as much I would say that it's complex. I've discussed this Bill with some legal people and other concerned groups like the association of taxpayers, the federation of independent business. This is a complex Bill and again, it's got eight pages of exemptions. And I suppose more of a concern than that, it gives unprecedented power to the Premier and his cabinet, relative to other freedom of information legislation in other jurisdictions, to make a decision to withhold information if they don't think it's in the best interest of government conducting its business. And, Mr. Speaker, that is a concern that all Saskatchewan citizens should have.

That is a concern that Mr. Avram has from the Saskatchewan association of taxpayers, because he knows that once this Bill passes, his association is going to be no further ahead in getting access to information from this government than it's been in the past. And we know as a matter of public record that they've been very concerned, as have a number of other groups about not getting . . . as has been the auditor, about not getting important information that the public has a right to know. So this Bill is not going to make any difference there.

The other important flaw in this Bill is the fact that there are many sections that it's going to be hard to know how to interpret them, and when

we start talking about Bill 71 a little bit later, that's one of the concerns that some of the municipalities have. And I'll talk about that later this evening.

But it's hard to know how some of these sections need to be interpreted. Here's a Bill with about, I don't know, 40-some pages. Our freedom of information Bill, I think, has five or six pages and it's been approved by most groups that I've talked to. So there's been no reason to complicate this Bill or to "muddify" it as Allan Fotheringham would say. That's exactly what has happened in this case, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: -- Muddified?

Mr. Pringle: -- "Fuzzify" or "muddify" or whatever he says, but there's been no need to make this Bill that complex, Mr. Speaker.

I guess the other point that's worth making is that as the minister . . . or as the government says in its release, talks about the information that will be available, Mr. Speaker. I can't believe that the minister would use these examples. The minister says that this is some progressive document that will allow the public to have access to information about the salaries of employees of government . . . senior government officials, details about personal service contracts.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the public wants to know the salaries of high-paid public officials. They have a right to know those salaries. The public has a right to know about the details of personal service contracts. Already though, that information can be provided within the existing legislation; in fact the public is demanding that information. We should know the details of those third-party agreements.

But he says that this will allow the public to know the costs of individuals travelling at government expense. That should already be provided as a matter of public record. That used to be provided as a matter of public record, Mr. Speaker.

It will allow the public to access to the results of statistical surveys or polling surveys, scientific or technical background research, and the results of product testing -- whatever that means.

My point is, Mr. Speaker, that nothing is going to change because the power is still vested with cabinet and the Premier and the examples they choose in their news release to talk about, the new information that would be provided to the public, is information that should already be provided. In fact it's because this information isn't being provided that gives this government the reputation as being probably the most secretive and closed government in the history of Saskatchewan, and maybe even in Canada.

So, Mr. Speaker, nothing will change. This is a window-dressing Bill. It's nothing more than a window-dressing Bill. It is seriously flawed. The public will not be fooled. They can see that this is not . . . anybody who's following this can see that this is not a serious attempt to provide new information to the public.

And, Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is we want to open up access to information. We want to open the books. We want to open up access to this building to the public of Saskatchewan. We want to provide support to external organizations in terms of their co-operating with the provincial government.

We want, obviously, to protect the privacy rights of citizens, which this Bill does, and I'll give this Bill credit for that. I might add I'll also give this Bill credit for establishing the information and privacy office and for putting the onus of proof or the onus of burden, if there's a dispute, on the government. I think that's the correct place to put the onus of proof.

But when you can still control, as the Premier and the cabinet will be able to under this Bill, the kinds of information that the public has access to, then putting the onus on the government for that narrow number of areas is no big deal. Small step in the right direction, but they've missed the boat in terms of the broader issue of opening up access to information.

So, Mr. Speaker, I might just make a point as well as to how this Bill was introduced or how this Bill was released because I think that says something about the fact that nothing is really going to change. Mr. Speaker, this Bill was introduced not in the Legislative Assembly, this Bill was introduced . . . several hours before it was introduced here, it was introduced to the media. Granted, it was embargoed until the legislature opened, but it was also introduced to invited guests of the government.

And for example, I know that representatives of the Saskatchewan association of taxpayers were at that meeting, and, Mr. Speaker, that is blatantly undemocratic.

Friends of the government -- whoever they might be, and they may be different people with different governments -- friends of the government do not have the right to be invited to a briefing of a Bill, and the sharing of the Bill before members of the Assembly. That's like the Premier's brother-in-law getting preferential treatment on his move to Gravelbourg over and above and before other public employees who have a right to get that at the same time. So some people get information and have certain rights over other people, and that's not the way it's supposed to be, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about the way the Bill was introduced. I'm also concerned about the comments by the member who introduced it, who a week before that Bill was introduced, on a radio line show said, well, yes we've kept the opposition out of the legislature for nine and a half months but the Legislative Assembly doesn't work anyway, we can be much more effective as a government outside of the Legislative Assembly making . . . It's a complex world and important decisions have to be made.

Well that's their attitude, Mr. Speaker. This place doesn't mean very much to them. In fact it's a hindrance; it slows them down because they've got

things set up so that cabinet can make all the decisions. And since everybody's in cabinet on that side of the government, they can keep harmony among the ranks because everybody's either in cabinet or a Legislative Secretary. But it's not fair to the rest of the public, nor is it fair that there be 4 vacant seats for going on 18, 19 months, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that it's not fair as well . . . and again this relates to information and I assume that this is being dealt with. I've got every confidence in your office to deal with the issue of the security of this building, but it's certainly not fair -- and I don't attribute any of these comments to you -- but that all members of the Assembly not know the security arrangements for this building. It is certainly not fair that the Government of Saskatchewan has a security division within the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation. Nobody outside a small corps knows what that security division does, who it reports to, what their mandate is, and where they're probing in terms of people's lives. That's basic information that this Bill will not help us get at.

Nor is it fair that the province of Saskatchewan has a secret deal with Ottawa to share information from files about Saskatchewan residents. We don't know what information is being shared, for what purpose it's being used, how it is being safeguarded. And that, Mr. Speaker, that is undemocratic. That's an infringement of people's rights.

This Bill will not allow citizens, as I read it, to get access to know whether or not any information about them is being shared. This Bill will not allow us, as the opposition, to know of the arrangements and the agreement between the provincial and federal governments regarding that sharing of secret information for security purposes, whatever that means.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a seriously flawed Bill. I would say that the Premier's saying that, as he did in November and January, that there's new realities in Saskatchewan, and the new reality, as the Premier says it, is that the public wants open government; they want responsive government; the public wants accountable government; and they want to be listened to, Mr. Speaker -- that is nothing new. That is nothing new. The public wants basic information. They want involvement in decision making. They want their government to be accountable. They want it to be open. And I would say right at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, now that the boundaries are clarified, what the public of Saskatchewan want more than anything else is a provincial election. And they deny that.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: -- Mr. Speaker, that's the new reality. And that was made clear to the Premier last week, that the new reality is that he's so low in the polls he can't go any lower. And, Mr. Speaker, he's at 19 per cent in the polls and he's the second choice of nobody else. And, Mr. Speaker, for him now to hang on and talk about new destruction, that he's going to create havoc on the province of Saskatchewan, including budget deficit legislation, a policy from last week that'll force shoppers to go outside

the province, and hundreds and hundreds of businesses to go under, at this stage in his mandate, is undemocratic. It just isn't right.

Mr. Speaker, the public want real openness; they want access to government information; they want honesty; they want to participate in decision making. And, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, they want a government that's willing. I mean, bringing in laws is one thing. You know, the auditor's Act is a law, but there's got to be a will to comply with the Act. This government did not comply with the auditor's Act by sharing information he had a right to see.

(1945)

First there's virtually nothing in this Bill that's going to force this government to change its ways. It's going to continue to show disdain and lack of regard for the public of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest is what we need is a comprehensive approach to democratic reforms that does a number of things simultaneously.

I mean, I would urge the minister to shelve this Bill until after the election and then we will bring in the democratic reform proposals that will make government more open, accountable, accessible, and allow the public to have access, and participate in decision making, and we will allow them access to this building, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Solomon: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this debate with respect to second reading on Bill No. 70, which is a Bill, Mr. Speaker, which is An Act respecting a right of access to documents of the Government of Saskatchewan and a right of privacy with respect to personal information held by the Government of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill the government puts forward is a sham. They have . . . at least the manner in which they've done it is a sham. It's a Bill which has been promised by the party opposite in 1981, in 1982, and even before that, Mr. Speaker. And after nine years of long, lean, tough government, riddled with the debts, riddled with the waste and mismanagement, and patronage, and high taxes, they come forward and say, we're going to be open with the people. Mr. Speaker, we have raised in this House, time after time, questions that are important, on behalf of the people of this province, with respect to accountability and responsibility and the finances of this government. They have been secretive in all of their transactions. They have refused to respond to this House either through oral question period or in written question form.

I refer, Mr. Speaker, to a document which I have here, the 1982 PC election program. And in this election program, Mr. Speaker, they say that . . . page 11, it's a question under responsible governments. They say, "Is it true that Saskatchewan has no freedom of information legislation?" And the response in the PC manual of 1982 said, and I quote:

That's correct. A PC government will be committed to Freedom of

Information legislation.

They made that promise. They said as soon as they got elected they would undertake to provide a freedom of information Act so that the people of Saskatchewan could have access to documents in this government.

Well we have seen, Mr. Speaker, prior to that, the former member from Kindersley, Mr. Andrew, rise in this House on a number of occasions when he was in opposition, and calling for a freedom of information Act. Well, Mr. Speaker, he was elected in 1982, re-elected, but in 1981 he had a number of comments which he made -- in 1980 as well. And I have some here I'd just like to share with the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, we have . . . I'm just trying . . . I'm making some reference here, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Andrew. My colleagues are advising me on some additional things which I'd like to say, and I'll get to it in one moment. Actually I'm trying to buy some time while I review my notes here. I can't seem to find the quote, but I have it here, Mr. Speaker, and it's dated April 28. Bob Andrew . . . maybe I could have my colleague here find it; it's in one of those Hansards.

But the member from Kindersley, when he was in opposition, Mr. Andrew, said time after time, Mr. Speaker, that if they became government, if the PC Party became government, they would undertake to pass some freedom of information legislation. Well he said this in 1980. He introduced a private members' Bill in this very Assembly, and in the private members' Bill he made the commitment and he quoted John Diefenbaker, and he quoted John Kennedy, and he quoted Voltaire, and he quoted every sage philosopher that ever spoke in the House of Commons or the U.S. Senate or the U.S. Congress, about how important it was to have freedom of information Act. Well, Mr. Speaker, in 1980 it wasn't only the one occasion that he introduced this private members' Bill to obtain that access to information, but in 1981 as well, he did the same on two occasions, Mr. Speaker, introduce this Bill.

And of course when he became minister of Justice everyone in the province assumed that because he made these two commitments by introducing two separate private members' Bills calling for freedom of information, that he would obviously quickly and efficiently, in his position as one of the top three members of the PC government in this province, introduce an Act which would provide for freedom of information.

Well we waited for 1982 to pass, Mr. Speaker, and it wasn't forthcoming. We waited for 1983, and members in this side of the House said -- well we waved the Hansards back and forth -- and we said, the member for Kindersley indicated he was going to pass this Bill once he became a cabinet member. Well '83 came and '83 went and there was no freedom of information Act.

Well in 1984 we waited and we waited and we waited, and the people of this province said, well I'm sure the member from Kindersley, the minister of Justice in the Conservative government, would introduce this legislation which provides for freedom of information and access to information by the opposition, and by the public, of government expenditures and government

matters.

Well 1985 came and 1985 went -- still no freedom of information Act. In 1986 my colleague from the constituency of Regina Centre went so far as to introduce another freedom of information Act, and it was a very good Act. And it was -- I might add to compliment Mr. Andrew -- it was similar to one of the Bills that he introduced, because it had the same intention, that is to provide access to information from a government that was secretive and a government that would fail to respond to written questions or fail to respond to oral questions.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the member from Kindersley, the minister of Justice, sat in this House silently as the member from Regina Centre and one of his colleagues from the opposition moved and seconded the Bill. But he sat in this House and refused to respond. Everybody in this province wanted the member from Kindersley to stand up in this House and say, member from Regina Centre in the NDP (New Democratic Party) opposition, I support what you're doing. I support what you're doing because I had the same sort of Bill introduced in this House twice -- almost identical.

And you know what the member from Kindersley, the minister of Justice did? He sat and he sat, and he was so silent you didn't even know he was in the House. You thought maybe he had resigned his seat and taken the Minneapolis appointment five years early, but he was still in the House. He hadn't resigned his seat, and he was still hanging around here waiting to perhaps comment on this Bill. Well, the member for Regina Centre tells me that the member from Kindersley didn't support the Bill. This freedom of information Bill that the member for Regina Centre introduced in this House, calling for access to information from the government, was not supported by the member from Kindersley, who was such a supporter . . . who in 1981 wanted to introduce the same Bill.

And I have here, Mr. Speaker, according to Hansard, April 28, page 2614, on resolution no. 22 entitled, "Freedom of Information and Privacy Legislation." And what do we have here, Mr. Speaker, but we have the minister from Kindersley, the MLA for the PC government, Mr. Bob Andrew, and it says:

Mr. Speaker, I wish to be very brief on this motion. Last year I brought a motion before the Assembly with regard to the concept of freedom of information. This year the motion is calling for an extension of that concept to cover the whole question of privacy as well.

And he went on to talk about the experiences that he had. He talked about the Trudeau governments who had introduced a Bill 43 which was presently being debated before the federal parliament. And he talked about supporting that kind of a Bill, and as well the Ontario commission on freedom of information and privacy had come down with its three-volume report. And he said it was:

". . . a very good report. Hopefully (he said) that will lead to some legislation in the province of Ontario."

And the only concern he had at that time is ". . . that now a majority government stands in place in Ontario." And he was concerned because they had a majority; they wouldn't pass that legislation.

Well he talked about some other stuff. He went on to say -- with respect to a quotation from the Ontario commission -- he quoted from a document called Privacy and Freedom, by Allan Weston. And he quoted, and I say the following:

The modern totalitarian state relies on secrecy for the regime, but high surveillance and disclosure for all other groups. The democratic society relies on publicity as a control over government and on privacy as a shelter for groups and individual life.

He went on to say that:

I think that is really the stage we are in our western democratic system of government. Canada stands far behind other countries in the world with regard to freedom of information legislation.

He talked about the U.S. and he talked about Sweden and he talked about Australia and he talked about New Zealand, and he supported all and each of these initiatives, Mr. Speaker. And I think the most significant thing in all of his comments was that what he said in his speech applies to the governments that we have here in this province of Saskatchewan in the past nine years.

We have a totalitarian government that is secretive. We have a totalitarian, arbitrary government that refuses to answer questions. We have a government which has, on every test, been proven to be unaccountable. We have a government which, by every test, has been proven to be irresponsible with respect to the financial transactions and the finances of the taxpayers of this province. And in this report, in this speech that he made to this House, he said that:

The modern totalitarian state relies on secrecy for the regime.

And this is exactly what he adopted when he became minister of Justice. He believed that the totalitarian state should have total secrecy, that we should not share any information, in particular when it is pertinent to the taxpayers of this province who fund the government and fund the costs of all of their crazy projects they've undertaken in the last nine years.

The minister from Kindersley went on to talk about . . . And I have another quote here I want to read to you.

I think it is amply clear that the government in the province of Saskatchewan is against this type of legislation. I would like to bring to the Assembly two or three situations where I think it would become relevant and material.

And he talked about the debate with respect to SGI and he talked about the Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker. And I quote:

When you have a Crown agency that is 100 per cent owned by the government, and therefore, 100 per cent owned by the people, the people have a right to know (what transactions transpire and) what the information is. It is only through that type of disclosure, open disclosure, that we can move in this field.

Now this was said by the Conservative member from Kindersley, the minister of Justice in this government. He said this in opposition, as an opposition member in the PC Party in 1981. And you know, a famous baseball player used to say -- and I think it was Yogi Berra -- this is de péja vu all over again; de péja vu all over again.

When they're in opposition, they cry for information; they cry for openness. And in this particular case, the PC member from Kindersley cried for access to information with respect to the Crown Corporations Committee and all Crown corporations. And, Mr. Speaker, we in government and we in opposition, be it either one, support that same principle. Under the Allan Blakeney government from 1971 to 1982, the Crown Corporations Committee, Mr. Speaker, was called without fail on a regular basis when the legislature was sitting. It was called to deal with the business of the legislature, to deal with the business of the Crown corporations, to hold accountable over half of the expenditures of the taxpayers' dollars which are made in the Crown corporation sector.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here we are, I think it's day 43 or day 44 in the legislative session of this spring, and we are not currently reviewing the Crown Corporations Committee. We have, Mr. Speaker, a very, very sad situation in this Assembly. The government, through Bill No. 70 and Bill No. 71, cry for the passage of a freedom of information Act in their last days of government. After nine years of trying to get some commitment from this government, some answers, some information, and to hold them accountable and responsible to no avail, they now say, well we are, in our deathbed repentance, going to provide some information.

Well we're in day 43; the Crown Corporations Committee has not met. We have made the request on numerous occasions -- four times in writing to the chairperson of the Crown Corporations Committee, the member from Pelly. We have raised in question period on two occasions why they haven't called the committee. We have asked the member from Pelly, the chairman of the committee, and the Premier and the Deputy Premier, to call this committee to meet to review the expenditures of the Crown Corporations Committee. In every occasion, the response has been no, or silence.

(2000)

As a matter of fact, they haven't even responded to the last two letters that were sent out by myself, who is a co-ordinator for the Crown Corporations Committee of the opposition, to the chairman of that committee. The member from Pelly, who is the chair, the Government House Leader and the Premier have not had the courtesy to even respond to our request to call this committee so that the members of the opposition can hold the government accountable for half of the expenditures in the entire

province, with respect to the Crown Corporations.

The former Speaker of this Assembly is probably as disgusted with this performance as the opposition and the members of the public. It's unbelievable; it's unparalleled; it's incredible to assume that they have any sincerity in wanting to move and pass a freedom of information Act when after the last eight and a half, nine years, they've frustrated the opposition in every attempt to gather information.

And now we see, Mr. Speaker, after seven or eight attempts to have them call this Crown Corporations Committee to meet, they refuse to meet. We have to ask the question: what are they hiding? Why will they not call the Crown Corporations Committee to meet?

The former chairman of the Crown Corporations Committee on the government side sits there and he agrees. Why haven't we called the committee to meet? Is there something that my ministers are hiding? I think he has the same inquisitiveness as everybody else in the province of Saskatchewan. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we've got some very, very serious problems with this government with respect to freedom of information.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they're always wanting to be co-operative. This is always their intention but it never, ever seems to materialize. Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of problems with this Crown Corporations Committee, even when it was called. We have seen a deliberate attempt by the members opposite in this government to frustrate the opposition in a number of ways.

In the first instance, they have had a very deliberate effort, in a disorganized fashion, to not organize simple meetings. This is, I think, witnessed and evidenced by the fact they refused to call the first meeting of the committee.

We have seen this government to be very reluctant to review major corporations on a timely basis when they do hold the committee meetings. And we see them organizing some of the minor corporations as a first agenda item. They come on the agenda and they'll allow us to review them, but they'll always hold the corporations which they're hiding things in till the very end, hoping the committee will expire with the legislative session when it adjourns in the summer or the late spring. Well, Mr. Speaker, they've done this time after time with the Potash Corporation and SGI and SaskPower and the Saskatchewan Transportation corporation.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, we've seen time after time a deliberate delay, a strategic, Conservative delay in tabling simple annual reports and government documents. They have failed in many, many cases to follow the regulations set down by this Assembly. The Provincial Auditor has outlined in many instances their failure to meet deadlines.

As a matter of fact, the opposition and the public are still waiting for the government to table SaskEnergy's annual report. But we must give them some more time; it's only been, I think, two and a half years. They must be doing this some place in a dark room and having monks reproduce the

reports by hand, with all due respect to monks.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've also had problems from the ministers and from the government when it comes to

Dresponding to questions on Crown corporation matters during the meetings. They always say, well we don't have that information but we'll take it upon advisement and we'll respond momentarily with some information in writing to committee members.

Well we've waited and we've waited and we've waited. And we've waited in particular with matters that deal with SaskPower, matters that deal with the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, and of course, matters to deal with SEDCO. And everyone knows what a wonderful job this government's done with SEDCO. Talk about freedom of information Act, SEDCO has run up tens of millions of dollars of debt every year and they don't even respond to questions with respect to accountability and responsibility on those funds. We ask them questions and they say, well, it's a private, client/manager relationship here. We can't give you information. Or we ask them questions on High R Door or the game farm that was involved with Graham Taylor's son.

Now we have the game farm, Mr. Speaker. We ask questions about how the money was approved. When Mr. Taylor, who was a minister of the government, had the amount of money approved, he was chairman of SEDCO at the time, and his son happened to be involved in the company and they had a lot of money. They got the grant with no feasibility studies -- at least none that they would table.

We've seen examples with respect to Canapharm in Wolseley. Again when the minister from Indian Head-Wolseley, Mr. Taylor, who is no longer with us in this Assembly, allowed in his constituency Canapharm to continue to operate at countless millions of dollars cost to the taxpayers with no accountability and no responsibility.

Example after example with SEDCO that we could relate in this House but time is limited. We only have a few more hours so I don't want to get into too many details with that, Mr. Speaker.

But with respect to accountability, it's unacceptable that this government can continue to live this charade of wanting to be open and accessible and to provide information in an Act, in their dying days, called Bill 70, when over the last nine years they've been the most secretive government in the history of governments that I've ever read about or experienced. It's unbelievable and simply lacks credibility from their perspective.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we also have problems with the Crown Corporations Committee, when it meets, with regard to privacy and information in getting answers to simple questions. The usual response, Mr. Speaker, has been well, it's in the courts; it's a matter before the courts. We really can't answer any questions with respect to that; or well we really can't provide you any information with respect to Westank-Willock or any other items because well, it's confidential. We can't really reveal that information because the precedent's never been set to provide anybody with information,

which is just hog-wash.

We've seen ministers in the Crown Corporations Committee, Mr. Speaker, even refuse to answer questions. They even refuse to answer simple questions which in many cases can be, I think, a result of their guilt. They know that they are guilty of something that is not proper and so they won't answer the questions that we ask them. Well, Mr. Speaker, I raise these points on the basis of where we see the province going right now. We have seen the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan privatized; we've seen Saskoil privatized; we've seen the Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation privatized, and SaskCOMP, and Sask Minerals, and the natural gas reserves, and the coal mines of SPC (Saskatchewan Power Corporation).

It's hard to believe that all of the major, profitable corporations that have been privatized have not resulted in a lower Crown corporation capital debt. In 1982 when this government took over, by the account of their very own documents, the PC document, the debt was negligible. And I think I have it right here; I want to share it with you. In this same document, Pocket Politics -- everyone on that side of the House knows what it's all about

-- it says right here, on page 23, "In ten years the NDP government has created a debt of over \$2.3 BILLION" in the Crown corporations sector, which is all liquidating mortgage money -- 2.3 billion.

Now in those days, Mr. Speaker, we had all the corporations I've just related that were making money, earning a profit, and paying a dividend. And this \$2.3 billion was like a mortgage. It was for capital debt. It was being paid off and self liquidated with revenues the corporations earned.

The other element of this \$2.3 billion Crown corporation capital debt, Mr. Speaker, was that it took 75 years to accumulate. After 75 years we had coal mines, and gas reserves, and telephones, and electrification; and we had hospitals, and we had government office buildings, and we had highways. And all of those services we provided, all of those services we provided only resulted in a very modest amount of \$2.3 billion, which was paid for on a mortgage basis, on an annual basis, with revenues earned by the corporations. And on top of that we were receiving half of the profits of all the corporations as dividends to our treasury to reduce the tax burden on the taxpayers of this province on an annual basis.

But now we've got all these profitable Crown corporations privatized. We have not \$2.3 billion in debt; we have over \$9 billion in debt, at least that they will admit to. And I think it's probably higher than that. But \$9 billion, Mr. Speaker, with all of the assets of the people in this province have been sold off, the profitable assets. So now we're stuck with corporations that are modest, if at all profitable; and we're also stuck with \$9 billion in mortgage payments on this debt for a population of less than a million people and for a population of less than 300,000 fully employed working people, I believe. What a massive debt.

Young people are now saying -- by the thousands -- we're not going to hang around and pay for their incompetence and their mismanagement. We're leaving the province. We're going to any other province because this is

the worst province in terms of debt in all of Canada.

When you add the 4.5 or \$5.2 billion, whatever the figure is these days, of operating debt, we've got over \$14 billion in total debt in this province -- \$14 billion. That's \$14,000 per man, woman, and child in this province, or for a family of four we're looking at \$52,000 of provincial debt alone -- \$52,000, Mr. Speaker.

And this government refuses to open the books; it refuses to provide information to our questions, refuses to respond to our questions -- be they verbal or written form. And we see, Mr. Speaker, very simply, a desperate move by the government now, after all of this incompetent debt-building, after all of this irresponsible and unaccountable sale of taxpayers' assets at discount prices to their friends, we see the height of arrogance, the height of hypocrisy. We see a government, Mr. Speaker, that says, we are going to introduce a freedom of information Bill.

Well I wonder if they're given any consideration to making it retroactive. I wonder if they'd given their consideration to make this Bill retroactive so perhaps they'd answer some questions.

I see the member . . . chairman of the SEDCO, the member from Thunder Creek, the Minister of Energy and Mines. He sits there and he's quite amused with the remarks I'm making tonight. He sits there. He's quite amused with the fact that they have totally bankrupted this province. He thinks it's funny that the taxpayers of this province are saddled with \$52,000 per family of four of debt.

Well the young people in this province, Mr. Speaker, are not going to put up with this nonsense. They're not going to put up with this hypocrisy, and they've proven very clearly the actions they've taken with respect to this government's incompetence and mismanagement. They're voting with their feet; they're leaving by the thousands, and going everywhere else looking for jobs and looking for a future and hope . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member from Thunder Creek should not be laughing at the former member from Thunder Creek because when he was in this House he was actually an honourable gentleman when he was in opposition. At least he didn't sit back and say one thing in opposition and do the opposite in government. Everybody knew in this province, the former member of Thunder Creek, when he stood on this side of the House, what he was going to do in government. And he did that. He gave all kinds of breaks to his wealthy friends. Of course some of the members opposite are unhappy with that because he did hire some Liberal lawyers. And they got angry with him and they told the Premier and they fired him. And I thought that was a pretty low blow for the member from Thunder Creek.

We have the new member from Thunder Creek here, Mr. Speaker, who is laughing at the people of this province. He's laughing at the fact that after nine years of secrecy and stonewalling and failing to provide information, they are going to do a mea culpa. They are going to do a de péja pâ vu all over again. They're going to introduce a freedom of information Bill, Mr. Speaker, and that'll solve all their problems. And

the people of this province who have been frustrated over the years because of lack of information are going to vote for them because of this wonderful move on their part.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe for one minute or one second that the introduction of this Bill is serious, that it's sincere. I don't believe for one minute, Mr. Speaker, it'll have any effect on the taxpayers other than to confirm what they already believe, that this government is hypocritical. It is unfair. It is incompetent, and it has no credibility with respect to any issue of concern that concerns the people of this province.

(2015)

And my colleague, the member from Moose Jaw North, says, in addition to that, the members opposite are not very nice. Well I think the people of the province will confirm how nice they've actually been over the last nine years, if and when they screw up the courage, Mr. Speaker, to call the next election.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've seen this government stonewall and deflect questions. The Deputy Premier of this province, the member for Meadow Lake, the Minister of Health, stands in this House; and rather than respond to questions on STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) or other Crown corporations, he says, well I'm not going to answer this question because you've got to refer that to the Crown Corporations Committee. So we're waiting and we're waiting, and there's no Crown Corporations Committee meeting. And I'm wondering if the minister who's putting forward this Bill would share with the people of this province and share with the opposition his intention with respect to when the Crown Corporations may meet so that people might take, for a moment perhaps, seriously their intention to pass this Bill 70, the freedom of information Act.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, all of their actions have resulted in a great, great standing in the polls. We've seen the polls in the last couple of weeks be released that was done by the Leader-Post and the CK TV, and the polls show exactly what the people of Saskatchewan believe to be the truth -- that not very many people in this province support their actions for the last nine years. The people of this province do not support their record. They do not support the programs that they've undertaken. They do not support anything this government's done. It's unbelievable, unparalleled in the history of polls; this government has no support in any sector out there as a result of their record, as a result of the actions they've taken. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure they are going to, with their mea culpa, gain further support with respect to Bill 70.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to end my comments this evening by saying that we've seen the Conservatives in the past support freedom of information when they're in opposition. The minister of Justice stood in this House year after year in opposition supporting freedom of information. When he became a minister and a highly powerful cabinet minister in the PC government, he failed to make his words good. He flip-flopped. He did a complete flip-flop in a matter of months.

And when he left this House in disgrace, when he took his political appointment, his five-year contract at \$97,000 from the taxpayers of this province to sit in Minneapolis and watch the Minnesota North Stars play hockey and the Minnesota Vikings play football and the Minnesota Twins play baseball, we find, Mr. Speaker, that these folks he's left behind in this Assembly are no different. They're prepared to take the patronage appointments. They're prepared to do anything it takes to look after their own people, but when it comes to governing the province with fairness, with openness, and accountability, they don't understand the meaning of the words.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the former member from Kindersley, Mr. Bob Andrew, had it right in the first place. He said he was going to support it; he didn't, by his actions in government. As a matter of fact he abused his position in this House, his position as a member of cabinet, by spending taxpayers' money to the tune of millions without answering questions, without responding to how those moneys were spent, and without being accountable.

So, Mr. Speaker, I end my remarks by saying the people of Saskatchewan won't buy their deathbed repentance with respect to freedom of information. The people of this province will not buy their deathbed repentance with respect to any issue, be it the disintegration of the civil service, freedom of information, or making deficits illegal. It's a lot of garbage on their part, Mr. Speaker. It's unbelievable. It's incredible, and the people of this province will take the appropriate action come the next election.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Bill No. 71

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lane that Bill No. 71 -- An Act respecting a right of access to documents of local authorities and a right of privacy with respect to personal information held by local authorities be now read a second time.

Mr. Pringle: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Bill, The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, it has kind of a funny history too, Mr. Speaker. Local governments that I've talked to -- the municipalities, the local school boards, the library boards -- they don't know where this Bill came from; they don't know why. It appears as though it came out of Ontario somewhere. I made some comments . . . I guess my major comments, the first time this Bill came up and I adjourned it . . . I just wanted to make just a few summary comments because I've had the opportunity over the last three weeks or so to discuss this Bill with some local government authorities.

This Bill is almost identical to the provincial freedom of information

Bill, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, most local governments don't know the origin of this Bill. They were not consulted; they were not involved in any process. In fact as it turned out, when I called local governments to see what they thought of this Bill, most of them had never seen it. And I include by that the cities of Saskatoon and Regina. They had not seen this Bill, this Bill that affects them, Mr. Speaker.

And I found myself in the position of sending them this Bill. This government Bill they received from the critic; they received from the opposition; not from the government. It's a strange way to do business. It seems to me it's a strange way to work co-operatively with local governments when you introduce a Bill into the legislature and they know nothing about it or where it came from or why it came to be, and have not seen it or been consulted. No prior consultation, Mr. Speaker.

And that in itself says volumes about the way this government deals with local governments, that local governments would not have been involved in this decision, in this consultation, in this Bill being presented.

And I guess, Mr. Speaker, it also shows just how out of touch . . . it shows how this government operates, that's true, but it also shows just how out of touch this government has become, that they would introduce a Bill where local governments would be required to provide additional information, supposedly, when in fact, Mr. Speaker, what I found out over the last three weeks to four weeks, is that most governments already provide the information that this Bill would require them to provide, as a matter of open local government and as a matter of local policy.

For example, the city of Saskatoon already publishes, as a matter of public policy, salaries of any employees over \$20,000, whereas this Bill would require them to make that information available upon request. Well they already provide that, Mr. Speaker.

The city of Regina has had a freedom of information Bill since 1983 and so they already provide much more information than this Bill will require them to provide. And I think my colleague, who will speak on this Bill next, in fact introduced that Bill at the city of Regina, and so we're very proud of that. We're very proud of him for that.

But my point here being is that local governments are already providing more information than they may be required to provide under this Bill. So that's an indication of how out of touch the province is and the Minister of Justice or the minister of Municipal Affairs, or whoever is responsible for this Bill. Whoever is responsible certainly didn't communicate with the local governments.

The other question mark in the minds of local governments is what this Bill really means. Local governments, school boards, library boards, don't know whether they should be concerned or whether they shouldn't be concerned about this Bill. They don't know whether it's good for them or bad for them because it's so complex -- it's 40-some pages. They don't know how to interpret some of the sections. The Department of Municipal Affairs cannot tell them how to interpret some of the sections. I have been advised that

they've been told that when we get the regulations we'll sit down with you then and work this through and see what it all means. That's a funny way to do business, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker. It's sort of that Big Brother mentality again of this government: we know best, what's best for you, or . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The minister of Municipal Affairs says, get it straight. Well, I'm getting it straight from the people who are affected by this Bill that you didn't consult with, sir. You should have consulted with them, so start doing your job. You're getting \$90,000 a year; start earning it.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's saying that the local governments are not telling the truth. Well I think I will believe the local governments before I'll believe the minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr. Speaker. It's an indication of this government saying, look, trust us; we know what's best for you.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm telling the minister here, Mr. Speaker, I'm telling the minister that local governments tell me that they don't like being treated that way. They don't like being told what's good for them. They don't like not being consulted in legislation that will affect them. Well I think I'll choose to believe the local governments, Mr. Speaker, rather than the minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I talked to some of them today. Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is local governments don't know what this Bill means for them. Now that's absurd. This is on second reading, and they don't know what it means to them. They can't get answers to how this Bill is going to work. They don't know whether they should like it or be concerned. They've had legal opinions about this Bill, and they are having trouble getting any good legal advice as to how this Bill is going to operate. But there's one consistent message I received from the variety of local governments that I talked to, and that is that they were not consulted. That the minister cannot dispute. They were not advised. They were not consulted.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, so much for this new realities approach by this government. See that's the point; nothing is going to change. You people are so arrogant that you know best. Nothing is going to change in terms of the way you conduct business. That's why people are demanding an election, so they can kick you out and get on with the new way of doing business.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Pringle: -- You people treat local governments as if they don't exist. You treat local governments as if you know best. And this minister is probably the most arrogant of the ministers they've had to deal with. Local governments are telling me that. And that was typical of the way I saw him behave at the SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) convention. If they were really concerned and interested they would respond to reintroducing the ward system which they know local governments want, Mr. Speaker.

But again, they know what's best for everybody. That's how this government operates. If they were really concerned about local governments they

wouldn't be shifting the tax burden to them, forcing them to make the tough decision at the local level, which is what they're doing, Mr. Speaker -- shifting, off-loading, their burdens onto the local governments because the Premier doesn't have the courage to take the issue up with Mr. Mulroney, and the federal off-loading onto the province. The province is just simply off-loading onto the municipalities.

If they were really concerned about local governments they wouldn't treat local governments that way. Mr. Speaker, if they were really concerned about working with local governments, the minister of Trade and Economic Development wouldn't go into Saskatoon and chastise the Saskatoon City Council for not dancing to his tune, and committing hundreds of thousand dollars to a project which he's not willing to give them any information on.

Or if they were really concerned about the people of the province, that same minister of Economic Development and Trade wouldn't tell the people of Saskatchewan that they're 40 years behind the times. That's offensive, Mr. Speaker, but that's the way they deal with the public.

Mr. Speaker, the local governments I talked to told me that when . . . if and when you form government -- I say if and when; they say when you form government -- but I say if and when. But what they're saying to us is they want you, they want us, they want a new government, to consult with them and work with them in the best interests of the province and of local governments and local communities.

They don't want Big Brother making decisions because Big Brother thinks Big Brother knows best for local governments. They want to be consulted. They want to be involved in decisions. They don't want to be locked out from the discussions. They don't want to be locked out from this building. They want to be involved in decisions which affect them.

Mr. Speaker, they want to work with a government that has an attitude that look, we're all responsible for the collective well-being of people across all of Saskatchewan. We want strong, supportive, caring communities. We want a strong, supportive, caring provincial government. And together, Mr. Speaker, we'll solve the problems the Saskatchewan way. That's what local governments want. They don't want a government that says we'll know best . . . we know best. And they don't want a minister that won't explain to them what the implications are for a Bill that affects them. They want to work with their provincial government.

And, Mr. Speaker, I've got many questions about this Bill and I hope the minister of Municipal Affairs is here when those questions are being asked. I've got many questions to ask on behalf of -- because it's clear that he's been derelict in his duties -- on behalf of local governments. I will be asking those questions and I'll be doing that on third reading.

My colleague has a few comments that he would like to make, and I'll be asking important questions on behalf of municipalities and local governments when the Bill comes up in committee, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

(2030)

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I support the intent of the Bill that's before us. I support the direction that the government has taken. We think that the government is moving in the right direction by setting forth legislation which would encourage the rights of all people throughout Saskatchewan to be able to obtain access about records and information from local authorities. And we support that. We think that the government is going in the right direction with this Bill.

But there's a big problem here. We don't know about some of the contents of the Bill, whether or not they will work the way it's supposed to work. We don't know about the contents of the Bill, whether or not it will in fact provide for the kinds of things that the government hopes. We don't know what kinds of problems might be posed for municipalities, as an example, by this Bill because we don't understand enough about the Bill. And neither do municipalities understand enough about the Bill to be able to make a reasoned determination as to whether or not this Bill will do the kinds of things that we all hope that it will.

So there's a real problem with this Bill. And the reason that arises is that the government has not consulted with people in the province about the details of the Bill. Normally in a process such as this, given the complexities of the situation -- and there are many complexities and I'll deal with those in a moment, Mr. Speaker -- but given the complexities of the Bill, the government would normally float some white paper on the whole question of freedom of information on the part of citizens, to documents and the like on local authorities, local government.

You would float a white paper which states out the objectives that you want to achieve, generally the type of process that you think should be followed, the expectations that you have for local government, the rights that people would be able to exercise under this Bill. You would put those kinds of things in a white paper, not the Bill itself, but many other things that you hope a Bill would achieve. You would put it in a white paper and you would enter into extensive discussions with urban municipalities, rural municipalities, school boards, hospital boards, all those that are proposed to be affected by this Bill.

And you do that so that you get some feedback from them, some feedback about whether or not they think in their opinion it's going to work the way the government thinks it'll work, whether or not the amount of paperwork which is proposed by this Bill is in fact in keeping with many municipalities. I don't think that that, for example, is any great concern to the city of Regina or Saskatoon or Moose Jaw or P.A., or many of the larger towns. But I tell you, some of the villages that have a population of not much over 100 that have a part-time clerk, I mean this additional paperwork could be a cause of some concern. It means an additional burden for them that, given these days and given sort of the constraints in their budgets, they hardly want to be taking on, you know, some extra work.

So therefore we're well advised to look at these kinds of things. The process that you would follow is that you would put forward your ideas, then you would consult widely with local governments in an attempt to get some feedback and thereby gauge whether or not the things that you're going to do are in fact the things that should be done.

And it's a process, Mr. Speaker, that's not done in a matter of weeks, as was the case of this Bill. But it is a process that takes some time, and it could take a year or longer if you want to get the right Bill. And I guess it goes back to the old principle -- the more you put into the front, the better the end product is going to be.

And you know, that's really the concern that we have with this Bill, is that it doesn't appear that any work has gone into the drafting of this Bill, that there has been any consultation at all with municipalities. And I have a quote here, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with you. And this is from April 22, from the Star-Phoenix, and the headline is "City not consulted on information bill." And it states here:

The city of Saskatoon wasn't consulted about the province's decision to introduce new access-to-information legislation.

A bill covering municipalities, first announced Friday, caught city officials by surprise.

"Usually, the province lets us know in advance about these things. We were not consulted in this case," said City Commissioner Marty Irwin.

And that's the point that I was making, Mr. Speaker. There wasn't any prior consultation about this Bill. It's my understanding that the legal department of the city of Regina, the clerk's office of the city of Regina -- those people that are most responsible in terms of the procedure by-law at the city of Regina which governs access to information -- weren't consulted about this Bill, weren't asked to review a draft copy of this Bill, weren't given time to look at this Bill in some detail to see what effect it might have on the city of Regina.

It's my understanding that the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, as an example, wasn't provided with a white paper which outlines the principles of the Bill, the objectives that the government wanted to achieve, the process as to how it might work, so that they were able to consult with their member municipalities, cities, towns, and villages, as to whether or not this Bill made any sense. None of that was done. But if you really want to have a partnership with municipalities and if you want legislation that makes sense to all concerned, you undergo that kind of process.

One really has to ask, what is the rush here? Why is it that the government, without any prior consultation, puts a Bill forward and says that we've got to put this through; we've got to get this through. Is this because it makes sense for the people of Saskatchewan? Is it because it makes sense for municipalities and local governments? Or does it have more to do with the government's own political agenda, an agenda which now

suggests that the government should be moving on all kinds of fronts to give the appearance of being concerned about accountability?

Because this is a government that's been stung, which has been hurt, because of its just abysmal record when it comes to accountability, and a government that has through its actions given the appearance of being anything but open. It has given the appearance consistently over time, in its nine years as a government, that it really doesn't care about openness, doesn't want to let the people of Saskatchewan in on what is happening in government.

And we've seen a number of Bills to that effect. Bill 5 in the '86-87 legislative year is but one good example where the government moved without any real debate, without any real opportunity for discussion, moved to make government more secret and less accountable, Mr. Speaker.

So our concern with this Bill is not the direction that the government has. Our concern with this Bill is that we have not seen a substantive discussion on the part of people in Saskatchewan and those who are affected and the organizations, whether it's urban municipalities, rural municipalities, school boards. We haven't seen those organizations. We haven't seen them have had an opportunity to effectively make comments known publicly on this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

And again if you want respect of local governments, if you want the partnerships of local governments to put forward a Bill and to have a Bill in Saskatchewan that is supported widely and is supported by all local governments, if you want that kind of support and if you want a Bill that is easily understood and is a Bill that makes more sense to the people of Saskatchewan, then what you would do is you would consult widely and you would take the necessary time to do that, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to coming here at the last minute in an unseemly rush and trying to force some Bill through the Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: -- Order, order. I'm afraid the hon. member from Regina Victoria, as well as all of us, are hearing two simultaneous speeches; one by him, one by the member for Quill Lakes, and a third member trying to get into it from Saltcoats. However let us allow the member for Regina Victoria -- let us allow the member for Regina Victoria to continue.

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I wanted to say is that even though the government has not indulged in such a process -- that is to say a process of floating a white paper, floating its ideas and getting a reaction from municipalities, I want to suggest later on another process which at least at this late stage of the game might do some of the things that should have been done. And that is to get the ideas out to the public and allow the public a public opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to comment on the Bill. Nothing makes more sense than to have a Bill which talks about freedom of information, access to information, the right of the public to that information, to give the public a public opportunity to participate in discussion on the Bill, Mr. Speaker. But I'll get to that in a minute.

Mr. Speaker, it's my feeling that if the government had consulted widely on this particular Bill we might have a better product before us now. And I want to refer, Mr. Speaker, to a quote which was in the Leader-Post on April 29 where it's indicated that the city of Regina has had a freedom of information policy by-law for eight years; that the city of Regina has a great deal of experience in dealing with the question of access to information. I would point out the city of Regina, for example, all committee meetings, with the exception of their executive committee meetings, are open to the public; that the public has a right to participate in those meetings and to make their comments known. The public has always had a right to ask for documents and records at the city clerk's office -- documents and records that pertain to the public good.

And there are exceptions to that of course in terms of land transactions and the like that must of necessity, or at least at a certain point, be kept confidential. But the people of Regina have always enjoyed those rights pursuant to by-law and not because there is some provincial Bill there. So I guess that what I'm saying is that at City Hall, in Regina at least, they've had some eight years of experience in ensuring that the public has access to information which is of concern to them and which affects them.

Now it seems to me that that eight years of experience could be put to good use in the drafting of a Bill which is intended to accomplish exactly the same kind of thing. And because of that, that you might have a better Bill because it reflects not only needs and objectives and wishes and desires, but also reflects some relevant experience, Mr. Speaker. And I feel that would have been welcome. I feel that you would have had a better Bill today if in fact we had consulted with institutions such as the city of Regina about their relevant experience.

As it stands, Mr. Speaker, as it stands, I suspect that . . . I am prepared to say that this Bill is a straight lift from legislation in other quarters, legislation such as is now in place in Ontario. That the government has told its people, get a Bill, we need a Bill to suit our political agenda. We don't care where you get it from just put one before us that we can float publicly and say, see we love freedom of information. We've got all kinds of Bills about freedom of information.

(2045)

So what they did is they took the Bill from Ontario and they put Saskatchewan on it and said, see here's our Bill. Well that Bill might have been very good for Ontario but we don't know about Saskatchewan. And the municipalities in Ontario may well support the Ontario Bill because of their experience with it. But that's no way to gain the respect and the partnership of municipalities in Saskatchewan -- to force down their throat something that's taken from another jurisdiction. That's not the way we do things, Mr. Speaker. That's not the way we've done things in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I can recall when I was first elected to City Council in Regina. Shortly after I was elected, I was informed about a process that was under way by the provincial government to review provincial legislation

affecting urban affairs. I was told that the Department of Urban Affairs was doing a comprehensive look at its legislation and wanted the input of municipalities.

I can tell you that I went to a number of meetings, a number of meetings as a city councillor as part of a regional group of municipalities to discuss the relevant issues which were posed by the changes to The Urban Municipality Act at that time. And I was asked for my input. I was asked for my feelings as to what I thought the government should be doing with that legislation. Then there were a number of suggestions which came forward which made a lot of sense and I understand were later incorporated into the legislation.

But not only did it mean that you had then better legislation in the final analysis, because you had the input of those people who would be affected by it and who had a great deal of experience . . . And I might say as an aside, you know, cabinet ministers shouldn't just think that because they've been promoted to the post that all of a sudden that they're the world's experts on these things; that there are people out there who are involved in our cities and towns and villages who have a great deal of experience, have much to offer and had much to offer at that time.

But not only did it mean that you had a better end-product, more importantly I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that another important thing happened. And that is that you had the support of cities, towns, and villages. Not for every specific measure, but you had support for what it is that the government was doing. They understood what the government was doing because they had been involved every step of the way. They had been asked for their opinion in many different ways. They were given an opportunity to put their views forward and to say: yes I agree; no I don't agree; I think you should go to this alternative or whatever. But at least you solicited their input. You developed a partnership with them, and you gained their respect for the end product, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the approach that is taking place here.

And there are a number of members on the other side, Mr. Speaker, who have backgrounds in local government, who understand what I'm talking about, and who agree with me that this kind of process that is taking place here is wrong and is not the right way to go.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of specific concerns that have already been identified by local governments. There is, for example, the question of a final appeal to an Information and Privacy Commissioner on the part of citizens who feel wronged about not having access, I suppose, to documents at a local level, that that appeal process has to go the provincial government as opposed to involving local authorities. That's one concern.

There's a concern about the release of current salary rates, as opposed to detailed, personal pay histories. That is not clear in the legislation and is a matter of some concern.

I would refer you, Mr. Speaker, to a press release which was issued on May 13 and this was released by the mayors of Saskatchewan cities. And they

indicated that they had reviewed Bill 71, the Bill that we're talking about, and the mayors noted that the public accounts now published by the cities already make most expenditure information available to the public.

And they say that although they are supportive of public access to city hall decision-making, they are suggesting that the intent of Bill 71 be clarified to permit the release of current salary rates but not excessively detailed personnel pay histories. This is a concern that's expressed by the mayors of the large cities.

I think that it's a concern that needs to be floated publicly. I think they should have a public opportunity to put their case forward. I think that there needs to be a public judgement as to whether or not this Bill, which talks about their public's right to information, be publicly judged, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- Mr. Speaker, nowhere does this Bill and nowhere has the minister of Urban Affairs, or the Minister of Community Services or whatever he's called now, nowhere has that minister released any attendant paper about the process and how it might work for smaller communities.

And as I indicated at the outset, I don't think that this Bill and the process and the paperwork that's involved will be of any great concern to the city of Regina or the city of Saskatoon. I think that they're well able to assimilate this additional paperwork within their existing paper flow. I don't think that this is a matter of concern to them.

But I do believe, I do believe, that it will be a matter of concern to smaller communities as I indicated; to have small villages with populations barely more than a hundred and a Bill that talks about putting forward requests in the prescribed form and soliciting the need for any alterations to what is put in the prescribed form, to talk about going back with written notices pursuant to something that's put . . . put before you in the prescribed form, this Bill creates additional paperwork for small/large communities.

I don't think that's a concern for the large communities but I tell you, it's going to be one big, royal pain in the neck for many small communities, Mr. Speaker, and I think there needs to be some public discussion about that. And I think those small communities should be given an opportunity to review this Bill and to make their inputs and to be able to advise as to how this Bill affects them and how it might be improved, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- And finally and most important, Mr. Speaker, I pose the question: that if you give people rights in legislation, if you give people rights in legislation, if you pass bills in the legislature and if you pass by-laws in the cities, towns and villages, and you say to the public you had such and such a right, what effective good is that right if

no one knows about it? If no one knows about it then effectively you haven't given the public any rights. Theoretically, legally, yes the public has rights; but effectively, pragmatically, there's nothing there.

This Bill does not talk about how we might educate, inform, or otherwise promote this Bill and what it is that the government is trying to do at the local level. There's nothing here that talks about how municipalities must make sure that the information gets out to its citizens so that they are well advised about this. Because it's one thing to say that the right is there; it's something entirely different to promote that right and to make people aware of what their rights are.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that on this issue that there is a great deal of ignorance in Saskatchewan. There is a great deal of ignorance on the part of people as to what rights they have with respect to the runnings of their local government. And even though present legislation provides for many of the things that this Bill provides for, people are not certain, they're not sure, about their rights.

To make this an effective Bill there needs to be attendant discussions about how we will promulgate the Bill, how we will promote the Bill, how we will make people aware.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the concerns I have about this Bill; those are some of the concerns which have been expressed to me by people in local government; and those are some of the concerns which suggest to me that there needs to be now a public discussion of how the Bill will work, and there needs to be an opportunity for the public to participate in this Bill. There needs to be an opportunity for the public to be able to react to all the specific items of the Bill, that I think that we need to go one step further now and that is, as opposed to simply debating it in the House and for the Minister to stand up with hardly a word and say, well this is a good thing and for the opposition to raise a number of concerns, I don't think that that's going to be healthy; or for the opposition to stand up here and to ask questions of the minister with his officials. I don't think that's going far enough. I don't think that's going to work. I think that there needs to be a better process for soliciting the input of the people of Saskatchewan on this very important matter, Mr. Speaker.

And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to suggest that after second reading that we look at a different process, that we look at perhaps of having this Bill referred to something such as the Standing Committee on Municipal Law, to have that committee consider this matter; to distribute the Bill widely through SUMA, which is Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, the Saskatchewan school trustees, the hospital boards, to the cities, and widely to the public; to let them know, here's the Bill; here are the specific provisions of the Bill.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- And to invite -- no, Mr. Speaker, indeed to encourage -- the public to make their feelings known about this Bill; to encourage those organizations to make their feelings known about this Bill; to share

with us their experience in these matters, because they have considerable experience in this matter, so that we can take all of that information, so that we can take all of that feedback, and we can incorporate it into the Bill and make a better Bill, Mr. Speaker.

And not only a better end-product, but an end-product that is supported by them -- an end-product that they can say, we participated in it; we think it's a better Bill; we think it's doing the kinds of things that it should be doing; and therefore it deserves to be supported.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- At this point, they don't know what they're supporting. At this point, they don't know what the Bill is all about. And I just must say again, Mr. Speaker, that in all my years in local government and consulting with other colleagues in local government, that they just never have seen the likes of this. They have never seen the likes of a government taking a piece of legislation which has major implications for local governments, and without any prior consultation, without any discussion before the fact, all of a sudden one day come up with a Bill and say, here's a Bill that's going to affect you.

And even though the Bill isn't a matter of prime urgency, because after all we have gotten along not badly in this whole area up till now, and because we do have existing legislation -- I know that in the case of the urban municipalities that The Urban Municipality Act says some things about access to information; it's not specifically spelled out but it's there, and if you ask any lawyer . . . and I know lawyers who've tried to get information from municipalities through this process and have largely been satisfied. And that's not to say that it shouldn't be spelled out more in a Bill such as this, but it's there. If you want to take advantage of it, there's an opportunity there to get information. So it's not as if this is a matter of great and pressing urgency because there's no right at all and concerns have been expressed.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, where has there been an expression of concern on the part of Saskatchewan people about access to information at City Hall? How many examples can you list of expressions of concern that have been put forward publicly about people not being able to get access to information, subject to the existing legislation? Can you count them on the fingers of one hand, sir? I can't recall one. Maybe there was one; I think there was one in Saskatoon about the details of some pay-out. I'm not sure whether that one would be covered by this legislation, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question. So maybe there's one expression of concern on the part of the public about the necessity for such a Bill.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that makes the point that I'm making, that there needs to be consultation, that we should undertake to discuss this matter with the people of Saskatchewan. So therefore it's my very strong hope that subsequent to the adoption of this Bill in second reading . . . and we'll support it because we agree with the intent of it. That's not to say that if we find that in committee that this is just a hornet's nest that needs to be looked at, it needs to be changed or improved, that we might

not change our position on that. But I tell you, at this point we support the intent. On second reading you're there to express in principle how you feel about the Bill, and in principle we agree. We agree with the intent of the Bill.

But I tell you, Mr. Speaker, we have very strong reservations about the process that the government has entered into with this Bill, very strong reservations and a very strong disagreement with the way that the government has moved on this, Mr. Speaker.

(2100)

Again, I have never seen the likes of this. I have consulted with colleagues. They have never seen the likes of this in terms of the government proposing to make changes that affect local municipalities, that affect local government, and has seen fit to proceed in this fashion. This is a government that supposedly in its dying days is trying to turn around this perception that it doesn't care, that it doesn't listen, and only acts in its own interests as opposed to the interests of the people of Saskatchewan.

Well with the way that they've acted on this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, they have done nothing but to reinforce the perception that the people of Saskatchewan have that the government doesn't listen, doesn't care, and only acts in its own interest, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, again I tell you we will support the principle of this Bill, but we're going to be making some suggestions as to how we can move on in terms of a better process to obtain the public input, the public involvement, that's so necessary to make this Bill not only good in principle, but is going to make it good in practice and last us and last us well for decades to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Motion agreed to and the Bill read a second time.

Mr. Van Mulligen: -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, moved by myself and seconded by the member for Saskatoon Eastview:

That Bill No. 71, An Act respecting a right of access to documents of local authorities and a right of privacy with respect to personal information held by local authorities be referred to the Standing Committee on Municipal Law.

The division bells rang from 9:03 p.m. until 10:25 p.m.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas

Shillington
Tchorzewski

Anguish t
Hagel t

Koskie
Thompson
Brockelbank
Upshall
Simard
Solomon
Atkinson

-- 18 R

Pringle t
Lyons t
Calvert t
Lautermilch t
Trew t
Van Mulligen t
Koenker t

Nays

Devine
Muller
Schmidt
Klein
Hodgins
McLeod
Hardy
Kopelchuk
Wolfe
Martens
Hopfner
Martin t

-- 23 R

Neudorf t
Gerich t
Swenson t
Britton t
Pickering t
Duncan t
Gleim t
McLaren t
Baker t
Swan t
Johnson t

The Bill referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:28 p.m.