

April 30/90

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure

Education

Ordinary Expenditure -- Vote 5

Item 1

Mr. Chairman: -- I'd ask the minister if he would introduce his officials please.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to introduce the officials that are here with me this evening. On my left is Dr. Eleanor Rourke, the deputy minister. Behind me is Mr. Mike Benson, who was the past executive director of administration, who is now special advisor in Executive Council. And beside him is Lorne Glauser, associate deputy minister of Education. And there are others of my officials that are here that I will be calling on as time goes on.

Ms. Atkinson: -- I'd really appreciate it if the Minister could introduce the other officials that are with him.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The others that I have with me are John Biss, director of policy and client services; Lorne Sparling, director of program co-ordination; Robin Johnson, director of financial planning; and Dianne Anderson, director of university affairs; Fred Renihan, as well, assistant deputy minister of curriculum evaluation.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. First of all, I want to congratulate Dr. Eleanor Rourke on being appointed Deputy Minister for Saskatchewan Education. I believe that this is the first time that we have had a woman deputy minister in the province of Saskatchewan handling the Department of Education.

We, on this side of the House, view this as a very positive move on the part of the government to appoint someone to this position that has had a background in education. And when we were doing estimates last year the minister advised us that Lawrie McFarlane was going to be leaving Saskatchewan. We certainly suggested to the government that they find someone in the province who was familiar with educational issues, and we know that you come with those credentials. So we wish you good luck and congratulate you on your appointment, Dr. Rourke.

Mr. Minister, as you will be aware, education didn't do that well in the last budget, particularly education when it comes to K to 12 school system. And as you will also be aware, literally tens and tens, probably over 100 letters were sent to you in March of this year from various school divisions across Saskatchewan suggesting to you and your government that we really did need to see a massive increase in educational funding if school divisions across Saskatchewan were going to meet the expectations of the

public and were going to meet educational requirements of Saskatchewan youngsters.

Mr. Minister, in these letters that were delivered to yourself and other members of the legislature, it was clearly indicated by school divisions that they wanted to see your government move toward a 60-40 cost-share arrangement in terms of educational funding in the province. And as you're aware, Mr. Minister, school board expenditures have dramatically increased over the last several years, but grants to boards have not dramatically increased on the part of the provincial government.

Mr. Minister, if you look at educational spending in this province, and if we go back to 1980-81, there's only been about a 38 per cent increase in grants to school boards on the part of the provincial government. And this is at a time, Mr. Minister, when inflation has increased dramatically. Consequently what we've seen is a shift in responsibility.

At one time in the province, and if we go back to 1980, board expenditures and grants, grants to boards from the province amounted to about 56.7 per cent of total board expenditure. And if you look at what's happened in this fiscal year, 1990-91, grants to school boards have decreased below 49 per cent. I'm talking about funding on the part of the provincial government. Consequently we have seen a shift in responsibility, and school divisions are having to tax local property taxpayers more and more.

And I've had the opportunity to receive some information in terms of mill rate increases in this province. And as a result of your government's decision only to increase operating grants by 3 per cent at a time when inflation is running at 4.6 or 4.8 per cent, at a time when school divisions, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, are under extreme pressure because of rural depopulation, and at the same time implementation of core curriculum, at the need to repair buildings, the need to have school buses in place to drive further and further distances, we see that the mill rates have had to increase dramatically.

For instance, Mr. Minister, in Broadview, their mill rate has gone up by 8.06 per cent; in Eastend, 6.35 per cent; Cupar, 9.92 per cent; Eston, Elrose, 7.81 per cent; Kamsack, 8.77 per cent; Canora, 8.13 per cent. And the list goes on and on and on, Mr. Minister. There have been dramatic increases in the mill rate, which means dramatic increases in property taxes on the backs of local property taxpayers because of your government's consistent underfunding of educational spending in the province of Saskatchewan. If you look at your record, there's been a 38 per cent increase since 1980-81, at a time when inflation has been running at much higher levels. Consequently we've seen a dramatic shift for educational spending from the province on to the backs of local school divisions and consequently local taxpayers.

Mr. Minister, I'd like you to explain to the people of this province why it is that your government seems to have money for the Cargill grains, they seem to have money for GigaText fiascos, they have money for Joytec, they have money for a number of projects that aren't necessarily in the best interests of Saskatchewan taxpayers, but when it comes to educational

spending in this province you don't seem to have money for what's really important; that's the future of our young people. Explain that to the people of this province.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I think what we have to do is take a look at the real facts, and not the ones that are being presented by the member opposite.

If we consider the fact that during the last 10 years, funding to education in this province has grown substantially -- it's grown substantially, Mr. Chairman -- and if you consider, for example, that back in 1981-82 some 266 millions of dollars were being spent at that time, and that has increased substantially to this year when we see that the total provincial funding is in the neighbourhood of 443.5 millions of dollars. So there has been a substantial increase. The fact of the matter is that there has been a net increase of some, well nearly 10 per cent in real funding to school boards during that particular time.

We have to also look at other facts that the member is talking about, Mr. Chairman. And I have given credit to the NDP in the past that they did move towards an increase in the amount of funding that the provincial grant was covering in the 1970s, and I believe it was up in around the neighbourhood of 54, 56 per cent I believe was the highest.

But I would suggest too, Mr. Chairman, that the decline started when the NDP were still in power. That if you take a look at 1981-82, that in fact the share of the provincial grant had dropped to 51.6 per cent. So even though she can say that they were starting to move towards this 60 per cent of the total operating fund was . . . they were moving towards that. Granted they were in good years, but by the time '81-82 rolled around, in fact, they had slipped back to 51.6 per cent.

Now I would point out that for the current year it is not below 49 per cent, as the member has just indicated. The fact of the matter is that the amount this year is 50.1 per cent. So we have tried to maintain that 50-50 share of the educational operating funds -- 50 per cent from the province and 50 per cent from the local municipalities.

Now we know that there is quite a variance across the province in that in some cases the provincial grant covers 80 per cent of the total operating costs. There are others. In fact in the city of Saskatoon it is somewhere around 31 per cent, but we have to consider the reason for that. And the reason for it is because there has been a tremendous increase in the assessment in the city of Saskatoon, tremendous increase in the assessment. This last year alone, Mr. Chairman, the assessment increased in Saskatoon by \$7 million.

Now I think if you look at the average taxpayer's bill in Saskatoon, that you will find that per taxpayer that the amount has not increased a great amount. The individual has not increased a great amount. The fact of the matter is that Saskatoon's population has grown substantially over the last 10 years and the assessment has gone up substantially over the last 10 years. So it's a little bit misleading to throw out these figures and say

that the local taxpayers are being expected to pay more and more of the operating costs, because that's not true.

Mr. Chairman, if you take, for example, the fact that when we calculate the provincial grants, that we do not take into consideration the amount of money that is paid in teachers' pensions, to the dental program, or to life insurance. That is all paid by the province. Now if you were to add all of that in in fact the provincial grant is about 57 per cent of the total operating.

I would point out as well, Mr. Chairman, that for the north-western part of this province, with 14 out of the 20 school divisions having reported in that area, that the departmental grants there, Mr. Chairman, were 59.9 per cent of their total operating grant. So we can see then the variance that occurs across the province.

I would also suggest, Mr. Chairman, that when we consider other funding for education in this province that the provincial government pays 80 per cent of the capital costs. The local taxpayers pay 20 per cent, they pay 20 per cent.

So I have already indicated that we are willing to look at this, in fact we are setting up a committee to examine educational finance in the province. And we will be including the trustees and LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents) and the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) with regard to the study that we're going to look at, and that information is going to be very, very beneficial. And it is time to take a look at it, but keep in mind, Mr. Chairman, that this is a change in direction that the trustees are taking today, because only four short years ago they had indicated quite clearly that they wanted to see the formula stay as it is because they were afraid of losing local autonomy. So that has been respected and now the fact that they are requesting some changes, we are willing to look at that and we will be discussing it with them, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Chairperson, in response to the minister's remarks, I can only say this. Mr. Minister, I was not talking about the other costs that the Government of Saskatchewan obviously incurs as a result of education -- pensions, group life insurance, teachers' dental plans, that sort of thing. Those particular items, Mr. Minister, are not part of school board operating grants. They are not part of total school board expenditures.

Now, Mr. Minister, I've got some statistics here from the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association. I've been able to verify those statistics, Mr. Minister, and it's quite clear to me that if you look at the record, in 1980 56.7 per cent of total school board expenditures came from the province of Saskatchewan. In 1981, it was 54.7 per cent; in '82, it was 54.6 per cent; in '83, under the Deputy Premier's leadership, it was 56 per cent. In 1984, 54.7 per cent; in 1985, 55.2 per cent; in 1986, 50.5 per cent; in 1987, 49.9 per cent; in 1988, 49 per cent; and I understand that in '89 and '90 it has dropped below 49 per cent.

Now, Mr. Minister, those are facts. I mean, you can reel out your list of statistics, Mr. Minister, but it's simply not borne out by what school trustees are telling us from across this province. What they are telling us, Mr. Minister, is that the Government of Saskatchewan's commitment to educational spending in this province has dropped dramatically. As a result of that, Mr. Minister, they are having to rely more and more upon local property taxpayers to make up the difference.

(1915)

Now I happen to have reviewed some of the newspapers in this province, rural newspapers, in the last couple of weeks in terms of the impact of your educational spending on local, rural taxpayers. For instance, I consider Yorkton to be a fairly rural community. "Seven per cent tax increase forecast," Mr. Minister, is the headline.

In the Arcola School Division, "Depleted reserves, anticipated salary increases result in higher taxes." That's the headline. Assiniboia, 3.4 per cent tax hike for Assiniboia; Shamrock School Division, tax rate 2.75 per cent mill increase, and they say that staff in the division has been reduced.

Reductions have been made in the maintenance work scheduled for our facilities. The purchase of new buses has been deferred, and our bus routes will be re-examined in order to achieve as much efficiency as possible while still providing a reasonable service.

Creighton, mill rate increase for Creighton has gone from 43.5 per cent to 48.75 per cent. "School division increases mill rate by 2 for 1990." The school division lost \$180,000 due to student decreases in the last year. We see rural depopulation in the Herbert School Division.

The Meadow Lake school board, Mr. Minister, mill rate taxes increase. And it says:

While the Meadow Lake board of education appreciates the difficult economic circumstances facing the Government of Saskatchewan, the increase of 3 per cent in provincial grants to school boards is not enough. In fact, the effect of the recent provincial budget will be an even heavier burden for property taxpayers in this school division.

And it goes on, Mr. Minister:

As a result of down-loading taxation, the Meadow Lake School board of education has found it necessary to increase the division mill rate by three mills to 57 mills and this increase will serve to maintain a standard of education for our children.

"School division told to control spending" -- this is in the Kindersley newspaper, Mr. Minister. Municipal councils across this province are concerned about school division spending. They're concerned about the mill rate increases, and it's come about, Mr. Minister, because of your government's consistent underfunding of education.

Now look at the Arcola School Division. They have advised the town of 11.5 per cent increase or a 7 mill tax increase for 1990. That's a tremendous increase, Mr. Minister. That amounts to about \$70 for each Carlyle resident, according to this newspaper article.

Then we have the Parkland School Division minutes, coming out of the Shellbrook newspaper. And the headline there is: "Hike in school taxes probable despite plan to cut 10 teachers." And they say, Mr. Minister, that they've had a special meeting; that the ratio of pupils to teachers will have to be increased. They say that they will see five fewer teachers at their school next year.

Canwood has been hard hit. They say the teacher cut-back is not going to affect libraries, critical in resource-base learning, but these are the kinds of things that we're seeing in newspapers across the province. They say, in addition, the board has also included plans to reduce the number of school bus routes in its various cost-cutting measures, but is also faced with only a slight increase in provincial funding.

Then we have one from The Melville Advance, Mr. Minister, "School boards ask taxpayers to dig deeper." And the Melville Public School Board increased its mill rate by 5, up to 58 mills from 53 mills, and they say . . . The chairman of the school board says, that the increase of 3 per cent in grants from the provincial government to school boards is not enough, with the effect of the recent provincial budget being that additional burden is being placed on local property taxpayers. And they say again, as a result of down-loading taxation, the board found it necessary to raise the mill rate.

And then there's an interesting quote:

The federal government passed the tax burden to the province, which in turn has passed it on down to us. Even with staff and teacher cut-backs and increases in class sizes, we'll have to raise our mill rate by 5 mills to make up for the provincial government shortfall.

And then we have another article in the Lloydminster Meridian, and the headline is, "Eight teaching positions eliminated from the public school system." The mill rate increases 6.7 per cent.

And we have another article. It says, "No increase in town taxes; school division up 5 mills." This is out of the Rosetown newspaper. And they've had something like a 7 per cent increase, Mr. Minister.

Now obviously we haven't . . . all rural newspapers have not yet reported on what's happening in rural school divisions in terms of the property tax increases, Mr. Minister, as a result of your government's decision to cut funding to education in this province.

And I want you to explain to the people of this province why it is that you've only got 3 per cent increases for school divisions at a time when you've got hundreds of thousands of dollars and millions of dollars to

Cargill Grain. Please explain the rationale for your government's thinking.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, to start with the figures again that the member opposite plays fast and loose with in talking about the percentages of provincial grant, provincial grant compared to the local taxation.

Mr. Chairman, what I have here is a document that was jointly funded by the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) and the Department of Education which clearly sets out the figures and I would be very happy to table that document.

Also, Mr. Chairman, we have the member opposite talking about cut-backs in several areas with regard to the funds, and we know that the grants that the school divisions get from the Department of Education depends on assessment and it also depends on what's happening with enrolment.

Now she can point out different cases, as she has done, where there have been decreases in the grants. I could also go through and give you many examples of where grants have increased substantially. And in fact I could refer to the city of Saskatoon. I didn't hear her talking about the city of Saskatoon. Well let's see what they said in the city of Saskatoon. And this was a document that was put together and circulated in the city of Saskatoon by Dr. Lowell Loewen who says:

The committee is pleased to report that education was assigned a high priority by the provincial government. Given the state of the provincial economy, a 3 per cent average increase in grants to boards of education, 4 per cent on a per pupil basis, was reasonable.

Now, Mr. Chairman, having said that, I could point out to the member opposite, Mr. Chairman, that Tiger Lily School Division -- that's the rural school division around Melfort -- had an increase in their grant this year of \$379,000. Now that was a 15 per cent increase. I didn't hear her mention that.

Wood River School Division, an increase of \$344,000 -- that was almost 15 per cent increase; Indian Head, an increase of \$243,000, an increase of 9 per cent. I heard her mention an area, I think, where you come from, Mr. Chairman, up in Parkland. Well there was an item there, I think she mentioned. Parkland, they got an increase of \$93,000 this year -- \$93,000.

So when she talks about some cases where they are cutting back in teachers, Mr. Chairman, I can remember back in the '60s and '70s when other governments were in power in this province. I do recall that there were also cut-backs in staff at that time, Mr. Chairman, and that was because enrolments were dropping, and they've been dropping in this province for a good number of years.

We can see the evidence with the number of schools that have closed over the years, and there have been cut-backs as far as staff was concerned. During the last year I think we've lost some 2,260 pupils, I believe, which

is interesting in itself, but also when you consider the fact that 79 more teachers were hired. So the fact that we're losing students doesn't always relate to the number of teachers that we have in the province.

so I'm sure that this year there are going to be school boards that will be cutting back, in some cases, in staff. But I would also point out that it isn't necessarily due to a cut-back in grant or any change in that regard at all. It's simply because the students have moved. Their enrolments are going down, and it necessitates them making some changes.

The member opposite likes to keep raising Cargill and money that's going into Cargill, but there isn't money that's going to Cargill, Mr. Chairman, as you well know. We're into a joint venture here, in a fertilizer plant, with Cargill. We're not giving Cargill anything.

But I would think, Mr. Chairman, that with the development of new manufacturing operations and processing plants like Cargill in this province, that in years down the road, that we are going to have more and more money that we can put into education. But that group over there, Mr. Chairman, are opposed to any kind of diversification and building in this province. They're opposed to Weyerhaeuser paper mills; they're opposed to bacon plants; they're opposed to fertilizer plants; they're opposed to upgraders.

But, Mr. Chairman, if we don't develop some of our resources in this province and build processing and manufacturing plants, we are going to be in much worse condition as time goes on because we will not have the revenues that are needed to put into education, to put into quality education programs for our boys and girls.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, just for your information, I've done a little research in the revenue that we've seen in this province since 1981-82, and there's been a 75 per cent increase in the revenue that your government has collected in this province in the last nine years. But there's only been a 38 per cent increase in operating grants to school boards.

Now you and I can have a debate on what the real numbers are for ever and a day, and we're not going to agree, Mr. Minister. The one thing we can agree on is the fact that we've seen some tremendous property tax increases, or school tax increases in this province as a result of your government's consistent underfunding to our school divisions in this province.

And I just want to name for the record the school boards that have had to increase school taxes in excess of 8 per cent: Big Butte, Wilcox, Broadview, Cupar, Outlook, Kamsack, Canora, Humboldt rural, Tisdale, Blaine Lake, Arcola, Wilcox again, Creighton, Weyburn, Melville. Those are all in excess of 8 per cent, Mr. Minister. These are all rural school divisions in essence, at a time when Saskatchewan taxpayers, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, aren't doing too well economically, Mr. Minister.

We realize that there has been rural depopulation. There's been depopulation in Saskatchewan because of your government's economic policies. People are leaving this province in droves. People are leaving rural Saskatchewan in droves because of a consistent lack of a long-term rural agricultural strategy in this province. And that's come about because of Tory governments in Ottawa and Tory governments in Saskatchewan not knowing what to do with the agricultural crisis -- we understand that.

But nevertheless, Mr. Minister, school divisions still have to provide education. There are still people living in rural Saskatchewan, people between the ages of 5 and 18 who are in the K to 12 school system. And while there's been rural depopulation, nevertheless core curriculum, core subjects, have to be delivered to Saskatchewan school children living in rural Saskatchewan. Underfunding of education isn't going to make the fact that education has to be delivered in this province go away. Education has to be delivered.

And so I ask you again, Mr. Minister: what are you going to do to deal with the fact that your government only increased educational spending, on average, by 3 per cent? As a result of that, Mr. Minister, school divisions across this province have had to increase school taxes dramatically. What you have done, Minister, is what you accused the federal government of doing, and that's shifting responsibility from the feds to the province. That's what you accused the federal government of doing. And now what you've simply done is shifted responsibility for educational funding from the province onto the backs of local property taxpayers, Mr. Minister.

That's not what school trustees in this province want; that's not what the teachers' federation wants, and that's not what the league of educational administrators and directors want. They want the highest priority, according to this press release, to be in educational funding, and you simply didn't come through in your budget.

And I have to ask, Mr. Minister: don't you have any kind of strength in that cabinet? Don't you have any kind of capacity to convince your cabinet colleagues that educational funding in this province is important -- that education in this province is important?

And I simply have to ask you: what are you doing about it? Why can't you convince your colleagues that a 3 per cent increase is unacceptable and that you simply have to have more, in view of some of the problems facing this province?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, we maybe need to remind the member opposite at this point, when she starts talking about mill rate increases in the province, that if she'll look back at the facts and the figures in the 1970s when the NDP were in power, that the increase in the mill rate each year was substantially more than what we have seen during the tenure of this government, Mr. Chairman. So maybe the member needs to just stop and look back at what the NDP were doing and give us an explanation as to why the mill rates were going up so much during some of

those years, Mr. Chairman, when the economy was doing fairly well.

(1930)

And the fact that people are leaving the province has nothing to do with the policies of this government, it's simply because people are leaving to get jobs. When the agricultural economy is down, we know that in many, many other years that people have also left the province, Mr. Chairman. Otherwise, how could we explain the fact that back in the 1970s that there were some several thousands of people that left the province when the NDP were in power. I mean, how do you explain that, Mr. Chairman? And I don't hear any explanation coming forth from the member opposite, because she wouldn't admit that people also left this province back in the '60s or in the '70s when the agricultural economy was down. They left looking for jobs.

But I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that if you combine that with the downturn in the economy in the other sectors in this province, it's understandable why people have moved to other areas to look for work. But as the economy picks up here and as we get back good crops, hopefully this year, and oil prices go up and uranium and potash goes up, that we will have more and more people coming back into this province getting jobs, and we will see a big difference in that area.

Mr. Chairman, I would also point out to you and like to read into the record just what has happened to the increase in our spending in education in this province over the last number of years. In 1982-83 we spent \$310 million -- that's what was going out to operating grants, long-term debt. And in 1983-84 it went up to 339.6; in '84-85 it was over \$358 million; '85-86 was over \$400 million; in '86-87 \$418.6 million; in '87-88 \$414 million; '88-89 \$412.7 million; and '89-90 \$431.1 million; and for 1990-91 \$443.5 million.

So, Mr. Chairman, since 1982 when this party came into power we have seen the grants grow from 310 millions of dollars to 443.5 millions of dollars. And I would also point out, Mr. Chairman, that when we talk about operating grants, we know that they have continued to increase. But it was also this government that introduced the Education Development Fund some five years ago, \$150 million that were to be spread out over now a 10-year period of time and this money is being used for many, many worthwhile things: the development of better library systems, computer systems that have been put into schools so that children now from kindergarten to grade 12 have an opportunity to learn how to operate computers and the benefit of them, not only in schools but also to society. And increased efficiencies in our schools. So we've got to also include the amount of money that's gone into the Education Development Fund and just a lot of good things have been done with that money, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you explain why the Blaine Lake School Division had to increase its property taxes by 12.28 per cent? What caused that?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I would point out that in the

Blaine Lake School Division that they received an increase in their grant of some \$35,347. They had a decrease in the number of students, but in spite of that they still went up with their grant. Now we have to keep in mind that it's the local school division board that sets the mill rate. I couldn't say why it went up, whatever number that she has indicated, without knowing all the facts involved. I mean, the board has to be responsible for their expenditures. Maybe there are other things that they felt that they had to do in this particular year. I'm not sure what's been happening with their mill rate over the years.

In some cases, I know that school boards have small increases in mill rates, and then from time to time they have to have a substantial increase because there may be more things that they require. So whether it was for buses or whatever, Mr. Chairman, I could not tell you why they have gone up some 12 mills because, in fact, they have fewer students, but their grant is up.

And I would also point out, Mr. Chairman, that we talk about the grants that the school boards or school divisions have received, that 85 out of the 115 school divisions received an increase in their grants this year.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me why Tisdale had to increase its property taxes by 8.77 per cent?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I could say the same thing about Tisdale, Mr. Chairman. They had a student loss of 59 students and even with that loss their grant was up \$26,492. So without knowing all of the different factors that were taken into consideration when they were setting their mill rate, I could not say why there was an increase. They probably had other expenditures that could not be met through the provincial grant and the other funding that they had coming in before that. But their grant was up over \$26,000.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Can you tell me what percentage increase that increase represents, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The increase in their grant was a little bit under 1 per cent, .64 per cent.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, how do you even pay the heating bill when your grant increase goes up by less than 1 per cent? How do you even pay teacher salaries, Mr. Minister? Teachers move through the incremental step system, Mr. Minister. How do you pay the potential, I suspect, teacher wage increase that's going to occur once your government negotiates the teachers' salary increase? How do you pay for maintenance? How do you pay for transportation costs, library costs, the costs associated with implementing core curriculum with an increase of less than 1 per cent, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, let me point out to the member just how much money the Tisdale School Division is receiving. They may have only had an increase of \$26,000 but the basic grant for this year in Tisdale is \$4,165,372. Now it has never been the intent that the

provincial government should be picking up all of the costs related to the operations of schools, so when you add to that the amount of money that would normally be put in from the local taxation, there is a substantial amount of money there.

I've indicated that the enrolment has gone down by some 59 students. I would also imagine that, in some cases, the Tisdale School Division is being faced by the closure of some schools. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Chairman, that they are getting a substantial grant in excess of \$4 million.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, while they're getting a grant of \$4 million, inflation in this province is running at about 4.6 per cent. Now obviously, Mr. Minister, your grant came in at less than 1 per cent. Your grant didn't even meet inflation.

It's no wonder, Mr. Minister, that the Tisdale School Division has increased its property taxes by 8.77 per cent because your grant didn't even meet inflation, Mr. Minister. And, as you know, your grant doesn't represent the entire educational spending in the Tisdale School Division. Obviously, Tisdale has to raise some of that spending on their own through property taxes, Mr. Minister.

So I understand why Tisdale increased its taxes by 8.77 per cent, because your grant came in at less than 1 per cent. I understand why taxpayers in this province are feeling particularly overburdened, because your government is continuing to shift the responsibility for educational financing from the province onto the local property taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Minister, can you explain to me why the Humboldt Rural School Division increased its property taxes by 8.89 per cent?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, just so we straighten out the member opposite, when she says that we're shifting the expenditures from the province onto the local taxpayer, in 1981 -- and I believe then the NDP were still in power, Mr. Chairman -- the provincial share of the operating grant for the Tisdale School Division was 62.1 per cent. Now in 1988, which is the last year that we have the audited statements for, it was exactly the same, 62.1 per cent.

Now if the member opposite can see a shift of responsibilities from the province to the rural, I fail to see it in that particular example, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure that if you were to look at the year 1990-91, that you'll probably see that it's still in the neighbourhood of 62 per cent. But for the years that we have at the last audited statement, 62.1 per cent, exactly the same as what it was when the NDP were in power.

Now you talk about Humboldt. Well let's see what's happening at Humboldt. They had a loss of 41 students. They had a loss in the total grant of \$112,733. Now what we would see there, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that the assessment in Humboldt has increased, will be there to offset the reason why they are having a decrease in their grant. I would also point out, and in spite of that, the Humboldt Rural School Division is still receiving

in excess of 4 millions of dollars for the current year.

Now when she talks about changes that are taking place, we can see there that . . . And this is another interesting one because here is a real good example of off-loading, Mr. Chairman. In fact in 1981 when the NDP were in power, the portion of the provincial grant that they provided was 54.7 per cent of the operating expenses. But in 1988, the last year for which we have the audited statement, Mr. Chairman, it was 67 per cent. In fact it had gone up over 13 per cent in the share that the province was paying towards their total operating costs. So, Mr. Chairman, again if the member would try to mislead the public and the House that we're off-loading, I certainly fail to see it.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, you know, you're awfully defensive tonight. What I'm trying to do is get a handle . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I'm not being offensive. He's being awfully defensive. I'm asking the questions but you seem to be fairly argumentative.

What I'm trying to get at, Mr. Minister, is why it is that your government continues to underfund education. You know you have \$65 million for Cargill Grain. You can give away thousands of acres of northern Saskatchewan to Weyerhaeuser. You can give away lots of money to the GigaTexts of the world. You can enter into wonderful contracts with Chuck Childers, you know, five-year no-cut contracts.

I'm trying to get at your priorities, Mr. Minister. And I'm simply trying to point out to you that while you're busy underfunding educational spending in this province, the individual taxpayers are picking up their load. Now if you look at the Outlook School Division, they've just increased their taxes by 10.34 per cent. Can you explain to this House why it is that they have to increase their local property taxes by 10.34 per cent?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Could you repeat the division again, please.

Ms. Atkinson: -- It's the Outlook school unit: 10.34 per cent increase. Their mill rate's gone from 58 to 64 mills.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, again with Outlook -- and I'll try not to be so defensive; I'm simply trying to answer the questions.

The Outlook School Division had a loss of 24 students but they have an increase in their grant of \$75,891, which is 2.68 per cent. Their total grant this year, Mr. Chairman, is \$2.9 million and that's for a total of 1,393 students.

Now I'd like to point out as well what's happened there with regard to the portion of the expenditures there, or the provincial grant. There has been a slight decrease there, Mr. Chairman, from 56.1 in '81 to 53.7 for 1988.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, what does your department estimate the inflation rate to be? When your regional people were out meeting with school divisions, what number did they fix as the inflation rate?

(1945)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, it would be approximately 4 per cent.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, is that what your officials were saying out at these meetings that occurred, I think it was the Friday after the budget came down Thursday? They said 4 per cent, or were they telling people that the inflation rate, as determined by Saskatchewan Education, was about 4.6 per cent?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- You could well be right on that. We get the figures, or I understand the officials get the figures, from Finance. It's quite possible.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Okay. Well, Mr. Minister, given that, as I understand it, your officials were saying to school board directors that, according to the Department of Education or the Department of Finance, inflation is running at about 4.6 per cent in this province, can you tell me how many school boards in this province received operating grants in excess of 4.6 per cent increases.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, for those that received -- and this would include rural as well as the city, separate and public, comprehensive and so on -- zero to 5 per cent, there were 44 divisions; from 5 to 10 per cent was 24, and over 10 per cent there were 14.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me how many school divisions received cuts.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Between zero to 5 per cent would have been 21, and 5 to 10 would have been 6, and more than 10 would have been 3. And again, I would point out that the reasons for decreases would be determined by the number of students that had left the school division and also it could be an increase in the assessment. Saskatoon public would be an example of where there was an increase in the assessment.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, there were 39 school divisions that received cuts or less than a zero per cent increase. And you say that there are 44 school divisions that received between a zero to 5 per cent increase. Of those 44, Mr. Minister, how many school divisions received increases in excess of the inflation rate of 4.6 per cent, or whatever?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I can tell you that those that received over 5 per cent increase would have been 38. There would also have been a goodly number of the next category of 44 that were probably in around that four and a half to 5 per cent. There were a total of 30 that received a decrease.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Okay, Mr. Minister, I need a little more . . . I need you to be a little more specific. Of the 44 school divisions that received between a zero to 5 per cent increase, how many of those school divisions received an increase between zero and 4 per cent, for instance?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We don't have it broken down to the 4 per cent. All I can give you is to the 5 per cent. And as I indicated there, the increase zero to 5 per cent, there were 44 in that category. And the next category, from 5 to 10 per cent, increase was 24, and over 10 per cent was 14.

But I would point out, Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, that the big thing that the department looks at with regard to the calculation of all of the school grants -- this is all done by the officials within the department -- is fairness. And what they are looking at is equalization. And we fully realize that we try to maintain the 50 per cent range right across the province. But again I would point out that it varies all the way from about 30 per cent to 80 per cent. So to try and look at those who got more or those who got less, you have to consider the whole province and see what is happening, because when you look at some of those divisions where they have a very, very low assessment, 80 per cent of their operating grants are going to be coming from the province. So we're looking at equalization when we determine whether or not they're going to be getting an increase or whether they're going to get a decrease.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I know that you will have a computer print-out of all the school divisions in Saskatchewan and their percentage increase. Can you give me a copy of that. I received it last year from the Minister of Education and I'd appreciate it if I could receive it this year.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Yes, we'll be happy to provide that.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me when you'll provide that for me?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We could provide it in the next session when we're into estimates -- tomorrow or Wednesday.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you, Mr. Minister. Now, Mr. Minister, it would appear from the information that you've just given me that over half of the school boards in this province received an increase less than the inflation rate in this province. And that, Mr. Minister, explains why we see school boards across this province increasing their school property tax rates by rates in excess of the inflation rate. That's why we see school boards in this province dipping into the reserves, as numerous newspaper reports have indicated, in order to keep the school taxes at a lower level, Mr. Minister.

The point that I'm trying to make is, and it's quite clear from the information you've given me, that the reason why school divisions in this province have had to increase their mill rates, and in some cases increase those mill rates quite dramatically, is because of the cut-backs, or the cut-backs in funding to their individual school board, or because the funding that your government has forwarded to them is less than the rate of inflation.

And while it's true there has been rural depopulation in this province of, say, 39 students in one school division, 59 in another, 24 students in another, all of those students don't leave the same school, Mr. Minister. Those students come from across the school division and those school divisions still have to provide an educational system. And while your formula takes into consideration rural depopulation, or student losses, that still doesn't solve the problems that many school divisions are facing in this province, and that is having to provide a quality education for the students that are left at a time when students are leaving their school division.

They still have to provide social studies or English or science or chemistry or physics or whatever the subjects may be. And yet the way that education is being funded in this province doesn't seem to take that into consideration. And while I recognize that the formula used to be well accepted by school trustees across Saskatchewan, obviously times have changed, factors have changed, the situation has changed.

I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, now that you're looking at changes to the formula, can you tell me what we are looking at in terms of changes: what those changes will take into consideration in order that we can get school funding in this province back on track, in order that school divisions don't have to increase property taxes at horrendous rates of increases, and in order that we can move to the 60-40 formula that's being suggested by the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association and which has certainly been endorsed by my party colleagues.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, there's no doubt, as I've indicated, that we have to look at the financing of education. But to just come out with a figure and say 60-40 and how that might work, there's going to be a lot of consultation and discussion with the groups that are involved. Because we know that in fact today, because we try to strive for this equalization and fairness across the province, that there is a variation all the way from 30 per cent to 80 per cent for the total operating costs of schools. And we also have to take into consideration the amount of money that we'd be putting in for capital projects.

But, Mr. Chairman, I think there are other factors that we have to mention along with what the member opposite has been raising. We have to keep in mind the fact that there are some 2,264 students that have left the province in the last year, or left our systems. We have to consider the fact that there are many school divisions and schools where there have been a few students that have dropped out, that they still have to maintain the same services, they still have to have the same staff -- they still have to maintain the same services. But we know that because of fewer students that the grants are going to be a little bit lower, so the only way that they can hope to recover that is by raising the mill rate.

And I would point out, as well, Mr. Chairman, that the same system is being used today as it was when the NDP were in power and when the Liberals were in power prior to that. They've always strived for equalization, right across the province, the fairness. And we know that, since times are changing, and we have to re-evaluate things and reassess things, it is, as

I said, time to take a look at the financing of education.

We intend to do that. But to say just what changes are going to take place, we can't do that until we've had an opportunity to discuss it with the trustees, with LEADS, with the STF, with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), and with SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), because these people are all going to be involved, they're all going to be affected by whatever decision comes down.

I think that, Mr. Chairman, as well, that we consider that education is paid through taxes, and if it isn't paid through property taxes then it has to be paid through other taxes. The provincial money that goes towards education comes -- whether it's through sales tax or gas tax, or whether it's through income tax, whatever the case might be -- we're taxing people throughout the province. And when we look at any new way of doing it, what we actually are going to probably find out, that we are going to be shifting the taxation from some people to other people, but it's still going to come, Mr. Chairman, from the taxpayers.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, there are some of us that think that the individual taxpayers have paid their fair share in this province for far too long. If you look at what your government has done, individual income taxes in this province have gone up by 75 per cent in terms of revenue since your government came to power.

If you look at the other kinds of things that individual taxpayers are involved in, for instance the sales tax, we've seen a 67 per cent increase in the kinds of revenues your government is collecting on that particular tax.

But when you look at corporate income tax, and uranium royalties, and land, forest, fish, and fur licences, and oil royalties, and potash royalties, we've seen dramatic decreases, Mr. Minister, under your government.

And therein lies the problem. Your government is consistently going to individual taxpayers and asking them to shell out more and more money, whether that's in the form of individual income taxes or in the form of property taxes or school taxes. And the corporate citizens in this province that are doing quite nicely in many instances are not being asked to pay their fair share.

And consequently, Mr. Minister, I think that we have the potential for a serious tax revolt in this province -- a serious tax revolt. Because people, quite frankly, are sick and tired of paying income taxes and property taxes and school taxes when they see the corporate friends of the government getting away without paying their fair share of taxes.

(2000)

And my colleague in the House of Commons, John Rodriguez, regularly has the corporate welfare bum of the week, and he has an Academy Award kind of presentation announcing the corporate citizen in this country that's not paying their fair share of taxes. And those happen to be your cousins in

Ottawa that haven't been able to change the tax system in this country so that we can get some semblance of fairness.

And in fact what we're not seeing is the goods and services tax, which is going to have another increase on school boards in this province because they're not going to be exempt, Mr. Minister. They in fact aren't going to have the ability to collect the goods and services tax, but they're certainly going to have to pay for the goods and services tax.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, are you prepared to support, should this tax go ahead, Bob Nixon's proposal, the treasury minister out of the Ontario government, who is suggesting that municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals have some special consideration as a result of the government's decision to go ahead with the goods and services tax -- a decision which your government has not protested to any great extent in the province of Saskatchewan or indeed in the country of Canada.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what sort of presentations are you making to the federal Finance Minister Wilson on the impact the goods and services tax is going to have on school divisions in the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the member opposite knows full well that we have indicated on many occasions that we do not support the GST (goods and services tax). It has also been indicated that school boards are not going to be affected by the GST. So we would certainly want to ensure that that is maintained.

Mr. Chairman, the member opposite, you know, likes to talk about the corporate sector and the fact they're not paying their fair share but she hasn't made any mention of the fact that all of the prices in our four major revenue generators have been down substantially in the last number of years and this has had an effect on royalties.

It's also interesting too, when they talk about the amount of money and the underfunding and all of the rest of this when we have a calculation that's been done of some of the things that they're proposing. It's going to cost about \$7 billion to bring in some of the things that they've already promised, and we're not even into an election campaign yet, Mr. Chairman.

So it's going to be pretty interesting to see what they come out with as time goes on with all of these promises that they're making to restauranteurs, and they're going to shut down the uranium industry, and they're going to do all kinds of things here. They're going to take back all of the companies that have been privatized for a dollar and all the rest of the scene, and yet they're going to have money for all of these programs.

So \$7 billion, it would really be interesting, Mr. Chairman, and we're not into a campaign yet, so boy oh boy, it's going to be interesting.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, you really didn't answer my question. Now you say that school divisions aren't going to be impacted upon. Explain that to me. Explain how school boards are not going to have to pay the

goods and services tax.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the information that we have is that it's to be cost-neutral, that the school boards, hospitals, and different sectors such as this would probably pay the tax, but then with a rebate system it will be, in fact, cost-neutral. Now that's the information that we have and that's the only thing that we've got to go on at this point and we would not want to see it any other way.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, has not the school trustees, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association made some sort of representation to you, encouraging you and your government to support Bob Nixon's proposal for how to deal with the goods and services tax as it will affect universities, municipalities, schools, and hospitals? I think it's called the MUSH (municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals) proposal.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, how you could arrive at the conclusion it's not going to affect school divisions when, in fact, school trustees across this province, and in particular the SSTA, is very concerned about the financial impact the goods and services tax is going to have on local school divisions.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, we understand that the trustees have indeed made a proposal, but not to us; it's gone to the Minister of Finance. And the member may well wish to ask the Minister of Finance some questions at a later time.

We too are concerned about administrative costs that may be involved. If school boards are, in fact, going to have to pay the tax and then are going to have to look for rebates, there may well be some administrative costs. So I think these are things that the ministers of Finance are now discussing and negotiating. We would certainly want to do all we could to ensure that there aren't going to be administrative costs for the school boards and if there isn't some better way of doing it.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I know that the SSTA has been talking to the Department of Finance, but I also understand that they had also made representations to you. I'm wondering what the Department of Education is doing in terms of making representations to the Department of Finance, in terms of trying to resolve some of the complicated problems that are going to arise for school boards, in particular the rebate mechanism which school boards are concerned isn't going to give them full recovery once the goods and services tax is implemented. I'm wondering again: what sort of representation are you making to the Minister of Finance or to some of your counterparts in Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the officials from the Department of Education have been meeting with the officials in Finance, and the officials in finance from all across Canada are involved in looking at these very issues and trying to work out the fairest possible method of handling them. We certainly do not support any increased costs as far as administration is concerned. That information has been put forward to the Finance officials, and they are looking after the negotiations at the

federal level.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Since your officials have been in contact with the Department of Finance, can you tell me what your official position is with regard to the goods and services tax, and what are your officials saying to the Department of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The stand that has been maintained by the officials is that we are opposed to the GST, but in view of the fact that the legislation is now well along and it would appear that the federal government is going to put it through anyway, then we are suggesting to Finance that they make sure that they get in there and see that there are no additional administrative costs involved.

But at the outset, we're opposed to it. But we are asking that they ensure that there are no additional administrative costs.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, are your officials familiar with Robert Nixon's proposal? And I would be interested in knowing what your department's position is on Robert Nixon's proposal.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The officials are aware of the proposal and find that there are some interesting suggestions within it, and discussions are ongoing. Whether or not those are the suggestions that are going to be followed in the end analysis, it's hard to say at this time. But yes, they are aware of it.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, it's quite obvious that you've developed yourself into quite a politician. You haven't told me a thing. You're aware of it; it's ongoing; but I want to know what your position is, Mr. Minister. Do you support it or don't you? A simple yes or no. Do you support parts of it or don't you? Tell us where you're at; we'd be interested in knowing.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, as I pointed out, we are aware of the Nixon report. Whether or not we're in support of all of it or part of it is really not the point here. There are other positions, though, that are being put forward as well. What we want to maintain is what's going to be best for the educational system here in the province of Saskatchewan. We will continue to work with the Finance officials. They're meeting all across Canada; the negotiations are going on; and it will be dealt with at that particular level by Finance.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, that was exactly what the point was. The point was, what's your position? And you haven't told me what your position is. And so the school trustees in the province of Saskatchewan will continue to wonder what your position is when it comes to the Robert Nixon proposal, because they certainly have found it an interesting proposal, and something that might . . . a proposal that might be able to accommodate some of the concerns. Obviously, it has some financial implications for the province of Saskatchewan and that's why I was interested in hearing what your department's view was on it. But, unfortunately, Mr. Minister, as you've developed into quite a politician, I

guess the answer's not going to be forthcoming tonight, so we'll move on.

Now, Mr. Minister, it's -- my colleague says is, he's putting politics into education, I would suggest he is. Mr. Minister, it's quite clear in our discussion over the last hour or so, that I think I've been able to point out to you, and if not you certainly to the people who are listening, that your government has not really met it's commitment to the K to 12 system this year in terms of funding. And I'm talking about operating grant funding. I'm not talking about capital expenditures, EDF (Education Development Fund), and those other things. I'm talking about funding for the day-to-day operations of schools in the province of Saskatchewan.

It is clear, Mr. Minister, that your commitment to school boards in this province has dramatically decreased over the last several years and there's been a down-sizing, or downgrading of education in the province of Saskatchewan on to local property taxpayers. There's no question that while not all mill rates have been set in the province of Saskatchewan there have been some dramatic increases across Saskatchewan.

You say that some 38 schools received in excess of a 5 per cent increase. Well, there were something like 98 schools that did not receive a 5 per cent increase; did not receive the inflation rate in the province of Saskatchewan. And that is why, Mr. Minister, we have seen some pretty dramatic increases in school taxes, school tax levies in the province. And not all of the reports are in as you're probably aware.

Mr. Minister, while it's true there has been rural depopulation in the province of Saskatchewan, some 2,400 students; students have been leaving the province. Nevertheless, school divisions still have to provide an education. We're witnessing across the province more and more calls from parents who are concerned about rural school closure, parents who are concerned about cut-backs in teaching staff, parents who are concerned about increase in student-teacher ratios, parents who are concerned about increases in their property taxes while at the same time recognizing that school divisions really, really have a hard time not to increase property taxes because of your underfunding of education.

And I guess, Mr. Minister, I find it disappointing that in your budget speech that the Minister of Finance read in this legislature in March, there were great platitudes given to education, and how education was a priority, and how education was going to receive increase in spending, how education was the backbone of the government's policy initiatives, one of its priorities. And if you look at what's happened since your budget was brought in, many, many school boards did not see increases in funding even to meet the rate of inflation and they've consequently had to pass that on to the local taxpayers.

(2015)

So, Mr. Minister, I'm going to leave this portion of estimates. I can say very honestly that I am disappointed that you haven't been able to convince your colleagues in cabinet that the K to 12 school system deserved more spending. It deserved at least the rate of inflation, Mr. Minister, and

you didn't even come close.

Consequently we will see more and more newspaper articles across Saskatchewan talking about increased student-teacher ratios, talking about cut-backs to school teachers and support services, talking about school closures, Mr. Minister. That in fact is the reality that's occurring in the province of Saskatchewan as a result of your underfunding.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to turn this portion of our educational estimates over to my colleague, the critic for advanced education.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Just a couple of things, Mr. Chairman, with regard to what the member opposite has just said. She made mention of the pupil-teacher ratio, and I would like to remind her that since this government has been in power that the pupil-teacher ratio has, in fact, gone down. We are now sitting at around 16.2:1, which is the third lowest in the country. And I think that certainly the department is to be commended for being able to maintain that pupil-teacher ratio.

Now I fully realize that we could go to lots of class-rooms in our larger urban centres and you would find that there are probably 30 or 35 students in a class-room. But the pupil-teacher ratio right now is the third lowest in Canada.

I would also indicate that we have tried to maintain the same proportion of funding of school divisions across this province that has been maintained for decades. And no mention is made, as well, Mr. Chairman, with regard to moneys that are going into distance education, moneys that are going into the correspondence school, which are also being utilized to assist those areas in rural Saskatchewan where, because of declining enrolment, students sometimes do not have as much of an opportunity or as wide a subject offering. So there are other things that are going on. It's not all happening just within the operating grant, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I want to take some time this evening to delve into post-secondary education. And, Mr. Minister, I too want to support my colleague from Saskatoon Nutana in saying that I wish you had more power in cabinet for . . . in education and particularly for post-secondary education.

At one time, Mr. Minister -- and I know you, being a former educator, will have to agree with me -- Saskatchewan was recognized all over this country and all over this continent as having one of the best education systems right from kindergarten to post-secondary education. We can no longer say that, Mr. Minister, and you know that. You know that. I know you have to defend the actions of your cabinet colleagues, but I know also deep down in your heart you know that you've got a tough time doing it.

It is difficult, Mr. Minister, when you have to face the universities, and you have to face the regional colleges and technical schools . . . particularly the universities, Mr. Minister. I know you've got a tough time in defending the money that your government has. And I know you don't like us saying so, but the money that you have for Cargill, the money that

you have for Weyerhaeuser . . . Mr. Minister let me just ask you if you ever sat down and calculated what the subsidy is to Weyerhaeuser at 8 per cent over 30 years. I sat down the other day and calculated it out. If Weyerhaeuser was to pay the going interest rate, on the price that you sold the mill for, Weyerhaeuser would have to pay an additional \$432 million. \$432 million.

Mr. Minister, I met with the university people this afternoon and we discussed the possibility of the U of R having a debt -- a long-term debt of \$6.8 million which may be down to 6.3 million depending on how it's going to be calculated. How advantageous it would be for them, Mr. Minister, if they had loans at 8 per cent rather than paying 14 to 15 per cent today. Have you ever thought, Mr. Minister, what that would do for the U of R and how helpful and beneficial that would be to the students at the U of R, instead of making that money available -- 8 per cent for 30 years -- to a multinational corporation like Weyerhaeuser. That is where, Mr. Minister, we have a disagreement with you and your government. That you have this money. You have this money for the Pocklington, and the Cargills, and the Weyerhaeusers. But when it comes to our school boards -- as my colleague has already pointed out -- and when it comes to post-secondary education, the U of R and the U of S, you don't seem to have that money available. That's where we have our argument with you. It's your priorities. You've got the money but you're simply spending it in the wrong places.

Mr. Minister, when we look at the U of R and the U of S, they certainly in operating grants -- and let's stay at the operating grants -- in the operating grants they have suffered severely under your government since 1983. Severely. I've got the figures here, Mr. Minister, and I showed them to the people at the university this afternoon. They didn't seem to argue with those. It has not kept up with inflation. The operating grants have simply not kept up with inflation, and consequently what the university has had to do a number of things. They've had to cut back on programs, number one; they've had to substantially -- substantially -- increase the size of the classes, number two. And we know, Mr. Minister, and you didn't argue with my figures the other day so I assume they're correct, that we've had since 1982 an increase in student fees of over 82 per cent -- of over 82 per cent. That, Mr. Minister, is unacceptable, simply unacceptable.

I know today you met with the president of the U of S Student Union. I want to ask you, Mr. Minister: what assurances did you give to the president of the U of S Student Union that more moneys would be made available in the student loan program, even though recognizing -- recognizing -- Mr. Minister, that that will mean that many of the students will have to go in debt even further, but at least recognizing that you will give them the opportunity to attend post-secondary education.

Have you given assurance to the president of the University of Saskatchewan Student Union that more moneys would be available in student loans to assist those students who will be adversely affected by the increase of tuition fees, due to the fact that you've once again underfunded the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina in operating

grants? Have you given that assurance? Mr. Minister, would you just comment on the meeting that you had with the president of the university student union.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the member opposite goes at great lengths into talking about some of the large corporations that are providing a lot of revenues to this province and a lot of jobs to this province. I didn't hear him saying anything about the \$91,000 a day that Weyerhaeuser was losing prior to their being sold -- prior to their being sold. So, Mr. Speaker, we could probably debate that topic for some period of time.

I would point out, Mr. Chairman, that operating grants to universities this year will increase by 3 per cent, plus they'll receive \$8.5 million under the Advanced Education Enhancement Fund.

University capital payments, debt retirement will increase by ten and a half per cent. Funding for university capital projects this year, \$52.6 million. And as well something that's new this year, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that federated and affiliated colleges will get in on the enhancement fund and also a 3 per cent grant increase there. SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) is going to be getting a 3 per cent grant increase plus \$7.1 million from the enhancement fund.

And something significant, Mr. Chairman, is the regional colleges and the increases that they're getting, a 3 per cent increase in their grant plus \$2.3 million from the enhancement fund. And as well the education outreach fund is again going to be at \$3.2 million. So a lot of additional money that is going to the post-secondary institutions this year.

Now I know, Mr. Chairman, that all institutions and all school boards, everybody could use more money, but we have to keep in mind the ability of the taxpayers to pay. And when tough times are here, such as we've had in the last few years, it is difficult to come up with any more money for any of the educational institutions. I would point out that for this year that the operating grants for our universities are going to be \$153.8 million. That's a pretty substantial amount of money, Mr. Chairman. And as well there's going to be eight and a half million dollars for the enhancement fund.

Now the University of Saskatchewan this year, their grant is going to be \$111.7 million with another \$6 million from the enhancement fund. The University of Regina will get \$42.1 million and another 2.3 from the enhancement fund; federated college, \$4.77 million plus another \$260,000 from the enhancement fund, and that's new from last year.

As well we're going to see another \$23.4 million; it's an increase for debt retirement and another \$52 million for construction, capital construction on our campuses. So a substantial amount of money, Mr. Chairman, is going to our post-secondary institutions.

Now with regard to increases in tuition fees, there is no doubt that there have had to be some increases, not only this year, but there have been

increases I think for every year as long as I can remember. The percentage increase of course has varied from one year to another. And, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that even with the increases that we see this year, I am pleased that they weren't any higher, and I know that Andrew Thompson was pleased that it wasn't any higher than 10 per cent. That is still a significant amount, but it's not certainly as bad as they had thought it might be.

But when you make a comparison of the increases in what students have to pay in other parts of Canada -- and particularly western Canada -- we find that in some cases we are higher, certainly with regard to the Alberta Universities. We're probably about the same as Manitoba; I don't have their new tuition fees yet for this year. I know that we're lower than U.B.C. (University of British Columbia) and we're lower than the universities in Ontario. So for western Canada, yes, we're higher than Alberta, we're lower than B.C. When Manitoba's tuition fee increase comes in, we'll probably still be about the same. And again it varies from college to college, so we're somewhere in the ballpark.

Now with regard to the student loans, I have indicated to Andrew Thompson that it is to be hoped that there will be some additional flexibility within the loan program this year. We know of some of the concerns that have been raised in the past and we're trying to address those. We have to keep in mind that the Saskatchewan student loan fund has only been in place for a very short period of time and there were a lot of growing pains to go through.

One of the problems that we have with the Saskatchewan student loan fund is that we use the same criteria as is used for the Canada student loan fund. We all I think would admit that some of the criteria there are a little bit outdated for today, but we haven't had any success to this point in making some changes. What I would hope is that in our own operation here that we can have a little bit more flexibility so that we can meet some of the needs that we haven't been able to meet in the past.

I think we've been doing a very good job with student loans in this province. And some of the new programs that have been introduced, it has enabled more students to participate in them when you look at the number of students that are getting loans today. That's up from 5,400 recipients back in '81-82 to now over 19,000 for this current year. So it's a pretty substantial amount.

The amount of money that's gone into that is around a hundred millions of dollars, 105, I think to be exact -- 60 from the feds and 45 from us. And there is a lot of loan forgiveness. There's free interest of course while students are still attending classes. We know that as well we did have 6 per cent interest loans which I think was a pretty good deal. And we recognize today that students can't always find employment that they want, maybe as easy as when you and I were going to university, although I think that we generally found it sometimes tough then. There weren't always the jobs that we wanted.

But I would point out as well that the student loan fund is really there

only to supplement the income or other sources of money that students would have to go to university. It's not the intent that student loans should be covering all of the costs. And that's where I would differ a little bit with Mr. Thompson and some of the points that he has been making. But we'll be discussing those as time goes on because we want to try and meet on a regular basis.

One other thing that I discussed with him today was the fact that we recognize that a lot of the problems with student loans occur in Saskatoon, and because of the large number of students there at SIAST and at the campus. And what we want to see there is some changes that we can provide the service on campus during the peak period of time.

(2030)

We're looking now and talking to the students. They're going to make some space available so that we can maybe have one or two people up there, one or two days a week, depending on the demand. We're going to have to monitor that closely, but enable students then to have some of their concerns dealt with right there on the campus. And we're getting full support from the students' union on that. And I think that that is going to be very beneficial and we'll probably head off some of the problems in fact before they become problems.

But we do have to continue to look at the student loan fund and address concerns as they are raised. I would hope that this year we have fewer concerns raised than last because of changes that we have made, some streamlining that has been done. But for the most part there is a lot of money that's going out as loans, and we have to ensure that those who need it are in fact getting it.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I'm not going to get into operating and capital grants to the university this evening. I want to do that much more extensively on Wednesday. But I was a little bit surprised by your statement that you said in your meeting with Mr. Thompson today that he was satisfied or happy with a 10 per cent increase in student . . . Did I hear that correctly?

Would you mind telling me exactly what Mr. Thompson's view was on a 10 per cent increase in student tuition fees?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- As Mr. Thompson indicated to me, and I think he was quoted in the newspaper the other day, that he was pleased that it wasn't higher. Certainly 10 per cent as far as he is concerned, probably is not acceptable, but at the same time there were a lot of rumours that they might be looking at a 15 per cent increase. And that was the indication that he had given to me, that certainly he was pleased that it wasn't higher. I'm not saying he was happy with it.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I'm sure glad you corrected that because that's not what I understood Mr. Thompson's position was either. But, Mr. Minister, would you tell me if the -- and then I'm going to get off of this particular area -- if the U of S had taken care, my understanding is that

even with a 10 per cent increase in student funds, student fees, the university will still be short \$1 million.

How do you expect the U of S -- they're not allowed to run a deficit -- how do you expect the U of S to take care of the additional million dollars, or are discussions going on with your department so additional funds would be made available?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I know that when we talk about a million dollars that it's still a fair amount of money, but when you consider the size of the University of Saskatchewan's budget, that that's just a little over half of 1 per cent that they're looking at, that they're going to have to try and address.

But again, it's up to the board of governors in the university administration to see what, in fact, they can do to address the problem that they have.

Now we recognize that through the enhancement fund that they are getting some additional money. We have to continue to work together with them to see if there are other things that can be done throughout the course of the year. We're not sure exactly, for example now, what effect that the increased expenditures to regional colleges is going to have, how many more students may be involved with programming out there, but we have to certainly continue to work with them.

I plan on discussing this again with Dr. Ivany later this week, but we do work in very close co-operation with him. Right now, they just had their board meeting, as you know, last Friday, and that's when the tuition fees were set. And they're obviously looking at their expenditures and seeing if there are, in fact, other ways in which they can do away with that deficit. So that's something that's going to take a little bit of time for them to try and work out, but we will be in discussion with them.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, as I indicated, I'm not going to pursue this any further this evening. I will go in much more detail on Wednesday or Thursday or Friday, whenever we get back to it, however long it will take. I will just remind you today that that's what I intend to do, and exactly what your lack of funding has done to the two universities and what will happen.

Now you talk very much about the enhancement fund, and I will go into much more detail of that a little later, how detrimental that is to the universities when you don't include that into the base funding, as you didn't do last year and you probably won't do this year.

What I want to do, Mr. Minister, is get back, I want to get back to the student loan fund. Mr. Minister, are negotiations going on at the present time between the provincial governments and the federal government to change the criteria, which you have already admitted tonight and I think we both agree are outdated?

They should have been changed and we were looking at some changes in the

late '70s and the early '80s which didn't come about. And I just want to ask you this evening, Mr. Minister, how far advanced are those negotiations? And if you can't, if you can't convince the federal government that they should change the criteria under which students are eligible for student loans, will you give us a guarantee tonight that you will undertake to change the criteria that you use in the Saskatchewan student loan program?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The concerns about the Canada student loan plan . . . or program are not just unique to Saskatchewan. All of the provinces have concerns about it, and in fact negotiations are going on with the officials and working through the Council of Ministers of Education. We had a chance to discuss it briefly when I was at the last meeting, but in the interim, the officials are looking at it. It doesn't appear likely of course that there are going to be any changes now in place for August 1 of this year, but we have to ensure that we continue working to have some of those changes brought in for next year.

With regard to what we can do with our own program here, we will still, for the most part, be following that same criteria. But what I suggested earlier, that we are going to be looking at all the flexibility that we can within our particular program to see that those students who require the loans will in fact be able to get them.

And as I understand it in talking with some of our officials, we do have some more flexibility that we can work on. But we'll still have the same general framework. But there are some situations we have to always consider on an individual basis. But there is some flexibility as I'm told by the officials in the student loan program.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, my question to you is, again, what are you recommending . . . what is it the Government of Saskatchewan recommending to the federal government in changes to the student loan program? What are your recommendations and could I have a copy of those recommendations that you have made? I know that those negotiations have been going on for some years now. Surely they are not secretive. Could I have a copy of your recommendations that you . . . the Government of Saskatchewan has made to the other provincial ministers and also to the federal government.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I would point out one of the main issues that we have and that's to do with the parental contribution table. They're really outdated. And I've been assured by my officials that we can provide you, for the most part I think, all of the recommendations that we have made to the feds and we'll have that for you on Wednesday.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I appreciate that very much. My next question I guess is, if you feel, as you've indicated already, that the federal criteria are outmoded and outdated and it takes a long time -- I know, I mean, I've been there and I know it takes a long time to negotiate those through all the provinces and then to get agreement with the federal government -- if you feel that those are outdated and unfair, why don't you make the changes and show some leadership in this province and make those changes for the provincial loan program so that our students in this

province won't have to suffer because of the lack of leadership by some of the other provincial ministers and the federal government. Why don't you show some leadership and show our students that you're really behind them and you will implement some of those changes that you have recommended.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I think we've shown a great deal of leadership in this province because I think that the Saskatchewan student loan program is one of the best that you'll find any place in Canada. We have made a lot of changes to it. It's the basic criteria that we follow that's been used by the Canada student loans program.

But I think if you consider some of the changes that we have introduced with regard to the money that single parents, disabled can get, when you consider as well the fact that parental assets have been excluded as assessment criterion for dependent students, that was something that was a real irritant. When you had, for example, in the farming sector where people might have a fair amount of land, but they had no income. So when that government, of course, was in power, it was very difficult for some of the rural students to get a student loan because they always looked at the assets and it had absolutely nothing to do with the income that the parents had. So there are examples of the relief, the interest relief that has been provided. A lot of the program criteria has been changed.

So there is a fair bit of change there in what you would find in the other provinces, which makes it possible for more students to get a larger amount of money in some cases, and also a larger amount that can be forgiven. So I think we have led the way in a lot of areas there, Mr. Chairman. But obviously, as times change we have to continue to take a look at what we're doing and act on the suggestions and advice that is being given to us by student unions on the different campuses.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I want to pursue that a little further, but I want to ask you a question. It is true that you've made a number of changes, some of them more certainly positive. Would you mind telling me, Mr. Minister, when was the change made to cancel the bursary program? And can you also tell me when the bursary, at what level the bursary program kicked in when it was in existence?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the change came in 1987-88 and I would point out that I think that some of the changes that were made were really a lot better than some of the things that we had before. Forgivable loans replaced bursaries in '87-88 and are targeted to high-need students and contingent upon successful completion of studies -- no longer a give-away program. Students receiving assistance above \$180 per week are eligible for forgiveness of loans above this amount if they successfully complete their studies. The student assistance program is intended to supplement and not replace the resources of students and their families.

And the average authorized forgivable loan in '89-90 is projected to be more than two and a half times that given in bursary assistance in 1981-82. In other words, it changed from 955 to 2,517. So even though the bursaries provide . . . that was a good program, but in fact that we find that today that the amount of forgiveness is two and a half times what the students

would have got through bursary assistance. So I think even though it was a change, the change was for the good.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, you still didn't answer my question: when did the bursary kick in? At what level did the bursary kick in?

(2045)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I think this is what the member wants. The Canada student loan was the first one that, of course, they would be eligible for and would apply for. Once they got up to \$80 a week on that, then the Saskatchewan student bursary kicked in at that point, so that was \$70 a week. The next category then, there could be another Canada student loan after that of another \$25 a week. And then that was followed by the Saskatchewan supplementary loan of \$75 a week, for a total of \$250 per week for regular students.

Special incentive bursaries over and above that, then, could be another 110 per week to a maximum of \$360 a week for those special incentive students. But the key point here, of course, is that we make maximum use or get maximum federal dollars before our own kicks in. And I think that that's good management to do that.

Right now then, since '87-88 when the change came about, now a Canada student loan would kick in first up to \$105 a week. The Saskatchewan student loan then, the repayable portion, would be \$75 per week. And then the third category will be the Saskatchewan student loan, forgivable, of \$70 per week, bringing it up to the 250 per week for regular students. But we're getting an extra \$25 per week then from the Canada student loan fund. The special incentive supplement again, which is forgivable, is another \$110 a week. So that was the equivalent of the bursary before. It's the same amount.

So the fact of the matter is, the maximum assistance levels are \$75 per week more than they were in '85-86. And the main thing is to maximize the federal dollars input first.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, isn't it true that, when the bursary was in effect, that when a student received a student loan of \$1,800 -- around \$1,800 if they were eligible for the bursary -- it was at that point that the bursary kicked in? Isn't that correct?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the member opposite is going back a long time in history to go back to when it was \$1,800, and at that time they could get the loan of \$1,800 and then there was an \$1,800 bursary.

Now the fact of the matter is that the changes were partially brought about to make more of that free money as such, available for the higher need students. And I think that we recognize today that there are students that have greater need for one reason or another, and so we should be recognizing that. So that's why some of those changes have been made and the money has been targeted to that particular group.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, what you're saying to me is that when students under this government were eligible for bursaries after \$1,800 student loans, today you're saying to that student, you must take out \$5,960 before you're eligible for any forgiveness at all. So what you're saying to the students is that you must take out another \$4,100 a year in student loans before you receive anything that is forgivable. And over a four-year period, you're saying to the students, run yourself further and further in debt with student loans. That's exactly what you're saying to the students. And you don't make enough money available to the universities so they have to substantially increase tuition fees. That was my point before.

So you're saying to the students, well we can't make enough money available to the universities so they have to increase your tuition fees, but we are going to take away the bursaries and ask you people to take on a much greater debt through student loans. That's what you're saying to them. And that's the point that I wanted to make to you, Mr. Minister.

Yes, you made some changes. But some of the changes you made, a fundamental change here, was to take away a very good bursary program from students and saying to students, but we'll make more money available to you in loans -- in loans -- that's what you're saying to them. And then you don't even give them the same interest rates as you give some of the multinational corporations, after they find employment. In fact, you ask them to pay considerably more.

So, Mr. Minister, don't tell me that you've been so generous, because you haven't been. You've taken from the students a very good bursary program and asked them to put themselves further in debt. That's the point that I want to make, and if you were honest with students you'd tell them that. That's what you did.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, let me point out to the member opposite that we are targeting more money for those that have a higher or greater needs. These are some of the people that that party over there -- and we've heard them say this before -- they don't believe in welfare reform. They'd rather see some of these people simply remain on welfare. And we've made it possible for some of them to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I've touched a nerve; I've touched a nerve over there, Mr. Chairman, but that's exactly what their philosophy is.

So there were some changes that were necessary. And we don't say to students, Mr. Chairman, what money they have to take in student loans. There are lots of students that go to university today without taking any money out in loans. And I would also point out, when he always keeps harping on Cargill, and let's consider what is going to be happening in so far as jobs that are going to be created as far as the fertilizer plant is concerned, that maybe more students will have opportunities for jobs at places like Cargill.

An Hon. Member: -- In Alberta and B.C.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well you'd rather have all of these industries go to Alberta or go down into Montana and then buy our product back from them and the jobs would all be over there. So you can't have it both ways.

Maybe if we can have a little bit more industry like this in Saskatchewan . . . You don't think that some students get jobs in the paper mill in Prince Albert, or in the bacon plant in North Battleford? I can see certainly that students are going to have an opportunity for getting jobs at the fertilizer plant as well, Mr. Chairman, and then maybe fewer of them will in fact need student loans when they want to go back to university.

So let's be fair about this. We can talk about this all we want and the difference in philosophy, but that's the way it is, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Cool down.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Yes, cool down. I don't like those hypocritical words from the minister. And that's exactly what they are -- hypocritical words. Mr. Minister, when you subsidize Weyerhaeuser to the tune of \$420 million, don't tell me on the one hand that you have any sympathy for the students who you soak more for loans. That's being very hypocritical. You ought to know better, as a former educator. I could take that from the former minister of Education who obviously didn't understand education, but I expect better from you.

Mr. Minister, if you had a little more authority, a little more power in cabinet, maybe you would get some more funds for our students. Mr. Minister, when you support 8 per cent loans -- an 8 per cent loan which is a 6 to 7 per cent reduction in interest rates for Weyerhaeuser, as I just pointed out to you; is a subsidy of \$420 million over a 30-year period -- don't tell the students of this province that you have any sympathy for them. None at all.

Cargill . . . Anybody, Mr. Minister, could produce one job if you give them \$3.7 million. And that's what it's been estimated one job will cost at the Cargill fertilizer plant -- \$3.7 million. Now that's not being very economical about spending the money in this province.

Mr. Minister, I asked you before and I want to ask you again: is it not true that what you have done through some of the changes that you have made, and in cancelling the bursary program, is to ask students to go further and further in debt because they simply do not have the money to pay the high cost of tuition fees and other costs that are connected with going to university? Isn't that what you're asking the students to do?

Now, Mr. Minister, isn't it true today that many of those students, those students in need, are going to be in debt to the tune of 25 or \$30,000 by the time they graduate from a five-year program? Isn't that true?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, we don't have to be ashamed at all of the student loan programs that we have introduced in this province. And I

can take the member back to when we had student loans that were at 6 per cent interest rates, and that's something that you never, ever did over there when you were in power. So you like to talk about all the great things that you did.

I would also point out, Mr. Chairman, that the fact of the matter is that some students may well have higher student loans by the time they have completed their courses, but I would point out that because of some of the changes that we have made in the student loan program, that more people now have an opportunity to access those loans and have more loans forgiven than ever before. So I think that we have made university and technical schools, in many cases, a lot more accessible because of some of those changes that we've made where there has been more money made available for them and more opportunities where money was forgiven.

There are some of those students, granted, that will have a higher debt load when they have graduated from college, whatever that might be. But, again, that's going to be determined by the amount of money that their parents can provide to assist them when they go to university. It's also going to depend on the amount of money that the students can earn prior to going to university or during summer school, or during the summers when they're not at university.

So there are lots of students today that are not solely relying on student loans to go to university, and you know that. Many of the students that you taught in high school haven't gone and got student loans because they went out and got jobs in the summer, or their parents assisted them in going to university. So we can't hang it all on the student loan program.

We are providing a great deal of money as far as student loans. In 1981-82 the total loan assistance was only \$12.9 million and only 5,400 recipients. Now we've got over 105 millions of dollars and over 19,000 recipients.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, the very point that you are making, the very point that you are making is the point that I'm trying to make. And that is that you're denying, you're denying children, young people of poor families, the opportunity to go to university.

Many of those students today simply . . . As you yourself indicated just a little while ago, jobs are not available; they're much more difficult to obtain. You yourself mentioned that. So what you're saying to those students who are coming from poor and low income groups, low income families, you're denying them the opportunity to go to a post-secondary education. That's what you're doing. And before this, when we had a bursary program, those students qualified. Those students qualified and were able to go on to university.

Mr. Minister, I want to go on to some other topic as it relates to student loans, but my colleague, my desk mate, has some questions that he would like to direct to you at this particular time.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Just to correct the member opposite, Mr. Chairman, on one thing he's talking about -- total loans may be amounting to \$25,000

at the completion of their programs -- estimates that we have that the average debt load will be approximately \$11,500 in federal and provincial loans for students currently graduating from three years of post-secondary study.

An Hon. Member: -- I said five years.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well depending on how long they're going to be going. There aren't that many who are going to be going for five years. I'm telling you what it is for three years and if you want to just take it over a four-year period or even five, it's not going to be \$25,000 as you've suggested.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, could you tell me how many . . . Now that you have that statistic, you would also have the statistic, what per cent of the students have loans, total loans of over \$20,000. What per cent of the students have loans over \$25,000? If you have the other statistic, you certainly would have that, too.

(2100)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I am told that we do not have that information. That's federal statistics. And this, of course, is information that we have been able to get, but we do not have the other. Maybe we can get more of that, but we do not have it at the present time.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, would you mind telling me what was the average loan last year for students at the university?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We'll provide you that information Wednesday.

Mr. Rolfes: -- That's not good enough. You provided that to me in January; you provided that to me in January. You have that information now.

An Hon. Member: -- Did you forget it?

Mr. Rolfes: -- No, I've got it.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I've indicated to the member opposite that we do not have the information with us tonight. We'll have that for him on Wednesday. He may, in fact, even have it over there right now and he's just being . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Yes, I do.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well then quit being silly about it if you've already got it.

Mr. Rolfes: -- The minister says I'm being silly. I want to show to the minister that you're not being . . .

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Mr. Rolfes: -- Oh there's Mr. clapper. Mr. Minister, I want to show you why I wanted you to give me that answer, because in a January letter that I wrote to you and you answered, you said the average loan was \$5,000 -- \$5,000. Five times five is \$25,000, Mr. Minister. So if the average loan is \$5,000 and the student goes to university for five years, that student would have a debt of \$25,000. Those were your words in a letter you wrote to me. You also indicated to me, Mr. Minister, that the average loan for a student attending private vocational school was \$7,700. Isn't that correct?

Now, Mr. Minister, when you say that the average debt load is \$11,000 over three years, I want your officials to check out whether I am right in the answer that you gave me in January -- and I've got the letter here with me -- or whether now the officials have changed their minds. Would you please indicate to me which is correct, the figure you gave me in January or the figure you're giving me tonight?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, as I indicated earlier, we do not have those particular figures here right now and we will check it out and we will give you that information on Wednesday.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I want to let my seat mate ask a few questions, and I will go through my files to find the letter that you sent me in January and read it back to you so that we are on the same wavelength.

Mr. Prebble: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, you will be well aware that in the first year of your second term in government, the fiscal year 1986-87, a student qualified for a bursary from your government if they borrowed \$2,640 or more. And of course, in fiscal year 1987-88 you changed that, Mr. Minister, so that a student at university in an eight-month program had to borrow \$5,960 before they were eligible for any loan forgiveness, and you changed the program from a bursary program to a forgivable loan program.

Now my question to you, Mr. Minister, is this: with respect to the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, can you tell me how many students were eligible for bursary assistance at the University of Saskatchewan and at the University of Regina in 1986-87? And how many students at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, last year, were eligible for forgiveable loans, Mr. Minister? Can you give us those two figures.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the member opposite is asking for some pretty detailed information and the officials inform me that they are going to have to take a little bit of time to get that information for you. We'll be happy to provide as much of it as we can, but we can't do it tonight.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I understand that. I would ask that you have that information available on Wednesday, so that it can be discussed during the estimates, instead of being provided after estimates are over. Because, Mr. Minister, I venture to speculate that we will see a

very significant reduction in the number of students who were eligible for loan forgiveness last fiscal year and this fiscal year, in comparison with the number of students at the universities of Regina and Saskatchewan who were eligible for bursaries four years ago, Mr. Minister. And we'll discuss the details when you provide them here to this legislature.

But there can be no doubt that if a student had to borrow more than twice as much money before they became eligible for any loan forgiveness, obviously the number of students eligible for loan forgiveness declined dramatically. And you yourself, sir, have pointed out that the average student loan is in the range of \$5,000 now for a university student. And what that means, Mr. Minister, is that that student, of course, is no longer eligible for any loan forgiveness, whereas four years ago, of course, they would have been eligible for a very significant bursary. And you know that full well.

Now I want to ask you another question with respect to students who are married and who are not able to obtain a student loan that parallels their assessed need, Mr. Minister. And I want to ask you why it is that a married student with children to support is only eligible for a maximum student loan that just exceeds \$8,000 even though their assessed need may be in the range of 13 or \$14,000, Mr. Minister. I wonder if you can explain that discrepancy to the Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, each situation is treated on an individual basis, and I'm sure that we have many situations where married students are going to university where in many cases, one or the other, the spouse is probably working. So they may in fact not qualify for any additional forgiveness or any additional loans.

So they're all treated on an individual basis as I indicated. In some cases if there are special needs, then there may have to be other considerations given as to how much they could borrow and under what conditions.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, you know full well what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the fact that under your government's policies a married student is only eligible for a maximum in student aid of just over \$8,000. Now under the formula that the student loan plan uses, their assessed need can be in the range of 12 or 13 or \$14,000, but the most that they can qualify for from your government is \$8,000. Now can you explain to the Assembly, sir, why it is that you don't provide student assistance that parallels the assessed need of the student? Why do you allow this large discrepancy to exist?

And this discrepancy is based on assessed need by your department, sir. In other words I'm talking about a student who after all revenues are taken into consideration from employment and all other sources, has an assessed need from your department of \$14,000, who is married, who has children to support, but who can't get more than \$8,000 from your student loan plan. When are you going to change your policy and start providing student assistance that parallels a student's assessed need?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, in answer to the member's question I could simply say that the \$8,000 is the maximum unless there are any other special circumstances. But I think that what we have to keep in mind here is that the student loan program is there to supplement other income. It's not the intention that the student loan program should be paying for all of the costs, whether it's a married couple or not, for that individual to go to university. So it's there as a supplement.

And I would anticipate that we have many people in this particular situation who would at least be out working when they're not at university. And maybe it's not always possible for the spouse to work, but there is generally some other source of revenue for them to go to university. It's not the intention that the government should be paying for all of it. Otherwise, how would you ever control it?

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, if it's the intention of your government, which actually I believe it's not, to assist low-income families to get an education and to be able to earn a good living in this society -- and to earn a good living, one really does have to have post-secondary education today, sir, and you know that full well -- then clearly what you're telling us that if a student's assessed need, because they have several children to support, is several thousand dollars higher than the loan program that you're operating, that you're not prepared to look at increasing the ceiling. And I'm very disappointed at that, sir, very disappointed indeed. What you're telling married students with children to support, is that unless they can find upwards of half the amount of money that they will need on an annual basis to attend university, that you're not prepared to come up with the money that they require for a student loan.

Because what you're doing in many instances, sir . . . And I've had several, several students in the constituency that I represent, the riding of Saskatoon University, who are married, come to me and show me how they are 6 or 7 or \$8,000 above the maximum ceiling that you will give for a student loan, based on the assessed need calculated by your department officials, sir. And you're not prepared to assist them at all, and I find that very disappointing indeed and you've just confirmed that here again tonight.

Mr. Minister, I want to ask you another question and this is with respect to the family income plan as it pertains to student loans, so it involves both the Department of Social Services and your department, sir. And I want to ask you how it is, as a matter of policy by your government -- because obviously you and the Minister of Social Services have planned this together -- working families, Mr. Minister, in this province who are eligible for family income plan are now, for the first time, as a result of a policy change that you made in January, that you and the Minister of Social Services made in cabinet, by order in council, you've made a decision that someone who is applying for family income plan and attending university can no longer have considered as . . . for the first time, I might say, must have considered student loan moneys as a source of income.

And when a student who is supporting children has to go out, Mr. Minister, and borrow money from your government for things like tuition and books, Mr. Minister, they are then being told by the Minister of Social Services that they're no longer eligible for family income plan benefits.

Now you said earlier, sir, that you were concerned about helping low-income families get an education. Now, Mr. Minister, how can you explain this order in council that took place in January, while you were at the cabinet table as Minister of Education. How can you explain allowing such an order in council to pass that for the first time says to a low-income working mother who's trying to take university classes, that for the first time she must consider money that she receives for a student loan for tuition and books as income, that therefore disqualifies her for the family income plan? You explain that policy change to me, sir.

And by the way, don't tell me that it's simply in the domain of the Minister of Social Services. It is clearly your responsibility as well, and I want an explanation.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, let me say that our responsibility is to do with student loans, and when we're dealing with them, the officials consider the sources of income that people have. Any changes that have been made, as the member is pointing out here, were made within the Department of Social Services, and I would suggest that maybe you ask that question of the Minister of Social Services when he's in his estimates. So I'm not going to make any other comment on that at this point.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I suspected such an answer, but the answer comes from someone, the man who is responsible for advancing the position of low-income families in this province getting an education.

It's your responsibility, sir, to make education more accessible to low-income families in this province. And what your cabinet and you, Mr. Minister, have done is, you have implemented a policy change, a policy change, sir, that makes it more difficult for low-income working families to pursue an education, and you know that, sir.

And what you are now saying as a government is, that because someone gets a student loan, that is going to make them ineligible for family income plan benefits. And that, sir, is not only the responsibility of the Minister of Social Services, it's your responsibility at the cabinet table as well.

What did you do, sir, to speak up on behalf of those low-income working families before this new policy was put into effect?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I think I indicated earlier that the student loan program that this government has provided and changes that we have made have assisted a tremendous number of students. And I think that some of the changes that we have made with regard to those who have special

needs have gone far and beyond anything that that government did when they were in power.

Let me point out that we've got somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten and a half times as much provincial assistance available for this past year to what there was when they were in power, Mr. Chairman. So at that same period of time the number of students assisted will have tripled.

Now we know that there are still changes that we have to look at, but we've got an awful lot of students today who are taking advantage of our programs. And I would point out that just the Saskatchewan student loan program alone, that an estimated 13,000 students will be authorized for loans from that program this year, and about half of those students will be eligible for forgivable loans.

And that, Mr. Chairman, is going to be a substantial amount of money.

We've got students today that can take a good part of their education and have the loans almost totally forgiven. And with other special incentive remission programs that we have and interest write-down programs and so on, Mr. Chairman, I think that the students are getting a tremendous amount of assistance from this government, but we will continue to look at ways in which we can improve the system and make it possible for more and more people to take advantage of it.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, I want to ask you a question that follows your comment just now. You said that half the students . . . Did you say, sir, that . . . I believe I heard you say that half the students receiving student loans also receive loan forgiveness. I wonder if you can break that down, Mr. Minister, with respect to the number of those students, how many of the students who are receiving forgivable loans are students from private vocational schools, Mr. Minister? Because the key question here, Mr. Minister, is that we believe that the numbers of students receiving forgivable loan assistance at university and at technical institutes have declined; that the numbers of students receiving forgivable loans at private vocational schools has increased.

What percentage, Mr. Minister, of the students who receive loan forgiveness are attending private vocational schools? Give us the percentage and the numbers, sir, and contrast that with the numbers at university and technical institutes, please.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- While the officials are looking that up for us, I would just comment on an earlier statement that you made with regard to people in need and the fact that if the student loans do not cover the expenses or the particular student's needs if they're on social assistance, they can still apply for the FIP (family income plan) program. So there are moneys that are still available for them if the loans won't cover it.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I mean that is an incredible comment. Because what you've done is that you've made . . . We'll find out from the Minister of Social Services the numbers of people who've become ineligible for the family income plan as a result of the policy change. But for the

first time your government is considering money borrowed by students for things like tuition and books as income. No other government in the country does that, Mr. Minister. No other government in the country considers student loan money borrowed for tuition and books as income.

And I might add to that, Mr. Minister, that you've also set a new record in that now when students borrow money for student loan purposes, if they have family to support and they're unable to get a job over the summer, and they have to go to the Minister of Social Services to apply for social assistance, again you're the first government in Canada, Mr. Minister, to deny those students assistance during the summer because, Mr. Minister, you're the first government in Canada that requires students who borrowed student loans for the September to April period to save money to live on all summer if they can't get a job.

They're unable to go to the Minister of Social Services for social assistance, Mr. Minister, because the Department of Social Services expects that they will have saved a goodly portion of their student loan money to live on over the summer. So don't give me any nonsense about the kind of help, so-called help, that you're offering to low-income families, Mr. Minister.

Now would you answer my original question. What percentage, Mr. Minister, of the students who get forgivable loan money are students who attend private vocational schools? Give us the percentage and give us the number and contrast that with the percentage and number of students receiving forgivable loan assistance at universities and technical institutes in this province.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, private vocational schools in 1988-89 accounted for about 22 per cent, and the public institutions the balance. Now as far as the number of students, the private vocational schools accounted for about 15 per cent of the students. So 22 per cent of the authorized loans, 15 per cent of the students. You got that?

An Hon. Member: -- The numbers?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Total numbers?

An Hon. Member: -- Yes.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Let's see. Number of assisted students attending private vocational schools increased up to 2,886 in the past three years.

An Hon. Member: -- That was the total number of students?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Yes. Twenty-eight hundred and eighty-six students. That was in '88-89.

Mr. Tchorzewski: -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, a couple of questions. Not only do you not provide adequate support for students financially, but for students who want to take certain courses you don't provide the courses.

I have corresponded with you, and I know others have corresponded with you and me, with regard to a problem regarding certified dental assistants who want to take the dental hygiene program at SIAST but are unable to do so because in order to do so, they have to have the dental therapy program which is no longer offered in Saskatchewan. And the proposal that has come forward to you, and I have forwarded it to you, was that there should be a bridging program in which dental assisting be the prerequisite for the dental hygiene program.

Now I was somewhat optimistic when your office responded to me in January and they said, somebody in your office said the following:

A proposal has gone to SIAST that would see a bridging program in place this fall between dental assistant and dental hygienist, and there may be something in this spring's budget.

Can you report now, Mr. Minister, whether there indeed is something in this spring's budget in order to provide this badly needed bridging program so that these people who want to expand their professional training and ability are able to do so?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I would inform the member that in fact the answer he received before was accurate. The bridging program will be in place by September 1, and the money for that will be coming out of the outreach program.

Mr. Tchorzewski: -- Likewise, Mr. Minister, can you explain where the program will be located?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- It will be located at Wascana Campus.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I certainly appreciate that answer. I'm sure there will be a number of people in Saskatchewan that welcome that initiative on your part, and I want to certainly congratulate you on that part.

Mr. Minister, I want to go back to the answer you gave us before in regards to private vocational schools and the number of students who were eligible for the forgiveness part. I don't think we quite got the figures. Were you saying that there 2,886 students -- well in that neighbourhood -- who had been eligible for forgiveness and had attended private vocational schools? Is that correct?

(2130)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The total number of students assisted in the private vocational schools was 2,886, that was for '88-89. And in the public institutions it was 16,345.

Mr. Rolfes: -- We have some difficulties with the number. Maybe we're not on the . . . 16,345 students in the public institutions were eligible for the forgiveness part of the loan? That's what we're asking. We want the

numbers that were eligible for forgiveness, those who attended private vocational schools and those who attended public institutions.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Okay, you have the 2,886; that's the total number of students in the private vocational schools. And now remember we're speaking of '88-89, the ones that got assistance, and of that number 2,083 - 2,083 then qualified for forgiveable loans; 2,083 qualified for forgiveable loans.

Mr. Chairman: -- Order. I'd ask the member to ask his question.

Mr. Rolfes: -- The 16,300 . . . Mr. Minister, the number you gave me for the public institutions of 16,345, is that the number of students who had loans forgiven?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The 16,345 was the total number that qualified for loans, nothing to do with forgiveness. The officials are telling me that they don't have the number here -- we can get that for you -- that qualified for forgiveness. The only one I can give you there is on the private vocational schools.

Mr. Rolfes: -- We would appreciate for Wednesday if you could find us the other numbers.

Mr. Minister, I want to also ask you . . . And I will have to eat a little bit of crow; I thought I had the letter with me. I can't seem to locate it in the files here; I'd have to check my files downstairs. But I wish if you could provide me with the average loan that students in public institutions received, the question I asked before.

Mr. Minister, I do, however, have a couple of letters here that you did write to me, and I want to . . . You may have them with you there. I refer to October 31, 1989. You may not have that, but if you don't have it, maybe you could bring it with you on Wednesday; and also one on January 11, 1990.

In those two letters I am given conflicting information. And let me read it to you so that there will be absolutely no mistake. In the last paragraph in the first page in the letter dated October 31, 1989, you write the following:

With respect to your question about loans to students attending private vocational schools in 1988-89, 3,215 loans totalling 10.9 million in Canada student loans and 14 million in Saskatchewan student loans were authorized to students attending these schools. The average loan value was 7,758.

In your January . . . pardon me, in . . . yes, your January 11, 1990 letter, I have the following: Number of loans in 1988-89 were 2,886 -- don't correspond to what I got before; Saskatchewan in millions of dollars was 12.8 -- does not correspond to the other answer I received; Canada, it was 9.4 million, which does not correspond, and the total value is 22.2 million, and the other one is approximately 25 million. The last part was,

the average loan was 7,703 in this one, and in the other one was 7,758.

Mr. Minister, I wonder whether you could have your officials check those two letters and bring back the one that is correct for Wednesday.

An Hon. Member: -- Herman, we could speed this up a lot if you'd make these questions either multiple choice or true and false.

Mr. Rolfes: -- I know, Mr. Chairman, that the present Minister of Finances' knowledge of education was so limited last two years, we had some very difficult times communicating with him on Education, so I wish he'd stick with Finance.

Mr. Minister, could I ask you to undertake that for me for Wednesday.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Yes I will do that. The one thing that, as I say, could be possible is that we're confusing fiscal year versus loan year and the dates are different, but we'll get that for you for Wednesday.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I was not being accusatory in this particular . . . I just want some clarification to know what they are.

I do, Mr. Minister, want to remind you again that private vocational schools, as you and I have discussed these quite often, I have a real concern about some of the private vocational schools, and some of the things that are happening, and I will pursue this on Wednesday. I only have a few minutes left because my colleague from Saskatoon Nutana wants to pursue another item for the remainder of the period.

I want to know, Mr. Minister, if for Wednesday . . . Mr. Minister, if for Wednesday you could provide for us the information, first of all, that I had requested in Public Accounts; I would like to have that information for estimates. I've asked a number of questions in regards to student loans and private vocational schools. I really would appreciate having that information for Wednesday to expedite our estimates a little faster.

Secondly, Mr. Minister, I wondered whether you would consider for Wednesday or even before, if you can, to provide us with your rough draft of the regulations that you are considering for private vocational schools. Would you undertake that undertaking?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We'll endeavour to have that information that you've asked for, for Wednesday. With regard to the regulations, what I will table, if you wish, or give to you on Wednesday would be a copy of the draft report. I can't give you a copy of the regulations because they are not completed. They're still in drafting, some questions that Justice had with regard to them. But I can give you a copy of the report which will give you an idea as to the recommendations that we're basing the regulations on, so that should suffice for now. And we would hope to have the regulations fairly soon.

Mr. Prebble: -- Just a very brief question, Mr. Minister, and that is with respect to the current fiscal year, 1990-91. You've been giving us figures

for 1988-89. Those are two years out of date now, of course. We would like to know with respect to the current fiscal year the number of student loans that you expect to go to students attending private vocational schools, the total dollar amount, and, Mr. Minister, more importantly, your expectation about the numbers of students who will receive loan forgiveness who are attending private vocational schools, what the dollar amount there will be, Mr. Minister. If you could provide us with that information on Wednesday, we would appreciate that very much.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well any figures that we give to the member, Mr. Chairman, would be purely speculative because at this point in time the best that we could go on was the number of loans that were given out, say for 1989-90 and the amount of them. I would anticipate though that because of some of the changes that we're going to be making -- and they will be in place by August 1 for the new loan year -- some of the changes that we're making as they apply to the private vocational schools, that the loans in that particular area could be down from what they were last year because we are going to tighten things up considerably.

We'll be happy to provide you a copy of those in the very near future.

Mr. Rolfes: -- Mr. Minister, I have a very quick question. I want to know if, by Wednesday, we would have the 1988-89 student aid fund annual report . . .

An Hon. Member: -- And if not, why not?

Mr. Rolfes: -- That's correct. If not, why not has that been tabled? What's the problem with it?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I am informed that the '88-89 report is still with the auditors, so we don't have it yet. That's the information from the student aid fund.

Mr. Rolfes: -- I'll be asking some questions on why it's there on Wednesday.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Okay.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. Mr. Minister, last Monday I believe, April 23, 1990, you released a press release indicating to the people of the province that your government required more time to implement the Fransaskois School system in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Minister, I wrote you a letter with respect to your announcement of your delay, or your decision not to introduce in this current legislative sitting the government's component for the Fransaskois schools.

Mr. Minister, one of the questions that I asked you was in relationship to your news announcement that said that because of legal and legislative complications and constitutional issues it was impossible to proceed with this legislation in this current sitting. Mr. Minister, can you tell me what the constitutional issues are that have caused the delay in the implementation of this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I find it very amusing that it's taken the critic across the way a week, and to this point has not asked a question in question period with regard to my announcement and francophone governance of the schools in this province.

Now, we're in the process of addressing the concerns that you raised in your letter, but I would point out to you that the Supreme Court decision that was brought down in Alberta on March 15, and of which we just received a copy a very short time ago as to the ruling that came down, and this is the first decision across the country that's come down that has really come out in any definitive way to talk about section 23 of the charter of rights, which is what determines the francophones having the right to govern their own school system.

So the reason for the delay in this particular legislation is, in looking at the Supreme Court decision, that there are a lot of questions that it raised when we compared it to the legislation that we were very well along with in drafting, in that there is a concern about where numbers warrant.

(2145)

And what it really boils down to is whether or not we would be open to a lot of challenges with regard to that if you've got a Supreme Court decision which is not really saying the same thing that our legislation would have said. So we feel that there is some constitutional problems in that, that need further addressing. Justice feels very strongly that this is a very significant document and that it now can be used as a guide in drafting our legislation.

Another concern that we had with it was, in fact, that our legislation could have very well disenfranchised some of the francophone people. And I don't think that any of them want that at all. So using this as a guide and taking a little bit more time to ensure that our legislation is going to be right and that it will protect those rights, we have to take more time with it.

There are also other concerns with regard to the rights of parents, with regard to the rights of school boards, and it's something that we just have to take more time for it. And there's no way -- if we wanted to have this in place for the first of September, you know as a teacher that the 31st of May is a deadline by which teachers have to indicate what they're going to be doing the following year. And if we're going to be staffing these schools, we would have to of course give the teachers an opportunity to determine where they wanted to teach, and there is no way that this legislation could be available and passed by the end of this month.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I'm afraid I don't understand what you're saying. As I understand it, in 1982 we had a charter of rights introduced where section 23 recognized francophone linguistic rights in separate school facilities. In 1988 we had a Saskatchewan court ruling, the Wimmer court ruling, which confirmed school governance entitlement for Fransaskois parents, Mr. Minister.

Now I'm afraid that you've lost me and my colleagues in your articulation of what is preventing you from introducing this legislation. Explain to me exactly what are the constitutional problems that your government is facing in light of this Alberta court decision, Mr. Minister. Can you be very clear on what you are talking about because the press isn't clear. As I understand it the francophone community is not clear. And, Mr. Minister, I wrote you a letter a week ago asking you to clarify these issues and I haven't yet received a response, and that's why I'm asking you the questions today.

Because you know perfectly well, Mr. Minister, that if we're talking about complicated legal and constitutional arguments, which your press release indicated, then those complicated and legal arguments have to be articulated very carefully. And that's something that question period doesn't lend itself to, and I think you'll acknowledge that, Mr. Minister, that question period does not lend itself to complicated legal and constitutional arguments. This forum certainly does, Mr. Minister, and I want you to be very specific, very specific on what those constitutional and legal arguments are, and I'd ask you tonight to tell us exactly what they are.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, you've never let not having the facts in the past prevent you from asking questions in this House, so I don't know why you would have talked about it right now.

I will slow down and I'll try and be clear. I realize and recognize that it is a complex issue. And with regard to the francophones in the province, we will be meeting with the different groups. We've already met with one group and we will be meeting with the other groups in the very near future to explain in detail the reasons why the legislation is being delayed.

If you want the significant portion or part of the ruling of the Supreme Court in Alberta, I'll read it to you:

The unanimous ruling by the country's top court is the first detailed ruling based on section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which declares that members of French and English minorities have the right to education in their own language where numbers warrant.

And what they did with the Alberta decision was that they looked at a sliding scale as to how they would determine the actual rights that the francophones had.

In other words, at the top end of the scale, if numbers did warrant, it could mean that they would have a full-blown board that would be in control of the francophone schools. But when you went down the scale you could reach the point where, in fact, they did not have any rights whatsoever.

It might mean that they could have a representative on the regular school board, or in fact, it could mean that there might only be a special class, depending on how many students they had. Or, if there were very few

students, it could mean that there were no rights at all. So, that was a significant part of that ruling and it did have a sliding scale.

Now in our particular legislation, section 29 was in no way shape or form really the same as what this section 23 says. And that's the point that I made about the fact that some francophones in fact could be disenfranchised because of the way that the thing was drafted. So I don't think that's the intent of the legislation. I don't think that's what the francophone people want. They want the right to govern their own schools, and so it's just something that we have to take a little bit more time. But I would point out that that's the significant part of it, as I've read it to you.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Now, Mr. Minister, as you know, your government had a task force that reported in June of 1989 on the question of francophone school governance in the province of Saskatchewan. And it was a unanimous decision of the task force members that represented many significant communities in the province of Saskatchewan.

This really, Mr. Minister, is an amazing document, because it was a unanimous decision of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, LEADS, various representatives of the francophone community. And, Mr. Minister, this document was hailed as a major achievement by your government and by the task force because there was a consensus, Mr. Minister, a consensus that isn't often seen in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Minister, as a result of this report your government endorsed the contents of this report in August of 1989. And then you set about and you, Mr. Minister, announced an implementation committee to implement the contents of this report, Mr. Minister. Now I think that it's fair to say that this report was proposing that the establishment of seven possible school boards in the province of Saskatchewan come September of 1990. And as you probably know, Mr. Minister, in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Vonda, Gravelbourg, and Bellevue, that there are probably significant numbers of people who might be interested in francophone school governance.

Mr. Minister, I want you to articulate very clearly what you're talking about. There were seven schools that were proposed for September of 1990. How does this differ from the judgement in Alberta in terms of significant numbers, Mr. Minister? I want you to be clear on that.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I certainly recognize what you're saying about the report, and it is a very well-done report. We have discussed that with the task force and certainly we have endorsed the contents that they have in there. But I think at the same time there's a recognition that there are still some problems that have to be worked out and that it is going to take more time.

The Mahe pé decision in Alberta, which I indicated to you came down on March 15, is a very significant document. I think there's some 70 pages or more in it and it's a very complex document. It was not received here in Saskatchewan until about three weeks ago, I suppose, and then Justice went

through it.

The best advice that we had then, when we compared that to the legislation that we were preparing, was that there were a lot of technical difficulties within our legislation. For that reason, and since we now had a guide to go by, it just made a lot of sense to delay the introduction of our legislation to give Justice an opportunity to ensure that they were coming in with the proper legislation.

Now I don't think that there should be anything wrong with that. I fully realize that there are many people in the francophone community that are disappointed because this is not going ahead. But at the same time we are still committed to the constitution. We certainly are committed to the work that was done and brought forward on the Gallant report, and it's just a matter of taking a little bit more time to ensure that we bring in the proper legislation which is going to fit this particular situation. And not all situations are different.

And I think you have to keep in mind that the Supreme Court decision supersedes the Queen's Bench decision that came down here in the province of Saskatchewan. So we're still committed, but it's just a matter that with getting the boards in place, the staff hired, and getting facilities, all of these things have to take place but none of that can take place until this legislation has been drafted in the proper form and passed in this legislature.

Ms. Atkinson: -- When do you now propose to circulate a draft copy of this new legislation, and when do you now propose to introduce this legislation? If it's not in this current sitting of the legislature, when do you propose to introduce it? The next sitting?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I've indicated that we are meeting at the present time with the different groups to explain the reasons why this has been delayed, and we will continue to do that until we have met with all of them.

I had indicated to them that I was hopeful that the legislation was going to be introduced in this session; that not being the case, that the next opportunity would be in the next session of the legislature, would be next spring.

Ms. Atkinson: -- So, Mr. Minister, are you saying that you'll introduce this legislation in the next sitting of the legislature?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- That's what I have indicated to the groups, that I would hope that everything is in readiness, that we can go ahead with it during the next session, which wouldn't be until next spring.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, was this a unilateral decision of your government, or did you at all talk to the implementation committee prior to making your announcement on April 23?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The only discussion that took place following the

information coming to us from Justice was with myself and the officials of the department and Justice. The decision was made then, because of the time line, that it was important that we get this out to all of the people involved just as quickly as possible. And now we're setting up the meetings to explain the detail within this particular legislation.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I am surprised that you wouldn't even consult or tell your own implementation committee, that you appointed last October, that you were going to delay the implementation of this legislation. I am surprised, Mr. Minister. I mean, you were the man, you were the minister that issued the press release announcing the various persons who were going to be part of this new implementation committee, and you didn't even have the courtesy of talking to them prior to your announcement.

What's even more shocking is that the people of Saskatchewan learned about this in La Presse, in the Montreal press. This information wasn't even available to the people of Saskatchewan prior to it being talked about in the Montreal press, Mr. Minister.

Now, you know, you have some fairly significant people who are sitting on this implementation committee, Mr. Minister, representing the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the school trustees association, and various members of the Francophone community. Mr. Minister, I'd like you to explain why you didn't have the courtesy to consult these people prior to making your decision on April 23. And why do these people have to read about it in La Presse? And why weren't these people told about it prior? And why did you have to set up a telephone conference call, I understand, to inform them as to the reasons why you were delaying it, Mr. Minister? If there were legal and constitutional reasons, which you say there are, surely that information could have been shared with these people before you went ahead and made this unilateral decision.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, the member from University getting carried away over there. Mr. Chairman, let me point out to the member opposite that she's totally inaccurate in what she has just said. The fact of the matter is, that all of the secretariat, the members of the secretariat, the members of the task force, the members of the implementation committee, the seven schools involved, the board chairman, the directors of education, the parents, the ACFC (Association Culturelle Franco-Canadienne), were all phoned on Thursday and Friday, the week before I made the announcement.

Also, every member was also followed up with a letter. In fact, the letter went out on a Friday and it went to every director of education in the province. It went to every board chairman in the province as well as all of the other groups as that I've already indicated to you. So, wherever you're getting your information from is totally inaccurate because everybody in fact did not learn about it from the press. They were phoned on Thursday or Friday, the week prior to the announcement being made.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister . . .

Mr. Chairman: -- Order! It being near 10 o'clock, the committee will rise and report progress.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:02 p.m.