

May 7/90

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure

Education

Ordinary Expenditure -- Vote 5

Item 1 (continued)

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. Mr. Minister, prior to 5 o'clock I asked you a question as to how many school divisions received cuts in grants to those school divisions because of the small school factor change. I'm still waiting for that answer, Mr. Minister. You've had two hours to get that information and I'm wondering if you now have it available to the House.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, as I understand it there were some 17 school divisions that were affected, which would have had a small decrease, and that decrease was probably from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand, but not a significant amount of money.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, is it possible that one school division may have had a \$110,000 cut or a 2 and a half mill cut as a result of your changes to the small school factor?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The largest decrease was 93 and the largest increase was 175,000. So quite a difference there.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me which school division had the largest decrease of the \$93,000?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The one with the largest decrease was Tiger Lily. That's the rural area around Melfort. And the main reason would be there that they have a lot of smaller centres, small high schools, that are relatively close together.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Chairperson, I just want to recap for the people who have just tuned in to the proceedings tonight, as to what we're talking about. As members of this legislature will know, the Government of Saskatchewan only increased the operating grants to school divisions by some 3 per cent on average. What that has meant is a down-loading of responsibility for educational funding in the province of Saskatchewan.

We have several instances, Mr. Chairperson, where school divisions received cuts in operating grants or they received an increase below the rate of inflation. Consequently, those school boards have had to increase their mill rate, dip into reserves, and in some cases cut teachers and cut program services to the young people of the province of Saskatchewan.

In addition, Mr. Chairperson, the Government of Saskatchewan has changed its small school factor formula to such an extent that we have a situation

where some school divisions have lost substantial amounts of money as a result of this change in the formula. Consequently, some school divisions have passed motions that are going to look into consolidating high schools in the province of Saskatchewan, and obviously consolidation of schools will mean that students are going to have to travel further distances in order to get an education.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to go back to school grants and percentage increases. I just wanted to read into the record what some Saskatchewan school divisions are looking at in terms of increases or decreases at a time when inflation in this province is running at about 4.6 per cent.

Arcola School Division received 2.08 per cent; Assiniboia had a .74 cut; Battle River, 3.92 per cent increase; Battleford, a 2.81 per cent cut; Blaine Lake, 3.17 per cent increase; Borderland, a 2.05 per cent cut; Buffalo Plains, a 2.83 per cent increase; Canora, a .79 per cent increase; Cupar, 1.94 per cent increase; Davidson, a .66 per cent increase; Deer Park, 2.67 per cent increase, Eastend, a 1.82 per cent cut; Estevan Rural, a 6.6 per cent cut; Eston-Elrose, a 2.98 per cent cut; Quill Lakes, a 2.94 per cent increase; Herbert, a 2.09 per cent cut; Hudson Bay, a 2.61 per cent increase; Humboldt, a 3.22 per cent cut; Kerrobert, a .23 per cent increase; Kinistino, a 3.03 per cent increase; Lanigan, a 31.07 per cent cut; Leader, 11.49 per cent cut; Long Lake, a 3.49 per cent increase; Maple Creek, a 3.48 per cent cut; Meadow Lake, a .82 per cent cut; Nipawin, a 1.7 per cent increase; Northern Lakes, a 3.47 per cent increase, Outlook at 2.05 per cent increase; and Oxbow a .19 per cent increase; Parkland a 1.11 per cent increase; Regina East a 1.56 per cent increase; Rosetown a 2.05 per cent increase; Sask Valley a . . . pardon me, Rosetown a 2.10 per cent increase; Saskatoon East a 1.56 per cent cut; Saskatoon West a 2.58 per cent increase; Shaunavon a 4.01 per cent cut; Thunder Creek a 3.51 per cent increase; Timberline a 4.93 per cent cut; Tisdale a .91 per cent increase; Wakaw . . . pardon me, Wadena a 1.01 per cent increase; Weyburn Central a 12.97 per cent cut; Wood River a 2.55 per cent increase; and Yorkdale a 1.37 per cent increase.

Now the rural members of the Tory party are very interested in what I'm saying, and you should be interested, because what we are seeing is a deliberate underfunding of education in rural Saskatchewan. That's what we're seeing. They have cut back in educational spending for rural communities, and what are they expecting these communities to do? They're expecting them to pass on these cuts to the local property taxpayers or consolidate schools, cut teachers, dip into reserves, cut programs.

Now the members of the Tory party tend to be from rural Saskatchewan, and I want to know, Mr. Minister, how do you justify this very, very poor increase in educational spending in rural Saskatchewan at a time when you people should know full well that rural Saskatchewan is in an economic crisis, not unlike the '30s. And this is hardly the time to be cutting back in funding to rural Saskatchewan and I want to know, Mr. Minister, what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, for all of those who have just joined us since supper-time then, we've just seen another example of how

the member opposite can play around fast and loose with figures, because the information that she is giving out is very misleading the way she's using it. She's using a row of figures here which, unless you understand the reasons behind how the whole thing was done, it fails to take into account the adjustments that were figured in for past years so it is not an accurate way of looking at the grants that these schools divisions are getting this year.

So I hope that the people listening and watching tonight will take note of that, because this member has done this many times before. She stands up in her place, uses all kinds of figures that are meaningless. She would have people believe that the formula that's being used is not the best way to go today, and yet it's exactly the same formula that's been used for many, many years in this province, and the one that is agreed to by the trustees' association.

Let's take a look then at some of the other changes that she failed to mention. And I should point out as well, Mr. Chairman, that she talks about all of the mill rate increases. Let's take a look at what's happened to mill rate increases then in the last few years. They're much lower, they're much lower in proportion than they were when that party was in power back in the 1970s -- much lower. Let's take a look at some of the grants, then -- and she likes to be very selective with these. She also fails to mention the fact that the size of grants are determined by the assessment that's found out in each of these school divisions, plus the enrolments. So in those areas where there have been some decreases, it's due to the fact that enrolment has gone down. And in some cases then, and in most cases in fact, the assessment has gone up.

A prime example, Mr. Chairman, would be in the city of Saskatoon. I noticed one here that I am quite familiar with, just to show you how misleading this member can be. She takes Saskatoon (East) School Division for an example, and she says there that Saskatoon East had a decrease of 1.56 per cent. That was a decrease of \$73,299. Now, Mr. Chairman, just to give you the accurate figure on what happened in Saskatoon East -- and a school division that I am very familiar with -- Saskatoon East this year has an increase of \$99,536, which is an increased percentage of 2.14. Now what did she say, Mr. Chairman? She said a decrease of 73,299, a percentage decrease of 1.56. Now just to show you how misleading this member can be, there is a difference of over \$170,000, so the member is just a little bit off there, Mr. Chairman.

Well let's take a look at some of the others here. She likes to be selective. Why didn't she talk about Wood River, for example. Wood River, a remote rural area where they've got smaller enrolment, and what's happened out there. Well this year, Mr. Chairman, Wood River School Division is getting an increase of \$344,000. That's an increase of nearly 15 per cent. Now why didn't the member mention that? Nearly 15 per cent.

Well let's take a look at another one here, Mr. Chairman -- Indian Head. Indian Head, an increase there of \$242,908, an increase of over 9 per cent. Turtleford, Turtleford, here's another one, Mr. Chairman, where they not only had a decrease in their enrolment, but they had an increase of

\$187,000 in their grant, Mr. Chairman. So we can be very selective if we want.

I can go down through these. She made mention about Tiger Lily, and she's quite concerned about the small schools factor and the fact that they might have lost a little bit of money because of the fact that they have several small high schools in that area and it's the board that makes the decision which schools are going to close, but their preference is to keep their elementary ends going and, in some cases, bus the high school students a small distance down the road to another school. But that's the board decision. Well she's concerned about the fact that they lost a little bit of money because of the change in the formula.

(1930)

Well let's take a look at Tiger Lily, Mr. Chairman. This is what actually happened with Tiger Lily. Tiger Lily has a decrease of 43 students for this year and their grant, Mr. Chairman, is up over \$179,000 -- \$179,000 -- and that's an increase of a little over 7 per cent. So she can make a big thing out of the fact that they've lost a little bit of money because of the small schools factor, but overall their grant is up substantially.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if you'd like, I could go on and I could list quite a few more of these, and I'm not being selective. I'm going down the list as it is. The member opposite proves or wants to be selected to just try and make a little bit of political hay here out of nothing and using inaccurate figures and trying to mislead the public.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I am taking my figures from a document that you gave me, and it's called "School Grants in (Operating) Order," Department of Education 1990 grant basic and net grant comparison. This is the document I'm using, Mr. Minister. It's your document.

Now, Mr. Minister, you cannot deny, of the rural school divisions, only 17 out of 72 rural school divisions in this province received an increase in excess of 4 per cent. You cannot deny that, Mr. Minister. At a time when inflation is running at 4.6 per cent in this province, literally dozens of rural school divisions received cuts in their grants or money less than the rate of inflation.

Now what does that mean for rural school divisions? What that means, Mr. Minister, the effect of your provincial underfunding means, for instance, in Eastend where they had a 1.82 per cent cut, they had to increase their mill rate by 6.35 per cent. That's money, Mr. Minister, that is coming out of the communities' pockets. That's money that used to be in the taxpayers' pockets that's no longer there because of your down-loading of education onto the backs of individual taxpayers.

The Battlefords, for instance, they had a 2.81 per cent cut; their mill rate has gone up by 5.68 per cent. Leader had 11.49 per cent cut; their mill rate's gone up by 6.06 per cent. The Weyburn central, they had a 12.97 per cent cut; their mill rate has gone up by 7.02 per cent. Saskatoon East, which you talk about, had a cut of 1.56 per cent in the

operating grant, Mr. Minister, and they increased their mill rate by 4.38 per cent. Canora had a 0.91 per cent increase; their mill rate went by 8.13 per cent. Tisdale, a 0.91 per cent increase in operating grant; their mill rate goes up by 8.77 per cent. Blaine Lake, a 3.17 per cent increase in operating grant; their mill rate is up by 12.28 per cent. Arcola, 2.09 per cent increase in operating grant; their mill rate's up 11.48 per cent. Outlook, a 2.05 per cent increase in their operating grant, they've had to pass on that underfunding of education by your government to the local property taxpayers, a 10.34 per cent increase in the mill rate. Thunder Creek, 3.51 per cent increase in the operating grant; they passed on that underfunding to their taxpayers, a 7.55 per cent increase.

Now, Mr. Minister, you can continue to defend your dismal record in education, but I will tell you this: the people of Saskatchewan are tired of your down-loading of responsibility onto the backs of local property taxpayers. Taxpayers have had it when it comes to property tax increases because of your deliberate underfunding of education.

Now, Mr. Minister, I understand that you are presently in negotiations with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Mr. Minister, if you negotiate a collective agreement in excess of this 3 per cent average that you have given to all school boards in the province of Saskatchewan, is it your intentions to assist local school boards in making up the difference? Because anything you negotiate at the provincial table, Mr. Minister, will be passed on in terms of responsibility for paying that settlement onto local school divisions. What is your answer to that, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, we see the member then running along again here with figures that . . . she likes to mislead, she doesn't use the figures accurately at all. I've already indicated that when you look at the grant sheet, when you talk about basic grants and net grants, that when you're talking about the net grants you have to take into consideration the fact that there are changes here that are made to take up things that were still left over from the year before. So you've got to . . . if you want to be accurate about this you've got to take a look at the basic grant because that's the amount of money that school boards are going to be getting.

Now the member talks about down-loading, Mr. Chairman. The same practice is followed today as has been followed for a long time, and that's trying to maintain that 50 per cent provincial versus the local property tax share. And she talks about the local taxpayers, the property tax holders who have to . . . they're having tough times here trying to pay these taxes.

Mr. Chairman, where does the money come from for any education, whether we talk about provincial grants or whether we're talking about the property tax? It's coming from the taxpayers. It's coming from the taxpayers. So it's really no different; it's still coming from the taxpayers, whether it's coming from income tax or sales tax or whether it's coming from property tax.

Now she talks about the change. Well there really hasn't been that much of

a change, Mr. Chairman. If you take a look at the time from 1981, the average then was 52.2 per cent -- 52.2 per cent. That was the portion that was provincially funded as compared to that which came from the local taxpayer. For this year now it's 50.1 per cent, for this current year. So not a real big difference there, Mr. Chairman, from what it has been historically for many, many years.

The other thing that I would point out when she likes to talk about mill rate hikes, well let's take a look at what happened. From 1975 to 1982, and I believe the NDP were in power then, the provincial average mill rate increased by 97.4 per cent -- 97.4 per cent in that period of time. That's an average of 10.3 per cent annually.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'll repeat that again just so that everyone is clear as to what happened. From 1975 to 1982 the provincial average mill rate increased when that party was in power by 97.4 per cent, an average of 10.3 per cent annually.

Now, let's take a look at what has happened from 1982 to 1990, Mr. Chairman, and I think this is a pretty interesting comparison. The provincial average mill rate increased by 32.2 per cent -- 32.2 -- compare that with 97.4. And the average increase since this party has been in power, Mr. Chairman, is 3.5 per cent annually -- 3.5 per cent annually -- as compared to 10.3 per cent annually when the NDP were in power.

So, for that member to stand in her place and talk about mill rate increases, is just being a little bit out of line, Mr. Chairman, because there is no comparison between what happened when they were in power as compared to what has happened here. Almost three times as big a mill rate increase when the NDP were in power, Mr. Chairman, and we certainly can take pride in the fact that we have kept mill rates low.

And as far as any changes within school divisions, the school boards make those decisions not the Department of Education.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, the Minister of Education has given us a ludicrous defence of what's happening in education in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Minister, in the '70s and early '80s inflation was running at 12, 13, 14 per cent annually. We had interest rates from Ottawa at 21 per cent, and we had wage increases at 13 and 14 per cent annually.

Now, there's quite a difference. Inflation in this province under your government has not been running at 13 and 14 per cent annually. Since your government came to office, Mr. Minister, educational funding in terms of operating grants has only increased by 38 per cent at a time when inflation over these last nine years has run at about 70 per cent. What has happened, Mr. Minister, what has happened is you have deliberately underfunded education in the province of Saskatchewan and that has been off-loaded onto the backs of local property taxpayers. That's what's happened. That's your record, Mr. Minister.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: -- Now, Mr. Minister, you talk about enrolment decreases in the province of Saskatchewan. I want you to tell me how many students are enrolled in the province of Saskatchewan in the 1990-91 . . . or '89-90 school term? How many students are we talking about?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, let's take a look at what has happened from 1982 to 1990-91. Funding in education has increased by 66.9 per cent while the consumer price index rose by 52 per cent. So the net effect has been a 9.8 per cent increase in real funding to school boards during that particular time.

So, Mr. Chairman, we can take a look at the fact that, as the member has just indicated, that the cost of living was running at a considerably higher rate, cost of inflation was running at a higher rate then. But I don't think that they were putting a comparative . . . a much larger amount of money into educational funding at that time. In fact we saw that as they went through their term that the percentage that the provincial government was putting into K to 12 programs was decreasing, was going down.

Now the other thing that I would mention, Mr. Chairman, is that let's take a look at what has happened to some of the prices in our revenue areas in the last few years. What about the farm prices? Where are they now in comparison to what they were back 10 years ago? What about the price of potash and the price of oil and the price of uranium? The revenues are all down substantially in all of those areas. So I mean, if she's going to talk about times when the cost of living or the price index was up considerably, let's take a look at the changes from those days as compared to what you find with the prices of the major revenue areas today.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Minister, I've asked two questions in the last series of questions and you haven't answered any.

Question number one: if you negotiate a wage increase at the provincial bargaining table with teachers in excess of 3 per cent, Mr. Minister, what are you going to do to assist local school divisions, which have already set their mill rates and which are already facing underfunding as a result of your government? And secondly, can you tell me exactly how many students are enrolled in the 1989-90 school term, Mr. Minister? You're talking about rural depopulation and enrolment declines. Tell me what the numbers are.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well negotiations in the first case, Mr. Chairman, are under way, and I'm certainly not going to be interfering in that. We will have to wait and see what the outcome is. With regard to the second question, the student population now is about 198,000.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, that's about the same numbers as there were in the 1983-84 school year -- 198,000.

In terms of teacher negotiations, Mr. Minister, I don't want you to talk

about negotiations at this particular juncture in our questioning, but I want to know: since you control the bargaining table -- your Department of Education or the Government of Saskatchewan controls the bargaining table -- in terms of numbers on the part of the employer, if your negotiators negotiate a salary increase in excess of 3 per cent, what are you going to do to assist school divisions?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, let me point out that I don't control what happens at the bargaining table and I'm certainly not about to speculate on what the outcome might be.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, if your negotiators negotiate a 4 or 5 per cent increase at a time when you've only increased operating grants by 3 per cent, at a time when a majority of school divisions in this province didn't even receive a 3 per cent increase or the rate of inflation -- I should say the rate of inflation -- what are you going to do to assist those boards? They've set the mill rates; they've made some of their program decisions for the 1990-91 school term. What are you going to do to assist those school divisions that may be looking at wage increases, knowing full well that about 80 per cent of the cost of education comes in the form of wages for our educational personnel.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The outcome, Mr. Chairman, of the teachers' salary negotiations would be purely speculative at this point, and so I'm not going to be commenting on that because we don't know what the settlement is going to be. Once negotiations are completed and we have a fair settlement with the teachers, then we will be talking to the trustees and see where we go from there. But in the meantime, it's all pure assumption, pure speculation, and there's nothing more that I can say in that regard as to what is going to happen. We'll make that decision when the time comes.

(1930)

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Chairperson, the reason why I asked this question is because in the province of Nova Scotia, which has the same year-to-date school year, I guess, from January to December -- that's when their budget is set, similar to ours -- school boards are expected to run from January to December in terms of operating grants from the province of Saskatchewan, the same as in the province of Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia government has negotiated a 5 per cent increase in this school year as well as a 5 per cent increase in the following school year.

School divisions in Nova Scotia are faced with the fact that they only received a 3.69 per cent increase in operating grants to those school divisions. Consequently, rural Nova Scotians are in the process of laying off massive numbers of teachers because there was no consideration given on the part of the provincial government of negotiating this settlement. Consequently, school divisions are in a position where they're laying off teachers, cutting programs, and consolidating schools.

So I'm asking you, Mr. Minister, should it arise that your bargainers negotiate a collective agreement in excess of the 3 per cent at a time when school divisions have set their mill rate and made their decisions, what

are you going to do to assist those school divisions? Because should they come in with an increase running at inflation for instance, Mr. Minister, when the year-to-date has already been set, you put school boards in a very nebulous position. And so I want to know, what do you plan to do should you go beyond a 3 per cent increase to the teachers of the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I would point out to the member opposite that I don't really recall any times, or very few in past history, when salary settlements ever would have been reached prior to late May and often times right into the latter part of June. And no government would ever have been able to give a commitment as to what changes were in fact going to take place on the assumption of what might happen within negotiations. So as I've indicated, when negotiations are completed, we see the end result. At that time, then, we will take a look at it and see if in fact there has to be any change. But right now it's all pure assumption.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, do you have anything in the budget for the potential for teacher increases? Do you not have any contingency fund, should you negotiate a collective agreement in excess of 3 per cent?

Mr. Chairman: -- Order, please. Would the Minister of Finance and the member from Quill Lakes, if they want to have a separate discussion, maybe do it outside the Assembly. Let the critic ask the questions and let the minister answer please.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the Government of Saskatchewan is making a very substantial contribution to K to 12 education in this province, some four hundred forty-three and a half million dollars. And when you consider that that amount is there -- at this particular point in time the member knows what's in the budget -- and when the negotiations are completed we will take a look at what the settlement is. Maybe it'll be even less than what the member is anticipating over there. Who knows; you can assume all kinds of things. But once a settlement has been reached, then we will take a look at it, and if in fact there is anything else that has to be considered.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I think we can assume that it won't be any less than what you've offered, which I understand is, at this stage, about a 3 per cent increase. Now, Mr. Minister, can you confirm that your negotiating team, through Mr. Ball, has asked the teachers to consider \$4 million in cuts to employment benefits that they already have?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, negotiations have been going on. I don't think at this point any other meetings have been scheduled. All of the items that were left on the table when the two sides met this past Thursday are still there.

The mediator will be considering all of those articles and at that time a decision will be made as to what is going to be happening with them. So

I'm not going to be making any comment on whether there are any draw-backs or additions or whatever. These are things that are on the negotiating table, and again I haven't been prepared to accept numbers that she has put forward before and I'm not prepared to accept that now.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you confirm that your government is asking teachers to pay the cost of the administration of the Teachers' Superannuation Fund and plans.

Can you confirm that you're asking teachers to bear the cost of the teachers' group life insurance plan? Can you confirm that teachers are going to have benefits cut in terms of sick benefits; they're going to have to pay for the cost of the administration of their drug plan? Can you confirm that your government has put on the bargaining table \$4 million in cuts at a time when I think in this province we don't need a confrontation with teachers? What we need in this province is some co-operation on the part of the provincial government.

And, Mr. Minister, are you trying to put teachers in a position where they'll have no alternative other than to have a strike? Is that what you're trying to do, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I don't know what question could be more ridiculous than the last one, Mr. Chairman. Certainly nobody welcomes a strike. Teachers don't welcome a strike, neither do parents or the students, and certainly the government does not welcome a strike. When the member stands up and reads off a bunch of statements with regard to what issues could be on the bargaining table, she says now the government wants to do all of this.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I'd remind the member opposite that we have a bargaining committee composed of government representatives and trustee representatives. Now the different issues that are put on the table, generally put on by the team in the same way that the issues are put on the table by the teachers, so when the mediator takes a look at all of those issues that are presently on the table, decisions will be made as to what is going to happen with them.

But I mean for the member to stand there and say, well it's the government that wants to do this or the government that wants to do that, we have a bargaining team, Mr. Chairman, that is involved on one side of the table only. What the end result will be -- and goodness knows she should be aware of the fact that there are always many issues that are put on the bargaining table by both sides -- and the end result at the end of negotiations will end up with some of those issues still being on the table, but in some cases some of them will be removed.

So I presume that that will be no different this time than it has been any other time in the past, and we'll see what happens with the mediator when he gets started, I think, some time next week.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me how many government appointments there are to the government-trustee bargaining team, and how

many trustee appointments there are to that team?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, there are five government appointees and four trustee appointees.

Ms. Atkinson: -- So, Mr. Minister, you control, in terms of numbers, the bargaining team. There are five government appointees and there are four trustee appointees. The Government of Saskatchewan controls the bargaining team when it comes to the government-trustees.

Now, Mr. Minister, I am asking you to confirm some things. I'm not saying that there are \$4 million in cuts on the table. I've been told there are cuts on the table. I'm asking you to confirm that there are \$4 million in cuts being proposed by your government bargaining team. And I'm asking you, Mr. Minister, surely as the Minister of Education you would be aware of what these cuts are. And I'm asking you to tell us in the legislature tonight what is the government bargaining team proposing to cut from what teachers have already negotiated over these last dozens of years.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I don't sit at the bargaining table. And again I would point out that the bargaining team consists of five government appointees and four trustee appointees. I would also point out, Mr. Chairman, it was the previous government that brought in the system of provincial bargaining that we have today with our teachers. It was the provincial government under the direction, I believe, of one Gordon MacMurchy that set up the plan as far as the government-trustee bargaining committee, which consisted, Mr. Chairman, of five government appointees and four trustee appointees. So the same practice is followed today as when it was started back in the 1970s by Gordon MacMurchy.

Now with regard to the issues that are on the table, Mr. Chairman, I will not be commenting on that. Any issues that go on the table are agreed to by both parties, in this case the government appointees and the trustees. They are there for negotiation, and since negotiations are now being turned over to the mediator, we will see what happens from there.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I realize that this five-four in terms of the government-trustee bargaining committee has been in place for some time. But I also realize, Mr. Minister, that this is the first time that the government has proposed to roll back benefits that teachers have already won in past collective negotiating sessions on the part of teachers and the government. This is the first time that roll-backs are being proposed.

Now, Mr. Minister, teachers all across Saskatchewan are presently voting on a strike vote. They're presently voting on a strike vote, Mr. Minister. They are going to decide in the next week or so whether to give the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation a strike mandate. And many teachers have contacted me, Mr. Minister, many teachers. They do not want to strike but they feel, Mr. Minister, that when you have \$4 million worth of roll-backs or loss of benefits being put on the table, that the Government of Saskatchewan is trying to provoke them into a strike, Mr. Minister.

Now why, Minister, would you want to provoke teachers into going out on strike to keep what they already have? Why would you want to do that, Mr. Minister, at a time when this province desperately needs co-operation? It does not need labour strife, Mr. Minister. It does not need teacher strife, Mr. Minister. Tell me, why would you be doing that at a time when we should be building a so-called consensus in the province of Saskatchewan and getting on with the challenges and opportunities facing the province of Saskatchewan? And that's how we get our economy moving again. Why would you want to put teachers in the position where they have no alternative? How does that benefit kids, Mr. Minister? How does that benefit kids, Mr. Minister? How does that provide young people with a quality education? How does that get on with the job of educating our students for the 21st century, for the 1990s? How does that benefit young people in terms of implementing a new core curriculum? Why would you want to do that, Minister? What possibly could motivate the government in terms of antagonizing teachers into going on strike?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- You're so good in your acting over there.

Mr. Chairman, let me point out to the member opposite that in the 17 years that we've had provincial bargaining in this province, there's only been one year that there's really been any problem or any disagreement with regard to the issues that are on the table.

Now the issues that are on the table today are put there by the government-trustee bargaining committee; not by the government, not by the Department of Education, not by the minister. These issues are there to be bargained, Mr. Chairman. Now we find that at the present time because somebody along the line in the hierarchy of the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) has said that there was an impasse, and really there hadn't been an impasse in my view and that they were still negotiating up until last Thursday, they were still having meetings. But the fact of the matter is that this has now been turned over to a mediator, and this is usually what happens in the process when you do have two sides that cannot agree; you turn it over to a third party.

Now this is the case today: we've got it turned over to a mediator, to Mr. Vince Ready, who is one of the best in the country; an individual who came in and settled the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) strike to the satisfaction of all concerned. I don't have any doubt but which that can be the case again.

So for the member to stand in her place and talk about all of the strike action and all of these other things, who's to say that the mediator isn't going to be able to come in with a report that is going to be acceptable by both parties. We don't know that at this point, Mr. Chairman. But the fact of the matter is that we now have a mediator who is going to be involved; a mediator who was selected by the educational relations board, which consists of two members from the STF, two from the trustees, and the chairman who is selected by those four individuals.

So that was the recommendation by the educational relations board. So now I would suggest to the member opposite, give Mr. Ready and his mediation .

. . with his mediator's hat on an opportunity to come in and look at both sides and see then if he can't come up with something that is going to be acceptable to both sides.

So all of this talk about strike -- certainly I don't want to see a strike in Saskatchewan teachers. I spent enough time in education that I know the impact that this can have on students, but who's to say there is going to be a strike? There shouldn't have to be a strike if Mr. Ready will just be given an opportunity to come in and do his job.

(1945)

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, if you're not trying to provoke a strike, would you then instruct your bargainers at the bargaining table to remove some of these roll-backs or cut-backs to benefits? Can you do that, Mr. Minister? If you're not trying to push teachers into a strike and if we are to take you at your word that you don't want teachers to go on strike, why then, Mr. Minister, would we have these items on the bargaining table? And will you give us your commitment tonight to remove these items from the bargaining table so teachers aren't going to be forced into striking, should this mediation process not work?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, what the member is suggesting opposite that the minister interfere with the bargaining process. Now I'm sure . . . Oh we got the member from Rosemont chirping back there . . .

Mr. Chairman, I don't think that the teachers . . . the teachers don't want the Minister of Education to interfere in the negotiation. The trustees certainly don't want the minister to interfere with the negotiating process. I mean, if that was going to be the case, why would we have a negotiating team? Why wouldn't we just go back and let the Minister of Education carry on the negotiations?

Now that's not what we worked for years and years ago, to get into provincial bargaining. That wasn't our plan at all that the minister should do it all, and certainly that's not the plan today. So if she thinks that the minister is going to be interfering in the negotiating process, she's dead wrong, because there is no intention of the minister becoming involved. And people out there do not want that to happen, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Chairperson, I would suggest to the Minister of Education that he's already interfered in the negotiating process, if that's what he's concerned about, because he's indicated that teachers may be ordered back to work should they go out on strike. So in that sense the minister already has.

Now, Mr. Minister, I realize that you aren't at the bargaining table, but the policies of the Government of Saskatchewan certainly are at the bargaining table. When operating grants only receive a 3 per cent average increase, that policy decision is at the bargaining table. When school boards are faced with cuts in funding to their school divisions at a time when they know that rural Saskatchewan can take no more in terms of

property tax increases, that policy decision is at the bargaining table, Mr. Minister. When you propose to cut, as I understand -- this is what the teachers are certainly saying -- \$4 million in benefits that teachers have already gained, that policy decision is at the bargaining table; that policy decision has an impact on teachers.

So what I'm suggesting to you, Mr. Minister, an average increase of 3 per cent in operating grants to school boards at a time when many school boards did not receive even a 3 per cent increase, at a time when school boards are increasing mill rates but they are worried about the wrath that they may receive from their taxpayers, at a time when school boards are dipping into reserves, having to cut programs and having to cut teachers, Mr. Minister, that policy is at the bargaining table.

Now I ask you again, Mr. Minister, it would seem, and many teachers have said this to me, why is the Government of Saskatchewan trying to push us into a strike? What possible benefit could it have to the children of Saskatchewan to have a strike? And you know what they're saying, Mr. Minister? They think what you really want is a strike in rural Saskatchewan where, as we know, teachers make good salaries in relationship to the many other workers and farmers in rural Saskatchewan. In many cases teachers are the best paid workers. And they think if they go on strike in rural Saskatchewan -- which is what you want them to do -- that this is going to be part of your re-election strategy, Mr. Minister. And teachers don't want to be used by you. They do not want to be put in a position where they have to go on strike to keep what they've already won over these many years. But they think the Government of Saskatchewan is trying to force them into a strike in order to help the Government of Saskatchewan be re-elected. Because as you know, Mr. Minister, organized labour isn't that popular in rural Saskatchewan.

Now why, Mr. Minister, do you want to continue to drive the wedge between farmers and working people? Why would you want to do that? As a teacher you know better. As a teacher you know better, Mr. Minister. And why don't you at least take these cut-backs off the table -- these roll-backs and benefits off the table -- so teachers aren't forced to go on strike because that hardly benefits the people of this province, and it hardly benefits the young people of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I think, Mr. Chairman, there are those that really ask the question quite often as to who's promoting a strike? Who's promoting the strike? Starting a lot of it right over there, Mr. Chairman, with the type of accusations, the type of comments that the member opposite is making.

I can see right now, Mr. Chairman, that if we had that member over there as Minister of Education, we can see quite obviously what she would be doing. She would be interfering in the collective bargaining process. That's exactly what she would be doing. Now I wonder what her colleagues in the STF would think about that. Because I don't think -- from the teachers that I have talked to, Mr. Chairman -- that they want government interfering in the collective bargaining process. They do not want that. The trustees do not want that. And she keeps making the insinuations that

it's the government that's doing all of these things; there's the government-trustee bargaining team that has put the issues on the table.

Now she makes mention of the fact about I'm going to legislate them back to work. That was not my comment. That was a comment in the Star-Phoenix and on the media. I had said that back-to-work legislation is always an option that any government has, but is something that they're very reluctant to use. That government was reluctant to use it, but they did use it as well. So I did not say we would be legislating the teachers back to work, but that is an option.

I would hope very much that all of this can be settled now, and we have Mr. Ready involved in the mediation process; that it can come to a successful conclusion. But we get all of the radicals on the other side really coming out with their statements about . . . They would like to see nothing more than a strike in this province, Mr. Chairman, but that's certainly not something that I support.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, if you don't want to see a strike, why don't you remove these from the bargaining table? Mr. Minister, your appointees control the collective bargaining process in terms of the trustee-government bargaining team. You control it, Mr. Minister. You appoint these people; you control it. Your policies are at that bargaining table. Now don't tell us you're not interfering in the bargaining process. Your policies are on the bargaining table, Mr. Minister. It's your policies.

You named the people, you named Dennis Ball, you control it, Mr. Minister. Don't tell me that I'd be interfering in the collective bargaining process, Mr. Minister, because as a Minister of Education, you know full well, Mr. Minister, you've made those appointments; you have a majority of the bargaining team on the part of the employer. And that bargaining team, Mr. Minister, your appointees are getting some direction from the Department of Finance . . . or the Minister of Education, Department of Education.

Now, Mr. Minister, if you don't want a strike . . . You talk about us wanting a strike. I ask you, Mr. Minister: if you don't want a strike, remove these items from the bargaining table, remove these roll-backs from the bargaining table.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the member opposite talks about the policies that are on the table. Mr. Chairman, let me point out to the member opposite that the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) policies are on the table. I would also point out that the STF policies are on the table. The STF comes to the table with the different types of issues that they want to bargain for. The trustees come to the table with the issues that they want to bargain for.

Now, Mr. Chairman, at the end of a period of time negotiation goes on, and at some point in time a settlement is reached. Now at this particular time the STF have felt that they don't think that they can reach an agreement at

the table so they asked then for some help from a third party. The mediator now is going to be going to the table or is going to be taking a look at this and making a decision.

Now really, for the member to continually suggest that the Minister of Education should be taking articles off the table . . . Maybe I could go in and I could remove some of the STF issues as well. Is that what you're suggesting -- that I go in and I'll pick out the ones that I don't think that should be there? I could pick out the ones that I don't think should be there from the STF and I can pick out the ones that shouldn't be there on the other side. Is that what the member's asking for, Mr. Chairman?

I think she's made it quite obvious. She wants interference in the collective bargaining process. She does not want the two teams to continue to work with the collective bargaining process.

And even now, since the teachers have put forward the request for some assistance in the form of a third party, that now she keeps harping on this and is not prepared, as the teachers are and as the trustee-government bargaining team is, that now we will allow Mr. Ready to come in and take a look at this and hopefully can come up with a fair settlement.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Chairperson, the Minister of Education has us believe that he is a neutral person in this. The Minister of Education is not neutral. The Minister of Education has five representatives of the department or the Government of Saskatchewan at that bargaining table. He is not a neutral player in this.

The other thing I want to remind the Minister of Education: if you look at what's happened in education over the last couple of years, Mr. Minister, we have had a strike at the University of Saskatchewan by faculty; we have had a strike at SIAST by faculty and non-faculty workers, and the Government of Saskatchewan is now putting the teachers in a position where they are taking a strike vote because of the roll-backs to benefits that teachers have earned over the last many years. This is a first, Mr. Minister, this is a first, where we have all of the major faculty members and teachers in the province of Saskatchewan either having been on strike or in the process of going on strike. Now why has this come about? It has come about because of the government's deliberate underfunding to education in the province of Saskatchewan at a time when they say education is a priority. Clearly the record shows, in terms of funding increases, that education is not a priority.

Now, Mr. Minister, I'd ask you to answer this very specific question. Do you believe that the cost of the teachers' superannuation plan should be borne by the Teachers' Superannuation Fund?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, this is an issue, as I understand, that is on the table. And the same as all of the other ones that the member has read off, this will be negotiated, this will be dealt with by the mediator. It's not something that I put on.

An Hon. Member: -- Yes it is.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The member from Regina Rosemont, if he'd like to get into it, I mean, he's welcome to do that but there is a way to do it.

But the fact of the matter is, is that these are all issues that are on the bargaining table. They will now all be looked at by the mediator, and the mediator then will make a decision as to where things should go from there.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me whether this item was put forward by the teacher or by the trustees or the government bargaining team?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, anything that is on the table is brought there by either one of the two teams -- any of the issues -- they're put there by one of the two teams.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Chairperson, this one doesn't sound like the trustee proposal but the Government of Saskatchewan proposal.

Now, Mr. Minister, the teachers' group life insurance plan, it's suggested that the cost of administering this plan be borne by the plan. Is that the government's proposal or is that the trustees' proposal?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, it's a government-trustee team. It's not two teams that are there; it's a government-trustee team. They have put some issues on the table, the STF have put other issues on the table.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, the Government of Saskatchewan has been dipping into the teachers' superannuation. In fact there's now a court case before the province, and this also is an item at the bargaining table, Mr. Minister. You can't deny that that item isn't the responsibility of the Government of Saskatchewan. The trustees don't have the capacity to dip into the teachers' superannuation and pull out funds to pay for other teachers' pensions. Is that your little problem or is that the trustees' problem?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I guess that the member was not here the other day, Mr. Chairman, when we dealt with that with the member from Prince Albert. Nobody has been dipping into the Teachers' Superannuation Fund -- let's make that very, very clear right now. That certainly, in many cases, is not the story that's been going out to the teachers.

The government has not been dipping into the Teachers' Superannuation Fund, and that is very, very clear and I made that very clear to the member from Prince Albert the other day.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, this is certainly what teachers are talking about. Teachers are saying that you are dipping in. In fact the teachers' federation is so convinced that you're dipping in that they've launched a court action against the Government of Saskatchewan. This is one of the items that teachers are talking about at all these bargaining meetings around Saskatchewan.

Now the point is, when teachers say that there are \$4 million in roll-backs, the big items, Mr. Minister, are in the teachers' pension plan, which is the Government of Saskatchewan proposal, the dental program, Mr. Minister, the group life insurance proposal, Mr. Minister, as well as your dipping in and using investment earnings for general government revenue. That's what teachers are in a position of having a strike vote on, Mr. Minister. Well we know very clearly where the Minister of Education is at. The Minister of Education is not prepared to take these particular items off the table which have been put there by the Government of Saskatchewan -- not the trustees -- because it has impact upon the Government of Saskatchewan expenditures, not the trustees' expenditures. And so we know full well, Mr. Minister, that teachers are being provoked into a strike, it would appear, because of the proposals that you, sir, you and your Tory cronies have put on the bargaining table.

Now, Mr. Minister, if you're not interested in provoking a strike, why don't you take those four items off the bargaining table, and let's see whether we can negotiate a collective agreement in this province where we won't be in a position where teachers may be on strike, which is certainly not something that this side of the House wants to see.

(2000)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I point out to the member opposite, my Tory cronies and I do not put issues on the table for bargaining. They are put on by the government-trustee negotiating team. There's agreement with those members that are on that team as to what is going to go on that table. It has nothing to do with the government. We are not putting issues on the table any more than we put issues on the table for the STF.

So for her to suggest that I should go in and remove articles or issues from the table for the government-trustee team, I might as well go in and take everything off the table, and then we'll just carry on with the negotiations. I'll get together with Susan Bates, the president of the STF, and maybe Bob Thompson, the SSTA president, and we'll have our little meeting and we'll negotiate, if that's what the member thinks should be happening. But I don't think that that's what the STF or the SSTA want today, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Chairperson, I'd like to ask the minister some questions on special education. Minister, can you tell me what expenditures you spent last year on special education, and what you budgeted for gifted education.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- The total amount from the special needs grant for this current year would have been \$22.2 million, and there was nothing budgeted for gifted education. I believe, it was your government that brought in the mandatory legislation with regard to special ed., that it went up to but did not include the gifted. So there's been nothing mandatory within that funding that school boards in fact have to do anything with gifted education. Any programming that has been done has largely been done during the last five years through the Educational Development Fund, with the exception of some of those school divisions like

Saskatoon public -- that would be one of the better examples -- where they've had, as you know, gifted programs there for probably 45 years or more. And that was something they were simply funding out of their own tax money.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I understand that you have introduced a new formula for funding special education, and included in special education is gifted education. Am I correct in that? And if I am correct, is the \$22.2 million for special education, gifted education, is gifted in there with special education, or is gifted education getting further additional moneys over and above the 22.2 million?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the member had asked me for this past year and I had indicated that was \$22.2 million but that did not include programs for gifted. This coming year now, for 1990-91, it's up to 25 million. We've had an increase there and the gifted are included in that as well as some other groups. Some of these funds, of course, they're unconditional. Speech and hearing, for example, those types of problems, boards have a need to spend money in those areas, they are free to do so.

I would also point out though, that for the past few years that the department has employed a gifted ed. consultant and they have also seconded people on a part-time basis, this cadre of consultants from different school divisions. I know we've had some from Saskatoon public and Catholic. That money, I think for the most part, was taken out of the Educational Development Fund. So that was more direct funding that was also provided over and above the 22.2 million.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, then if I'm correct, this year when we will include special education, gifted, and some additional groupings, we will have \$25 million spent on "special education". Mr. Minister, last year, the year '89-90, the province spent 22.2 million on special education. Obviously that doesn't include the other groupings that you're referring to, and gifted. Can you tell me what we spent on the other groupings in 1989-90, and what we spent on gifted education in '89-90.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We'll get that one on the gifted because that would have been money, as I said, that was drawn out of the Educational Development Fund. With regard to the other programs, of course, you've got to keep in mind that there are a lot of programs that are provided to children that have speech or language problems. Their services are being provided through the resource room. So it's being funded through the normal channels and that would have come out of the 22 million. Those will be programs where the children probably have mild to moderate types of problems and so it would have been out of that particular fund. I don't think we could probably break that down though in the way that you're asking. Gifted we can, because that money would come from EDF (Education Development Fund).

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, when you compare apples to apples in terms of '89-90, '90-91, what are we looking at in terms of a real increase for special education, the few other groupings, and gifted education, is there any increase, or if the dollars remain constant?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I would say a substantial increase of nearly \$3 million. The fact of the matter is that all of these other groupings are being included, before where the service basically was provided through a resource room teacher. In some cases there might have been some other support that would have been provided. As far as the gifted are concerned, most of the programs that I am familiar with in school divisions, that is being provided through the EDF.

So you know other than maybe some of the other problems . . . I know there is some concerns about LD (learning disabled) and ED (emotionally disturbed) kids and special services for them, because at one time they were under the designation area.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, you say that there has been practically a \$3 million increase. I don't see how you arrive at that number, Mr. Minister, because in the 1990-91 fiscal year, or year that we're talking about, I understand that you have rolled into this amount, special needs funding under the old LD, ED, and a few other categories; you've rolled in some new categories as well as gifted education.

That's why, Mr. Minister, I wanted to know exactly how much you did spend on gifted education in the year 1989-90. Because there's a great many people that believe that while you say there's been practically a \$3 million increase, there's been no increase at all because you've put additional categories into this special education funding, and in fact while you say there's been an increase, there hasn't at all.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the increase, as I've indicated, is \$2.8 million. Okay? Now . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Is that new money?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- That's new money. Now as well, let me point out that an increase in the number of pupils identified as high cost will require an additional \$300,000. So that will bring it up then to \$3.1 million.

Now there are a lot of kids here before that . . . Speech and language problems, as you know too, were not recognized before as high-cost kids. So in many cases there the school boards had to make provision for those kids from the unconditional fund -- money that they were getting, the low cost -- but now of course they are going to have additional funding that they can apply to some of the specific types or problems that those children have.

Gifted -- I don't know how much more we're going to see in that particular area. A lot of the schools have their program set up now, based on EDF. It's going to assist some of those. I'm not just sure at this point how many divisions around the province have programs for gifted education? There are quite a number of them, I know now. But this additional funding, from all the reports from the directors, and you've no doubt talked to a lot of them too, have found that this is very, very positive, very well

received because the funding had not changed for three years, and there are a lot of programs that are being provided today, of course, that were not being provided some time ago. So this will pick up some of the slack that they were carrying before that on their own.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, you say there is \$2.8 million in new funding. This is money that isn't coming from anywhere else, it hasn't come out of EDF, it hasn't come from any other programs like gifted or mentally retarded or whatever, this is brand-new money. Is that what you're telling us, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, my understanding that this is all new money, that's it over and above the grants that they would have otherwise received. It's outside the operating grant that they would get, and it is money that is designated for special education.

Now we also keep in mind that there are the two programs here, as I still understand it. You've got those that are designated high cost and you've also got the low cost, the unconditional type of funding. But it is an increase of \$2.8 million plus, as I understand it here, an additional 300,000 for more high-cost kids that have been identified in the last year.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, have you added some new categories to this special funding, and can you tell me what those categories are?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, included under this category are learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, behaviourally disordered, gifted learners, speech disordered, language disordered, and pupils with low intellectual ability such as the educable mentally handicapped and slow learners.

(2015)

Grant recognition is conditional on the identification of staff that support the educational placements of these students. So those are the other categories.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell us what the categories were for the 1989-90 school year when you spent \$22.2 million?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, for the most part the new categories included here now would be the gifted learners, the speech and language disordered. Okay?

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, can you tell me how much you spent last year on gifted, and speech and language disorders, Mr. Minister? And I'm talking about the '89-90 school budget year?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I've indicated, for the gifted we'll get that for you because the only place that came from was from the EDF. The other categories would have been there, but under the low-cost funding, the unconditional. So I couldn't tell you how much was spent specifically on those because that would have been lumped in with all of the others,

children that were being served in the resource centres, under the low-cost funding and such.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, what I'm trying to get at here is that in 1989-90 you spent \$22.2 million on special education. You say that you've increased that funding by \$2.8 million. Mr. Minister, that is impossible, because you have spent some money in the past on gifted education, and you have spent some money in the past on speech and language disorders. So I'd like to know, Mr. Minister -- I believe that there are three new categories that you have added in the 1990-91 year -- I want to know how much you spent on those in the previous years. And the point I'm trying to make, Mr. Minister, is that I don't believe that this is \$2.8 million in new money. This is \$2.8 million additional funding, that's true, but you've added some new categories.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the whole idea between reorganizing this and increasing the funding was to have a much broader program delivery system whereby we would be dealing with all types of exceptionality.

Now when we talked about gifted as being a new category in here, for example. Prior to this year any funding, any programs that would have been provided in gifted education in the province, the money for that would have had to come from EDF. This . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Or locally.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well yes, or locally. But for the most part, since EDF came in, I think that's where it's been coming from.

This increase now in the fund should enable those school divisions, where they did have gifted programs before, to now use special education funds, and to use that EDF money that maybe they had committed to before, for something else. Okay? So that's one thing that they can do.

The other thing, of course, if you keep in mind that there may be some systems now who will get into programs for gifted learners where they didn't before because they didn't feel that they had the money. With the speech and language, there was no high-cost category for them before, so any service that was delivered to them was done through resource rooms or, in some cases, maybe within the class-room if they had the support to do it. But the money for that would have come out of the low-cost funding that the boards received.

So now, of course, if you . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well it's got to be new money there, though, because you've got some systems . . . We know that because of the fact that we've got better diagnostic and assessment out there today through shared services in most cases, that more and more of these children are being identified and need programming.

This is going to enable now more boards to provide that programming at the local level, probably, rather than having to send the child who had a more severe problem some place else. So we think from . . . and from the

feedback we've had from directors is it's going to be very, very beneficial and they will be able to do much more at the local level.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, what we have gotten you to admit then is that this \$2.8 million isn't all new money; that there's been an internal transfer, Mr. Minister. Some of the money has come out of EDF and some of the money has come out of low-cost funding. This is not all new money. You just said yourself, some of this money has to be new money, but it's not all new money.

Now, Mr. Minister, I think therein lies the problem, that there are many people who are concerned that services for learning disabled, emotionally disordered, and behaviour disordered people, which used to be designated money -- you would get students designated and then you would get the money from the Department of Education at the local school division level -- that some of these kids that were designated in the past won't necessarily get in the future the kinds of services that they had gotten in the past.

I think that there are several people, particularly, who work with learning disabled students and parents of learning disabled students, that feel as a result of your funding freezes in the last three years, services to LD kids in particular, and ED kids, have not been at the level they had been in the past. And while I recognize that you're trying to move towards some sort of formula in terms of getting X number of staff in place for X number of students, and while this has certainly worked in other jurisdictions, I think that there is some concern that this will become the maximum that we will see in various school divisions, and that school divisions won't necessarily go beyond that. While I realize that there was some problem in the past, in that school divisions were getting kids designated that maybe shouldn't have been designated, they were doing so because they wanted to have the funding to put the services in place.

I realize, Mr. Minister, that there are some school divisions that have done a tremendous job of identifying students that require special needs services and special needs funding, and that there are some school divisions in the last three years had just gotten their special education consultants in place, and were just beginning to identify students, and then all of a sudden there was a funding freeze and they couldn't get any services in place for those students. So while there have been changes, and certainly the changes are going to benefit some school divisions, Mr. Minister, I think that there is a concern that this may become the maximum level of service in terms of support services for these students, and we won't go beyond that.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, have you heard these kinds of concerns expressed to you, and can we be assured, Mr. Minister, that we will indeed see more funding going towards special needs students in Saskatchewan, because as you know, we can do a great deal for young people who have special needs by putting special needs services into class-rooms, into schools, and giving these young people an opportunity to get an education.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, when the member talks about whether this is new money or not, I would simply suggest to her that she

takes the \$25 million figure and put it down on a piece of paper and underneath it put 22.2 million and subtract. And in my books, that comes out to a \$2.8 million increase. So for her to say that it's just moving money around, I mean, this is new money . . .

An Hon. Member: -- From the EDF?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- No, the EDF has not changed. No, the EDF money is still there; it stays the same. I suggested to you earlier that this is going to enable boards to take that money from EDF that they otherwise might have been spending on gifted programs in the past and use it for other things.

Now with regard to the concern about the freeze, and I know of that concern. But one has to keep in mind the fact that the program started back in the early 1970s with the mandatory legislation. And there was need, I think, to take a good look at the types of programs that were being provided and see if which direction things should be going here because there have been concerns over the funding, I know, for a number of years.

There's no doubt about it, that particularly with rural school divisions where you maybe had one or two children that were assessed to be high cost, then you had, in many cases, a very high-cost program that had to be provided. You couldn't always group these children with others, so that it was a high-cost program. But there was a need to do a good assessment.

Now I don't know whether you have a copy of the special needs program funding; if you do, fine, because I'd send over a copy. But this paper has been arrived at through a lot of consultation with teachers, with the STF, with the directors of education, trustees. A very wide circulation of requests here for opinions on this and a lot of different drafts of it that were developed before we arrived at what you see before you. Now I've indicated before that this is simply the first phase in this.

We had to take a good look at inequities that existed across the province and, I think that now, as we are moving ahead and as we have more input from all of the people involved, that we will eventually, and it probably will take another couple of years, I would think, it's going to take that period of time before we get to the point where we are providing quality program for all of these special needs children and that the school boards are receiving, what they feel, is a fair payment for the services that they are providing.

So this is the start, and I think we're going in the right direction, and I've really appreciated all the support that we've had with the people that are involved and certainly, to this day, the comments have been very, very positive. The money is most welcomed by the school divisions, and I don't have any doubt that what the parents are also very happy about the fact that their children are now receiving, in some cases, some very specific problems, and they're now getting more of the help that they need.

But we're not finished yet. We've got to keep going and we need help from people like yourself, as well, who have worked with these special needs

kids to give us your opinions on it too, because it's got to be a joint effort. And when we do that, we're going to end up with something that is going to, I think, be fair and good for all.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, in the past I've studied what they've done in New Brunswick in terms of X number of staff for every 200 pupils. I thought this was the way to go, and I'm still not convinced it's not the way to go, but one of my concerns, Mr. Minister, is that this may become the only . . . this becomes the maximum. School divisions don't go beyond that.

The other problem or shortfall in this particular procedure is it's possible that school divisions may have an inordinate number of special needs children, and that this one to 200 won't necessarily recognize that.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if that's something that's been drawn to your attention, and whether or not there's any provisions for changes should this kind of thing arise in Saskatchewan where the full-time equivalence doesn't meet the real need that's in some school divisions. Obviously there'll be more special needs children in some school divisions over others. Will this formula, as you move it through the system, will it take into consideration that problem, should it arise?

(2030)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, a good point raised by the member opposite, and the fact that we are going to be very flexible with this because we understand that there can be some unforeseen problems that arise with this new formula, and we're going to have to make changes where those who were involved in the delivery of the service suggest that it's not working out.

So there has to be flexibility, because our concern has to be for those special needs children out there and the people who are delivering the service. And we know that today we've got different types of problems showing up in our class-room with different causes, some of the things that we didn't see five years ago when you and I were working with special needs kids.

So we have to be flexible, and we're prepared to do that. And we welcome, as I say, the input and the feedback from the people who are out there in the field, and we'll have to make some changes.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Mr. Minister, last day during the Education estimates we'd spent considerable time discussing the funding, or perhaps better terminology would be the lack of funding of the Teachers' Superannuation Fund. At that time I had established, and I believe with your concurrence, sir, that there was a shortfall of about 175 million plus interest, which would amount to about \$250 million, from the Teachers' Superannuation Fund since 1985. And this is at a time when the unfunded liability has risen to a total of 1.6 billion according to the figures you gave me.

You in turn indicated, Mr. Minister, that the NDP government of the 1981-82

year had taken some \$6 million from the interest that was over and above 7 per cent, for which I asked for some documentation, and I have not yet received and I await that documentation before I concur on that, Mr. Minister.

But be that as it may, I want to ask you this question about that fund: what plans have you got to restore to that fund the \$250 million which are rightly owed to the teachers' fund? I ask you this question because I want to know whether there's any possibility whatsoever during your term of government that any portion of this money will be recovered and turned into that fund.

As you well know, Mr. Minister, there's increasing concern about funding that fund adequately. I suppose over the weekend that concern is only heightened in view of some of the news that we hear about what's happened to the Canada Pension Plan, which we always knew, I suppose, that it really wasn't really a funded plan, but that that money that people are paying into it, today's generation is paying into it, is being used to pay off the interests at the federal level and also being used to lend money to the provincial governments, which is quite likely not recoverable. Hence the Canada Pension Plan is . . . the funding for that for those people that are going to be receiving or eligible for pensions over the next 20 years, 20 to 30 years, is threatened.

So my question then, Mr. Minister, is, and I repeat again: is there any plan, is there any chance of this money being repaid back into the Teachers' Superannuation Fund so that that fund will eventually become completely funded and that the teachers who will be receiving their pensions, say 20 years from now, will not have their fund threatened?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, we talked the last day when the member was asking questions and reference was made to the annual report. Did you get a copy of that? Because a copy was sent across and I guess your colleague, the member from Saskatoon South, had it. But I can certainly send another one across as soon as we get someone to take it over. And I would refer you to page 33, because it's on that particular page that reference was made to numbers last day.

Now you're talking about \$250 million supposedly that you figure is the shortfall in the fund. Now I indicated to you the other day, and I indicate to you again tonight, that the same practice is being followed today that was followed by your government back in the early 1980s.

And I refer you to page 33, where I had indicated to you the other night, investment revenue was \$26.805 million. The provision for interest was 11.324 million. So the investment income in excess of 7 per cent was \$15.481 million. That was the investment income in excess of the 7 per cent. Now the contribution to surplus was 9.473 million -- \$9.473 million. The difference was over \$6 million.

Now what happened to the \$6 million? Well I can tell you what happened to it. This went into the general coffers. Okay? This is money that was . . . The government of the day used these moneys to meet minimum provincial

contributions, thereby reducing their contribution to the surplus. Now that's exactly the situation that we have today.

Let me read that to you again. I don't want to give you the wrong information. The government of the day then used these moneys to meet minimum provincial contributions, thereby reducing their contribution to the surplus. That was \$6 million. Now that was in 1981-82 annual report. Now that was no different then, the NDP government of the day, that practice then was no different than what is being done by the present government, the PC government. So I mean, again it's a matter of you pointing out a double standard. What was good for you is not good for us. So let's be clear on that, and I refer you to page 33. So the same practice has been followed. We're talking about investment income in excess of the 7 per cent, and your government was doing it when they were in power.

There is nothing as far as we understand it, but that will be clarified as we move ahead into the court case, there's nothing there that's indicated, as far as we know, that would suggest that we couldn't do the same thing you did.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I will look at these carefully. And now you've spent a lot of time talking about \$6 million.

Now if you would proportionately spend some time and some effort discussing \$250 million, which has been brought to your attention repeatedly year after year. So I ask you that same question once again: have you got any plans, or is there any chance of this government even beginning to look at some way of returning that money, that 250 million, back into the teachers' superannuation plan?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, what we're talking about here is a process, and the same process that is being used today that was used back ever since 1980. Starting with the \$6 million that I just mentioned to the member opposite. I mean, this is part of where he wants to get with his \$250 million. The auditor, as we understand it, has questioned the fact whether or not overpayments can be made. The government has always met it's commitment.

Your government met it's commitment back in 1980-81 and on into '82. Your government met it's commitment by matching the teacher contributions plus the 7 per cent, that's what you did. This government has done exactly the same thing since that time. The auditor has questioned whether or not overpayments could be made into that fund. Whether or not any government should have been putting in more than the 6.5 per cent plus the 7 per cent interest. So that's a matter of question right now as well.

So you know, we can always go back and talk about the 1.6 or .7 million dollar or billion dollar unfunded liability that you people were partly responsible for. Didn't do anything about addressing that problem. That's a much bigger problem than the one that you're trying to make a lot out of.

But the fact of the matter is, we're talking about a process here that has

been followed ever since your government brought in the new plan, that now teachers want to throw out and go back to the formula plan again.

So I mean, you can't have it both ways. I mean, the process was established when you people were in power. It's the same process that has been continued on right up until this day where the moneys in excess of the 7 per cent have been taken. But at the same time, this government has made an effort to have overpayments in there to try and address the unfunded liability that you people left behind.

And you don't make any mention of the fact that when the crash came in 1987, in October, that the government of the day put in some \$19 million additional to make up for the shortfall that the fund had in the investments that they had entered into. So I mean there are a lot of things that have happened with that fund.

But the bottom line is that there hasn't been one nickel taken out of that fund to be used for anything other than the pensions, over the 7 per cent mark -- the same thing that you people did. But there hasn't been one nickel used for anything other than pensions, and yet we've heard some of your people running around on talk shows, talking about the government taking \$10 million out of the fund and using it for whatever.

We know of cases -- and I hate to say this -- where teachers have said this in their class-room, that the government is stealing money from the fund. And to me that is inexcusable and very, very unprofessional. Not one nickel has been taken out of that fund that has gone for anything other than pensions. And people out there who may be watching tonight and who are all on pension do not have any fear at all they're not going to be getting their pensions. The same practice is carried on; the government's meeting its commitment; the money is going into the fund. As I understand it, the fund has in excess of \$800 million in it today which is more than enough, much more than enough, to meet all of the obligations that there are in paying those people who are on pensions.

So, Mr. Chairman, we can talk about the pension plan and some of the problems that there are with it. We know that there is a disagreement between the STF and the government as to what should be happening within that fund. That will be determined before very long, hopefully, so that we can put this to rest once and for all, so that we will know actually that the process that is being followed is right and accurate.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairman, the reason that I have raised this issue continually is because of the fear that is present in the teaching body about the unfunded liability. Certainly if there was a completely funded liability, then there would be no problem at all in switching everybody to one fund and to one superannuation plan. Certainly the purpose of going to the second plan, which you and I both acknowledge, was to try to establish some kind of funding for the pension plans.

You have a very interesting interpretation of the auditor's report, Mr. Minister. It clearly differs with my interpretation of what he's saying. I don't think that the auditor ever indicated in any place I read that the

government was putting a little too much money into the Teachers' Superannuation Fund, and I certainly think that the teachers will be interested to hear that interpretation of yours.

Lastly, Mr. Minister, I acknowledge then from what you have said, that you are not looking at any way of putting any of that 250 million or any of the 6 million previous to it back into the Teachers' Superannuation Fund.

I want to turn now, Mr. Minister, to a completely different topic. If you have a comment that you want to make after what I've just said, I would sit down before I turn to the topic of heritage languages.

(2045)

Mr. Minister, I want to ask you a few questions about heritage language program in Saskatchewan. I want to, in the course of their remarks and our discussion on it, establish the direction that you're going and the direction that the people of Saskatchewan can expect from your government with respect to a heritage language program.

I want to ask you first of all, Mr. Minister, for some information. Do you have information on, or some statistics on the enrolment trends in heritage language programs that are being handled in the schools? And I want to discuss first of all heritage language programs that are being handled through the school system as opposed to those that are being handled or funded through the Department of Culture and Recreation.

But can you give me stats on that? Specifically can you tell me how many students have been enrolled annually since 1984 right to the present time, in how many schools, and in how many languages?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I'll give you some of the information now. If there's still more that you require, we can get back at that. But we work very closely with the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation, and as well we have a committee that's been set up. We have a multicultural education consultant; I'm sure as you know, a Ukrainian consultant, and a curriculum writer. And the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation is providing right now some \$104,580 to 92 organizations, to give you some numbers -- 92 organizations for instruction to 2,901 students in 25 languages. So 92 organizations, 2,900 students, and 25 languages.

Now we are involved; these are joint projects with Education and Culture. So there is a lot happening out there. We also of course are working on some of the recommendations with regard to the report that came out from the task force on multiculturalism. And we are very concerned about some of the cut-backs, the federal money, and we are contacting them and voicing our displeasure of course with the fact that there have been some changes there.

Since 1988 we've had a full-time heritage language consultant. And working across the piece in K to 12 in all of these different language programs.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- What I want to do, Mr. Minister, is get the figures specifically from one department and then go into the part from Culture and Recreation, so that we can establish some kind of a trend here. Because I've yet to see a document that's been put out jointly by both departments. I have documentation from Saskatchewan Education about the . . . or a couple of documents here.

First of all, is the Report of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Heritage Languages and then an interim response to it. And so I want to just get the figures for that. Is it possible for you to give me -- and if you don't have them today, perhaps you could, you know in short order -- but I want population trends of in-school programs, not out-of-school programs, separate from that given by the Department of Culture and Recreation.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We'll get those figures for you the next day that we're back in estimates.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Then, Mr. Minister, I want to know whether you have had any follow-up to this interim response to the minister's advisory committee on heritage languages. What follow-up is it that your department has done already, and what follow-up is in progress. I know that you've referred to the report on multiculturalism, but what I see happening here is, I see one report back in 1986; a response finally in '89; the multicultural task force in late '89, or is it early '90, released, and we're seeing report after report. But I want to know has there been any changes or any follow-up done as a result of the recommendations that have been put into this report?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- As far as the follow-up is concerned, I've indicated to you about the special multicultural education heritage languages unit. We've had the consultant; he's been in place now for a few years. But also during this fiscal year the heritage language liaison reference committee was established to provide advice to the minister on heritage languages issues. And I know that I have met with the committee; I've also met with a smaller group of the committee. And an interim policy for credits for heritage language courses taught outside the school was also developed.

Financial assistance included \$3,150 for heritage language teacher in-service; \$4,000 for heritage language teacher methodology credit course; 750 for teacher bursary; and 750 for development of a German language computer-assisted program. So those are some follow-up, I would think the type of thing that you're wondering about. And there are other areas that we've got to continue to work on along with them.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- From what I've gained from what you've just said, Mr. Minister, and I think according to government policy you've continued to be active in the area of curriculum development, teacher education, largely when it comes to heritage languages programs.

Have you done anything, Mr. Minister, in the last, say two years, specifically to try to increase the enrolment in heritage languages in

in-school programs, and do you have any plans for any innovations, or any incentive program to increase the heritage language programs in school?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, in answer to the member's question, we work very closely with Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation, as I'm sure he understands, because there are a lot of good things that they're doing. They've got the expertise, and we help out in whatever way that we can in working very closely with them.

But with regard to the last two years and some of the changes that have taken place, and some probably go back further than that, we know that first the school division has to identify the need. They have to determine their own special need, whether it's a course . . . A couple of examples I guess I'm familiar with are Ukrainian and German. I recall, for example, that at Aberdeen that they had enough interest there in Ukrainian that they employed a half-time teacher to teach Ukrainian. So once that determination is made then there are ways in which the department can help out.

One of the things, of course, is the policies for credit, particularly for the high school students and grants for pilot projects. Now I know of one project in Saskatoon, for example, with Saskatoon Catholic, where we have been providing \$50,000 a year for that pilot, and I think this is something going on the third year now. We also have curriculum writers that are involved.

So all of these things have to kind of go along together in tandem because first you need the identification, the need established, and then working with the board to meet that need. Of course, if we are going to have these programs, we have to have curriculum. I'm sure as time goes on, I could see other areas where this may well arise too, where there are other language needs that are identified. But right now for the most part, they're being met through the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Now, Mr. Minister, with respect to the heritage language program that was funded by the federal government and which the federal government has cut. Now those are largely to programs which I believe are handled by the Department of Culture and Recreation. I want to ask you, Mr. Minister, have you looked at replacing any of that funding from your department or filling that void that the federal government has left us with from moneys from your department?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- What we're doing, Mr. Chairman, is protesting to the secretary of state with regard to this cut-back, and we're doing this certainly on behalf of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation, because we feel that these funds have been very, very, well spent; they're very, very important and that they should be continued. So we're hopeful that there can still be some continuation of those funds.

Other than that, we will continue on with the practice that we've had in the past in helping out with pilots and working in joint ventures with the other department. And we'll have to wait and see whether or not any more

of these funds are going to be forthcoming. But in the meantime, it's going to be business as usual.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Well, Mr. Minister, you indicated you're protesting. I want to say that if you're protesting, then I hope that you protest loudly and clearly. I have had some considerable amounts of letters and statements written from people who have been involved in the providing of these heritage language programs. For example, to date there's some . . . out of 1,028 students who have been represented in responses to a letter I've written, at least 212 of them indicate that they will be losing their schools unless some other type of funding is found. It's interesting to note that they give also indication of things like, they're tired of going to bingo's and trying to raise money through methods of this type.

(2100)

I want to indicate to you, Mr. Minister, some of the statements that people have written about with respect to this program, and I'll give you a couple of quotations. They give me quotations like this, "Heritage language education is not a luxury." They feel that it's something that should be incorporated more permanently into the system and not be played with. Others say, "We weren't given enough notice. Maybe the province can help us for the first year." Another example -- I'm just taking at random here several from 20 or 30 quotations -- "Community members can contribute time and guidance, but no one can afford to give more money."

The end result here is, Mr. Minister, is that there are a lot of people in Saskatchewan looking for your assistance in securing this money from the federal government. You say that you're making protests. Could you give me specifically the nature of the representation that you are making or have already made to the federal government? Are there any letters that you have that you would care to lay on the table or document? Are there any meetings that you have had? What meetings are you planning to have with the minister responsible at the federal level?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I would point out to the member two things: we're responding to the report that came out on multiculturalism, and there were 21 of the recommendations that he may well be aware of that apply to education. So we are working to meet as many of those as we can, but we are not doing this in isolation; we are doing this along with the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation.

Now in regard to the support . . . And keep in the mind that the grants that were coming from the federal government were coming to Culture and Multiculturalism. But since we work very closely with them, we feel that we should be supporting his request, as he has been also trying to get more of this money.

So just let me give you one paragraph from the letter, and this is to the Hon. Gerry Weiner, the Minister of State:

This announcement has distressed many of our ethno-cultural organizations who rely on the financial support for the program to promote heritage

language instruction for approximately 2,800 school-age students in more than 20 languages throughout Saskatchewan. Interest in promoting heritage languages has increased steadily during the past seven years and supplementary heritage language schools have played a very important role in the development of some fine language programs in this province.

So we're talking about the fact that, as you have have raised too, that the elimination of some of these funds does place the viability of these schools in jeopardy and I'm sure that . . . and I've received copies of letters as well that have been written by some of the members of the different language groups indicating this very fact as well, and the concern that they have that without this funding that their programs are in danger of being cut back. And I think this would be indeed very unfortunate.

So I think that all of us have to continue to work in trying to get the federal government to reinstate some of these funds that they are cutting back on.

Mr. Kowalsky: -- Thank you, Mr. Minister. I will just have one comment to make and I'll direct the rest of my questioning on this to the Minister of Culture and Recreation.

I want to say that when you compare Saskatchewan's record with Alberta's and Manitoba's, and you can go back for times before you and I were in this House, that Saskatchewan's always managed to be somehow behind. And I guess it's okay to be behind if there's some promise of catching up. And what I see is that I don't see much promise of Saskatchewan catching up in the field of heritage languages.

I believe, Mr. Minister, that for too long a period of time in Saskatchewan we've spent time giving what I call lip-service to heritage languages through committee work, through studies, reports, replies to reports, without actually getting right down to making sure and making a commitment to increasing the number of students that are enrolled in heritage languages. And I say that at this time because right now I think, Mr. Minister, it's particularly evident to us, much clearer to us now, to us living in Saskatchewan as to having a good reason for having more heritage languages taught.

Up until this date, until the last couple of years, until we saw the Berlin wall come tumbling down, the major reason for implementing heritage languages was to preserve the cultures of those who were non-British or non-French in the province. A lot of it was just because it came from here -- because I was of a Ukrainian background so I wanted my kids and my offspring to have a little bit of history and to know where their roots are from. And the same would apply to somebody from a German background or for an aboriginal background or whatever.

But now in addition to that, Mr. Minister, we have a new reason, and this is the reason -- it's an economic reason. There is an advantage now for people from Saskatchewan, and from the prairie provinces that never existed before, and that is the advantage of a possibility of greater trade opening

up with people in eastern Europe as well as with the Pacific Rim, but in most cases our population was not derived from that part of the world. So, Mr. Minister, we now have two reasons -- two reasons, two big reasons -- to put a little more emphasis on heritage languages and at least to do as much as is being done in Manitoba and is being done in Alberta.

Mr. Minister, in this latest document that I have of March 1989, the interim response to the report on heritage languages, stated on page four, indicates, and I quote:

Requests for the development of a policy on heritage languages emerged as a major issue.

I concur with that; I think the report concurs with that. My question to you, Mr. Minister, is: can you give us a date when we can expect a policy on heritage languages to be formulated and presented by this government?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I can't give the member a fairly . . . I can't give him an accurate date as to when this policy will be ready.

This is part of the responsibility of the task force or advisory committee that I mentioned earlier, that are working along with us and with the department. They're working on a policy. I would expect that this would be coming forth some time later this year. But again they're going to spend a lot of time on it because, as you can well recognize, it's going to have to be a policy that is workable in Saskatchewan.

I would point out as well that we are in close consultation with Alberta and with Manitoba, learning from their experience in how they do things, because we recognize that there's a lot that can be learned from those two particular provinces in the programs that they have been able to establish.

But I would point out as well that the department has been very involved with other groups in the province, providing a lot of support in other language areas, and I would point out, and you mentioned about trade. There's a lot of interest today, as you know, in the Pacific Rim, and we have more students coming into our schools from the Pacific Rim area.

And we've assisted, for example, White City. They're involved with the province of Jilin. I know not too long ago there was one of the directors of education and some of the teachers from Saskatoon were over in China, and also taking a look at an exchange of ideas and programs and in some cases, students. So these types of things are going on as well. So since we are such a mixture of cultures and languages here in the province of Saskatchewan, it's hard for us to take on the whole works of them. But we have to try and do the best that we can.

Where there is that demand out there, we will work with these groups and we will provide support as we are doing with some of our educational programs. But for the most part, we will work along in conjunction with what the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Recreation are doing. So we're looking forward to the advisory committee being involved with us and

putting forward suggestions that we can try and put into practice.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. Mr. Minister, I now want to turn your attention to school bus safety. You will recall, Mr. Minister, that I wrote you a letter in March of 1990 advising you that on May the 14 to 19, the eleventh national conference on pupil transportation will be held at the Missouri safety centre at Warrensburg, Missouri. I wanted to know, Mr. Minister, whether or not you are going to be sending a representative from Saskatchewan education to this conference.

You advised me in your letter that you would be taking this up with the Department of Education and I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, whether in fact, anyone from Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan, either Sask. Ed. or through the ministry of transportation, whether or not there will be a representative attending this conference.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the simple answer is no, we're not sending anyone down to this conference. We feel we have one of the top individuals in Canada when it comes to bus safety, and that is in the person of Gordon McGregor, and he works very closely with school boards around the province, and has no doubt attended many similar conferences such as this in the past. So we're not sending anyone to this particular conference.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I have a newspaper article here that describes what the Manitoba government has done in terms of ensuring that their school students have a safe ride to and from school. Mr. Minister, one of the provisions is that all drivers in Manitoba have to receive certification and training that is upgraded annually, and I'm wondering if that's the case in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, none of the officials here are familiar with that particular topic, but we'll get that information for you for next day. I've no doubt that there are standards that are being followed, but we'll get that for you.

(2115)

Ms. Atkinson: -- I have some additional information that I would like to know about. Can you tell me whether in Saskatchewan all of the vehicles that transport children to school have to be less than 12 years of age, which is certainly the case in Manitoba?

As well, each day the driver has to inspect the bus and sign a log-book that can be legally binding should a court challenge arise. And I want to know whether that's the procedure in Saskatchewan. As well, in Manitoba all of the buses have to be inspected at least twice a year by the school division and once by the provincial inspector. And I want to know if that's the situation in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, I recall when we used to have public service announcements or advertising on television, that would tell drivers how to behave when they're driving their vehicle when they are behind a bus. And I no longer

see that kind of advertising on television, informing motorists of driving courtesies when coming up behind a bus, or in front of a bus. And I'm wondering whether the Department of Education has any plans -- or the Department of Justice -- to inform the public as to how they should proceed in terms of school bus safety.

As well, Mr. Minister, the RCMP in Manitoba is extremely stringent in enforcing the laws in order to protect children. Mr. Minister, it seems to me that all children have the right to be delivered to and from school in a safe manner. And as you may be aware, there are a number of citizens in Saskatchewan that are concerned that we do not have a minimum set of standards that are written down anywhere in law that pertain to school bus operation. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, whether you have any intentions of introducing any kind of legislation that would require school buses and drivers to meet minimum safety standards.

In addition, Mr. Minister, in Manitoba, students are instructed how to get on to and off of a bus, and I'm not clear that that is happening in Saskatchewan. As well, parents have been taught how to get their children to and from the bus stops safely, and I'm not sure that's happening in Saskatchewan. So I want to know, Mr. Minister, what we're doing to ensure that schoolchildren in Saskatchewan aren't being driven over by their own buses. Because as I read the information, that is the greatest danger. If you look at the information in the United States, the majority of the fatalities have to do with school buses driving over children -- not necessarily other vehicles. Certainly that is a problem, but the largest numbers of children that are involved in fatalities or injuries do so when they're in contact with their own school bus.

So, Mr. Minister, I am, as a matter of fact, quite disappointed that you're not sending anyone to Missouri because that's where set minimum standards for the United States, and they do have minimum standards there and it seems to me that we might want to look at minimum standards in the province of Saskatchewan to ensure that our young school children aren't at risk.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. member for raising that because it is of primary importance. We'll be happy to check on that and find out the standards and the regulations that we are following here in Saskatchewan.

With regard to advertisements about safety, it's my understanding that the Highway Traffic Board looks after and has looked after that traditionally. As far as safety, I think SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) at one point did some of it as well. But we'll follow up on that and provide that information for you as well.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, the other question that I'd like to know is whether or not you've done a comparison in our people transportation in Saskatchewan and our standards as they compare to the United States' minimum standards, and if you have, can you provide me with that information as well? And if you haven't done a comparison, would you be prepared to undertake that kind of comparison? Because I think what we really need in Saskatchewan right now is some information as to how we

compare to other jurisdictions.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I'll check into that, Mr. Chairman, and provide that information.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, the next question that I have for you -- you will recall that on March 20 you sent out letters to parents in Saskatchewan advising them of this new system of evaluation that's being used in Saskatchewan schools. And with that letter, Mr. Minister, you included a card where parents could ask for information on the following topics and I quote: "How I can help with my child's education at home, and how I can be more involved with decisions about education."

In addition this little card said that all parents returning the response card would receive a copy of "Understanding Education, a Parent Guide." Mr. Minister, can you tell me where you got the names to do this direct mail? And can you tell me how much this direct mail cost the taxpayers of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, there were some 114,000 letters sent out. The total cost for that was \$110,000. And with regard to the names, this is from a computer base which we contracted with. And I'm sure there are several data bases around but it was with a particular computer company that we got the names.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, where would this computer company have got these names? Because this letter was sent to parents of Saskatchewan school children. Where would they have received these names? Where would they have gotten this kind of, what I would consider confidential information?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, it's difficult for me to say what data base was used. I presume that computer companies have various data bases that they can use, listings of people from around the province, for many different reasons. We contract with them and they do the job for us, so it's not something that we're directly involved in.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Can you tell me who this computer company is?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, it's my understanding this is all done through Strategic Direct Marketing. They looked after all of that for us.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, can you tell me who owns Strategic Direct Marketing?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, we can get that information for the member. Well we'll try.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Oh now, Mr. Minister, we know who the principal is and we know he's tied closely to the Government of Saskatchewan. Come on, you don't have to go out and find out the information, Mr. Minister. Who owns

the company? You know that yourself.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I could suggest I may know of one of the owners, but there could be several.

An Hon. Member: -- Who is it?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well I think it's one Dave Tkachuk.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, and did Mr. Tkachuk use to be the principal secretary to the Premier? Is that how you know Mr. Tkachuk?

While the minister is searching for his answer -- it looks as though he's not going to admit that this Mr. Tkachuk is the former principal secretary to the Premier -- Mr. Minister, how could it be that Mr. Tkachuk would only do a mailing out to parents of school-age children in the province of Saskatchewan? And, Mr. Minister, can you tell me whether you have the names and addresses of all of the parents of school-age children in Saskatchewan, in the Department of Education or anywhere in the Government of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, we don't have that data in the department. That's why we employ someone else such as strategic marketing to look after this for us.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well, Mr. Minister, where possibly could Mr. Tkachuk get this information? How could Mr. Tkachuk, as a private business man, know the names of all of the parents of the schoolchildren in Saskatchewan? Now how could Mr. Tkachuk possibly get that information if he didn't get that information from the Government of Saskatchewan? He certainly didn't get it from individual school boards, Mr. Minister, so where did he get the information?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I made it clear, Mr. Chairman, that we contracted this out to strategic marketing, and where they get the information from is outside of our department. So you'd maybe have to check with him to see where he gets it.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, did you give him a computer disk with all the names of the parents in the province of Saskatchewan? And, Mr. Minister, if you did that, what safeguards are there that Mr. Tkachuk doesn't sell this to someone else?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, as I've indicated, we don't have that information other than the responses . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Do you want to get in the debate too?

Mr. Chairman, I would point out that the only addresses that we have are the response cards that come back, and I understand we have some 11,000 that have been returned to date. We have those addresses and we respond to them.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I say to you that Mr. Tkachuk got this from the Government of Saskatchewan, and I want you to deny that. Deny that Mr. Tkachuk got this information from the Government of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I have no idea where he got it from. The department has contracted with different projects with Strategic Direct Marketing, and where he gets his list from is something that I do not know.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, what other projects have you contracted with D-Mail for Mr. Tkachuk, a big Conservative hack? How much other money has he gotten from the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, and what other projects have you contracted with this particular person?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well let's just keep in mind, Mr. Chairman, the fact that when we talk about Strategic Direct Marketing, that this is a company that's in the business of mailing out large quantities of letters or other information. So that's not something that we have here within the Department of Education. I will point out that the other direct mailing that he looked after for us was on the core curriculum in late 1988, so that's the only other one that he's been involved in.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, anybody who isn't a parent in the province of Saskatchewan didn't get a letter. I am not a parent of school-age children; I didn't get a letter. The member from P.A. is not the parent of school-age children; he didn't get a letter. Only parents of school-age children in the province of Saskatchewan got a letter. Now I want you to tell this House and the people of Saskatchewan, where did Mr. Tkachuk get his data base? He didn't get it from school boards. And, Mr. Minister, how did he get it? How did he get access to this kind of information if it wasn't from the government of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I would point out to the member that she's inaccurate in what she's saying that just parents got these letters. Letters went to teachers. Every teacher that I'm aware of got a letter. Every director of education got a letter. The members of school boards all got letters. So this was a very broad mailing that included more than parents. It included all of those other groups as well.

(2130)

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I want to know where the list came from. Did it come from the Department of Health? Because the Department of Health certainly has records as to who is a school-age child in this province. If you have your little blue card you have the names and ages of children. I want to know, Mr. Minister, where did this information come from? It didn't come from school division employees. Mr. Tkachuk just didn't come up with this list on his own because how could he possibly know the names and addresses of parents of school-age children? I want to know, Mr. Minister, where did he get the information? And we'll be here a long time because I want you to tell the people of Saskatchewan where he got it.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I've already indicated that this is a contract that was done with Strategic Direct Marketing. Now where he gets his list from is not for me to know. That's up to him. As I understand it, this could be a confidential list that he has. So that's not something that I follow up on. The department has contracted him to do a job; he has done his job. Where he gets this information from is not something that we're aware of.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, ask your officials where he got the list. You contracted with D-Mail to send out a letter to every parent of school-age children in the province of Saskatchewan. Where did he get the list? You ask your officials: where did Mr. Tkachuk get the list of every parent in the province of Saskatchewan of school-age children?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well you're not listening over there. I've indicated to you that these letters went out to school board members, they went out to teachers, they went out to all the directors of education. The Department of Education contracts -- contracts -- with this company to do a job. They provide the service; they're paid for doing that service. We are not interested in where he gets names, where his base is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well then you better ask him. You better ask him.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I have every school trustee in my computer so I can do a direct . . . (inaudible) . . . with them because that's public information. I have the name of every director in the province of Saskatchewan in my computer because that's public information.

I also have a good list of teachers because, Mr. Minister, the teachers publish a list of counsellors. I do not have a list of every teacher in the province of Saskatchewan, but your department certainly does because you have to certify teachers.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want you to tell this House and tell the people of Saskatchewan whether or not the Government of Saskatchewan gave a list of every parent, a list of names and addresses of every parent in this province to D-Mail, because they certainly didn't get it from school division offices. The only place they could have gotten it, Mr. Minister, is from your government. Now fess up and tell this House the truth.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I've indicated the service that was purchased from Strategic Direct Marketing. I'm sure that from time to time other government departments employ companies such as this to send out direct mailings. Where they get their information from is not for us to know. This is something that they provide in the contract, so I can't stand here and tell you where they get the names from. This is something you better ask Mr. Tkachuk.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, how did you know that Mr. Tkachuk had this information?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Tkachuk has been employed by the department before for direct mailings; I'm sure for different departments in this government. What information he has with regard to names, that's up to him. If he wants to tell you that and give you that information, fine and dandy. We contract him. He provides a service and we pay him for providing that service.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I accuse your government of turning over the data base of the names of every parent in this province to Mr. Tkachuk. Mr. Tkachuk has the names of every farmer in this province. Mr. Tkachuk has a very large data base.

Now, Mr. Minister, where did he get it? He didn't develop it on his own. He got it from the Government of Saskatchewan, and I want you to tell us tonight: did you, or did you not, did your government, or did your government not give Mr. Tkachuk the name and addresses of every parent in the province of Saskatchewan? And if you did, Mr. Minister, what does that mean in terms of confidentiality, and how secure are the records on people of this province from abuse, Mr. Minister, from abuse?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I would point out to the member again, as I have on other occasions, the Department of Education does not have this list. That's why we employ a company like Strategic Direct Marketing to provide this type of service. We don't have that list of names within the Department of Education so we employ someone then who has. And if you want to find out where he gets his list then you'll have to check with him.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, it is obvious that Mr. Tkachuk could not have gotten those names from any other place than the Department of Education or the Department of Health or the Government of Saskatchewan.

Mr Tkachuk does not have access to that kind of information. He could not have known the name and address of parents in this province in order to have done this direct mail. He got that information, Mr. Minister, from your government. Now I want you to tell this House tonight why it is that your government feels compelled to share confidential information with a business? Can you assure this House that this business isn't selling these names to other people, because that's certainly what happens in these kinds of direct mail kinds of operations, Mr. Minister? And I want you to tell this House why it is that you would share that kind of information, confidential information, with some private entrepreneur when that information should be kept within government.

Mr. Minister, big brother really is looking on people, and this is exactly why people are fearful of computers and information on people in computers because of the likes of people like you that will give that information to your big business cronies in order to engage in a direct mail campaign with the people of Saskatchewan. And they couldn't have gotten those names from any other place in the government, and I want you to tell the people of the province that's exactly where they got it.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well it's pretty easy for the member opposite to stand in the House here and make all kinds of accusations. She's suggesting that this firm of Strategic Direct Marketing has the names of farmers in the province and has the names of parents and all of the others. The Department of Education does not have these names.

I've already indicated to the member that this is why we would contract with a firm like Strategic Direct Marketing who is in the business of sending out large quantities of mail. We can't do that within the department. We don't have the names; we don't have the personnel to do all of this, so we contract with someone else who can do it in the best way possible.

So, Mr. Chairman, that's straight that we do not have those names in the department, and so we contract with somebody who has this capability. Where they get the names from is something certainly that we're not aware of.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I want you to table the contract that your government has entered into with D-Mail to ensure that those names and that information is secure. Will you do that today or tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, we'll take a look at the contract. We can certainly assure the member that the cost will be provided and we'll take a look at the terms of the contract and give her as much information as is possible.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Well you're going to have lots of time to table it because we're going to be here for a good long time on this issue. I can tell you right now, Education estimates will not be over tonight at 10 o'clock. I want you to tell the people of Saskatchewan which department gave that information to Mr. Tkachuk. And, Mr. Minister, is it possible that every name and address of every citizen over the age of 18 has been given to Mr. Tkachuk for a direct mail campaign for the next provincial election? And has that information come from government? And if it has, Mr. Minister, your government is totally, totally, totally unethical.

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the Department of Education has produced a lot of excellent materials over the years. And right now, in regard to the new core curriculum, we are putting out a lot of materials. And these materials have to be circulated and it's important information that parents want to have. We've had many indications given to us that in fact parents and educators want to see more information going out to parents. So we will continue to use companies like strategic direct mailing to put out this information. We will continue to consult with parents; we will continue to consult with teachers, because this is what they're asking us to do. There are many suggesting that we should be doing much more than we're doing with regard to this type of consultation and

getting out information such as the one that we've sent out on evaluation.

We are interested in hearing what parents have got to say. I've indicated that of the 114,000 letters that were just sent out -- not that long ago -- that we now have had in excess of 11,000 responses to those. And the parents are very, very pleased to get that type of information. They have sent back cards to us requesting more information to be sent out. Mr. Chairman, we will continue to do this. We will continue to get this material out in the best way that we possibly can and in the cheapest way that we can.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, I'll tell you where this information came from. This information came from the Department of Health records. And you know why I say that? Because the only people that got the letter were men. If you were in a two spouse family, and there was a man and a woman, the only person that got the letter was a man. Now do you know why that is? Because when you look at your health card the first person's name that appears on that health card is the man's name -- the man's name.

This information came from the Department of Health. I see the Minister of Health is in this House tonight. I want you to ask him, Mr. Minister, whether it is the policy of the Department of Health to give over confidential lists to D-Mail so that Department of Education can send out a direct mail letter to the people of this province. Is that the policy of the Government of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I think some of the language over there is getting a little bit out of hand. I would point out to the member opposite that it's interesting . . .

Mr. Chairman: -- Order please, order. In the last 10 or 15 minutes, we've had several outbursts from the member from Regina Centre. And I would ask him if he would kindly co-operate with the committee so we could continue with the estimates on Education.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, I think it's quite interesting what the member opposite is saying, that all of these letters have gone out to men. It's interesting to note that a good number of the responses that we've had back have been from women. So I would wonder that if this is the case, as she has indicated, why we're getting so many responses back from women.

Mr. Chairman: -- Order, please, order. I would ask the other members of the opposition if they care to ask the Minister of Education questions, just . . . Order, please. I'd ask the other members of the opposition if they want to ask questions of the members . . . Does the member from Moose Jaw South have something in particular he wants to address the Chair on, or Moose Jaw North, I mean? I'm sorry. Member from Moose Jaw North, is there something that you wanted to address the Chair with . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Then will you kindly refrain your remarks until I finish? Thank you.

Now, if there's any other members want to ask questions, I would ask that you ask the member from Saskatoon Nutana to relinquish her position first.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Now, Mr. Minister, we have direct mail letters sent to male parents if you were in a two spouse family. If you were the female head of the family, your name appears first on the health card, and, Mr. Minister, they got the direct mail letter.

Mr. Minister, can you advise the people of the province whether or not it is illegal for the Government of Saskatchewan to share any kind of medical records, whether that includes the names of the people of this province and their addresses, with anybody outside of government? Is that illegal, Mr. Minister? And if it's not illegal, is that ethical?

(2145)

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure what relevance the member opposite has in talking about medical records. This has nothing to do with the Department of Education.

I've already indicated that we contract with companies to look after the mail-outs of this type of information, and we can follow up on that. I'll try and get some more information for you as to how this all came about.

And I guess I could make a comment too, Mr. Chairman. We talk about confidential lists. So, Mr. Chairman, maybe I could ask this question about the . . . We've got other departments, obviously, that send out a lot of information to many large groups of people. No department has the personnel to look after all of this in-house. There's no other option -- I'm sure that when the NDP were in power that this was the way it was done as well -- and so you employ companies to do this sort of work. So if you want me to look into some more of the specifics, I will do this, and I'll bring that back to you then when we get into our next session.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, the Department of Health has the largest data base of any government department in the province of Saskatchewan when it comes to the people of Saskatchewan. The Department of Health data base can tell you the name of the parent, the name of the children, and their ages if they're under the age of 18. The only possible place Mr. Tkachuk could've gotten this information is from the Department of Health. There's no other place he could've gotten it.

And, Mr. Minister, the reason why I say it comes from the Department of Health is because if you are a man in the province of Saskatchewan, your name appears first on the health card; the woman's name appears second. This letter in two-spouse families was sent to the man only. This information came from the Department of Health.

Mr. Minister, in my view the sharing of that information by the Department of Health with D-Mail is totally illegal. It goes against the medical care insurance commission legislation. I was the former Health critic. When I was the former Health critic, Mr. Minister, and when I was the

privatization critic, the thing that I worried about most was the privatization of information on the part of the provincial government, because WESTBRIDGE Computer now has taken over SaskCOMP, the old public company SaskCOMP.

Now, Mr. Minister, I accuse the Government of Saskatchewan of using confidential information to serve their own political purposes. I accuse the Government of Saskatchewan -- I'm doing that -- I accuse the Government of Saskatchewan of handing over confidential information in terms of the name of a family and their children to D-Mail in order for the Government of Saskatchewan to enter into these contracts and do direct mailings.

Now, Mr. Minister, I find this horrendous. I think this is probably the most horrendous thing that your government has done. You've used confidential information, and handed it over to your political crony, Mr. Tkachuk, who then does direct mail-outs. And, Mr. Minister, I was in the Assiniboia-Gravelbourg by-election and I saw direct mails there in the Rockglen town. And I want to know, Mr. Minister: where do you get off using confidential information on people? Where do you get off by handing over that information to Mr. Tkachuk, Mr. Minister? Tell me, what gives you the moral authority or the legal authority to do that?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, the member stands in her place making accusations and talking about health records. She knows she has absolutely no proof on which to base this at all. I mean there are computer companies around that have lists for one reason or another.

Mr. Chairman, maybe I could ask a question as well. I'd like to know -- maybe the member opposite with all her wisdom, she's talking health records and all the rest of this -- could you tell me, did the former minister of Social Services in Regina Rosemont, when he was a candidate in '82, did he keep a computer disc of all the people on social assistance when he wrote a letter to them? Now how did he have a list of all those people on social assistance, that he could write a letter to them?

Now where do you suppose he got that information? Would that have come . . . Do you suppose that came from health records, or where would that come from, Mr. Chairman? Because you see, the party on the other side of this House seem to have ways of going about doing things that they think are just great. They're all above the law, no problem with that at all. But now we've got a company that sends out large quantities of material and has a computer list which the Department of Education does not have access to.

I've already indicated that I will try and find some more information for the member. I will bring this back when we get into our next session, if you'll just allow me to do that.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, we have a direct mail-out that is sent to parents in the province of Saskatchewan. Every parent in the province of Saskatchewan of school-age children received a direct mail from yourself. This direct mail, you have said tonight, cost the taxpayers \$110,000. You

tell us tonight that Dave Tkachuk did this direct mail. You can't tell us where he got this information. Mr. Minister, he did not get the information from school divisions; he didn't get it from going through a phone book, Mr. Minister; the only possible place he could get that information is from the Department of Health.

The reason why I say he got it from the Department of Health, or at the minimum, government records, is because the first name that appears on the letter, and the only name of a two-member family, two spouses, is the man's name. At the top of the health card, the first name that appears is the man's name, Mr. Minister. He got this information from the ministry of Health or the Government of Saskatchewan. I want you to tell us what gives you the moral or legal authority to hand that personal, confidential information over to Mr. Tkachuk. What gives your government the moral or legal authority to do that, and how do you justify it?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- I've already indicated about 10 times that the Department of Education does not have this list. I've also indicated that I will attempt to find out where the list was generated and bring that information back. But the member opposite insists on making these accusations, not based on any fact whatsoever, and is rather impatient, does not want to give me an opportunity to bring that back.

We've got to keep in mind that when you have companies -- and there are several companies in Regina, I would add, that look after large contracts like this where there are substantial mail-outs -- they have their computer lists. Where they get them from, I don't know at this point. But I will attempt to find out and I will provide that information for you next day.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, when you decided to give Mr. Tkachuk this contract, how did you know Mr. Tkachuk had access to this kind of information?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, this is a company that's been in business for a number of years now and certainly they're involved with many mail-outs. There are a lot of different systems that are used. I know of cases where they may just simply go by the postal code; there may be other cases where they go by occupation; in some cases they go by names.

So if you'll give me an opportunity, I'll try and find out where that information comes from. But you wonder, how did we find out about this company? Well goodness knows they've got a good reputation for doing this type of work. Have been doing it for a few years now and look after hundreds and hundreds of thousands of mail-outs for many different groups and departments within government.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, when you let this contract out to D-Mail, what were the requirements of the contract and how did you know that Mr. Tkachuk had this information, had all of these names? How did you know that?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Well you've already asked for the specifics of the contract which I assured you that I would check and I will give you as much

of that information as we can and we'll do that in the next session when we get together.

Ms. Atkinson: -- How did you know, Mr. Minister, that Mr. Tkachuk had the names of all of the parents in the province of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Chairman: -- Order. Order, please. We could . . . Order, please, Minister of Health. We can finish these estimates or continue with estimates for the next four or five minutes or we can . . . (inaudible) . . . the Chairman's light on, whichever you prefer.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- Mr. Chairman, when we have a large bulk mailing to do, such as we did in this particular case, we obviously contracted with strategic direct mail. We told them what we wanted done, the information that we had to send out. We obviously had to get some price quote from them as to what it was going to cost us. We indicated that we wanted to reach every family in the province, and asked them, of course, if that's something that they . . . service that they could perform for us. So, I mean, those are some of the things that lead into the preliminary of the contract being established.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Mr. Minister, how did you know that D-Mail had the names of every parent in the province of Saskatchewan? You still haven't answered that question.

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- We didn't necessarily know that he had every name. We contacted him with regard to the service that we wanted provided, and he said that he could provide the service. Now I'm going have to check, as I indicated to you several times, whether or not he has the names or whether he gets them from some other company.

Ms. Atkinson: -- Just let me run that by everybody again. You say that you wanted to send a letter out to all of the parents in Saskatchewan, so you enter into a contract with D-Mail, not knowing whether or not they had all the names of the parents in Saskatchewan. Now, Mr. Minister, what is it? How did you know that D-Mail had the names and addresses of all of the parents in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Meiklejohn: -- As I understand it, with the early discussions with him when we indicated the service that we want provided, he indicated that he could provide that service. And I assume that he either had access to the names . . . had the names himself or had access to the names, so it was on that basis then that the contract was drawn up.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10 p.m.