

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
May 4, 1995

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to present petitions today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to support Bill 31, An Act to amend the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code (Property Rights), which will benefit all property owners in Saskatchewan, and specifically firearms owners, in order to halt the federal Liberal government from infringing upon the rights of Saskatchewan people.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition comes from the Carlyle, Alameda areas of the province, Mr. Speaker. Oxbow. I'd like to present it today.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petition has been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) is hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to oppose changes to federal legislation regarding firearm ownership.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mrs. Bergman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 66 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Department of Municipal Government: (1) what was the cost of sending Peter Hoffmann to the effective executive program at Waskesiu in 1993; (2) the names of all Municipal Government employees who participated in the effective executive program at Waskesiu in 1994; (3) what are all costs associated with these employees attending the seminar; (4) what are the names of all Municipal Government employees who have enrolled in this seminar for the current year?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and to introduce special guests in your gallery. These guests are former members of the Cafeteria Board, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary today.

In May 1945, Premier Tommy Douglas asked the civil service to assume responsibility from the Dome Cafeteria in the Legislative Building, and at that time, it was the Minister of

Public Works who was responsible. Now as the Minister of Sask Property Management, I am responsible.

So I would like to introduce, Mr. Speaker, some of the past board members. If they could stand when I mention their name: Ray Fenwick, Jim MacLeod, David Zawislak, Yvonne Duncan, Shirley Sebastian, May McPhee, John Yeomans, Nick Rudrick, John McLaughlin, and Alice Hehn.

Thank you very much, and I'll introduce a separate group in a minute. Could you join me in welcoming these folks?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Also present today are former treasurers and auditors of the Cafeteria Board: Ken Arndt, Dave Bemént, and Ted Watt.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I would like to make also a special introduction for Mary Rocan. Is Mary in the audience here?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — And I'll just mention that Mary began her career in the public service in 1938 in the Department of Municipal Affairs.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to introduce Mary Rocan and the rest of the Cafeteria Board members to the Legislative Assembly. And thanks again for helping me welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Bergman: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you, and through you to the members of the legislature, 56 students in your east gallery from McLurg School in my constituency. They are accompanied by their teachers, Verna Taylor and Carol Grant, as well as parent chaperons Mrs. Wood and Mrs. Long.

We will be meeting at 2:30 for a visit and refreshments and photos, and I look forward to that meeting. I ask all members of the legislature to join me in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, Gerry and Kay Adams who are seated in your gallery in the front row. They are constituents of mine. As well they are the parents of Rhonda Adams, who's a page in our legislature, and they're here to observe Rhonda at work today. And I know all members will want to join with me in welcoming Mr. and Mrs. Adams and wishing them a very pleasant stay here in the city of Regina.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon University Sutherland.

Mr. Koenker: — Mr. Speaker, Sutherland-University. I too would like to welcome the Adamses to the legislature today. They're old-time friends. And I don't think we need to say that Rhonda is doing an excellent job; you knew that she would. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you seven women sitting in the west gallery. Aina Kagis is the coordinator of the Pay Equity Coalition of Saskatchewan. And she's accompanied by six other women who also care very deeply about this issue. I was privileged this morning to be able to meet with them to discuss this important matter.

And I would ask members to welcome them to the House today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to welcome the women who are here today from the Pay Equity Coalition and thank them for taking the time to come to the legislature and meet with various elected members and educating people on the importance of pay equity. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Rolfes: — I hope the members will allow the Speaker to make a special introduction today. I would like to introduce somebody that was very special in my life — and she still is very special in my life — back in the 1970s. She had the onerous task of guiding a rookie cabinet minister through those early days when you get an appointment and you really don't know what it's all about.

Of course I'm referring to a person who not only served in the Blakeney government, but served in the Tommy Douglas government and in the Ross Thatcher government. Today it's my very, very deep pleasure to introduce to you, Blanche Green, who I see seated in the Speaker's gallery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

50th Anniversary of Dome Cafeteria

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As our minister has mentioned earlier, today commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Cafeteria Board. I know I speak for all of us when I say we want to congratulate and to thank them for the many years of service to this Assembly.

This afternoon, Mary Rocan, one of the founding members, will be recognized. And we have with us many of the past members of the Cafeteria Board.

It was in May 1945 Premier T.C. Douglas asked the civil service association to assume responsibility for the Dome

Cafeteria. An order in council was passed on August 23, 1945. The cafeteria since then has been remodelled two or three times. In 1945 patrons were seated around tables covered with white linen tablecloths; waitresses provided the table service. There were few coffee pots in the building and so the cafeteria was the place to meet.

Some things don't change. In our busy lives the sustenance and accommodation provided is sometimes the only part of our day that we have time to rest and to refuel.

The cafeteria reminds us that Saskatchewan people enjoy gathering around the table for a coffee and for political debate. For us it is a place to meet with friends for a visit, continue a political discussion with colleagues, or to find a solitary corner and reflect. There is one constant that you can rely upon and that is the smile you will receive when you're greeted by the staff of the Cafeteria Board.

To the board and staff members, I want to congratulate them today on the commemoration of the 50th anniversary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Future Skills Programs

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the member from Swift Current described two Future Skills projects that are providing training to meet the needs of Saskatchewan industries for skilled workers. Training under the Future Skills program is tied to permanent jobs.

One other fact about the Future Skills program worth noting is that its projects are targeted and economical, designed for specific jobs, whether the number be 3 or 53.

Here is a sample of some of the projects. First, 37 trainees in North Battleford, Melfort, and Yorkton, including some from my constituency, are learning the safe use and application of farm chemicals, as well as equipment operation, environmental impact assessment.

The North West Regional College, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), and Monsanto Inc. are working with the Canadian association of agricultural retailers on this project.

In Canora three workers are being trained in the use of high-tech weaving equipment used to manufacture equipment used in the trucking industry. The training institute is SIAST and the expanding industry is Eastern Air Supplies.

And in Prince Albert 12 first nations candidates are undergoing geographic information system literacy training, a computer technology used for storing information on natural resources. The project partners are the Prince Albert Model Forest Association and the Prince Albert Grand Council — more examples, Mr. Speaker, of confidence in our expanding economy.

Thank you.

as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

This marks an important stage in self-determination for the first nations.

New Nursing Care Policy Manual

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I informed the Assembly about a pilot project involving the Twin Rivers Health District that will save money for the people of Saskatchewan.

I know that the tribal council, the district health board, and the levels of government involved, look forward to the completion of this modern health care facility which will replace the existing, ageing hospital in Fort Qu'Appelle. Thank you.

Not only is the health district demonstrating sound financial practices, but sound policy as well. A team of health professionals, headed by Sharon Dick, a nurse from Maidstone, has completed a universal policy and procedural manual for nursing care throughout the Twin Rivers Health District.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fund-raiser for Chili for Children Program

When Twin Rivers formed, at times there were several different approaches to performing the same procedures within its 15 member agencies. So it was decided that a policy manual would help alleviate the problem. This manual is a first in Saskatchewan, and it will be shared with other districts, so they can commit their resources and time to other projects that will benefit the province as a whole.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize and congratulate a very hard-working individual in the constituency of Regina Elphinstone. Mr. Speaker, this individual, Theresa Stevenson — and she is also known everywhere else in Regina, I might remind you — has been working on a hot lunch program which has fed thousands of children since it started 10 years ago. It operates out of the Albert-Scott Community Centre and serves lunch to inner city children three times a week.

Mr. Speaker, this cooperative effort in the Twin Rivers Health District is further proof that our health system is the forerunner in Canada, because of the commitment of these health care professionals and because of the commitment by our provincial government to ensure health care in Saskatchewan is the best that it can be.

Mr. Speaker, tomorrow night we all have the opportunity to show our support for Theresa Stevenson and her work at the second annual Chili for Children fund-raising dinner. The dinner is being held at the Centre of the Arts and will feature chili and bannock.

Thank you.

I want to say now that Mr. Speaker and I have arranged to stop the clock in the Assembly until tickets are sold, so we can see everyone at the function this Friday night.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tribal Council Health Agreement

Mr. Carlson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have just heard about our government's commitment to health care from the member from Cut Knife-Lloydminster. I also have an example of how the cooperative spirit is enhancing health care.

But seriously, Mr. Speaker, the guest speaker is Chief Blaine Flavel, chief of the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), and there will be aboriginal performers throughout the evening. As well, there will be a silent auction of aboriginal artists, many of whom you can see in our First Nations Gallery here in the Legislative Building.

Yesterday Saskatchewan's hon. Health minister and the Touchwood-File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council signed a bilateral accord creating a working relationship between the province and the 16 first nations of the tribal council to improve health care and wellness. This accord outlines the positions of the provincial government and the tribal council on several issues and establishes a health partnership task force to address them.

Mr. Speaker, in a province of worthy causes, I know of no project more deserving of our support than the Chili for Children program. I urge all members to offer their support. And on behalf of the Assembly, I want to thank Theresa Stevenson and her staff for their tireless work. Thank you very much.

It also establishes a joint capital planning committee on the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital. The hospital, which is a federal institution, is being transferred to the jurisdiction of the tribal council. Tribal council president, Perry Bellegarde, is quoted as saying:

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Doghide River Festival

Once the transfer is complete, we will be able to take our place in (the) Saskatchewan health care system, not just as consumers of the health services but as providers

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago I rose in the House and spoke about the plans for the Doghide River Festival that was to be held in Tisdale. Well, Mr. Speaker, the Doghide River Festival has taken place and I had the great honour and delight to attend this event last weekend.

New Orleans has its Mardi Gras, but I don't believe it can compare with Tisdale's Doghide River Festival. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, mere words are insufficient in describing what an

outstanding event this truly was. The Friday night opening banquet and entertainment set the stage for a wonderfully unique and exciting cultural and art experience. And the truly marvellous thing about it — it was a total participation of the whole community.

The guests to the opening night were all dressed up in early western costumes — the young children to the seniors. They all displayed great creativity in playing the part of the wild, wild west theme. The events in the following two days were an incredible array of local talent and ingenuity.

The whole weekend was an incredible experience and speaks to the strong spirit that Tisdale people have, their commitment to their community, and their appreciation of the role that culture and arts play in making everybody's life better.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Doghide River organizing committee of Hazel Wagner, Elaine LeStrat, Jim Weseen, Elaine Desrosiers, Wendy Weseen, Alice Hoffart, Grant Wilson, Carol Andrusiak, Mary Ann Vey, Joan Broughton, John Abbs, Jim Grant, John Scott, Nancy Carter, Barb Krowchenko, Dale Nippi, Bob and Brenda Campbell, Carol McPhee, Joyce McPhee, Tibbi Frazer, Marion Zagiel, Tracey Taylor, Marion Fargey, Maureen Doneld, Edna Oleksyn, Gwen Zimmer, Brenda Samida, Sandra Penner, and Verla Will. As you see, Mr. Speaker, there were many, many organizers and hundreds of volunteers in this wonderful event.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

MLA Pension Plan

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for three and a half years the government hasn't listened to anything the opposition or anyone else has said in this House. I guess we've been going about it all the wrong way. All we had to do was make one campaign announcement, put one ad in the newspaper, and bang, the Deputy Premier takes our advice and caps his outrageous pension. And the Liberal leader says, me too, me too.

You don't suppose there's an election coming, do you, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Minister, you didn't go far enough. Your obscene pension is just an appalling pension now. The Premier still stands to collect over \$60,000 a year and over \$70,000 a year if he's elected for one more term. That's still a higher pension than most people earn working in this province. Mr. Minister, will you go one step further? Will you reduce your pension cap to 50 per cent, as we have suggested?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to some of the commentary by the members from the opposition of both parties who refer to this debate on the pensions taking place because it is prior to an election. And I'm glad that the

Leader of the Official Opposition isn't falling into that kind of a mode here today.

Mr. Speaker, the reforms which we have introduced in this legislature . . . which will soon be introduced in this legislature, capped the pensions of the members of this legislature under the old plan at 70 per cent, the same as it is done in the public service, as for teachers, as done for the employees of the Crown corporations. That is fair, that a standard that has been tried and tested, and people recognize that.

The reforms eliminate the allowance, the special allowance, introduced by a former Liberal premier to enhance his salary under the administration of Ross Thatcher. The reform prevents and expands the areas in which MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) who may be defeated or retire can no longer double-dip by becoming appointed as senators or become members of the House of Commons as is the case with a lot of Conservatives.

This is a good reform, Mr. Speaker. It is fair; it meets the test of fairness; and we will stand by that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Before I ask the next question . . . or allow the next question, will the members please just calm down the interruptions on both sides.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I guess the minister doesn't want to roll his pension back too far, and it's pretty obvious why they wouldn't want to do that. If they roll it back too far they will not be able to use, will not be able to use, their campaign slogan: re-elect us — it's cheaper.

The fact is the Premier, the Deputy Premier, and a handful of the front-bench NDP (New Democratic Party) cronies, stand to collect still an outrageously high pension, paid for by Saskatchewan taxpayers.

Mr. Minister, is that fair to the people of Saskatchewan? Is it fair that you stand to collect a tax-funded pension that is still higher than most people earn in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to answer the question by the desperate Leader of the Official Opposition.

Let me point out, Mr. Speaker, that what we have announced today is that pensions of members of this Assembly who are under the old defined benefits plan will be frozen at 70 per cent of the best average of the best four years of income, similar to what exists in the public service and other sectors in the economy, Mr. Speaker. I think that's fair.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker — I know the members opposite will be unhappy with that — prevents double-dipping. If a member gets elected to the House of Commons, will not be able to collect an MLA's pension because he or she served in this

Assembly. If a member gets appointed to the Senate, which I know the Liberal leader would like to be, and Mr. Berntson is, they will not be able to double-dip with the provincial pension plan.

If a member becomes, after a defeat or a resignation, an employee of the provincial government, will not be able to double-dip. I think, Mr. Speaker, that's right. I think that's fair and I think the public of Saskatchewan thinks so as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a question on a related topic — the outrageously high taxes that Saskatchewan people pay to pay for things like the Premier's pension.

Last night I attended the PST (provincial sales tax) coalition meeting in North Battleford and listened to various business people talk about the devastating effect the PST is having on their businesses and their communities. But they also talked about possible solutions, something I haven't heard out of this government in three and a half years.

People at the meeting discussed very realistic proposals to drop the PST by at least two points immediately in order to create more economic activity and jobs in Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister — to the Minister of Finance — when are you going to start developing solutions like the people at the meeting in North Battleford were doing last night? Why won't your government lower the PST?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to take the question on behalf of the government to say that the objective of this government is to continue to work toward lower taxation. I want to remind the members opposite, the Conservative members opposite, that it was this government that provided the taxpayers of Saskatchewan a tax break of over \$200 million when, three and a half years ago, we unharmonized the PST with the hated GST (goods and services tax).

I might add that the Liberal leader wants to harmonize the federal GST with the PST and put that tax back on again.

That is the biggest tax break in decades that was given to the people of the province of Saskatchewan. We want to work with the coalition and we want to work with any interested group in working to find workable means to continue tax relief. But when our tax relief is announced, it will be for ever, it'll be sustainable, it'll be permanent; it won't be at election time, made by desperate Conservatives or Liberals to try to get votes only.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, what the

people of Saskatchewan remember about you is you said you would take off the PST effective midnight election night. That's what you promised them, Mr. Premier. You broke that promise to the people of Saskatchewan.

In the election campaign upcoming, they will remember that promise that you made to the people of Saskatchewan on election night during the last election campaign. They will never forget that, Mr. Premier, because you betrayed the people of Saskatchewan in what you said to them on that day.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Premier, it's gotten a lot worse — it's gone from 7 to 9 per cent, even though you promised to take it off entirely. Mr. Premier, when are you going to start listening to the people like the people who were at that meeting in North Battleford last evening, and look for solutions on how to lower the PST in this province? When are you going to listen to the people of this province and do what they ask and lower the PST?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, we were elected in 1991 precisely because we were listening to the people of Saskatchewan, who were telling us, take off that harmonization; restaurateurs who were saying, get that harmonization of the former PC (Progressive Conservative) administration off our backs. Children's clothing. They were saying, get that hated tax off our backs.

They were saying the same thing with respect to reading books: take it off our backs. And we did. And it was a \$200 million tax break for all the small-business people.

When we assumed office, however, we didn't realize we had the largest per capita deficit in the history of this province and the largest per capita debt — still, in some circles, it is argued — as a result of the Tory expenditures.

I say to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker, the following. Our government is committed to lowering the taxes of this province and we have done so in selected and targeted ways, allowing Cargills to come in and allowing economic developments to be announced.

But I tell you, unlike the Conservatives and the Liberals, when we announce a tax cut — and we're going to announce tax cuts — they will be here, they'll be here permanent, they'll be fair, and they'll stimulate the economy. They won't be mere election campaign promises like the two of you are making.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

District Health Board Deficits

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I trust the Premier has the willingness to stand up and answer this question.

In fact it seems, Mr. Premier, in view of the fact that we're looking towards answers from the Minister of Health, that I'm

not sure if he's going to be able to answer them today. We've heard the Minister of Health just in the last few days accuse the opposition of providing misleading information — information that one has to wonder regarding the answer that was given just a moment ago from your office.

But in fact, Mr. Premier, yesterday in the auditor's report we find that it wasn't the opposition giving misleading figures, but certainly who was the person misleading this Assembly? It was the Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health told us, when we raised questions on Monday, that there were total deficits in the health boards of \$15 million. And yet his own information showed it was 17 million. But the reality, Mr. Premier, is the fact that the auditor pointed out yesterday the deficit is not 15 or 17, it's actually \$30 million — a \$30 million mistake.

Mr. Minister, why are you misleading the Saskatchewan people about the size of the deficit in the district health boards, and will you apologize to the people of Saskatchewan for this deception?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, this is an issue which, very simply put, is as follows. The district health boards indicated in this report, referring to that year, and the government indicated there was a deficit of \$15 million with respect to the district health boards. I think that's the number that's correct. The Minister of Finance will have the actual details in subsequent questions.

At issue is whether or not \$15 million more, which is capital expenditure of the district health boards, should be added as an operating debt or not. There are legitimate differences with respect to accountants on this issue, and the Provincial Auditor's view is that it should be.

The important part, remember, is nobody's health is affected; the operations of the district health boards are not affected. And this is a suggestion of the Provincial Auditor which he makes on a number of areas which indicate his view to the reporting.

We have a different view of reporting. We'll take his considerations under consideration and decide what to do in future reports.

But let no one be mistaken about it. This is not a question of some sort of debt which was covered up. It's a question of whether or not the debt is to be reported with the capital plus the operating, or whether it's to be separated. And we took the latter approach.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Premier, and I'm sure the Minister of Health supported you on this. When you first took office in October of 1991, you took great glee in calculating the province's accumulated debt. And that calculation included the Crown corporation debt. And at that time you invited a

gentleman by the name of Donald Gass to take a commission and review the books. Maybe you should ask him to review the books today.

In 1991 you included depreciation, and that was included, as the Provincial Auditor pointed out. But today what do we see? Today in this House you stand and say depreciation and capital replacement costs don't really count. Mr. Premier, you can't have it both ways.

Why did capital replacement costs count back in 1992 but they don't count now when those depreciation costs make your figures look . . . and the truth really comes out?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid that the members of the opposition wouldn't know the truth if it hit them smack in the face in the middle of daylight. So I don't think I need have the member from Moosomin tell this government about that aspect of it.

Mr. Speaker, he says two aspects of this question. First of all, what is the accounting procedure? We implemented the Gass report which you criticized heavily the time that we did. You attacked it. You attacked the personnel; you undermined it. Now that report presumably and that person is rehabilitated in your eyes and that's acceptable. I say Gass identified the total sums of the deficit and the debt accurately. I said it then; I said it now.

Now with respect to this special issue, I can only say what has been reported in the *Leader-Post*, which I think summarizes it more succinctly than I can do it. And that is as follows:

Finance Minister Janice MacKinnon says the difference is simply an accounting matter.

"They're both right. It's just whether you want to put the capital in or not," she said.

The story continues:

For his part, Strelieff (referring to the Provincial Auditor, the story says) Strelieff says "the complete picture is the more appropriate" and he'd like to see that information come before the legislative assembly.

That's a question of whether or not it is more appropriate. It is not a question of whether or not the numbers have become covered up or not. They have not been covered up. That is a practice of the Tories and the Liberals; it's not a practice of this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that interesting, that the member would talk . . . or the Premier would even have the audacity to stand up and talk about the complete picture and suggest that they are offering the complete picture.

What did the auditor say? He basically said that the budget the government is presenting only represents 60 per cent of their activities — 60 per cent. I would question, is that the complete picture, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Premier, the people don't have to believe me. They don't have to believe you. But I believe most people in this province would believe the Provincial Auditor. And I would ask you to follow the guidelines of the Provincial Auditor and present the complete picture. But, Mr. Minister, you continue to give us just a partial view of the expenditures. You only tell half the truths. Mr. Minister, people want to know where the \$30 million is. They want to know what it's going to cost them. Is it going to mean service cuts, bed closures, more hospital closures? Is rural health care going to be cut even further?

Mr. Premier, why will you not admit today that you haven't been giving the people the total facts? That because you haven't been honest with the people of Saskatchewan, people throughout Saskatchewan are going to pay for the dishonesty that you have brought forward, and that the fact that we do have a . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. I think the member is going a little too far in his language that he uses in this House. Order, order. And I ask the member to please refrain from that kind of language.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Minister, your new improved system is \$30 million in debt and that money has to come from somewhere. What further damage is this going to do to our health care system and what are you going to do to make up for the shortfall?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I've already answered that question twice so I'm not going to repeat it a third time. The member can accept or reject the answer. But I do want to respond to two other aspects of the question which he had raised.

He talks about cuts. It is his party that is advocating a 5 per cent cut, I believe, across the board in government. Tell the health boards about that. Tell the health people and the health care workers, tell the teachers, tell the trustees, about that.

I believe the Liberal Party had an announcement today about what it would do if it gets elected. Amongst other things, it's going to implement something called the Texas Performance Review, which is scrupulously going to apply the test of efficiency to every program; and the words of the Liberals, quote: services to Texans were actually improved over this time.

Tell that to the teachers, tell that to the health care workers, because under the theory of shrinking the size of the government she should tell us where those cuts are going to take place. She should tell us exactly where they're going to take place.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that if there is a question of legitimacy in this political process, it is one that the opposition parties have raised themselves. You can't cut taxes, you can't increase the expenditures, you can't balance the books, all at the same time and say that you're going to do it by having less government. Everybody says that if you believe that, there are bridges in Saskatoon that can be sold very, very cheaply.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Board Decision Making

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The problems with district health boards continue, and in Melville the North Valley District Board is accused of breaking a legal agreement with its affiliate hospital, St. Peter's. The hospital board chairperson, Reverend Gaw, wrote the district board, and I quote:

The district has made announcements with no attempt to work within the affiliation agreement. The fine-sounding emphasis on teamwork and cooperation has taken on a hollow and discordant tone. This roughshod approach to decision making has created what may well be irreparable damage to the ongoing relationship between St. Peter's board and the North Valley board.

My question to the Minister of Health or his designate, are you aware . . . in fact is the government, anyone in government, aware that St. Peter's hospital board is considering legal action for breaching the terms of their affiliate agreement?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I will examine the . . . I'm not taking notice of the question except to say that there'll be further details into this that the department will examine. There's no doubt about this, and I'll ask the minister to do so.

But I want to remind the members of the House that this question, coming from the Liberal leader today, needs to be looked at very, very carefully before it can be given a complete and full answer because yesterday, the Leader of the Liberal Party accused all the people of Saskatchewan, in effect slandered all the people of Saskatchewan, by saying we had the lowest GDP (gross domestic product) per capita of any province in the country.

The truth of the matter is, under Statistics Canada and the Conference Board of Canada, that is not the case. We are about fourth, third or fourth, in the best record ever. An absolutely, blatantly, misleading fact. And that's not once only. Anybody can make a mistake; I've made my fair share for sure. But this happens every day, every day, with the Leader of the Liberal Party. You know what I think she should do? I think she should apply the Texas Performance Review test to herself before she asks a question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, it is precisely this unwillingness on the part of this government to take

responsibility for its actions in health care reform that has Dr. Jim Melenchuk, who was president of the Saskatchewan Medical Association until Sunday, who is one of the more . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I have asked members before, but the member from Saskatoon Wildwood just thinks that she can just yell right across the floor at any time, and I ask her to please refrain from doing so. Order.

Ms. Haverstock: — I was indicating that the immediate past-president of the Saskatchewan Medical Association is now running as a nominated candidate for us, and one of the reasons why is because of the total unwillingness of this government to acknowledge what it's doing to health care.

Mr. Speaker, since July 15 in 1994, St. Peter's Catholic Hospital board had a legal, binding agreement which guaranteed them specific jurisdiction over the management of their health care facilities. The district board has taken action to create new administrative positions, cutting funding from St. Peter's and other affiliate hospitals to pay for brand-new personnel, and left the boards in a position where they are going to have to let some of their own personnel, with many, many years of experience, to let go of them.

My question to, obviously I guess the Premier: sir, how do you justify a health care plan that ignores legal agreements — yet again — replaces experienced administrators with untested personnel; and thirdly, overrides commitments that guaranteed control over administration?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again we'll have to take a careful examination of what the Leader of the Liberal Party says in this regard.

But I want to say this, and I wonder whether her candidate — I don't know where it is in Saskatoon that he's running — knows that you are campaigning on something called the efficiency audits. This is what you are going to apply to every district health board, are efficiency audits, the Texas performance efficiency audits procedure.

But according to your paper, it says, quote:

. . . the Texas performance review, a team of 102 auditors who scrupulously examined and re-examined 195 state programs and agencies . . . And by testing every program against the strict demands of efficiency (I wonder what the good doctor thinks about that) services to Texans were actually improved over this time.

Services to Texans were actually improved over this time. Really? Ask the Texans about how their health care system is; ask the good doctor that's running for you how his approach to the Texas health system is; ask the people of Saskatchewan how they support your plan to Americanize the health care system in Saskatchewan. And we'll find out in this next election campaign.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, I can only assume that the Premier of this province is not the least bit interested in the North Valley District Board that has a \$900,000 deficit and is hiring more in administration and passing on the costs to the Catholic affiliate hospitals. If he doesn't know what's going on and isn't concerned, I shall table today the letter from the chair of the board.

Mr. Speaker, the St. Peter's Hospital board is a model of community cooperation. For years they've worked together with St. Paul's Nursing Home and home care to provide top quality service, making physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of staff and patients and families their number one priority. They're proud of it, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Premier today: since the district board decisions will increase, sir — not decrease — will increase overall administration, will diminish management experience in the hospitals, where it is vital, and will actually contravene legal agreement, which we know how much respect you've had for that in the past, what, sir, are you going to do about the actions of the North Valley District Board who ultimately acts on the authority from your government?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member what we will not do. We will not implement the Texas Performance Review board to go into North Valley to examine how the efficiency and how the agreements run. No, no, the Liberal leader shakes her head at me.

This is your campaign platform, right? Efficiency audits. You're going to have less government, but you're going to hire 102 auditors by following the Texas review performance model, and presumably you're going to say to the district health program and the district health program that we implemented, here you go, ladies and gentlemen, here you go North Valley, the Texas audit system is going to apply to you.

That's your approach. Or are you rejecting it? I invite you to go outside and tell the media that the Texas audit approach isn't going to apply to the district health boards of Saskatchewan. If it isn't, then why'd you put it out this way?

I say that the district health boards are people who represent the areas; they have agreements. We have confidence that they're going to be able to work out the relationships required with affiliations. We can assist them where we can; we will try to do all that we can.

But I tell you what we will not do. We are not going to agree with the Liberal approach to Americanize the health care system of this province — never, either in Ottawa or in Regina — we are going to fight for the preservation of medicare and health care in this province, unlike you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

REDA Funding

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make a ministerial statement today. This morning I had the pleasure to announce that the government will provide additional financial assistance to the province's regional economic development authorities.

Specifically, I indicated that we would provide cost-shared assistance up to \$60,000 per year to each REDA (regional economic development authority) for such operational activities as the hiring of professional economic development officers, the establishment of permanent offices, and the provision of critical economic development services.

(1415)

I also announced that the phase 1 start-up funding of \$25,000 per REDA will be extended for another year for the new REDAs that are coming on stream in 1995. This funding, which was provided for in the 1995-96 budget, represents our commitment to grass roots organizations that are building on the Saskatchewan strong principle of cooperation and self-help — principles that are the heart of the province's *Partnership for Renewal* economic development strategy, of which the REDAs are a key component.

Mr. Speaker, the funding represents a significant investment of around \$1.5 million a year in the people infrastructure of Saskatchewan, the forging of new partnerships, and the encouragement of many new allies in the task of economic development and job creation.

Mr. Speaker, 10 REDAs are now up and running, and we expect another 15 to be established by the of 1995. The existing REDAs, which have been operating anywhere from two months to just under two years, have provided advice and assistance to nearly 80 businesses.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing more good work from them in the future as the communities, businesses, cooperatives, municipal governments, and aboriginal groups, which comprise membership of the REDAs, all pull together for the benefit of their regions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in response to the minister's statement, I would just say on behalf of the official opposition that we as the opposition are always in favour of development in this province, always in favour of expanding opportunities, job creation, that kind of thing, here in the province of Saskatchewan.

What strikes us as unusual though is at the same time as a meeting was held last evening in North Battleford dealing with the PST and ways to reduce taxation in this province . . . which really would go to the heart of the job creation development here in this province where people believe that there is opportunity, if there is lower taxes in this province, for business expansion.

That is the kind of development that we would prefer to see

where the people of this province believe that we will have the lowest tax regime, the best opportunities, that kind of way of developing our economy rather than an announcement-a-day style of governing this province leading into an election campaign. Which seems to be the style this government is promoting in the last couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, where every single day it's an announcement, another announcement, another announcement, hoping the people of Saskatchewan will forget about the years gone by when the Premier has promised in the election campaign to lower taxes, and then jacked them up in every single case.

So I would ask . . . and I would say to the minister, if you want to take some direction from the people of this province, you should have been at the meeting in North Battleford, and the Minister of Finance should have been at the meeting in North Battleford last night, when they discussed solutions about how to lower the taxes in this province rather than increase them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, as it would relate to question no. 70 and 71, I would table the answers and move that question 72 be converted to motions for return (debatable).

The Speaker: — No. 70 and 71, answers tabled; and 72, convert to motion for return debate.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

Bill No. 61

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 61 — An Act respecting the University of Saskatchewan** be now read a second time.

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

Bill No. 26

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Carson that **Bill No. 26 — An Act respecting Saskatchewan Assessment Appraisers and to enact certain Consequential Amendments to The Assessment Management Agency Act** be now read a second time.

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

Bill No. 30

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Carson that **Bill No. 30 — An Act to amend The Assessment Management Agency Act** be now read a second time.

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

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 36 — An Act to amend The Municipal Employees' Superannuation Act

The Chair: — Before we proceed to the clause 1, I would ask the Associate Minister of Finance to please introduce the officials who have joined us here this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Just before we begin to introduce the officials, I wonder if there's some confusion about what is before the Assembly. I hear the members opposite talking about the income tax Bill. If that's what they expected, then we have a bit of a problem.

An Hon. Member: — No, it's municipal employees' superannuation.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Okay, all right. I thought . . . I got a false clue. Sitting beside me is someone whose attendance in this Assembly has been pretty good actually. I think he'd rank with many of the members.

An Hon. Member: — Up there with the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, up there with the chairman of the committees, whose attendance is an example for all of us. It is Bill Jones, the deputy minister of Finance. Sitting behind Mr. Jones is someone who may be a little less familiar to members of the Assembly. It's Brian Smith; he's executive director of the Public Employees Benefits Agency. With that, we look forward to your questions.

Clause 1

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister and his officials today. Mr. Minister, this Bill provides for a change in name from The Municipal Employees' Superannuation Act to The Municipal Employees' Pension. We can appreciate the government's concern for clear language, but I'd like to know how much this name change will cost the taxpayers of this province.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — The cost of changing this should be insignificant. Letterheads, forms, booklets, are going to be replaced only when current supplies run out or when materials become outdated. Accordingly the cost — I repeat again — the cost should be insignificant.

Mr. Swenson: — Well, Mr. Minister, will not any other Bill with references to this particular Act also have to be changed? Because I understand it is widely used through a number of areas of government. And will that not all have to be changed in

order to make this applicable?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No. A change introduced by a former administration actually, which has been much pilloried but actually got some things right . . . one of the changes made by a former administration was to provide in The Interpretation Act that where the name of an Act was changed, the references to that Act in other statutes was also automatically changed, so none of that is necessary.

Mr. Swenson: — I must have missed something, Mr. Minister. I don't remember that going through the House under our administration . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I'm glad you agree.

Mr. Minister, there's some changes in here as far as parental leave. I wonder if you might explain those changes in more detail and the economic ramifications of them.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — The member's question was relatively general. Were there some particular sections which you were referring to?

Mr. Swenson: — Well, Mr. Minister, the main stated reason, as I read the Bill, is to allow additional parental or educational leave. And you're going to two years, so I guess I can ask you why two years was arrived at.

But there must be an additional cost to taxpayers as a result of this provision. I mean how many people will be affected by the change? You know, had the change been in place last year, how would that have affected the budget for this year, for instance?

I mean you must have some idea because you've obviously arrived at a time frame that is appropriate. There must be some costs associated with that.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — The two years is the length of time — I think the member understands this — the two years is the length of time you can be absent without the benefits lapsing. I think the member understands that.

As well, I would point out that with respect to The Municipal Employees' Superannuation Amendment Act, this is one pension fund which the taxpayer has no responsibility for and which has also got a complete clean bill of health from the actuaries and is fully funded.

I assume, without knowing it for certain and perhaps could find out, but I assume that they have discussed these changes with the actuaries and the actuaries have assured them that the fund will continue to be fully funded even after these amendments are introduced.

Mr. Swenson: — Mr. Minister, when an individual leaves for two years, I presume you would find a replacement, and you're going to have to then employ someone new at either the same salary or whatever the bargaining grid is in that particular organization.

So you've got the individual on leave. It's not affecting their

pension. You've got a new individual in who you are paying and also who is making pension contributions. That means that there's going to be a certain turnover of people in the public service.

There has to be some . . . I asked the question, how many people would this have applied to last year and how would that have affected this year? I mean you've got either increasing or decreasing number of people that you're employing.

(1430)

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes. This is the municipal employees. This is no relation to the provincial government employees, and the provincial government has no financial responsibility for this.

This Act does not in any way govern under what terms a municipal employee might leave his employment or her employment — his or her employment. They might be on secondment, they might simply be absent for a couple of . . . they might retire and come back. There might be any number of arrangements under which they might leave, for which the provincial government, and accordingly the taxpayer who pays money to the provincial government — the taxpayer — has no responsibility at all.

There's no way of answering the member's question except to say the provincial taxpayer has no responsibility for this at all. It is conceivable in some cases there might be a saving of money. It's conceivable in some cases when they leave it might cost the municipal government some money, but it wouldn't cost the provincial taxpayer anything.

Mr. Swenson: — Minister, that's simply not true, because so many of municipal government finances are affected by direct transfers from senior levels of government. I mean the funding that they receive in order to be able to maintain an employee base often-times is predicated on the amount of money that they receive from senior levels of government. They're mandated to balance budgets.

And we've seen how they've been affected. I mean there's been lots of lay-offs occur at the municipal level because of the cut-backs that you've made over the last few years. So yes, you are directly funding municipal government and the number of employees that they have. And to say otherwise is simply not so. You're a large contributor.

And I guess if there are significant numbers of municipal employees taking leaves for some reason, that maybe could be a further reason for you to cut back the level of funding that you put to them because they would have less employees. There's a direct relationship between the provincial taxpayer and the amount of municipal employees that we have. And to say otherwise, I think, would be not necessarily misleading but certainly not true, because you affect their levels in a large way.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I'm not entirely sure what the member's asking. Let me just make the following comments. This is not a paid leave of absence. There is nothing in this

legislation which provides for the employee getting a pension while they're gone for two years. Nothing in here provides that.

This simply deals with the eventuality of after having left, within two years of coming back — that might have been planned, but it might also happen by chance — it's conceivable an employee might retire. Both he and the municipality find his services were mutually useful, and he may come back.

That might have saved the municipality money because they might not have refilled the position while he was gone. They might have thought they'd get along without this person and found they couldn't. That might have saved the municipality money.

This is not a paid leave of absence. It is not done at the expense of . . . the employee during the two years is not paid out of the pension, and there's no necessary reason why he would be paid by the municipality.

This is not a leave of absence in which they necessarily get the pension during the two years. This just provides, if they are absent for two years, they can come back and the pension benefits don't lapse. That's all it does.

Mr. Swenson: — Mr. Minister, the Bill also talks about switching pension plans. The Bill allows contributors to the old municipal employees' pension to switch to the new one, if they do so by December 31. Could you outline the difference between the old and new pension plan?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Keep in mind in the following comments that this is fully funded, none of which has been done at the expense of the provincial taxpayer; how the provincial taxpayer might wish that all pension funds could meet those two qualifications.

Having said that, this is a reversal of everything we've been talking about over the last few days. Because the former plan is a money purchase plan; the new plan is a defined benefit plan. That's the reversal of what's happened in the provincial government and elsewhere.

Converting the former plan to the new plan involves purchasing service in the new plan with the money the members will have in the former plan. The closer the members come to retirement, the more expensive it is to purchase new plan service. Therefore the sooner the transfer occurs, the more service can be purchased.

Mr. Swenson: — How many employees is it anticipated, Minister, because of this enabling legislation, will be eligible to switch their pension? And have they indicated if there'll be any additional cost of allowing the change-over?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — There is no cost at all to anyone. The ever-diligent Mr. Smith here is looking for the number. He believes it's about 250, but we'll try to get that confirmed in a little more precise fashion. That's just kind of off the top of his head.

Mr. Swenson: — Minister, the Bill allows for terminally ill pensioners to withdraw a larger amount of their . . . on a monthly basis from the plan. Would it be correct to assume that this would be entirely funded from the individual's pension plan? Or are there any implications with terminally ill pensioners on the provincial government side?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, no implication for the provincial government at all. The two plans operate in completely separate, watertight compartments.

Mr. Swenson: — There is another area in there on pensions that I found curious, and that's that if you're a pensioner without a spouse, you get more money than one with a spouse. Usually it costs more to run a household with two people in it than one, and I'm just wondering why this exists. Why is it necessary to impose a 15-year guarantee on pensions of persons without spouses?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — This pension, in a sense, operates as many people believe pensions should, because what the person gets is the value of what you contributed. And the single person, because there are no survivor benefits, the pension can be larger to the single person than the married person, and still have the same value and the same actuarial cost to the commission. So that's why the single person's is larger is because there are fewer contingent liabilities and therefore a lower cost, so it would make the pension larger.

Mr. Swenson: — Is this a significant amount of people each year, or are we talking about a few dozen here?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — No, it's more than a handful. There are about 7,000 people in the plan. It's estimated that about a third of them are single; so it's more than a handful.

Mr. Swenson: — What process was gone through, Minister, by the organization, to arrive at the requested changes? Was there a vote taken across the piece, or were there information meetings? What was the process that brought these changes forward?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Each June there is an assembled group of representatives of the various segments. There is someone there representing the peace officers, now called police officers, and fire-fighters; someone there representing the rural municipal administrators; someone representing the Association of School Business Officials of Saskatchewan; etc. This group comes together; they met in June, they discussed this in June; they approved of these changes. As changes were put forward to them, this group approved of these changes. They brought them to us, and we are bringing them to the Assembly really on behalf of this assembled group of municipal employees.

Mr. Swenson: — Why is it you believe, Minister, that this group have been able to maintain this pension fund actuarially sound and in this shape, when there is obviously a tremendous unfunded liability with provincial government employees? Why have these people been able to sort themselves out in this way and the province hasn't been able to?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — It's simply the way the thing has been structured from the beginning. Employees have always had to contribute; the employers have always had to match. And from the beginning they've had a policy — I'm not sure if it's written into the statute — but from the very beginning I'm told they've had a policy of having a fully funded program.

That was not done, as members will know . . . Over a period of some 50 years the provincial government . . . through various governments of all political stripes, that has not been done. And while we're now trying to . . . Well we're now trying to deal with those problems. They got off on the right foot and I guess the provincial government got off on the wrong foot some one-half century ago.

Mr. Swenson: — Is there any discussions taking place, Minister, vis-a-vis the provincial government employees' pension funds, about making some changes that might rectify the situation or at least make it easier to make that unfunded liability payable sooner than what is anticipated?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, we have been giving that matter some earnest consideration. The Minister of Finance has commented to the effect that we are considering it. It is a problem we need to deal with. We have, however, a number of problems to deal with and we're trying to prioritize them.

So we've had some discussions in the department. I should say the appropriate minister has had discussions within the department and there's been some consideration given to it. I think those discussions have included officials of the union as well, the union leadership. But no decisions have been made and there's no timetable or anything that definite.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 12 inclusive agreed to.

(1445)

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I've excused the officials and they've left. I know the Assembly would want to join with me — I think I speak on behalf of government and opposition — in thanking them for their attendance today.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Mr. Toth: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the opposition, we'd like to thank the minister and his officials for their involvement and their presence in deliberations this afternoon. Thank you.

Bill No. 12 — An Act respecting the Application to Saskatchewan of the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption

The Chair: — Before we proceed to clause 1, I would ask the Minister of Social Services to please introduce the officials who have joined us here this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, to my right is Neil Yeates, the associate deputy minister of Social Services; behind Neil is Dave Hedlund, our director of children and family services.

Clause 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the minister and his officials, welcome.

As we indicated the other day, Mr. Minister, we certainly don't have a lot of opposition, in fact any real opposition, to this Bill. I think it's certainly a good Bill, and it enhances an avenue whereby many people certainly across this province, and I think across the country, have been looking at ways and means of reaching out to children in need, and children, especially in many countries, that have been displaced because of the ravages of war that have taken place.

I believe what this legislation is doing is creating an atmosphere and an avenue whereby a more simpler and straightforward process of adoption can take place and bring Saskatchewan into the . . . or under the umbrella of the Hague Convention, and recognizes a number of the conventions, I guess, that have come out of the Hague Convention.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you would take a moment to provide us with a bit more detailed information on the intercountry agreement that was signed on April 12, 1994.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, thank you very much. The convention, the international convention — and we do very much appreciate your support — regulates the international adoptions by establishing standards and criteria so that across the world, for those countries who are willing to be supportive, there will be, I guess, a consistency of practice that always focuses on the best interests of the children and the families involved.

And so under the convention of course, countries who are not able to look after their own children will help determine who will be eligible, which children will be eligible.

There will be standardized or regular or sufficient reports regarding the suitability of adoptive parents in countries wishing to adopt. It will ensure that there are parental consents, which is very important. And of course reports will be provided outlining the child's background.

Just the agreements will allow for the assurance that everything is open, that the countries that want to help and the families who are looking to adopt children have the opportunity to do that in a way that kind of has an international standard to ensure that the best interests of children are maintained.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, were there any other standards or criteria established with regard to regulating international adoptions, or does the comment you just made just basically cover some of the standards, or were there any other standards that would have been adopted?

We talked about making it easier and certainly getting support

from the . . . we'd need support from the country in question and certainly from, I guess, natural parents as well if that's available. And I would imagine in some situations we may not have natural parents that can be contacted regarding adoption, but maybe some other standards are basically outlined, if there are any other standards and criteria regarding this agreement that was signed in '94 over and above what the couple comments you made.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, the attempt here is that . . . and the goal and I guess the discussions that we've had too, say with the Romanian officials recently, what they want to do, what the international convention wants to do, is to make sure that there are government-to-government agreements.

And so from our point of view we want to . . . we're setting it up so that we believe we're complying with the wishes of the convention whereby, through my office, through this office, we will be the central authority to sort of regulate and set the standards, some other more detailed standards over here that would apply, and monitor the progress. And as you know, we had a very positive meeting with the Romanian officials recently whereby we are hoping to have a government-to-government agreement.

So that in one part of your question there, if there is no parent available over there then the appropriate authorities there in their systems . . . and part of the reason for our visit of course, was to offer our support in terms of establishing systems as well. And I think that . . . you were there, Dave, right? Dave was there; Mr. Hedlund was there, along with our deputy minister. And that's one of the services that we're offering as well, to provide our expertise because actually Saskatchewan is recognized as — and I say this as a credit to Saskatchewan people over the years — we're recognized as being a real leader in the area of adoptions and ensuring that the best interests of all the parties are maintained.

So this allows for country-to-country adoptions. We will maintain our central role. Of course we work in conjunction in Canada with the National Adoption Desk.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, have you a time line set up to deal with establishing regulations and imposing these regulations in Saskatchewan once the legislation has been passed? Is there a specific time line, or is this legislation covering most of the regulations that may arise out of the legislation?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, as you are aware of course, we have our Adoption Act and regulations. And if a conflict arises between those regulations and any provisions of this Act, the Hague Convention will supersede. We don't believe there will be any regulations in conflict, but there may be one or two additional regulations that might be required. We're not sure of that at this point. We don't think so.

We're really more focusing here on setting procedures in place that would allow for the easier facilitation of adoption, so that people here can have better access to children who other countries identify and prioritize as needing an adoption home internationally.

So we're really focusing more on the procedural aspects rather than new regulations. We don't think they're going to be required — any additional ones.

Mr. Toth: — I guess so basically what you're saying, the regulations that are now in place with regards to adoption in this province will basically cover most of the regulations that might fall under this new agreement in this Act.

Mr. Minister, I've got three questions that basically deal with other countries that may be involved, and I'm wondering which countries does Saskatchewan currently have adoptions with, agreements with. Under the Hague Convention, will the list be expanded? Are you presently talking about, with other countries, about setting up similar agreements? And as well, how many provinces in Canada are requesting that the Hague Convention be extended to their jurisdiction?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well at this point in time only Nova Scotia has actually passed the legislation, I understand. And as you know, we have recently updated our Adoption Act and regulations. And so in many ways, we have a lot less work to do to endorse the convention. But every province is committed to doing this.

With regard to the agreements, we do not have any at this moment. But we're well on the way to establishing an agreement with Romania, primarily because of the interest there. And I think 70 children have been adopted since 1990 here from Romania.

And we will, I guess, be looking at other countries on a case-by-case basis, keeping in mind we're sensitive to the needs of other countries and we're working with the National Adoption Desk. But the list could very well be expanded, and, I assume, likely will. But that's kind of the current situation at this point.

(1500)

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, section 6 states that:

a child adopted in accordance with the convention has, to the extent permitted by this or any other Act, a right of access to information concerning the child's origin that is held in Saskatchewan.

I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what type of information would be held in confidence by the department?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — We would not be holding any files that contained information that the parents would not have access to. I'm not sure if that answers your question or not.

Mr. Toth: — So basically what you're saying that, if I understand you correctly . . . are you talking the adoptive parents or the birth parents? Information that would be available . . . that realistically the department will not have any further information other than what you've basically . . . worked with the parents in contact with another country regarding

adoption.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, the adoption is actually legalized in the other country. And so this section just ensures that the adoption parents get the information that is available there when the adoption is confirmed and finalized. That's what it really does — ensures consistency, and that we'll work out all the procedures beforehand, I assume, before we have signed the agreements, to make sure that that will flow smoothly.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, what kind of fees or charges can be associated with gaining access to information in regards to adoptions or working it through adoption agreements?

Now I would take it that prospective parents would come to the department seeking information regarding intercountry adoptions, and are there any fees that would be charged in processing claims or even following through?

And I would imagine, I guess . . . or I say I would guess that you would contact a country to see if there are prospective children that would be available for adoption, and this would take some time and effort too. And I'm wondering, do you have any fees associated with that process of putting this type of information together and putting adoptive parents together with children up for adoption?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, there will be a fee charged and it will be up to a maximum of a thousand dollars, but it may be less. And that would be to cover the service to make sure that the adoption home study is completed; a minimum of two years of post-placement support with reports being sent to the child's state of origin as to how things are going. So it would be that range.

Other jurisdictions, the cost ranges anywhere from 500 to 5,000, but we're setting a thousand as a maximum cost there.

Mr. Toth: — Just how would the department then go about arranging for adoptions with other governments?

Now first of all, do you have a list of individuals, or do couples come to you with regards to asking about the possibility of adoption? And then as that information comes forward, do you then have a list or file of couples interested in adopting? And then what process do you follow from there? Do you then check to see what countries do have?

Or first of all, is the request made based on adoption within our country and then you proceed to look into an intercountry adoption, or do couples specifically come requesting the possibility of adopting a child from another country and then you proceed from there?

What's the process that's followed? What does your department do to enhance the adoption of children either in Canada or outside of the country, as we're seeing through this piece of legislation we have in front of us?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, just to confirm the process as you envisage it, where prospective adoptive parents do approach us

and we do have waiting-lists.

Initially many people approach the department on the basis of wanting to adopt an infant. They recognize of course that that is increasingly less of an option, and so they may indicate their interest in a variety of other options — older children, special needs, also international. And so they're willing to be put on a waiting-list in those various areas.

Some people approach us on the basis of hearing a news report or through their cultural network or family network or so on. And they come to us wanting to adopt internationally. And we're in touch on a regular basis, and put them in touch with central agencies who are trying to help facilitate international adoptions.

So that's I think basically how it tends to work. And what we want to do is to meet the need internationally for good adoptive homes. And by signing these agreements, say with Romania, that will speed up the process and facilitate a very smooth matching with the support of both jurisdictions.

Mr. Toth: — I guess one of the most important questions to be asked is, are adoptive parents aware of who the birth parents were and vice versa, especially when you go into intercountry and one kind of agreements are basically signed. Say an adoption is agreed to and a child is brought back to live and become a member of the family in this country. And then what happens if . . . I guess the reason I'm asking, what agreements are in place to basically protect the adoptive parents from the birth parents determining maybe within a year that they want the child back. So we don't have a push and pull and tug, if you will, between adoptive and birth parents.

I'm wondering, is there knowledge of who the adoptive parent is by the birth parent and vice versa, and what protections are there so that the child isn't pushed and pulled between one parent or one family or the other?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, officially the guardianship — just take Romania — would be finalized over there. The transfer would be finalized by the courts over there, so that legal guarantee transfer would take place there.

Canada Immigration would not allow a child to enter the country and be placed on a permanent basis without the legal question being clarified and resolved and that would, of course . . . so there would be no question of who has legal guardianship.

Now as to what future contact there might be, I guess really depends on the openness in the country or the province of Saskatchewan and on the willingness of, say, the adoptive parents as their child is growing older I suppose, and that decision that they might make to try to initiate contact. So it's really . . . there wouldn't be the potential to interfere, I don't think, I suppose any more than there is now. But there would be no question about who has the legal guardianship.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think that's very important, because I just happened to catch via the television

the last couple of days — and I'm not sure; I don't think it was on a Canadian network — but following a couple of cases down in the States where there's quite a battle between adoptive parents and birth parents now regarding children. I think it would be . . .

Once a decision is made, I think for the sake of children and the parents involved and especially adoptive parents, it's important to have a real understanding of what you mean by that adoption agreement having been finalized. And then as a child gets older, and if they want to have the ability to become acquainted with the birth parents, I believe that provision is here too, based on the willingness of both the adoptive and the birthing parents to agree to that type of information being released so that these adoptive children can then follow up on their birth parents.

So I think that's important. And I believe, as you've indicated and as I've looked through the Bill, it's basically . . . it looks to be covered fairly clearly in here. So I thank you for that.

Mr. Chairman, I really don't have any further questions, but I'd like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the minister and his officials for their responses.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much for your important questions. Those are very important. I would like to also, Mr. Chairman, I move to report this Bill . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's a little premature. Sorry, Mr. Chair.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 11 inclusive agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank my officials for their fine work in this particular endeavour, and of course for their help here today.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1515)

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 36 — An Act to amend The Municipal Employees' Superannuation Act

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Bill No. 12 — An Act respecting the Application to Saskatchewan of the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its

title.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36

The Chair: — Before we proceed to item 1, it's been some time since Social Services was here, and perhaps the minister could reacquaint us with the officials who have joined us here today.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my right, deputy minister Con Hnatiuk. Behind Con, Neil Yeates, the associate deputy minister of Social Services. Behind me, Bob Wihlidal, the director of the budget branch. And to my left, Phil Walsh, the director of the income support program.

Item 1

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, welcome, and to your officials today, the Department of Social Services. I'll be asking a few questions and then my colleague from Moosomin will be back to ask some more.

First of all, I know you didn't have them here last time, but the global questions which we have been providing ministers for the last three sessions, have you had the opportunity to have those prepared for us? The Education minister brought them across the other night, so I'm wondering where yours are.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — They're not quite ready, but we'll send them over as soon as we have them.

Mr. Swenson: — We'd appreciate that, Mr. Minister. It's very difficult for us to be able to finish up anyone's estimates without those being provided. Because, as you know, a lot of the questions we ask in there negate House time, and it's been very helpful for us, and I'm sure for you, to not have to stand and answer every one of those questions in the House.

There's a couple of areas I'm going to ask about, Minister. I, as you are aware, have received concerns from a number of people who are employed within the system that you're responsible for. And there seems to be a problem that I don't quite understand.

And I appreciate the help the minister gave me with the one individual, but there seems to be people who, in the last couple of years, continually fall through the cracks. They are laid off for one reason or another, or they have medical problems, and there seems to be a failure somewhere within the system. And I don't know if it's because of the union rules that you have to deal with through the Public Service Commission or if there are agendas at work inside that seem to prohibit people from coming through these things in any reasonable manner.

And there's one that was raised with you last year that's still outstanding. It involves a medical disability and an inability for this individual to come back through the system. And the name is Perry Bhatt, who was employed for 15 years at Valley View, had to take a medical disability because of a heart operation,

and to this day . . . in fact he was in my office yesterday. Has talked to me a number of times, went through some re-education, all sorts of things, but seems to just continually fall through the cracks.

And I'm wondering if you're comfortable with the way that the employment, re-employment, system is working, or if you have concerns that people aren't being able to either requalify or seem to be on the outside looking in because of the current union structure that you have to deal with? Is there some reason that people seem to have a lot of these problems, particularly in the last two years?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — With regard to the details of this particular case that you raise, I'm not familiar with that just off the top, but we will look into the details and provide you with specific information as soon as we can, if that's okay.

As you know, this is being . . . (inaudible) . . . this is being managed by the Public Service Commission, not us. And I say that because the process basically is such that the Public Service Commission manages a re-employment for individuals who are on long-term disability.

You know each case is different. Over the years, generally, there's been downsizing in government over many years and this could make it a little more awkward for some persons with disability to compete.

But I think you raise an important question about the level of comfort in this regard. And I guess I would have to reflect on this myself and take a look at it on a more broad basis. But other than that I'm not sure how to answer the question.

Mr. Swenson: — Well, Minister, your area is a big employer in government. And I can appreciate the fact that you, along with other people, face downsizing requirements. Your case-load has gone up 30 to 40,000 people in the last three and a half years — some of your own doing, some on-loaded because of federal government changes. So people are under pressure within the system to perform more because there isn't the backup structures that maybe there were 10 years ago.

So I guess what I'm saying to you is, if the requirements of the caseworker, of the people, the family services people, the people that do the investigations, all of the things that you have to deal with, if that workload is going up, is there a concerted effort being made, I guess, to raise the educational levels?

Are you looking for a different kind of individual that you did in the past? And if so, if you're looking for a different kind of individual to be involved in Social Services in this province, what changes are you asking for at the Public Service Commission level? And what changes are you asking for vis-a-vis some of the bargaining agreements that have been in place which obviously dictate certain bumping rights and certain requirements to you?

(1530)

Because your department seems to be one that always comes up when people talk about nepotism, when they talk about hiring

practices within certain areas that people don't feel are as good as they would be perhaps in other areas of government. And I've heard this complaint in my local area, in Moose Jaw; I've heard this complaint in other areas. And your department seems to be one that draws all of this ill will, if you will.

And this is bad, because the people that you're charged with serving are often those that can least afford to defend themselves. We're talking about people that . . . two and three generations on social services. Or we're talking about aboriginal people that prior to recent changes dealt with the federal government, but now deal with your government.

And if there are changes that need to be attended to, I would think you would be the first to want to make those changes. If you've got lousy union agreements, then you would want to do something about it.

The Public Service Commission seems to have their hands tied in many cases because their re-employment lists are governed by SGEU (Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union) contracts, or they're governed by CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) contracts, or they're governed by something else.

And it seems like you don't have the cream rising to the top, Minister, in many cases because of what you are, in many cases, handcuffed by. And given the size of your budget, given the case-load that we have to deal with in this province — and I don't see that case-load changing a whole lot in the next couple of years — I would think you'd have some pretty specific ideas about the type of individual you would want to see coming up through the system in order to provide better service, obviously, with budget restrictions. And you must have some thoughts on that.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well I will attempt to respond to . . . You raise so many questions. You were flipping back and forth between workers and clients and making a number of inferences regarding unions and so on.

Let me say that we do re-employ many individuals who go on the re-employment list, who are disabled. And basically in some cases . . . I mean it's a heavy workload. In some cases the ability of the individuals who are on sick leave and so on sometimes prohibits them from coming into certain kinds of positions, and so we try and find a way to fit them in that meets their needs as well and it's something that they can manage. Certainly we operate within a system-wide classification service. And that was no different than when you were in power.

And certainly the question you raise about nepotism in our department, I find that a little bit offensive actually. I would say that if you've got some specific examples of where you believe that has occurred, based on what you've said, I would appreciate knowing that. You know we've tried very hard — we've tried very hard — and we've in fact been successful in increasing the qualifications required and the training for a number of positions where . . .

I mean I'm not going to get into this, but I can certainly provide

you with some information with regard to previous hiring practices where a former minister of Social Services, under your administration, took it upon himself to change legislation so that he could designate who is a qualified social worker. Now I don't think that has ever been done in the history of the Commonwealth, where the minister would give himself or herself that authority. So I believe that your suggestion that we are doing that is inappropriate.

I am very proud of our staff. You indicate that the cream isn't rising to the top. I think that's very unfair to say that. That just simply isn't correct. And with regard to our hiring practices, we were presented, I believe, a special honour by the aboriginal community for the degree to which we're committed to supporting qualified aboriginal people to work in the department, who work with aboriginal people, aboriginal families and children and young people. I would hope that you would see that as progress.

With regard to the unions, again I'm not sure what your question there was. Certainly you made some inferences. I would say that our relationship with the unions are constructive and positive. There are good processes in place. Certainly we believe in collective bargaining, and the system in that regard is working well. Unions are supportive to people, to members who need their support. So those are some of my responses to the points and questions that you raised.

And again, I want to reiterate that under very difficult circumstances, not just workload demands but the complexity of the challenges today to deal with some of the social conditions, I would say that there is very innovative work being done on many fronts — on many fronts.

For example, in our youth and family youth program, in our child action plan, in the day care field — on many, many fronts, there are good examples where our staff are involved with communities. West Flats in P.A. (Prince Albert), for example; Fort Qu'Appelle; Assiniboia; inner city of Saskatoon where we're working in a very integrated way to support communities to make their own decisions and be involved through the community grants program in ways in which we strengthen preventive supports and actual services to families.

So I guess I would disagree with you. I think our staff are doing an outstanding job.

Mr. Swenson: — Well, Minister, I'm glad to hear that. I think, Mr. Chairman, we must be getting close to an election because those kind of questions a year ago would not have elicited the same type of political responses from the minister.

I wasn't castigating you or the unions or anybody else. I said you're under a tremendous amount of pressure; you have a very large budget. There are people that say that your system that you're forced to work inside is less than perfect and that there obviously maybe are changes that need to be made in order for the taxpayer to get the best bang for their buck. That's all I was saying.

It had no personal inference to you or your immediate

ministerial staff or anyone else. I simply was passing on comments to you that people have made to me who seem to be in some degree of difficulty with the way that the structures exist within your department vis-a-vis Public Service Commission.

And I wasn't taking a shot at the union at all. You have to live with what cards you're dealt. And if there are certain things there that are prohibiting doing a better job, I would think you would want to discuss those in a reasonable manner.

If you think all is perfect, I'll take your word for it, but my discussions with people around government are that there are some problems. And I understand that there's been a new agreement negotiated that will allow more flexibility with bringing in, for instance, the more qualified people that you talk about — people with better educations, that type of thing.

And I simply wanted you to tell the Assembly and tell the taxpayer about some of those initiatives and marry those up, if you will, to Fort Qu'Appelle to show us that those initiatives, those changes, in fact are starting to bear fruit. Because at the end of the day, Minister, it was your department that had to go back and get extra funding in order to keep your case-load in line.

Very few other departments went back and got more money. You obviously were one that had to do that during the past budget year. You needed more money to do your job. And if you need that extra funding, then legitimately I, representing taxpayers, should say to you: okay, you need that extra money; what are you doing in order to make sure that those extra expenditures are in line, that you're not prepared to sit on the status quo, that you're prepared to demand changes in the system so that you can come up with better systems in order to do your job?

That's all I was asking. And I mean if you find that political and offensive, I'm sorry, because that wasn't the intent of it.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well let me mention four things that we are doing that we believe are constructive, positive, and maybe designed to address some of your concerns.

We are working a on a new . . . In addition to the agreement, we're working on a new social work classification plan, negotiating that, with the involvement of all the parties — unions, Public Service Commission, and so on.

We've considerably enhanced our automation and have a plan to further do that, which enhances accountability and provides additional support to the staff to make sure that we're . . . it's another tool that we're using. And we of course are . . . have an employment equity plan that we believe is constructive, and we've worked very hard to better integrate our services with other government departments — one of the vehicles being the child action plan where there's seven department are working together on issues across the piece, whether it's family violence or youth issues or so on.

So those are some of the things we are attempting to do. Of

course we're working very closely in terms of good case-planning model and accountability with the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Swenson: — I'm interested in that, Minister. I was chairman of Public Accounts for just about two years, and it was an area that came up in the auditor's report consistently. I understand that you were going to change the way that the computer set-ups within the department . . . you were purchasing new equipment, as I understand it; that there was going to be more ability to cross-check the flow of funds because you spent this.

And could you update us on how much has been spent? You were one of the departments, I believe, that spent quite heavily in that area in order to meet those auditing requirements that were laid out in the auditor's report. Can you tell us what you have spent in the last fiscal year on your administration side?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — The detail that you asked for with regard to the administration on the technical side, we will get that over to you as quick as we can, in terms of these standard questions. But last year — in fact we initiated it, as the auditor says in his report — we initiated a review of a sort of a case-planning model.

And we focused on employable clients, and we wanted to ensure that the value for money audit . . . And of course I had the pleasure, with the deputy minister, of meeting with the auditor last week, and he was very complimentary of the fact that we initiated this case-plan audit, that we worked very closely with his office and have pledged to do that in the future, and indicates in his report that the department has adequate systems and practices. And I quote: the department has adequate systems and practices to develop case plans for employable clients.

And so we . . . and he made a couple of suggestions, and we'll continue working with him.

And what was heartening is his comments to me that we are making good progress and that accountability, for example, in the social assistance plan is better than it ever has been. And we were very proud of that.

(1545)

Mr. Swenson: — Well thank you, Minister. I am going to ask you some more questions on this area in awhile. I've got to step out of the Assembly for a minute and the member from Moosomin is going to.

But I think it's absolutely crucial that not only on your technical side but on your manpower side that there be some changes. I don't see, unfortunately, your requirements having to go down very much in the near future. And if those requirements are going to stay at the current levels, that means that we as taxpayers are going to have to be ever diligent in order to deliver the services.

I can see, quite frankly, the day coming when you will see 5 and 10 per cent cuts across government for all sorts of reasons, and that'll be irrespective of political party. I honestly believe that.

And that won't only be in the province of Saskatchewan, that's going to be Canada-wide. And with those size of budgetary cuts taking place, the ability to manage existing resources will be incredible.

So I guess with that parting comment, I'll turn it over to my colleague who can ask some questions. I am going to want to ask you some specific questions about the workshops that are associated with handicapped people and the funding around those workshops and its level over the last couple of years. I need to understand some things about how they make up deficits in their projected operating budgets and how that reflects on the client load. So I'll let you think about that for another opportunity.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Now, Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that I think that the ability for the department to continue to manage the challenge that exists in Saskatchewan, but across Canada, across Canada in spades . . . because as the hon. member will know, we have second lowest dependency rate of persons on social assistance of any province in Canada. We have the second lowest, and the second lowest dependency rate as well of individuals receiving unemployment insurance.

And so that reinforces — I mean we are positioning ourselves — that reinforces why we're proceeding with the development of the need to have better qualified staff, better education and training, more culturally sensitive hiring practices where a number of our clients for example are from aboriginal background; better technology, better computerization, better in-service, and so on, so that we . . . Those are the kind of tools that we've been developing along the way and is one of the reasons why we're making great progress on the financial accountability side of the program.

Now I think that it's important to remind the hon. member that the only reason that the case-loads have gone up, the only reason — and we can demonstrate this — is based on the decision by the federal government with respect to the change in terms of who's responsible for status Indian people when they leave the reserve. The member I think knows that.

And secondly, in the last three federal budgets, and no doubt on the next federal budget, because that's already been announced, there have been cuts to unemployment insurance benefits. And just the last cut alone by the federal government meant that it took \$40 million in UIC (Unemployment Insurance Commission) payments from Saskatchewan low income people. That cost us 17 to \$20 million for additional people on social assistance.

But the important thing here is that the economy is turning around. StatsCanada's figures show that there was, I think February to February, February '94 to February '95, there were 9,000 new jobs in the province. About 2,500 or 3,000 have been announced since then because there's evidence again that the *Partnership for Renewal* is working — long-term, sustainable jobs across Saskatchewan. So that's good news.

And of course in 8 of our 11 offices in Social Services, the case-loads are down. In some parts of the province things are

. . . the economy is very, very tight. Things are booming very well. Across the province, in spite of the offloads, our case-load numbers are down about 360 this year over last year. So we're heading in the right direction on that front as well.

And in the meantime, we have put in place programs like Future Skills and JobStart and the opportunities through the New Careers Corporation, which are acting as bridges to independence for people who are on assistance, to ensure that they have a hand up, if you will, to get into the labour market and to become competitive and to make sure they can access the jobs that are available.

And we've worked very closely with all the departments, but certainly with Economic Development, Agriculture, and the Department of Education, Training and Employment, to make sure that we continue to ensure that young people and unemployed people have access to the training that will make them competitive for the future jobs that will be created.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Minister. While we continue to debate the numbers of people on assistance and while you continue to reflect and suggest that most of the problems that you're facing are because of federal Liberal policy, I'm not sure . . . I think there are some areas where you're going to have to eventually accept responsibility.

You mentioned, I think, that there was a reduced case-load of 360. I'm not sure if that means that people have found work or they just got tired of going to the office and possibly even moved out of the province. So we have a reduction of people, individuals in the province, because they just felt that the government they most likely supported now is letting them down as well.

And as my colleague had indicated, we certainly have . . . and I don't think any government in the future is going to be just handing money out hand over fist. We're all in a situation, a position, of having to really maintain restraint even if the economic conditions improve.

But I think the Economic minister made a statement about the Chili for Children program and that we still have many people in this province that need assistance. And I'm not sure what the numbers are in the Chili for Children program or how many people are looking for or seeking assistance through food aid programs. I noticed yesterday in yesterday's *Leader-Post* city . . . I mean food banks still a major component. And I believe that that was in the Saskatoon . . . well I think it was in both the *Leader-Post* and the *Star-Phoenix*.

So while on one hand, Mr. Minister, you would imply that we're gaining a bit of a hold or managing better, unfortunately the headlines don't totally reflect that. They also reflect the fact that your comment about the economy turning around . . . I'm not exactly sure that the economy is turning around as much as may be implied through your comments or the Premier's or the Minister of Economic Development.

I talked to individuals out in my constituency, and I can assure you of one thing, that while the urban dweller may feel the farm

community has really got it together, in fact I just saw some numbers today which indicate that there has actually been an increase in people having to approach the Farm Debt Review Board and the farm security boards because of the problems they're facing on their farm due to the fact that not everybody had a super crop last year. We talk about good prices but prices don't mean anything for your commodity if you don't have a commodity.

And also, even if you did have a crop and you received a fair price for it, the fact is so many producers are still facing some very difficult challenges because of the debt load that they're carrying.

So I think, Mr. Minister, we need to take things a little more in perspective and I think even what we've seen, just the announcements out of the Department of Energy and Mines, the land sales certainly have not been anywhere close to where they were last year.

Which is also another indication that the economy may not be as bright and why it's important that we need to look to the tools of small business across this province. And there were a couple of announcements in the last two days where smaller businesses have expanded because they happen to be right now meeting a niche market and are able to expand.

So it's very important that we at least present all the facts. And while we're dealing with the social assistance and Social Services, I understand that my colleague in the last time the department had been before estimates was asking some questions. They were directed to our office by constituents.

And questions like . . . individuals like to know, how many individuals are currently collecting social assistance in the province? And I wonder if you could provide us with the up-to-date numbers of individuals and the number of cases. And I wonder if you'd also have a breakdown of the ages of recipients and how many are single-parent families.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — This is the end of March. The cases are 41,058. Pardon me. That was last year. Sorry. 40,699. So the difference is 359, as I'd indicated. Across the province, 359 lower than last year.

And as I said, in many of the 11 offices the case-load is actually down. I think it's in Saskatoon, Regina, and P.A. primarily, but . . . where it's not down as much as it is in some of the rural areas.

Single parent was 28 per cent or 12,036 cases. Those are the numbers I think that respond to your question.

I guess I would say that your general outlook of the situation is a little bit gloomier than you typically are in here. I think that many people want a little bit more sense of optimism and hope, and I think that many people are feeling that way across the province. And I think we're fairly well aware of the fact that we need to continue to work hard to make sure that those people who are unemployed get opportunities.

But I might just clarify that there is a net in-migration. I think

every quarter over the last — about the last six or seven quarters for sure — there has been a net in-migration. Now some of those people, 500 or so, are coming from Alberta because of the massive cuts to social services there, but I think that they see opportunities and some hope here in Saskatchewan.

We do not believe in exporting our problems to other provinces. We're trying to do things the Saskatchewan way by working hard as a government, between departments and with communities, to strengthen services and supports to families.

I think that you referred to the article yesterday in the special report. I think if you read some of those articles closely — and I know you will, if you haven't — you will also see that the social groups agreed with some of the comments that I made, that we're doing what we can with the hand we were dealt.

We're doing what we can, and we've accepted responsibility for that. We're not passing that on to somebody else. But that the long-term solutions, the long-term economic development strategy, the putting money into education and training and employment supports like JobStart, Future Skills, that that is the direction to go in.

And in terms of helping people, I stand to be corrected, but I think that we may very well be the only provincial government in Canada that last year and the year before did not cut social services programs. Manitoba, for example, took \$10 million alone just out of shelter rates. And we did not do that. We recognize that in times of need, people sometimes have a greater need for . . . to build supports around them.

And we, for example, do not agree with the Reform Party that would say that you should have to deplete all of your assets and be destitute before you qualify for any social assistance. We want to support people to get off more quickly, and that's the approach that we're taking here.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, when we look at the numbers, you gave me a number of 12,036 of single-parent families. And one concern I have, and I know a number of people have, and that's the aspect of the fact that a number of these single parents . . . and I'm not sure if you'd have numbers to indicate it — but how many of these single parents are under 18?

I think there are some areas of responsibility where parents have a responsibility to look after and provide for their siblings. And in some cases we may have single parents falling into being supported by Social Services that should . . . where individuals should still be being supported by their families. And I'm not aware of that, but I'm wondering if there are any individuals and why we would be basically taking over responsibility that should rest with the parents or family members.

(1600)

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well I think it's very important to state clearly that Saskatchewan families do care for their children and take responsibility for them. Of the 40,000 cases that I discussed with you — and this is very important — that there

are only 218 of those 40,000 under the age of 18, and less than 100 of those are single parents.

So I think that the hon. member will see that that . . . you don't have to worry about that one, because that isn't a problem.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, there's a question that has come in from a lady from Dalmeny and we haven't really had a chance to ask it. And it's been here sitting on our desks, and I guess sometimes maybe we get carried away with some of the other questions and follow-through, and I think it's important that I raise it so that we don't miss it today.

It's coming from a Ms. Attwater from Dalmeny, called with a number of concerns regarding social assistance recipients, and she brought up some valuable points and suggestions.

It's regarding a problem she has confronted, is individuals on assistance moving without notifying the landlord. And while this shouldn't be a problem, it does happen, and individuals are left in a position where they've been renting out property . . . And she's wondering, how can Social Services allow recipients to move out without providing notice to the landlord? And I'll get into further questions as we discuss this.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well the member might recall that this question was asked by your colleague, specifically asked by your colleague, the last time we met and so I would . . . I may have to send the answer out to Ms. Attwater myself because I answered this for your colleague about a month ago.

But as was pointed out yesterday by our Minister of Justice, he and I met with the landlords association some time ago and we agreed there to set up a process whereby through the Rentalsman's office coordinating this, all of the interested parties in this question would come together, discuss the issue from their perspectives, and produce a report. Now we're anticipating that report to come any time and when it does we'll take a serious look at it.

Mr. Toth: — So what you're telling me, Mr. Minister, is that basically my colleague did get this question off; that you've answered the question of Ms. Attwater, you've answered. I believe it has to do with damage deposits and . . . Was that asked — about the damage deposit and what takes place and how it's taken care of?

And I unfortunately didn't get a chance to chat with an individual from Whitewood today, but he was basically bringing up the same concern, I think, although his concern relates directly to the Bill that will be coming before the House.

So I wonder, you can give me your assurances that we've already dealt with these questions with regards to Ms. Attwater; and also this question: does Social Services pay for relocation expenses when someone moves?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, that's right.

Mr. Toth: — Unfortunately, both ears aren't quite operating that well. I guess I should have conferred a little bit with my

former colleague . . . I shouldn't say former colleague, my colleague who had raised some of these questions — how far he got on a couple of the questions. Because I certainly can get off in another area.

But I'm wondering, how many individuals requested moves in the last fiscal year? Did you have that question put to you? And how many were granted, for what reason, and at what cost? And does social assistance . . . or do social assistance recipients residing in hotels receive money for utilities?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — I'm not sure that we can answer the question with regard to how many moves have there been. But let me just say that generally we pay for moves typically if someone has a job that they need to relocate to. We negotiate some form of reasonable agreement around that and then we would cover the cost.

Mr. Toth: — So recipients do receive assistance for utilities and other services if they're living in a hotel. Is that what you told me?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — No, I was referring to your question about whether we ever pay for moves. The issue of paying utilities for people who live in hotels, I would be pretty sure that we don't do that.

Mr. Toth: — I'm sorry about that, Mr. Minister. There's other important details with regards to the operation of this place as well that we need to discuss. I got carried away there. Where do we go from here?

An Hon. Member: — Just pass the Bill.

Mr. Toth: — Just pass the Bill?

By the way, Mr. Minister, did you give us the global questions, or did my colleague ask for the global questions, when we began this afternoon? Did we receive those global questions or responses?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — They're just about ready. We'll send them over as soon as we can.

Mr. Toth: — Well if they're not ready yet, Mr. Minister, maybe we should bring another department in so we can move on, because I'm not sure I'm quite prepared to move and pass the Social Services estimates without . . . until we have the global questions in front of us.

When can we expect to receive those, the global responses?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — A couple of days.

Mr. Toth: — Not the next 10 minutes?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — I'm sorry. We don't have them quite ready yet. Sorry.

Mr. Toth: — It's unfortunate. We were really hoping that we

could have the global questions in our possession before we even considered moving. And I think we would have been more than prepared to move through and pass the social assistance estimates today if the global responses were in our hands.

And it's going to make it very difficult to just move through and pass these estimates without having the global questions, because I think we find that having the global questions in our possession and in our hands gives us a chance to review some questions that we would otherwise just spend time asking in the Assembly.

So I think it's important that we have those questions here, and you've indicated a couple of days. What do you mean by a couple of days? Would Monday, for example, be considered a period early enough to get the global questions? Are we talking Monday, Tuesday?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Sure, very likely Monday.

Mr. Toth: — If a social assistance recipient sells his or her assets, for example in a garage sale, and receives money, are they allowed to keep the money? And do you have any rules or regulations regarding this sort of thing?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Your example where you're talking about a garage sale, you're really basically . . . it's converting one asset to another asset. They're really not gaining anything there. I guess they're converting just to a liquid asset, I guess, for a bit of money. So, no.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, a case that was just brought to my attention the other day and more recently is a situation where an individual who managed a store for a number of years and then . . . it was a chain store that closed its doors in our community. And shortly after the doors closed, this individual was also . . . it was diagnosed that the individual had cancer and was on cancer treatments for a number of months. At the last I talked to her, I think at least the prognosis is they feel they've got the situation with cancer under control.

She's applied to your office for assistance. To date she's been told she doesn't qualify because she still has some assets in the fact that she owns a quarter section of land and has been told by your office or by the worker that she must dispose of that property before she can apply for social assistance.

Now in this case her son is operating the land. Her son isn't paying any rental revenue. He's covering the taxes, but by the time he covers his expenses, he really has very little left himself to live on.

And what I'm wondering is, what criteria does social assistance follow in looking at individuals. She has no other source of income. The business closed . . . when the business closed down, she was contributing toward a pension plan but they actually settled on a severance. And most of that, if I'm not mistaken, has been basically eaten up. She has a house, she's got utilities, she's got taxes.

And her son has basically as well indicated to me that he's more than prepared to open up his books for Social Services to look at, to see where his income is, to show that it's not that they're trying to cover anything.

But certainly his mother is in a situation where she doesn't really have a lot of alternatives. She gets a little bit of money here or there from scattered jobs that open up in the community.

And I'm wondering, what criteria does your department have in dealing with situations like this, rather than saying, well dispose of those assets and then when you run out, come and see us. It's an avenue whereby if she just . . . in order to dispose of her quarter section of land, possibly putting it on the market, takes it away from her son, and just leaves him with that much less because he's not in a position to buy it as well.

So how do you address situations like this, Mr. Minister? And how does a person like that prove to you that they are in a situation of need -- versus just looking at it, the rules are such, these are the rules; unfortunately you fall under those rules and guidelines, therefore we can't do anything. Isn't there some room for some compassion and understanding and an ability to review a situation, take an overall view, an objective approach to it, so that we can address the need out there, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Certainly as the member knows, because this hasn't changed from before and this is the way it exists across Canada, that the social assistance program is a program of last resort. If someone has an asset, for example, a quarter section of land, if someone has an asset — I don't know the details here — but you're expected to see if you can use that asset to generate the income that you need.

Now if the situation is exactly as you describe it, there could be a possibility of some assistance here. But when you take one individual who has his or her house paid for, so you don't have that shelter allowance to factor in, it doesn't take a lot of income before you're not eligible.

So I would suggest that if this hasn't occurred, that this resident sit down with our staff and figure out some fair value of what income that asset could generate, that quarter section of land. And the thing to keep in mind always is that any client can appeal a decision. Any decision can be appealed. And those appeal committees are basically neighbours, community representatives who hear the appeal. And I think that is one of the safeguards of checks and balances to ensure that we're accountable with public funds on the one hand, and secondly, that we act and follow our rules and act in a compassionate manner on the other.

So if that individual has not sat down with the local staff, I would make the commitment to you today that, with the client's permission, we would be happy to look into it and make sure that it gets resolved as best as possible.

(1615)

Mr. Toth: — So basically what you've said, Mr. Minister, is you've just told me that the rules are the rules and we don't

really take into consideration the individual specific needs out there; we're not willing to look at really reviewing them.

And the reason I'm suggesting that . . . at least that's what I caught from your first few comments. Because, as I indicated earlier, the client or the individual who has come seeking assistance has pointed out what she has. Her son is willing, more than willing to open up his books to show what that asset of the quarter section is really deriving for him.

And unfortunately he's not in the position of making an offer to purchase. He just doesn't have the financial ability or wherewithal to purchase. So that means it disappears out of his . . . if she is forced to sell, it disappears out of his operation, which makes it more difficult for him.

So I'm asking you again, Mr. Minister, what avenue does this person follow, and what does the department do in showing a little more compassion and understanding? If an individual is willing to just disclose all their income to the department to show exactly where they sit . . . and who would I put this individual in contact with to basically come before you and lay out the problems that they are facing?

Yes, the individual does have a house. But the individual also has the costs of the taxes on that property. They face the costs of all the utilities that have to be paid upfront. And as I indicated earlier, there was a severance, but it won't be . . . that severance, I'm not sure whether that severance has now been used up in trying to cover the fees and what have you.

I guess what I'm basically saying is what avenues do individuals follow when it seems that yes, the rules are here; here's the criteria; unfortunately you fall between the cracks because it seems that you're basically sitting on the edge; and those are the criteria and we can't do anything unless you're absolutely destitute. And that's what it appears to be coming from your office, Mr. Minister. That's what they feel.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well, as I said, I would be happy to have our officials look into the situation if you, with the client's permission, would send that to me.

Obviously you need rules. You had rules; we have rules. We try and apply them fairly. We give our directors and our supervisors some level of discretion for professional judgements, and the check and the balance here is that the individual can appeal it.

Now you've introduced new information on the second question that you didn't on the first question. I'm not being critical. All I'm saying is that there may be many factors that you and I aren't aware of. You said something about a severance. Well severance is money, and just because someone discloses — just because someone discloses doesn't mean that they're not expected to use an asset to generate some income.

But I have confidence that our staff will look into this in a sensitive manner and could arrive at some fair resolution of this. And if the resident is not happy, then she had the appeal mechanism available to her. If that has been exhausted, I mean I would be happy to look at that and to see if there's something

we can do.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, I'm sorry you never caught it, but when I first mentioned it I mentioned that there was severance — at least I believe there was severance. And I might be mistaken too, so I'll just throw that in.

But what I will do is I will commit to get the name and a phone number and ask that your department follow up and chat with this individual and see where they can go. And as I've indicated, she's indicated to me she has no problem in releasing whatever she has, just disclosing everything, and certainly her son is in the same position. So I'll present that to you.

And I guess what you . . . if you wouldn't mind, Mr. Minister, I wouldn't mind you at least as well indicating the avenue of appeal that is available to her if indeed after your department or your officials or one of your staff do call her and you still determine that she doesn't qualify, that she has an avenue whereby she can disclose and make a request to where she may feel that at least she has been heard at the end of the day. And that she's got . . . felt that whether she agrees or not or the individuals . . .

And I'm sure it's not just this one case that has been brought to my attention. I'm sure other people feel at times they're batting their head against a wall. And I guess it comes back to the number. You talked about a reduction — is it because people finally gave up? I don't think we want people to feel that they had to give up because they were dealing with Social Services and just dealing with individuals that they felt weren't listening.

I think people need to know that they've legitimately been hurt, that some understanding and compassion has been part of the discussion that has taken place, that the worker has indeed understood the situation, and at the end of the day, the reason a certain decision was made is because they followed the criteria, they followed the guidelines. And unfortunately for these reasons — and maybe we need to look at avenues whereby we can work within the reasons to see . . .

I guess what I'm trying to say is you may have an asset of a house, you may have an asset of a quarter section, but if there's no income whatsoever and you're not deriving income . . . In this case, and I come back to this, if the son is forced then to pay out of his . . . what's left after he has farmed the land and sold the produce and then paid all his expenses, then it maybe puts the son in a position where maybe they end up coming to Social Services for assistance because he's trying to share with his mother.

I trust that through your office we can at least come to some resolve in this matter, and I will get the name to you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, regarding permanent wards of the minister, who determines whether a child should be become a permanent ward of the minister?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, that decision is always made and finalized by the courts.

Mr. Toth: — How many permanent wards do we have to date, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Approximately 800.

Mr. Toth: — Would it be possible, Mr. Minister, to break this number down by age, and please outline what these individuals receive in assistance from the government.

Excuse me one second, maybe I'll ask one other question while you're putting that together. How are the wards' needs determined? And maybe you've got a good answer for that, or maybe I should have saved it for a second question.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, just to be a little more precise, we'll send you over the breakdown of the various ages if that's okay. The actual number for January, I said, approximately eight hundred and seven forty-eight permanent wards.

And with regard to how their needs are met, basically you determine . . . these young people are in foster homes, and some have been there for long time. Some are longer term arrangements. And the fee paid to foster parents is about \$20 a day. It varies with the basic needs of the child, but approximately an average of about \$20 per day paid to the foster parent.

Mr. Toth: — So what determines whether a person becomes a ward of the state? What's the criteria by which you arrive at whether an individual becomes a ward of the state? And is that determination factor being made by a local worker? Is it made on the basis of an individual coming to a worker, having problems in a home? Maybe you could just explain that for me, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Every decision that we make in the department, whether it's a worker, supervisor, director with regard to child welfare, has got to be presented to the court because we're held accountable under the Act for our actions. We have to demonstrate there was sufficient evidence to take a child into care in the first place.

So the court makes the decision based on the evidence presented as to whether or not there is enough evidence to suggest that the family situation is such that you will never improve in terms of neglect or abuse. That's fairly extreme, but if the prediction is that it would never improve, then a permanent order would be considered.

But many times it could be a temporary order for a period of time so that parents could get the additional supports they need, or the child is often returned home under a supervision order. And so those are three of the options available to the court.

But the permanent order is only granted if there is, in the judgement of the court, really no potential for improvement, the best interests of the child being always paramount in the system.

Mr. Toth: — What steps are in place, Mr. Minister, whereby a

worker, I guess if you will, must follow before a person is made a ward of the state? And as I'm saying that, the reason I'm asking that, Mr. Minister, is because of circumstance that took place down in our area a couple of years ago where an individual was . . . a worker walked into a school because a complaint had been raised, and then left the school with a student and went to another community without even notifying the parents that a complaint had been raised regarding a situation in the home, and the feeling that there was reasons for Social Services to move in and take control, or take this person as an individual, or making them become a ward of the state.

And the feeling I had from all involved was that there should have been at least some consultation prior to, because it created a lot of anxiety in the home. It also created a lot of anxiety for the individual as they were all of a sudden found themselves being taken to another community and they didn't really understand why.

And I'm wondering, what criteria is there in place regarding this, so that we make sure that decisions aren't made before a total review of accusations that may be levelled are followed up on?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well basically what occurs is that somebody complains, and we're obligated under the Act to follow up on that, of course. And what the worker has to do is make a judgement, an assessment.

This is why a good level of education and training and sensitivity to the circumstance is important. And there has to be a belief by the worker in order to apprehend . . . and the supervisor, that the child's in need of safety. In other words the child's in some sort of jeopardy — physical or emotional abuse or whatever.

Now if that decision is made, we don't have the ability to make that decision without being held accountable. The department has to apply to the courts within seven days to present the circumstances under which the child was apprehended, if that's the case, and then present the information to ensure that there was adequate evidence to have made that decision.

(1630)

Then of course the Act protects the rights of the child and of the parent, in that they're both entitled to legal representation around that incident. And there's a fine line here too because if the circumstances are such that the worker makes the wrong assessment and doesn't apprehend the child and there's some later review and in the face of the evidence, a trained person should have been able to see that there were danger signals, then the social worker's potentially in jeopardy as well because there's often a fine line there.

And this is why it takes important training and education and skill level to make those assessments. Those are taken very seriously, and apprehension is a last resort. There are many situations where we're called out where we don't apprehend the children. But those are signals to everybody that there may be a service that the family needs or the child needs.

So we take apprehension very seriously. And I believe — I stand to be corrected — the approximate numbers are that we only have half as many children in care as the province of Manitoba because we spend a lot of money on preventive, community-based services. The child action plan is a good part of that, and that's how this ties in to support families and keep them together.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, I appreciate that. I think at the same time though I just would like to reiterate the fact that I think it's important that we have some checks and balances within the system. And those checks and balances . . . if an accusation is brought forward, especially by someone outside of the home — and more so, even outside of the home — that there is some follow-up and there is, if you will, some time spent in review and some form of investigation so that we don't end up with a situation such as we've seen in the Martensville case.

And I raise that, and certainly there are many people in this Assembly that are quite well aware of it. I think, Mr. Minister, and I think as the Minister of Justice indicated yesterday, the feeling that we've got to consider the children. And I agree wholeheartedly in that matter. We must think of the children.

And I raise that because I just had a call this afternoon from an individual who basically said to me . . . she had or this individual had some concerns. She had levelled an accusation against another individual who happened to be her separated partner, but her comment was that the authorities didn't really want to do anything because they're somewhat paranoid over circumstances that have arisen all out of the Martensville case.

And I think it's very important, Mr. Minister, because we want to establish some criteria whereby you can sit down and determine whether or not accusations that may come from a family member or from a child are indeed accurate or whether those accusations were made in a fit of anger. And that's important.

And it's also important, Mr. Minister . . . and I trust that we do not have individuals or workers who are overzealous when an accusation like this may come their way, and they're going to prove that they're going to make sure that the person that was accused is going to pay for their actions, without taking the time to sit back and determine . . . do a real review and determine whether or not there is a case to proceed.

And I think it's very important that we have some very clear guidelines, and we have an understanding . . . we do have some checks and balances so that we indeed prevent an abusive situation from becoming an overly abusive situation, as you've indicated. Because I think it wasn't that long ago we had a situation where I believe it was a child or a couple of children were actually very seriously injured, if I'm not mistaken . . . may have even lost their lives because it was felt that they should have been removed from the homes, as more drastic action should have been taken. And certainly it hurts a person when you see that happen.

But at the same time we . . . Every situation is different. And what I'm saying, Mr. Minister, is we do need some checks and balances so that you can determine where it's actually important that the worker move in and offer protection, and in other cases where it may be just a fit of anger where a call is made. And I think it's very important that we have those checks and balances. And I'm wondering what the department has to determine that, whether a worker has the ability to maybe talk to someone else in determining . . . making that final move or whether it's all left up to a single individual. And certainly in the heat of the moment, the wrong decision may be made at the same time.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well first of all, let me thank you for recognizing the tricky balance that you identify that we sometimes walk. I think the principle that we attempt to use is the principle of least restrictive. We don't want to intervene in the family's life and affairs, so we use sort of a least-restrictive principle.

And there is an important balance here because you'll remember later '80s or early '90s, in that period, where there were a number of high-profile cases where young people and children died because there was evidence there where we didn't act. And so obviously you're always walking that balance, and you try as best you can to make good assessments so that you can assess as to whether or not a child is in jeopardy of injury. And it is sometimes a fine line to walk. Certainly if there is any doubt though, I think it would be fair to say that you err on the side of protecting the child.

Now the criteria that you were talking about that's necessary — I agree with you — is outlined in the Act itself. In other words, workers have to be thinking when they're in that situation, what authority do I have to even make a decision to apprehend? It's got to be evidence gathered based on the criteria as identified in the Act itself. And then, as I said, that's often a decision not made by the worker. It may be in the case of an emergency, but there of course is good supervision. We have lots of training around the protocols there.

As a matter of fact, we have set up a new procedure, a new unit here in Regina whereby we're, I believe, locating police officers and social workers together, medical social workers, who will do joint assessments to make sure that we learn every day to make sure that we just have the best protocols available and make the best assessments available.

But still at the end of the day, whatever we do, if we apprehend a child, we've got to account for our behaviour and decisions in the court system, have to make that application within seven days, and we have to have solid evidence that there were reasons to make that decision. And that's important because we need to maintain our credibility as well.

Now we hear about some of the high-profile cases. But there are just dozens and dozens and dozens, if not hundreds over the years, that are handled very well and done properly. And I think that's the collective experience that is important to have.

We provide a lot of training in addition to the educational

qualifications. We provide a lot of training to making sure that we continue to be at the forefront in the field, to ensure that there is good practice occurring.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, are permanent wards able to commit themselves to the minister under section 56, and by doing this, must they attend school? Is that one criteria?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, this is the section whereby we . . . where a 16- or 17-year-old could enter an agreement with the department. We had 42 of those across the province, only 42 of those, and it is on all occasions based on a plan and usually, I'm advised, to allow a young person to just sort of finish and complete a school term or sort of finalize the plan that's in place. So it's very much related to a specific, in a sense, a contract and a commitment, fulfilment of a plan that a young person wants to complete.

Mr. Toth: — A couple of questions in regards to that, Mr. Minister. What funds are available to the ward in this instance, and at what age do permanent wards disassociate themselves with the government? Would it be at age 18? Maybe you could explain this to us.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, 18 is the age, and we're talking about permanent wards here, and up to 21 if the young person is completing a school plan. And most of these are still in foster care. Most of these are still in foster care and may have been in foster care and they're just sort of completing their plans, or there may be some that are in room-and-board situations.

Very few would be on their own. They may be 19, 20, going to say, technical school or something like that; I think there are one or two of those in Moose Jaw. And that individual then would be living on his or her own.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I asked my question based on permanent wards. I should ask one other question that continually arises and that is: can a person just walk out and say, I'm tired of living with mom and dad — at 16 or 17 — and come and ask to be placed as a permanent ward of the state?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — We have . . . the case you were talking about, we have a total of 218 across the province out of the 40,000 there. But no, someone can't just walk in and do that. That wouldn't really be possible.

Basically, these young people come into permanent wardship and may enter some sort of agreement that we referred to in the earlier question, based on a fairly thorough analysis that the home situation is just such that it's not possible to go back there and to function and to pursue the goals and plans that the young person might have.

So, and this is really based on dysfunction back there, not a parent-teen conflict or anything like that, you know, because as I said earlier, the parents are responsible for their children. I think that the fact that there are only 218 altogether in this category indicates that parents are taking responsibility for their children.

Mr. Toth: — So I take it then, Mr. Minister, if a person just walked into an office of a worker and asked for ward status, that the worker would take the time to assess the situation and determine whether or not they have a legitimate reason to become a ward of the state, or would also then take the time to counsel them and suggest it's still most important for them to be at home.

And I guess if I could ask you what steps would be taken if a person does come and request being a permanent ward, does the worker not only sit down with the individual, but would the worker sit down with the parents to determine why that individual may have come and asked to become a ward of the state?

And also would the worker try and work out an understanding between the individual, the young person, and the parents, as to building a better working relationship? Is that what would transpire if a person asked, came and asked, to become a ward of the state?

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Well you've describe it exactly right and just the only point I would make is if you're over . . . if you're 16 you can't walk in and do that. Any wardships that extend beyond that are really young people who have been wards prior to that. So yes, but you describe it accurately in terms of the family assessment and so on.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, my colleague has a few questions. I think he sent some information, and he would like to ask a few questions . . . read this information. But before I allow him to proceed, I'd just like to clarify one thing in case his questions proceed beyond the normal sitting time.

And that is — I'd asked earlier about the global questions — I'm wondering if your department would take the . . . and as soon as the global questions are ready, rather than waiting for us to come back to the Assembly and to further our discussion, would they agree to send over the forms to our caucus office as soon as they're ready? We'd really appreciate it.

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — We'll do that as soon as they're ready rather than waiting until we're back in here to do it, yes.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, it's fortuitous that I just received this today from a constituent since Social Services are on board today. And it deals with a Social Services case in my constituency.

I know you have the information there. I'm just wondering if this is a normal circumstance, the funding that this person would receive. Or what would a person receive, a single person, on social assistance? What kind of funding would they receive?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, just looking quickly here at the information you sent over, and I appreciate that, it appears as though the individual must own his own home, because there's no shelter allowance on here; but has an income of \$101, total needs of 296, and we're supplementing the difference.

Just by looking at the medical here and thinking that, given our policy where we pay actual utilities, we pay actual, so he shouldn't . . . We made that decision so people don't have to use their food allowance to pay utilities. So he shouldn't have to be cutting into his food allowance on that front.

It would appear from the medical, just at first glance, that he might have a partial disability, or there might be some disability consideration here. If that's the case, then we could provide some additional support to him. And also he of course would be eligible for supplementary health coverage. Again looking on the surface, as a client, he would be.

What I would suggest, if it's okay with you, is that if you could provide his number, if this is okay, that we could contact him directly. I believe that would be through our Estevan office. I'm not sure what community this in, but — Kisbey. That would be Estevan, yes. We'd be happy to follow up on it, if you like.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, if you would, please. You know as much about this case as I do. As I said, it just came in this afternoon so this is all the information I have on it also. The fact is I just received it about five minutes ago or so.

What would a person under social assistance normally receive for a single person? And what would they receive for a shelter allowance if they didn't own their own home? If they did own their own home, would they receive anything if there was a mortgage against that home?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — The single person that you referred to, for example if employable, would get a shelter rate of 210. If the individual was not employable, it could be up to 320 — a higher level for those who are unemployable.

The individual would get 195 for food, clothing, and personal allowance, and higher if it's a person disabled. A little bit higher if the person is disabled. And then, in addition to that, the actual utilities.

There is always a special needs provision, which is accessed, maybe special food, special diet, and so on, if the person is disabled.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What would happen in the case of an individual who . . . You mentioned this person that looks like he owns his own home. If he owns his own home but has a mortgage against it, what happens in that particular circumstance?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — Yes, the person has shelter needs; therefore we would pay the mortgage up to the shelter allowance if they own their own home.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What kind of . . . you say that there's additional support in the case of disabilities. What kind of additional supports are we talking about here and what kind of levels?

Hon. Mr. Pringle: — The basic allowance rate is \$40 generally for a disabled person. But there may be transportation needs based on medical travel, or special diet, and this sort of thing. So those would be the other opportunities where you could access special needs.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.