

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present names of people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Assiniboia, Rockglen, and Limerick.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of citizens concerned about the impending closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Signatures on this petition are mainly from the Regina area and rural Saskatchewan in the South.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to again present petitions of names from people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition are from Regina, Denare Beach, Melville.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition from the citizens of southern Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer read as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider the decision to close the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by many concerned citizens from the communities of Lumsden, from Regina Beach, and from the city of Regina.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present petitions of names of people in Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Chaplin and Moose Jaw.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk:— According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reverse the decision to close the Swift Current Care Centre; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce on behalf of the Premier a group of 34 students seated in your gallery this morning. They are from St. John School in Saskatoon. They are grade 6 and 7 students, and they are joining us this morning for a good portion of question period. So if you'd join with me in welcoming them, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too am very pleased to introduce on behalf of our Premier, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale, a group of 60 students seated in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker. This is the Saskatoon French School. They are here accompanied by their two teachers, Lucien Deux and Clément Bertoncini, and their chaperons, Mrs. Jerika and Mrs. Brooke.

I hope that they enjoy themselves in the gallery. I know that I'll be looking forward to meeting with them later on this morning. So please join me in extending to them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all the members of the House, a group of people in your gallery. I see 11 teachers from the Canora Junior Elementary School, a school within the Canora division. Welcome, and I hope you enjoy the day.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Universities' Spring Convocation

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the end of a week-long ritual of convocation exercises at our province's two universities and affiliated colleges. In total, more than 4,000 students are receiving degrees, diplomas, and certificates in the full range of fields.

Our Saskatchewan universities are providing world-class education to Saskatchewan residents, many of whom have gone on to make remarkable contributions to our national culture and economy.

This week, two of our Saskatchewan-born cultural icons are being honoured for their contributions with honorary doctorates. Actor Eric Peterson and singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie are being honoured by the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) and U of R (University of Regina) respectively.

Mr. Speaker, by conferring these honorary degrees and the more than 4,000 other degrees and diplomas this week, our universities are recognizing the confidence our province places in the abilities of these fine people.

I want to make special mention this morning of Brad Hornung who is receiving a degree in history from the University of Regina. Mr. Hornung, as members may remember, is the former Regina Pats hockey player who, because of an injury, is now a paraplegic. A decade after his accident, he is now receiving his degree and has been awarded the Champion College Award of Merit for his courage of spirit. He is only the fourth recipient of this award.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to congratulate Mr. Hornung, Ms. Sainte-Marie, and Mr. Peterson, as well as the other graduates, for their fine accomplishments over the past several years. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Place Essay

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize a constituent from Weekes, a grade 11 student, Lindsay Grisdale. Lindsay placed first in the Saskatchewan Elks and Royal Purple literary contest with her essay, "How to say no to drugs and alcohol and still keep your friends." Her essay also received an honourable mention at the national level.

Lindsay's closing paragraph, which shows much insight, is pertinent for youth and adults. She writes:

By using your resources such as communication, friends, self-belief, and self-control, you can accomplish a major task. The task is saying no to drugs and alcohol and still keeping your friends. It takes a lot of courage to go against the crowd to do what you believe in your heart is right. To anyone reading this who has made this decision and has had the strength to follow through with it, I commend you. You, as an individual, have done something of utmost importance. In our society, you have become a model individual which is a highly honoured role and you are an incredible person for doing what you have done.

Mr. Speaker, Lindsay's essay shows a wisdom that many adults lack. I ask this Assembly to join me in congratulating Lindsay on her first place for her insightful essay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Women's March Against Poverty

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard yesterday the Women's March Against Poverty will pass through Saskatchewan for four days beginning today.

The caravan of marchers will arrive in Lloydminster at noon today and will make stops in Saskatoon, Weyburn, Regina, Moose Jaw, and Qu'Appelle. As well as recognizing the marchers, I believe we should acknowledge the organizers because, as we all know, an event of this magnitude does not happen just because someone wishes it will. It has to be planned and organized by individuals banding together in common cause.

The march is sponsored by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and by the Canadian Labour Congress.

Sunday will see the march begin at 3 o'clock with activities in the park — Victoria Park — from 4 o'clock until 9 in the evening. Their call is a simple and profound one. They are marching to call attention to the fact that we in Canada still have a long way to go to eliminate poverty and injustice for all people and to remind us that none of us can rest easy until social justice is universal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Youth Centre's New Building

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the Assembly about a ground-breaking ceremony taking place today at 2 p.m. in Weyburn for a new Weyburn Youth Centre. The foundations are being poured and two buildings, one from Goodwater and one from Colgate, will be moved in, renovated, and will become the new Weyburn Youth Centre.

This project began about two years ago under the guidance of Jerry Dennill. The purpose of the centre was to address the needs of youth aged 12 to 19 in the Weyburn area. The centre firmly believes that if you invest in youth, you are investing in the community and the future.

The task of building a permanent home for the centre began about one and a half years ago. To help in this project, the city of Weyburn recently donated a piece of land for this centre to build on. Through community and business support, the centre has managed to raise all but \$49,500 of the money necessary to complete the project. Youth employment through provincial and federal programs has also been established to help with this project.

The new Weyburn Youth Centre will include services such as a games room, café, gym, and a weight room. Programs will include sports leagues and annual outdoor trips targeted for financially distressed families and the disabled, although anyone will be able to take part.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the Weyburn Youth Centre on this important initiative. I would also like to commend them

on the outstanding service they provide their community. The foundations being poured today are more than concrete; they are the future of a strong community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Multiple Sclerosis Walkathon

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I understand that this weekend there's going to be a special walkathon in the city and possibly across the province to do with multiple sclerosis, as far as raising funds for more research in the area of that disease.

And I think it's appropriate and I think we need to recognize and say thank you to the individuals who will take the time this weekend to march on behalf of the multiple sclerosis individuals who are suffering from that disease across this province.

It comes a little more closer to home when all of a sudden you find a relative or friend is struggling with a disease such as multiple sclerosis, which most of us haven't really thought about in the past. And another significant thing is this province does have one of the highest incidences in Canada.

So I would like to say hats off to each and every individual who is thinking of their fellow colleagues and fellow friends and neighbours who are suffering from the disease and giving of their time to raise funds to help in research to find ways of overcoming the problems this disease creates. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Recognition of the Metis People of Saskatchewan

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Speaker, this is Aboriginal Awareness Week. On Tuesday I was pleased to make a statement focusing on our aboriginal people represented by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. Today I want to recognize the continuing struggle for recognition and ongoing contribution to Saskatchewan society by the Metis people, another of our founding peoples.

I want to make special recognition of the political arm of the Saskatchewan Metis people, the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, and its president, Mr. Jim Durocher. As Mr. Durocher has said, and I quote:

All Louis Riel wanted was land for his people and the ability to govern themselves. The same principles apply today.

Perhaps progress towards this goal has been slow, but some progress has been made and there are some significant examples of Metis accomplishment, not the least of which is the Gabriel Dumont Institute and many programs devoted to educating Metis people.

Mr. Speaker, as Aboriginal Awareness Week draws to a close, I

wish the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan and all Metis people well in their endeavours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Big River Trade Show

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend Big River is demonstrating its community spirit in a very big way. On Saturday, Big River is hosting their annual trade show, and as of yesterday over 60 booths were registered, offering food to financial services, and everything in between.

The day kicks off at 8 o'clock with a pancake breakfast, and the show starts at 10 and runs until 4. The host of this activity is the Big River Chamber of Commerce. The chamber is also hosting the northern final in the provincial trucking competition. The winner of that competition will go to the provincial finals.

The Big River volunteer fire department will be hosting and operating the dine and dance, with music by the Diamond Ridge, in the evening at the curling rink. There is also a loggers' rodeo being hosted by the Weyerhaeuser timberland division, and a weekly farmers' market.

It is the kind of big, bold activity that makes Saskatchewan the best place in the world in which to live. I ask my colleagues in the Assembly to join with me in congratulating the dozens of volunteers, town officials and businessmen, who have done their part in making Big River the place to be this weekend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Local Light Opera Production

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the Regina Lyric Light Opera on their latest production, *The Mikado*. I was there on opening night and enjoyed every minute of it.

This version of *The Mikado* is different. It's set in modern day Japan with electronics, fax machines, rock stars, and the other trappings we surround ourselves with today. The style of this production is fresh, innovative, and highly entertaining. You might say this modern version updates the original by poking fun at today's corporate environment just as Gilbert and Sullivan poked fun at the people of their own time.

It's also fun when stage productions poke a little fun at people in your own community, and this one included a special reference to our colleague, the Deputy Premier, in one of the songs. It's always nice to recognize someone in the cast — in this case, Noel Hamilton, son of the member for Regina Wascana Plains.

This excellent production was funny, witty, and absolutely delightful. It was also the work of countless dedicated individuals, some of them on stage, but many more not.

I'd like to congratulate Regina Lyric Light Opera society for its latest production. I would recommend it to everyone. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Assiniboine Valley Health District Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, an all too familiar story was heard last evening in Canora. About 450 people attended a meeting to discuss what to do in the face of major health care funding cuts from this NDP (New Democratic Party) government.

Those in attendance heard how acute care beds in the Assiniboine Valley Health District have dropped more than one third in the past year. They also heard to expect a further 8 per cent reduction in acute care funding in the next two years.

Mr. Speaker, the one positive aspect of this rally was that community leaders from the district were not fighting each other. They focused their frustration where it truly belongs — at this NDP government.

Will the Minister of Health explain what steps he's prepared to take to ensure that the residents of Canora, Preeceville, Kamsack, and others in the district are provided proper acute care funding?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the meeting called by the district health board in the Assiniboine health region was in fact to discuss that very point, their plan to provide acute care to the people in the communities of Canora, Preeceville, and Kamsack, and the surrounding communities.

The member will know that last year the previous board had a plan to convert the Preeceville hospital into a health centre, and that was not popular in the community. Now the board has a plan under which they're trying to keep those three acute care facilities open. That's what the board's trying to do, Mr. Speaker.

And I have every confidence that the board has analysed the number of acute care beds necessary in each of those three communities and they're trying to come up with the best, most logical number of beds in each of those communities, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I would also like to mention to the Minister of Health that three of those board members resigned last year when that plan was found . . . that it could not work. And such is taking place again. We have a plan that is not working.

Mr. Minister, there have been massive reductions in health care funding and the quality of health care for Saskatchewan residents, particularly those in rural areas, is deteriorating. It is not Ottawa, but rather the misplaced priorities of this government that are at fault. The sick and the elderly are

waiting for the Minister of Health and his government to begin taking some responsibility for its actions. They don't want more excuses.

Mr. Speaker, I heard last night that the announced cuts will leave the Assiniboine Valley Health District with 42 acute care beds, or 2.3 beds per 1,000 residents — possibly the lowest rate in all of Canada.

Will the minister stand in this House and justify these actions — a direct result of his government's lack of acute care health funding.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that in terms of overall funding to the Assiniboine Valley Health District, that funding was cut by .4 percent this year. It was almost the same as last year.

But I want to point out to the member and to the House — and I wonder if he pointed this out to the people at the meeting — that the federal cut to health care, translated for that district, means that approximately \$500,000 less was received from the Liberals to put into health care in the district this year.

And I wonder, when the member was talking about so-called cut-backs from the province, whether he mentioned that the Liberals had taken half a million dollars out of the district in effect and that every dime of that money was put back in by this government, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if he mentioned that to the people present at the meeting. But I doubt that he did, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rural Health Centre

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also attended last night's meeting in Canora and heard firsthand the frustration and the anxiety that this NDP government has created because of its under-funding of the health system in Saskatchewan.

Further adding to those feelings were comments from the government member from Yorkton, who indicated that health care and educational services should only be centred in larger urban areas where they can be provided cost effectively.

Will the Minister of Health explain if this is the government's aim — to centralize these services and allow health care to die in rural Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — As I have pointed out in the House before and to the member, Mr. Speaker, many people go from rural areas to get certain services in the larger centres that could be provided at home.

And one of the points that we have been trying to make is that the seven largest districts in Saskatchewan have 61 per cent of the population but are providing 94 per cent of the surgeries

and 79 per cent of the births. And that's something we have to talk about because there are services that people can get close to home, and we have to encourage them to do so.

But at the same time I say to the member from Arm River, that if one of his constituents chooses to go into another centre to get health care, one of the principles of health care is that we will pay for that health care where they chose to get it. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the dollars follow the people. We do not encourage this. But at the same time if anyone from Saskatchewan needs health care and they go to a particular place to get it, they are entitled to have it paid for, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The comments last evening by the member from Yorkton only confirmed what many have believed to be true for some time. This government has absolutely no commitment to health care beyond the borders of Regina and Saskatoon. They fail to realize that communities such as Canora, Swift Current, Melfort, Estevan, many others which have recently experienced devastating cuts in health care, are major rural centres.

Mr. Speaker, if in fact the aim of this government is to centralize all health care services, as the member for Yorkton indicates, will the minister table this government's list of communities that it sees as the sole location for health care services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the member that the Assiniboine Valley Health District has the highest percentage of population over age 75 in the province. And to meet the needs, the district has increased home-based services and is continuing to do so; increased respite care through both home care and district facilities; increased adult day programs; and is increasing, Mr. Speaker, the number of long-term care beds, increasing the number of beds.

But I want to say to the member that if he thinks that the people of the province accept the solutions he has been proposing . . . which are, yesterday he said that we should not have a national medicare system funded in part by the federal government, a notion that we reject, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago he said that people should have to pay user fees for their health care, a notion that we reject, Mr. Speaker. And yesterday he also said that we should be imposing premiums on the people, which, Mr. Speaker, is another form of taxation. And the member should be upfront with the people and tell them what he's actually proposing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

St. Joseph's Hospital Funding

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, this government is bringing down a package of Bills that will give the minister all encompassing power to dictate what services will be provided by what facility in the health care districts.

Last night the Minister of Health met with representatives from the health board in Estevan who raised their concern over a \$1 million cut to St. Joseph's Hospital, a cut that'll cost jobs and severely harm patient care. Did the minister tell the people of Estevan last night that because of the new legislation, it'll be his ultimate control to decide what services will be provided at St. Joseph's Hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, as the member says, I did meet with the Estevan . . . or Southeast Health District and others in Estevan last night. And the member doesn't say that the major problem that the St. Joseph's Hospital has faced in Estevan is that they have lost about a million dollars in funding from Alberta which was paid to treat Alberta residents who came there for alcohol addiction treatment. Alberta has discontinued that, and that's been difficult for the health board to deal with.

But that has been the major cut, Mr. Speaker. The member isn't being completely straightforward when he doesn't point that out and suggests that we've cut funding to that district by a million dollars, which we have not done, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Health assured the people concerned about the cuts that he would meet with them. It's about time. I just think it's sad that it takes a protest to get this government's full attention. Will the minister now agree to meet with communities' coalitions in Canora and in Central Butte and in Melfort and in Wadena and every other community coalition to address their concerns? Or will they have to throw a full-scale protest before you'll even consider this?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I want to say to the member, Mr. Speaker, that I was very pleased to meet with the people in Estevan last night, and they were quite reasonable actually — more reasonable than the members opposite, if I may say so.

They expressed their concerns quite clearly. They're concerned about the health system, and they work hard in the health system.

But before the member gets too carried away, I want him and his fellow Liberals to know that they didn't have very much good to say about the Liberals, Mr. Speaker. In fact when I sat down with them, they said that they knew about the federal transfer cuts for health care and understood that a major part of the problem was what the Liberal Party is doing.

Moreover, they are opposed to the end of national medicare as proposed by the Liberals. They are opposed to the two-tier, pay-as-you-go system advocated by the Liberals. They are opposed to the user fees that the Liberals advocate as well, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposed Health Legislation

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions as well are to the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, your Crown foundation of district health boards Act is another example of the NDP spending money on health bureaucracy and not on health services.

Mr. Minister, Bill 114 calls for a government-appointed board of up to 12 people to decide where charitable donations to local health facilities and districts will go; 12 people who will be paid per diems and salaries and mileage, Mr. Minister, for no good reason. People have been donating funds to their local hospitals for years and the system has worked fine.

Mr. Minister, why all of a sudden is it necessary for you to set up yet another level of bureaucracy to oversee charitable donations to health facilities when health care services are being slashed and health care dollars are so scarce?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a question that I'm prepared to deal with at length when the Bill is before the House and I'll certainly do that with the member. But I want to say to the member that this Crown foundations legislation is something that is being recommended by health care fund-raising organizations because it would assist them in their activities.

This is something that they want for large donations which would be channelled to them, Mr. Speaker. This is not money that would go to the government. In fact this would cost the government money in the form of foregone revenue. But I think if the member checks with the people that work in hospital foundations and so on, they actually welcome this legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question to the minister. Mr. Minister, this Act states that the appointed board will take into consideration the directions of the donor, but the board isn't bound by those directions. In other words, a person can will or donate money specifically to their local hospital but your board can take the money and put it anywhere you want it to go. That, Mr. Minister, is not right.

Just this week you said, and I quote from *Hansard*: "either you believe in local decision making or you do not." Well, Mr. Minister, you're proving once again that the NDP do not believe in local autonomy and that the wishes of Saskatchewan people don't matter to you.

Mr. Minister, do the right thing, amend this Bill so people will receive additional tax credits for health donations but abolish your government's money grab from local health donations. Will you do that, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly be prepared to take the member's suggestions into account when we get into the Bill and we can analyse what the member says. But I want to assure the member that he's drawing a very long

bow. This is legislation designed to accommodate federal tax rules to allow people to give donations to local people and receive a complete deduction for their donation. There's no interest on the part of the government, Mr. Speaker, in raising money for government purposes. That is not the intent of the Bill. In fact the Bill will actually decrease revenue to government. I think the member's drawing a very long bow here, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Service Districts Act

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I direct my question to whichever minister available today would like to take responsibility for yet another broken promise. A month ago . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Now I remind the Leader of the Third Party that questions in question period must — order — must be directed to ministers in the context of their portfolio, and I ask him to put his question that way.

Mr. Boyd: — I'll direct my question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. A month ago the Municipal Government minister promised SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) that The Service Districts Act would be pulled this session. Now they've been informed that you intend to pass the legislation through but have promised not to proclaim it.

Mr. Premier, that's like putting a gun to someone's head and saying: don't worry, it's not loaded; trust me. Your assurances just aren't good enough. Will you honour your government's promise? Will you pull The Service Districts Act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister, in responding on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Government, has been very clear in that it is her intention to pass this legislation in this term of government and that it would await proclamation before further consultations take place with municipal governance structures.

And I think the minister has been very straightforward with that regard. The member, the Leader of the Third Party, may not agree with her position, and that certainly is his prerogative. But I would want to say that the minister has been very open in working with local governments and assisting them to consolidate, where they desire, some of their operations. And I think it's a very straightforward, I think it's a very reasonable, approach to take.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, why then did the minister responsible for Municipal Government give the promise to SUMA and SARM that you were going to pull the legislation?

SARM has been requesting a meeting with your government and you have refused. They are worried about your

government's forced amalgamation of municipalities, just like you did with health care districts. They are worried about what your government has in store for them. They have many concerns and you are refusing to listen to them; you are ignoring them.

Mr. Minister, will you commit today to meet with SARM immediately, as they have requested, as they have requested of the Premier? Will you personally contact SARM today and set up the meeting that they have requested, that you should be giving them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that discussions with SARM and with SUMA have been ongoing by Municipal Government over the last months with respect to this legislation and other issues. The minister has been very open, very accessible, and will continue to be. For the Leader of the Third Party to suggest that dialogue with respect to municipal government has not been ongoing and that there hasn't been discussions with SARM and SUMA is just simply not correct.

With respect to his comments on forced amalgamation, I think the minister's been very clear in that regard. The member is also aware about that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We too have had many calls from RM (rural municipality) boards who are very concerned about the recent announcements about the district health Act. The Minister of Municipal Government indicated to the media recently that The Service Districts Act would be put on the back burner. She stated and I quote:

We don't intend to proceed with it any further at the current time until we're sure that we have a pulse on what the majority view is out there.

Mr. Speaker, it has come as a great shock to hear reports that the NDP government now intends to push through this proposed legislation. Is it true?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, my answer to this member is the same as it was to that member — that the minister has been very clear with respect to the legislation and it will pass through this House. It will await proclamation pending further consultation with the stakeholders.

I think the minister has been very clear in that regard. That may not satisfy the member but that is the process that the minister has indicated she intends to pursue and that of course will be her decision.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members of this Assembly are aware, the minister responsible for Municipal Government and her NDP government justified breaking a promise to return 10 per cent of VLT (video lottery terminal) revenues to local governments by stating that this money would be instead directed into establishing a province-wide 911 system.

Yet when questioned on this issue on April 22 in the House, the minister stated that municipal governments will now be called upon to help fund the establishment of a province-wide 911 system. Will the minister or her designate explain why it would appear this government is preparing to break another promise to local governments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, the member again has not got his facts right and I wish he would spend some time doing some research or at least hire someone capable of doing it for him.

He may not be aware of this, but the fact that the VLT revenue being allocated to the 911 system was by agreement with the stakeholders. I would urge the member to spend a little time, discover in fact what the facts, what the truths, are and then bring questions related to that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the minister stated a number of times that the government is committed to establishing a fully-enhanced, province-wide 911 system. However, under questioning in this House, the minister stated, and I quote:

The problem with providing for mandatory fully enhanced is that there will be more sparsely populated areas of the province that simply don't have the resources to make a significant contribution, to have locally a call centre of trained people available 24 hours a day.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister or her designate explain if this NDP government is truly committed to fully enhanced system for all Saskatchewan residents, or is the government working towards a patchwork system in which rural areas are once again left in the dark?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, let me say that the member may be in the dark, but I can commit to him that rural Saskatchewan residents will not be left in the dark. The minister has been very clear with respect to 911 in that she intends to introduce a system and work with municipal governments in rural Saskatchewan to ensure that people have access to this kind of service.

I want to say to the member, Mr. Speaker, that this particular member is doing more to destroy morale, more to destroy the confidence of business in this province, more to divide urban and rural Saskatchewan residents, than any member that I've witnessed in this province. And all you've got to do is read the *Regina Leader-Post* and see what comments are made by

corporations in this province that hire hundreds and hundreds of people, like Crown Life, in order to confirm exactly what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Investigation of Patient Death

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, one month ago I brought to the attention of this House the death of 84-year-old Moose Jaw resident, Jack Nicholson. As members of this Assembly may recall, Mr. Nicholson suffered a fall while in the hands of home care last September. On October 3, he died.

When I raised this issue the minister stated, and I quote: "If something (was) wrong . . . this should be properly investigated".

However, the only parties to look into this issue have been a home care supervisor and SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), the district board's insurer. Both are self-interested parties.

Mr. Speaker, Lorraine Michon, the daughter of Mr. Nicholson, does not believe this is good enough. Will the Minister of Health explain if any further investigation will take place in this matter?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I consulted with the Moose Jaw district to see if this matter had in fact been investigated. And I was assured by the district that it had been investigated and that the result of their investigation was that they felt that the matter had been properly handled.

Now the . . . I understand that this matter is currently before the courts. I'm led to believe that an action has been started by the family and I'm led to believe that they will be pursuing this in the courts. And if that is the case, then in fact I think that would be the appropriate place for it to be resolved and it would not be appropriate for me to comment with respect to the matter, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the circumstances leading up to the death of Mr. Nicholson do need to be looked at further. He was placed under the watch of home care only after it was determined that no nursing home or palliative care beds were available. One . . . only days later, he had suffered a fatal fall.

In a letter from SGI, which I can share with the minister, indicates that during each of Mr. Nicholson's frequent trips to the bathroom, he was accompanied by a home care worker. Yet the same correspondence states, and I quote, "He was left only momentarily when he requested a drink of water."

Mr. Speaker, Lorraine Michon feels the onus is on the Minister of Health to ensure that such an incident is fully investigated so as to prevent such a tragedy from taking place again. If this government is prepared to go to extreme lengths to clear the names of cabinet ministers, will the minister make a commitment to thoroughly investigate this fatality?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, there is a difference in terms of versions of events, I think, between the family and the district health board. The advice I have received is that the district health board does not agree with the version of events put forward by the family.

I believe that the family wishes to put its version of events forward. They've initiated legal proceedings in that regard. And I think it would be inappropriate to comment on this matter which is before the courts, but the family will have every opportunity to put the facts before the court, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Murray: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to introduce young people to this Chamber, and it's doubly so today because we have seated in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker, a group of 36 students from Stony Plain, Alberta.

They are here visiting from High Park School. They are accompanied by their teacher, Koreen Kerswell, and their chaperons, Mrs. Eleniak, Ms. Goebel, Mr. and Mrs. Martfeld. They are going to spend some time in the gallery and then have a tour later on of this fine building.

So please join me in welcoming our neighbours from Alberta.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — With leave, to introduce a motion with respect to the estimates of the Legislative Assembly being referred.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Referral of Estimates to Standing Committee on Estimates

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much. I will, at the conclusion of a few brief comments, refer the estimates of the Legislative Assembly to the Committee on Estimates, as we do.

Just before doing, I want to make a comment about . . . This may be an appropriate occasion to make a comment about our staff in the Legislative Assembly. Each year they're here, through thick and through thin. At this time of the year the hours get awfully long, as they stayed here until 20 after 11 last night, then they're here early in the morning preparing for our Friday morning session. So I want to thank them.

In particular, I want to extend congratulations to one of the members of our staff. Some members are here for year after year, some are normally only here one year. That includes the pages.

This year we have one of the pages who is today convocating at the University of Regina. This is a proud moment for you and it's a proud moment for us. I want all members to join me in congratulating Leasa McDougall on her convocation. Perhaps stand up, Leasa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — With that having been said, I will move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the estimates for the Legislative Assembly, being vote 21, and the estimates for the Provincial Auditor, being vote 28, be withdrawn from the Committee of Finance and referred to the Standing Committee on Estimates.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Convert, convert.

The Speaker: — Question 105 is converted to motions for returns (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 92

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Mitchell that **Bill No. 92 — An Act respecting Elections** be now read a second time.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Bill 92, An Act respecting Elections in our province is a very long and detailed piece of legislation. It's also legislation that's long overdue in the province. The world has changed so much in the last 25 years and our province has changed right along with it.

Clearly it was time to take a second look at The Election Act to see what changes or improvements were necessary. Then, Mr. Speaker, a great many changes have been made; many of them minor, but a few major. And on a whole I think the majority of the amendments that have been made to the Act are for the better. Certainly not to say that we don't have some serious concerns with the proposed legislation. We'll touch on those concerns later.

But always wanting to remain positive, I would like to first talk about some of the details of the Bill that we do very much support. Much attention has been paid to the fact that this Bill

now makes it easier for people to vote in a general election in our province. And anything that would accomplish this is obviously a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan residents can be proud of the fact that in most general elections the voter turnout rate is among the highest in the entire country. Well turnout dipped a great deal in the last provincial election; one hopes that that was only an aberration and the high voting patterns will return in time for the next election. And I'm sure they will, since often people do turn out in greater numbers to defeat a government.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, I think the changes that have been made in this Bill will encourage more people to vote, and it makes it easier for them to do so. The advent of mobile polls is a great move. It will aid those who find it difficult to leave their homes for health reasons, in order to get to a polling station, to have a polling station brought to them. Therefore people who might otherwise skip casting their ballot because of the inconvenience are now able to do so. That's a good idea and one which we wholeheartedly approve of.

As well the extension of the absentee and mail-in ballot procedures are good news because it would give those who are out of province temporarily, such as overseas members of the armed forces or students attending institutions outside of Saskatchewan, a chance to exercise their franchise — an option many of them did not have prior to making these changes. Again we think that's a good move and we support that completely.

As well, Mr. Speaker, this Bill gives some latitude to the Chief Electoral Officer in cases of emergency to act quickly to ensure everyone gets a chance to vote. If these options had been in place in time for last year's provincial election more people could have cast a ballot, in particular those in northern communities who were evacuated from their homes during the fire season. As a result, they were away from their community on election day and they were unable to vote.

I'm glad to see this same situation could be handled in future elections in a different manner. The same would go for the case of the men who were fighting the fires, who were unable to vote.

I believe another positive aspect of this legislation is the move towards a permanent voters' list and the sharing of information with the federal government. Anything we can do to make the process more streamlined and more accurate is a good move in our estimation.

Giving the Chief Electoral Officer the right to commence enumeration prior to election calls, rather than restricting him to enumerating only after the writ has been dropped, will make the job easier and the process run more smoothly with less people being left off of the initial list.

Making this process run better as well, Mr. Speaker, is the fact the legislation now recognizes we're fast approaching the end of the millennium, and that the world now makes use of computers. As I understand it, the current legislation specifically spells out voters' lists and the like must be typed out on manual typewriters. So obviously the change that's being

proposed here . . . being a minor one, but actually it's a huge leap back into the 1980s really if the truth be known. The use of computers in this manner will no doubt make life easier for election workers.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also attempts to put some clarification into some of the rules we as political candidates live under. I think we can all identify with problems faced as first-time candidates trying to get a grasp of all of the rules involved in the process. And I know any of the MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) sitting here today probably had to wait months for their electoral expenses rebate. Some maybe are still waiting. I think anything that could be done to clarify the rules and speed up the process is a good step. I understand the Chief Electoral Officer will publish guidelines to help the various parties and their candidates in following proper procedures.

This, along with the aspect that brings about greater accountability, is something we all have to take seriously. As the Tories have just proven with their sudden discovery of \$400,000, parties have to be held accountable and there must be procedures in place to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to make sure that accountability exists.

On this aspect of the new legislation we will be asking for some greater clarification in committee over the exact powers the Chief Electoral Officer will have and how much scrutiny individuals will be under. There's also many housekeeping issues in the Bill that we may require some clarification of but again that would be able to be done in committee.

Mr. Speaker, there's much in the Bill that the official opposition is in favour of, but it's probably not surprising to anyone that a Bill of this length and breadth, there are some concerns that we feel must be debated fully in the House. Of course, as has been widely reported in the media, the official opposition does object strongly to the change allowing Crown corporations to advertise during election campaigns.

We understand fully the pressure that is being put on our Crowns as finally they are beginning to face the real world of competition, and in that real world, advertising and marketing are components to doing business. We understand that but, Mr. Speaker, we also understand as long as these corporations are under the control of government they can and will be used to political advantage. And I'm afraid we saw examples of this in the past.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, who is responsible for drafting this piece of legislation, states that any party in power that dares try to use these rules for political advantage is asking for troubles from the voters. He says any government so blatant in its political machinations will surely pay dearly at the ballot box. Mr. Speaker, that could very well be, but we've seen in this province in the last 10 or 15 years that we've had governments that have bent rules to their own advantage to gain political favour or advantage.

We can understand the need for certain ads to be taken out by Crowns such as in the case of public safety. But, Mr. Speaker, the changes are far more wide-ranging than that. The changes allow for Crowns to continue to run ads that were contracted

before the election call.

Now one might call me cynical, Mr. Speaker, but I believe that the government usually has a pretty good idea when elections are going to be called, especially now that the government has more or less committed itself to elections every four years and in the spring. And it's not too difficult to imagine a Crown corporation contracting an advertising campaign prior to an election call, even though it knew fully well such a call was coming. I think that's not stretching one's imagination too far. It's not too difficult to imagine that the advertising could very easily be put in place to manipulate voters, just like any other election advertising. This is a concern that we have.

While watching the Tories and the NDP work, as I say, it's not hard to imagine, as unfortunate as we may find that. I think, with this change, we're heading towards even more manipulation by government, and using public dollars to perform the manipulation makes it that much more difficult for us to stomach. While the government opposite and particularly the minister responsible for the Bill may say it's absolutely not going to be the case, I wish we could be so sure.

This is our major concern with the Bill that is proposed, and we do have a few others as well that we'll be addressing in committee, Mr. Speaker, so we just now move to send the Bill to committee.

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

(1100)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 17 — An Act to amend certain Acts respecting Highways and Vehicles

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to proceed through this Bill again this morning. I have with me, Mr. Bill McCallum, who's the manager of driver licensing, to my right. Immediately behind Mr. McCallum is Anna Young, who's the manager of traffic and safety promotions. And, Mr. Chairman, directly behind me is Mr. Alan Cockman, who's the vice-president of the auto fund.

Item 1

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to the minister's officials.

Mr. Minister, the last time we were discussing this Act, we left off at the part where we were discussing the meaning of the new driver. The minister referred to four categories of new drivers. Mr. Minister, could you refresh our memories on those four classifications we discussed last session?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Madam Member. The definition of the new drivers — and we have really three bullets

we'd like to share with you — the first one is anyone who's validating their first driver's licence or who held a valid driver's licence in the last five years, regardless of class, would be the first recognition.

Someone who is . . . out-of-province drivers who do not have two years driving experience in the licence class higher than a learner's licence.

And thirdly, would be a driver entering Saskatchewan from outside of Canada and the United States — would be the three categories, Madam Member, who would be in that classification of designation of — or definition of — who would be considered a new driver.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I'm wondering if you feel that this definition is really clear enough. In interpretation section 89.1, there is no definition of new driver. Only in section 78.1 do we actually get a hint of what you mean. Do you believe you could be more forthcoming in this definition?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Madam Member, the definition will be in the regulation and will more broadly define the definition than what it is in the Act. It will certainly cover the sections that I have . . . or the points that I've talked about but will be more broadly expanded then in the regulation.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I think that it's wrong that it's not in there.

Mr. Minister, while the vast majority of new drivers are 16 years old or near that age, there are cases of new drivers in their 20's and 30's and even older. How does this Bill take those drivers into account?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Madam Member, anyone who would be applying for their driver's licence for the first time under the definitions under which I have described would be categorized as a new driver and it wouldn't matter then what their age would be, whether they're 20 years old, or whether they're 16 years old, or whether they're 50 years old. It isn't age respective.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. New rules have been developed regarding the seizure of vehicles by police. How are these rules different from what they were before?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Of course police could certainly seize vehicles for financial reasons, as it is current. But as our legislation addresses itself in this Bill, it's specifically for unlicensed vehicles . . . drivers.

Ms. Draude: — Have the police actually been given new powers then?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — They've been given authority to impound but they of course can't practice that until the legislation of course is proclaimed.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, do you feel these rules give police any more significant powers in this regard?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — This wouldn't give them any . . . This would just given them additional power, expanded powers that they don't currently have in the legislation until the legislation is proclaimed. But it doesn't expand their authority.

Ms. Draude: — This provision makes it necessary to serve notice of a vehicle seizure on the unauthorized driver, the owner, a garage keeper, and the administrator of the program. Did the government given any consideration in serving a similar notice on a company that holds the mortgage on the vehicles?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — We won't know that until we complete the search on the vehicle. So once the search is completed, then that particular action could implement itself. But we wouldn't know that until the search would be conducted.

Ms. Draude: — Do you believe there would be any advantage in doing that?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think there would be some advantage to that only in the case of unclaimed vehicles, and then of course the appropriate notifications would have to be provided then to the garage keepers prior to the disposal of the vehicle.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, the garage keeper that stores these vehicles has a lien on all the vehicles for unpaid amounts incurred for the seizure and storage. These amounts are to be set out in the regulations. Does the minister know what kind of costs we'll be looking at?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The amounts will be set out in regulation, as you've indicated, and there will be a number of charges that will be included here. And I might just share them with you.

In the first area, for towing and transportation of impounded vehicles with a registered gross weight not exceeding 5,500 kilograms from the place of seizure to the place of impoundment including pick-up and whatever means necessary, and the first day of storage, cost, remitting, administration fee, credit card discounts, and any other costs and charges for any service not otherwise specifically provided for in this schedule, that particular cost will be then \$45.

The storage per day of impounded vehicles with a registered gross weight not exceeding 5,500 kilograms will be \$5 a day. And then of course there'll be towing and transportation of the impound vehicle to a registered gross weight exceeding 5,500 kilograms from the place of seizure to the place of impoundment, including pick-up and whatever means necessary from the first day of storage. That particular cost would then be \$100. And the storage per day of impoundment vehicles with a registered gross weight not exceeding 5,500 pounds would be \$5.

And this rate would be consistent then with our neighbouring provinces of both Alberta and Manitoba.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, if the costs aren't paid, the garage keeper has the right to sell the vehicle under this Bill. This Bill doesn't specify how the proceeds of selling the vehicle will be divvied up. Does the minister believe that this type of

detail should be included in the Bill?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Those would be all dealt with under regulations; and under The Garage Keepers Act, the distribution of the funds would then categorically describe how those proceeds would be distributed.

Ms. Draude: — So you're saying that actually under the regulations it is broke down on how the money will be split up?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — That's correct, Madam Member.

Ms. Draude: — For the release of a vehicle under this Act, a hearing would have to be conducted under the authority of the hearing officer under section 89.21. Then under 89.3(1) a vehicle may be released by the administrator. My first question is, who has authority over whom?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The hearing officer would actually look after the release of the vehicle.

Ms. Draude: — So where does the authority come from and what is the qualifications of either one of these positions?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The authority would come under the Highway Traffic Board and the hearing officer means a hearing officer as defined in the regulations.

Ms. Draude: — Do you feel that the court should have any role in making these decisions?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — We think that there is a role for the use of justice of the peaces and certainly in the review that conducted this piece of legislation, that brought it forward, also recommended that there be some recognition of the use of justice of the peace and hearing officers in concert.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, under the Act of course the limit for blood alcohol content resulting in a 24-hour suspension is lowered to .04. I know you have been dealing with the SADD (Students Against Drinking and Driving) group and other groups, with a lot of consultation. Can you provide us with the evidence that this will in fact save lives?

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think that when the committee went around the province and met with a variety of different folks and the consultation process, as you can appreciate, and have learned . . . have been extensive. Throughout that review period, there was also a great deal of work that was done in terms of looking at the technical levels as how blood alcohol contents within the . . . that someone has consumed would affect them in terms of their driving habits and the management of the vehicle.

And some of that work that was done . . . and I have some information in front of me here that I certainly would be prepared to share with you if you don't have it. When we start looking at where the risk of crash by someone who is consuming alcohol would really start to begin, we're looking at about .01. That level intensifies itself to about .05 where we

really start to become somewhat concerned about the abilities of one managing and controlling the vehicle in which they're operating.

When you ask about the kinds of statistics that have been put together across the country, I think that when you look at the number of impaired drivers, for example, convictions in 1995 itself, we see that we have about 6,540 to be exact, the number of convictions of people who are drinking and driving.

And of course during that period of time, we see about 1,779 of those people that have been convicted while driving while they were disqualified. We simply share that with you.

When we look at making comparisons of those statistics to other parts of the country and we look at drinking and driving charges per 1,000 . . . or 10,000 drivers in Saskatchewan, for example, in 1992, we see that we're 35 per cent higher in Saskatchewan than we are in Alberta. We're 57 per cent higher in Saskatchewan than we are in Manitoba. And we're 88 per cent higher than we are across the country when we take our comparisons with that of the statistics in Canada.

I think the other question that you were raising with me is drinking and driving in Saskatchewan and the alcohol-related deaths. We're recognizing that 35 to 50 per cent of traffic deaths involve alcohol and more than 50 deaths in this province annually. And if you take a look at the number of fatalities, homicides, car crashes in the provinces, impaired driving is leading as a criminal cause of death in Saskatchewan between the years of 1988 and 1993.

We're seeing that there are more than a thousand injuries annually and more than \$35 million in health care costs and income, to property damage costs annually due to drinking and driving.

The council on drug and alcohol safety have said that the recommendation of course is that — the working group — is the implementation of the blood alcohol threshold of really .05 is what they're recommending. So when we look at the recommendation that's coming forward in our Bill at .04, of course, we're just slightly below that, but believe that the statistical data that has been put together for us . . . And certainly the individual's ability to manage adequately the responsibilities of a motor vehicle really start to reduce themselves significantly as you start to exceed that .04 level.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that information, and if it's possible, I would appreciate some of those facts.

Just a couple more questions. Can you tell me how many 24-hour suspensions are currently given out under the Act and what do you predict to rise to under the new Act?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — We don't have, Madam Member, the exact number . . . or we don't have a statistic that we can give you on that, and our best guess on it currently is that that would be about 2,000 annually. Of course under the new legislation, what we'll see is that we'll have a tracking mechanism in place. And we'll be able to provide for anyone who asks the question that you just raised, the exact number in the future because part of

the new process under the legislation, of course, will be that we'll be tracking all of that information for our benefit and also those who may want to know that and also to assist us in our work.

Ms. Draude: — Can you tell me what the 24-hour suspension level is in other provinces?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — For those provinces that have it . . . for example, Alberta, .05, 24-hour roadside suspension for blowing a warning on a roadside screening device. British Columbia is also at .05. They have a 24-hour administrative suspension. Manitoba has a .05; they have a six-hour suspension for blowing a warn at a roadside screening device.

New Brunswick has .05 as well, which is a 24-hour roadside suspension. And theirs has been there since 1968, and for blowing a warn at a roadside screening device. Newfoundland's is .05 as well, which is a 24-hour impaired driving charge, where an officer judgement of four- to twelve-hour administration suspension . . .

Nova Scotia doesn't have it. The Northwest Territories doesn't have it. Neither does Quebec. Prince Edward Island has a .05 which is the 24-hour roadside suspension for blowing a warn. And then of course Saskatchewan is recommending here the .04.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, my last question is the cost to recalibrate the Breathalyser machines, and asking if the government will be picking up the cost.

And just for the record, I'd like to let you know that I think this is probably some of the better dollars that you'll be spending this year.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I know that the member was indicating that the government very wisely and responsibly looks after the expenditure of all its funding. And you were just simply wanting to indicate that as we proceed to continue to do that, that we will make another such wise investment and management of the — and prudent — funds of the government. The cost of the calibrations would be approximately \$100 per machine. This total cost would be about \$25,000, that which is in fact in the Justice budget for the 1996-97 budget. And as you've indicated, and we certainly support, this would be a small expenditure in terms of the cost savings to personal injuries here.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

Clause 7

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, thank you. Mr. Minister, we had a bit of a debate and discussion over this clause in specific . . . with specifically item 67(3)(f) about the disconnection of lighting equipment or lamps required in regulations made pursuant to The Vehicle Administration Act. And I indicated the other day that I didn't really feel that was necessary. Certainly there are ways to shut the lights off.

I think the argument you used is if a police officer happens to be by the side of the road . . . Well number one, if they are off the road, they can certainly . . . as soon as you turn your ignition off, those lights shut off. And generally speaking, if you're not facing traffic, the lights would be directed away. You wouldn't really notice it anyway. You wouldn't. Also you wouldn't want lights shut off if you're sitting on the shoulder of a road as that would certainly . . . wouldn't be a safe way of . . . or a very safe or a wise way of having a vehicle on the road. And we see it all the time where people happen to have a problem, had a problem with the car, maybe forgot to put the warning lights off, or maybe the battery's already dead on that vehicle.

So I think, Mr. Minister, that this section isn't . . . or this clause really isn't necessary. It isn't essential, and therefore I'd like to move an amendment to clause 7 of the printed Bill:

Amend clause 7 of the printed Bill by deleting clause 67(3)(f) as being enacted therein.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I certainly respect the position that the hon. member takes, and puts forward the position that he's concerned about the public safety. And certainly as we talked about this issue on the last occasion that we were in committee, recognize that the police forces across the province really are designated to provide not only security and surveillance but good public safety for all of us.

And because this particular request is coming from the enforcement agencies across the province, it seems to me that we need to pay at least respect to the fact that these individuals are in the business of protecting us. And in part of their work in providing security and surveillance and protection to the people of Saskatchewan, there are obvious actions that they need to participate . . . or be permitted to participate in, in order to make that job a little easier for them.

Of course, as we'd indicated earlier, that all of the new vehicles that are currently manufactured, when you turn them on their lights then come on. Of course if the member is suggesting that they can do their surveillance, particularly in Saskatchewan in the winter months, without the vehicles operating and running it becomes a very difficult task in my opinion, considering that the weather in this province gets fairly cold. Fortunately only for short periods of time.

But in order for them to be able to do their work in a fashion that of course we would be satisfied with, we think that it would be important that we look seriously at making sure that this amendment is . . . or that this piece of the proposed legislation they're requesting us to support, is in fact supported.

And I have a real difficulty in supporting the amendment and suggest that we not do that.

(1130)

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, my concern isn't with surveillance and most people don't have a problem with that. We acknowledge that. But we're into a process of safety on the highways. We are promoting Lights On

For Life and yet you see vehicles — fairly modern — vehicles of police forces travelling down the highways now with their lights off. That's because they've disconnected that light. And whereas everybody else, we're trying to promote that.

And for the areas of surveillance it would seem to me, Mr. Minister, there should be at least some controls, not just a wide open . . . the police forces in this province can disconnect their daytime running lights and use the argument that it's because of surveillance.

When they're on the roads they should obey and have to operate under the same guidelines that the traffic and all other personnel in this province operate under and the fact that we promote safety and running lights are on. If they need to disconnect then, in order for other avenues of surveillance where they're not actively on the highway, then there should be at least some requirement when they're proceeding down the highway that those vehicle lights . . . that they have their lights turned on, that they recognize the rules of the road. I realize this isn't a rule that you make or break, and you're held accountable, and there's a fine for it, but I think, based on driving down the highways . . .

And certainly I acknowledge the fact that with new vehicles we do have the automatic daytime running lights. But those daytime running lights can be disconnected, and therefore I would at least strongly urge, Mr. Minister, if you are going to refuse this amendment, that you at least acknowledge and request that police forces in this province follow the same guidelines we're trying to get the traffic . . . or the average citizen in this province to follow when they're proceeding and driving down the highways.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I just want to make one further comment on this. Just picking up on where the member had left off, because as he was concluding, he was talking about the requirement for the, I think for the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), or any other police enforcement body in the province really, to obey the rules of the road. And really this is what I was talking about earlier. And under section 67(7), the way in which it reads, there is a requirement here that they carry out his or her duties.

A peace officer may of course do a variety of different things in order to do that. And one of those of course would be that they would then be able to shut their lights off as they proceed in making sure that they're carrying out their duties. But obviously it would be in such a fashion that they would be obeying the rules of the roadway and that they wouldn't be endangering any public safety here.

In the same way as I described the last time we spoke about this . . . is that sometimes they need to exceed the speed limit on a highway in order to overtake somebody, to bring them to a stop. In the same way that from time to time I've witnessed them — and fortunately it wasn't because they were chasing me — but turn around in the middle of a roadway to overtake someone else, which of course if you or I were to do that there may be some need for them to charge us. Of course in the operations of their duties and their work, there is permissiveness here for that to happen in order that they can carry out their duties in a safe

and effective fashion.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, on the same vein, if the amendment that you have proposed comes into force, you're suggesting then that the police officers will be able to disconnect their headlamps. Will you be allowing the police officers then to travel at any time during the day — the 24-hour period — while they are in motion with those headlamps off, or will you insist that they have them back on? First question.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think, Mr. Member, as I'd indicated earlier, that the only time that they would proceed to work under this particular piece of legislation — if it were to change — is really for the purpose of carrying out his or her duties. So I think that that would be self-explanatory, in my opinion, from the point of view of when the police officer in fact would exercise that particular privilege.

Mr. Krawetz: — But, Mr. Member, if you recall when Lights On For Life was introduced in this province I, as an insurance agent at that time, received brochures. We received bumper stickers. We received letters from SGI encouraging us as agents to tell our people not only to have the lights on on the automatic cars that automatically came on but to in fact encourage people to change to a system that would keep their lights on during the daylight.

That has occurred, Mr. Minister, across the province. I think you realize that when you travel now, that lights are on during the day as well. Many accidents have been prevented because people are now driving with their lights on during daylight hours. Big problem when you're looking at the hours just before dusk, just at daybreak, where it's very difficult to see vehicles. Now we're going to be allowing police officers, in the guise of doing their duty, to travel with lights off.

How can you have two standards? One that says to the public, you must keep your lights on or you should keep your lights on all the time when you're travelling. Please begin this program of turning your lights on if it's a manual switch or the automatic cars. And now we're going to put in place a ruling that says to police officers, well if you think you're carrying out your duty driving down the highway at dusk because there might be something happening over the next mile, you're now going to drive with your lights off, and allow then an accident to occur. I don't think it makes sense, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think you're right, Mr. Member. What you've said, in my opinion, doesn't make any sense because I would be of the opinion, as I expect most of the public not only in Saskatchewan but across the country, where you have police forces that are entrusted in protecting the public and ensuring that you have good public safety, would exercise their discretion in carrying out good public safety policy and practice to ensure that not only is what they do safe, but that of the public.

So what we're saying here is that you're right. I mean the fact is that we do have a Lights on for Life program, an excellent program. And we encourage the motoring public to use that practice even in vehicles where the lights don't come on

automatically any more.

But to suggest that police forces across the province would be acting some way or somehow in a fashion that would jeopardize the safety of themselves and/or the motoring public, in my opinion, simply is an unreasonable statement, in my opinion.

And of course I think that there are occasions where police forces need to do things that are not usual to what you and I might do, in order to ensure that the enforcement practices of the law are maintained. And I think that that's necessary for them to do that.

This is certainly one of those such requirements that they think that they would need to have in place in order that they're not contradicting the legislation. And I'm of the opinion that police forces would be using that at a discretion that wouldn't jeopardize any of the public safety and/or theirs.

Mr. Krawetz: — Final comment, Mr. Minister. I concur with a lot that you have said. Of course in the middle of winter if they are at a stake-out or trying to sit in an area and be inconspicuous, of course the lights must be off. And if the engine's running to keep warm, you have a problem. So you've addressed that concern, and I think legitimately so.

My concern is that if I, as a police officer, am driving down the highway and in my judgement I am looking for something that's occurring, and my lights are off, it's not necessarily the fault of the police officer but somebody else who takes a look and doesn't see any lights coming and proceeds into an intersection and hits the police officer.

What are the ramifications then when the police officer has made a judgement that yes, it was daylight hours, I didn't need to have the lights on, but now someone else who has committed a fault and of course didn't check clearly, but has missed the fact that these lights are not on?

Very difficult in the wintertime, I might also add. Many police cars are white in colour. And in the wintertime, when you have snow conditions like we do have in this province, it's very easy to get a glare off the snow and all of a sudden you don't see a white car until it's right there . . .

An Hon. Member: — What sort of argument is that?

Mr. Krawetz: — You know it's correct.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I guess, Mr. Chairman, my understanding of police forces is that in the preparation for them to perform their duties in providing good security and surveillance and road safety to the people of Saskatchewan, they're certainly well trained, go through a rigorous training program, which part of it of course includes how they manage their vehicles and how they use their vehicles of course in their work, because it's a very important tool in them performing their duties as police officers.

And I can't believe for a moment that we have members of this Assembly who actually would suggest that we have police officers in this province that would violate the legislation, from

the point of view it would violate the legislation and put in jeopardy not only themselves but that of the motoring public. I can't believe that we have people who work in the system who would do that.

Now if the members opposite are suggesting that we have people who are employed in the police force who are behaving in that kind of fashion, I think they should be making that known to the Department of Justice or the police forces in which they operate.

Amendment negated on division.

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clauses 8 to 30 inclusive agreed to.

(1145)

Clause 31

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to:

Amend clause 31 of the printed Bill:

By amending, after clause 78.2(1)(a), as being enacted therein the following new clause:

“(a.1) being a person 16, 17 or 18 years of age, drove a motor vehicle having consumed any quantity of alcohol;”

(b) by repealing section 78.2(7) as being enacted therein and substituting the following:

“(7) An order of suspension issued pursuant to clause (2)(a)

(a) with respect to reasonable grounds based on clause (1)(a), (b) or (c), expires 30 days from the date of the order of suspension; and

(b) with respect to reasonable grounds based on clause (1)(a.1), expires 6 months from the date of the order of suspension.”

(c) by repealing subsection 78.2(9) as being enacted therein and substituting the following:

“(9) An order of disqualification issued pursuant to clause (2)(b) or (c):

(a) with respect to reasonable grounds based on clause (1)(a), (b) or (c), expires 30 days from the date of the order of disqualification; and

(b) with respect to reasonable grounds based on clause (1)(a.1), expires 6 months from the date of the order of disqualification.”

Can I make a comment?

Mr. Minister, I have asked for this clause because I feel very strongly, and after speaking to members of the SADD group as well, that zero tolerance for any young adult between the ages of 16 and 19, where they're not legally allowed to drink in a liquor establishment . . . I can't see how we as government officials or representatives of the people can say it's okay to be drinking in vehicles.

And I'm also hoping that if this amendment is passed, that young adults not accustomed to drinking before they . . . in vehicles are . . . (inaudible) . . . until they're the age of 19 will realize that it's not necessary and they don't have to, and perhaps maybe we'll get towards zero tolerance in all drinking . . . drinking and driving.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Madam Member, and I appreciate the amendment that you put forward and certainly recognize the significance and importance particularly in light of the statements that I'd made earlier regarding . . . and your question as it relates to the number of young people who lose life across the province and the growing numbers of young people who are certainly involved in drinking and driving, road accidents, and death.

I'm a bit concerned about changes to this piece of . . . or amending this piece of the legislation from the point of view that when we looked at . . . the all-party committee in particular looked at this particular issue and went across the province. And as you can appreciate, the great deal of consultation that was undertaken, and not only with young people but certainly with adults all across Saskatchewan.

And when we spoke with . . . and when they spoke with young people of course, one of the biggest issues that they'd identified is that they would like to move to the zero tolerance level — without any doubt.

But the recommendation of . . . the all-party committee that deliberated this particular item long and hard for days came with the recommendation that .04 was really a beginning point for Saskatchewan. And it already exceeds any levels that are established anywhere in Canada as being the lowest level and certainly ties to it a number of expectations if in fact the new drivers are stopped with a blood zero . . . alcohol content of . . . that's greater than .04. So we have obviously in this piece of legislation some of the toughest requirements for anyone.

The concern of course that SADD raised, in spite of the fact that you indicate that it's supported very strongly by them — and certainly it is — is the fact that what your amendment would do by and large is that it would really discriminate against those other new drivers that we're talking about here.

And SADD supports . . . what SADD really does support here is not just 16- to 18-year-olds. But what SADD supports is all individuals who are new drivers. And they weren't selecting out only that particular individual grouping.

And I know that a couple of consultations that I was a part of in my community and the one in Canora, which are obviously . . . any time you attend an event in Canora, you're always well welcomed, and people express their opinion in a very

favourable fashion. And of course the young people in both of those communities that I participated in clearly indicated that what they wanted to see is they wanted to see the zero tolerance. But if they were able to achieve the zero tolerance, that it would not only be for the discriminatory ages of 16 to 18, but that it would apply across the piece for all new drivers.

If that couldn't be achieved, then what they were suggesting is that we move to the stage of .04, which of course is the toughest — as I've indicated to you — legislation anywhere across Canada as it relates to drinking and driving suspensions. And then would work at trying to achieve, as time passes and public attitude changes, what you're recommending in your amendment.

And that would be then the zero tolerance level of course, and that would certainly be the position of the committee whose wisdom I'm really paying a great deal of attention to from the perspective that that all-party committee, as the title of the committee indicates, is an all-party committee and it reached the consensus on the current blood alcohol level of .04 that we have. And I have a difficult time moving away from that, based on that position that has come forward, both by the committee and I think SADD's position, as it relates to what your amendment tries to address.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Our amendment isn't trying to discriminate against anybody; we're trying to protect some of these children. Ages 16 to 19, they're not considered adults in lots of cases and they're not allowed to go into a drinking establishment.

You already told me a few minutes ago that from some of the studies and results you've had that there is an effect at even .01. And when you take into consideration somebody the age of 16, 17, or 18, they're not considered mature and any kind of an effect on their judgement can cause problems.

We're talking about children's lives here. I know we all have something that . . . have had accidents we can relate to that hurt us deeply and I think that if we can do anything that will cut down on that effect we have to do that. That's what we're elected for and that's what we're responsible for. We have to keep everybody's best interest at heart but at the same time we have to protect our children.

And I'm asking that you seriously consider this. We're talking about a legal act where people are . . . we're saying you can't go into a bar and drink but you can drink and drive. I don't understand that.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chairman, I recognize the position that the member takes and not distantly away from what she's suggesting in terms of . . . I'm not condoning for a minute — and the legislation certainly isn't either — that we're wanting young people to drink and drive, because the legislation is certainly the opposite to that.

The problem of course that we have, I think, with your amendment is that what it does do is that it moves us away to some degree from the recommendation of the all-party committee. And as I say to you, that would be somewhat

troubling to me if we were to proceed on that today on the basis that, if there has been a piece of legislation that has come to this Assembly in my short lifetime here that has had the viewing of the Saskatchewan public in a more broader perspective than this, it would be hard to find.

And so the consultation processes that have been undertaken by the joint committee, the all-party committee, in my opinion have been absolutely exceptional. To move beyond that at this point in time would, in my opinion, be difficult.

And also based on the early premiss of the point that I made, and that is that what SADD supports here and will try to achieve, I think, over its lifetime, will be to get to the zero tolerance that you talk about, and that the majority of, I think, adults in this province who have children will support as being what we would like to see.

But to begin there, in our opinion, based on the recommendations of the committee, would be a difficult starting point for us. And so I'm . . . Although I have a great deal of appreciation that the member makes in terms of the amendment, at this point in time, it would be difficult for us, I think, to support.

And as you know, SADD wants a zero percentile for all drivers, not just for that particular category. They view that as really a discriminatory grouping and are really suggesting that they want it for all drivers.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I can tell you that our official opposition as well as the Conservative Party do agree with us and we are . . . I know that you had an all-party committee, but at the same time we all represent the people of Saskatchewan, and as individuals we are responsible for the 15,000 people, whoever would have elected us. And I think that that's what we have to be able to do ourselves, is to go back to our constituency and say that we did the best thing we could for our children, irregardless of whatever some committee said. That's what we're elected to do — is to represent the people out there. And I feel strongly, and I'm hoping that you will let your members decide here today if they agree with this amendment.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want you to have some appreciation that the people who served on the all-party committee were all elected officials . . . or all elected representatives of the province of Saskatchewan, other than the specific officials that worked with the committee. And so I'm of the opinion that that all-party committee that went around the province and provided the kinds of consultation that it did, really did represent not only the people who live in my constituency of 15 or 17,000, or your constituency of 15 or 17,000, but that all-party committee really did represent the views of all constituencies in Saskatchewan and all people in Saskatchewan.

So the recommendation that they bring forward, in my opinion, represents the views in the very collective and collected fashion where they believe this particular piece of legislation should be going.

And I guess I'm of the opinion that for us to move away from this amendment . . . or to support your amendment and moving

away from the recommendation of the committee, would not be one that I would be supporting at this particular point in time, or suggesting that the government support it at this particular point in time.

Ms. Draude: — I just have one final comment, Mr. Minister. I think that . . . I don't know if you're realizing we're asking for two categories of new drivers: those that are caught with the .04; and those that would have been caught with alcohol who are 16, 17, or 18 years old.

The Criminal Code kicks in at the age of 18 and they are dealt with under the law. But what we are talking about are 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds. And I really feel strongly. I think that the people in the province of Saskatchewan feel that our responsibility is to protect our children. That's one of our main concerns.

The division bells rang from 11:59 a.m. until 12:09 p.m.

Amendment negated on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 6

Aldridge	McLane	Draude
Krawetz	Gantefoer	Toth

Nays — 19

Van Mulligen	Shillington	Anguish
Johnson	Upshall	Kowalsky
Renaud	Calvert	Trew
Lorje	Serby	Hamilton
Murray	Langford	Kasperski
Ward	Sonntag	Murrell
Thomson		

Clause 31 agreed to.

Clauses 32 to 37 inclusive agreed to.

Clause 38

Ms. Draude: — Propose an amendment:

Clause 38 of the printed Bill is amended by deleting the words "on proclamation" where they appear in subsection (1) thereof and substituting the following words therefor:

"upon consideration and acceptance by the Committee of the Whole of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly of regulations proposed pursuant to this Act".

The division bells rang from 12:13 p.m. until 12:14 p.m.

Amendment negated on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 5

Aldridge	McLane	Draude
Krawetz	Gantefoer	

Nays — 17

Van Mulligen	Shillington	Anguish
Johnson	Upshall	Kowalsky
Renaud	Calvert	Trew
Lorje	Serby	Hamilton
Murray	Kasperski	Ward
Murrell	Thomson	

Clause 38 agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill on division.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 17 — An Act to amend certain Acts respecting Highways and Vehicles

Hon. Mr. Serby — Mr. Speaker, I move this Bill be read a third time without amendment.

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

The Chair: — The department was last before the committee on April 22. Before we get started, I'll invite the minister to re-introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my right we have Don Metz, acting deputy minister. Behind Don is Barry Martin, executive director, engineering services division. Behind me is Lynn Tulloch, executive director of corporate information services division. And Bernie Churko is to my left, and Bernie is executive director of logistics planning and compliance division, Department of Highways and Transportation.

Item 1

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, very much. Welcome once again, Mr. Minister, and to your officials.

Over the last couple of weeks, Mr. Minister, when we've asked some questions in the House regarding Highways, you've stated a number of times about taking money from administration and transferring it into other areas within your department. Could you explain that for us please.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The member will know that the budget, the total budget of the Department of Highways, is approximately \$169 million. Increased dollars to roads this year to the capital program is \$4.1 million. Increase to preservation is 2.2 million, and that was done by streamlining.

Savings were in the engineering services of 1.6 million; regional operation streamlining — .8 million; fleet operations

streamlining — 1.2 million; preservation field organization streamlining — 1.3 million; logistics and planning division streamlining — .7 million; and miscellaneous other streamlining initiatives — .7 million for the 6.3 million.

As you will note that the 169 million is about \$750,000 more than in our Highways budget last year. So you can see there would have been a reduction in the Highways budget if it were not for finding internal efficiencies in administration.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We do have a decrease in the budget irregardless of those moves.

In relation of those costs to, I guess, to FTEs (full-time equivalents) full-time employees, what numbers of people are involved there?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Okay the total of FTEs affected, there were 131.1 actual reductions in the department or 84 per cent. FTEs transferred to SGI were 24.3 for a total of 155.4 FTEs.

Breakdown by scope: out-of-scope were 42.3 FTEs or 27 per cent; in-scope 113.1 for a total of 155.4.

Breakdown by permanent and non-permanent: permanent were 80.5 or 52 per cent. Non-permanent were 74.9 or 48 per cent.

Breakdown by location: head office 51.7 FTEs; field 103.7.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you just tell us quickly about the in-scope employees and what positions they were eliminated from.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — You asked about the in-scope positions. There were 20 in engineering services. There were 37 in preservation and operation. There were 4 in logistics, planning, and regulations. There was 1 in human resources branch. There were 2 in corporate information services, for a total of 64.

Labour service, there were 12 in engineering; preservation and operation, 28; logistics and planning, zero; human resources, zero; for a total of 40. And there were 23 transfers to SGI, which included both.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. Could you tell us the jobs that were lost in preservation and maintenance, what those positions were?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — In preservation and maintenance, in-scope positions, there were . . . I believe it's 37 and 28 for a total of 65. Most of those were mechanics, equipment operators, and crew supervisors. In the case of Highways, I believe there is something like 95 per cent of the employees affected that took the early retirement package.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. In your opinion, Mr. Minister, how do you think that some of the job losses, in particular the ones in engineering and in preservation and maintenance, will affect the quality and the safety of the highways?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — To the member opposite, we expect that

we will have nearly identical maintenance services, in fact in some cases even better. What has happened over the last several years there has been no reorganization of the Department of Highways. It was established many years ago in many, many locations in Saskatchewan. Since that time the equipment has changed dramatically.

We have now larger graders, larger trucks, new technology in the placement of salt on highways, etc. And in some cases, a crew would look after a hundred kilometres perhaps. In some areas crews would look after 300 kilometres. We've balanced that workload out.

In the summertime, what we'll see is larger crews which will be more efficient than a lot of small crews. So we believe in some cases actually the maintenance will improve, and in all cases we suspect the maintenance will be the same. Winter maintenance in some areas could be delayed as much as half an hour to an hour, and in those cases we will likely have to start the crews earlier in order to give the same service that was provided before.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Minister. Can you tell us what would the average salary per full-time employee be in your department?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I would ask the member if he could clarify that. Are we talking of out-of-scope or in-scope in the case here?

(1230)

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, maybe we could segregate them and do them both?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — We do not have the average salary, but we will certainly get that to you as soon as we can.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. I'd appreciate that. Would you have the numbers for the ratio of management to staff to out-of-scope . . . or to in-scope?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Okay, the people that have left Highways, the out-of-scope were 17 per cent of the out-of-scope staff. In-scope, there were 10 per cent of the in-scope staff.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Moving on a bit I noticed in the '96-97 construction projects that you talked about, I notice that you, under the heading of grading, you have the bridge at Outlook listed there. I'm just wondering . . . I guess I'm a little . . . I would need to know that why you have that listed under grading. And I'm just wondering where that comes out of in the budget, if that indeed comes out of construction or if that is coming out — because of the heading — out under preservation and maintenance.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The budget item is under capital, and not maintenance and preservation. And it will be between 5 and \$600,000, and it will be the west abutment that we will be doing this year.

Mr. McLane: — Okay without going back into our discussion that we had earlier in estimates, Mr. Minister, about that bridge . . . that appears to be a little different idea in what was going to happen with that bridge this year. Have things changed? Is this an update as to what you told us the last time?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — No, it has not changed. It's the same as during last estimates. It's a two-year project. We'll be doing the technical portion and the abutment this year and the construction of the bridge next.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. Regarding another bridge and that would be the Cumberland House bridge, I'd like a little information and history on that bridge if I could, starting with when was the construction of that project started?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The drilling and the geotechnical work started in the summer of 1994. The preliminary services for road work was also done in September 1994; the road right of way, winter of '94-95. The tenders for the steel supply was March 15, 1995; the advertised bridge construction contract, April 1, '95.

We awarded the contract on May 15, '95; earth work at the bridge approaches, May 15 to June 20, 1995; the construction of the new road location, June 20 to September 15, '95; the bridge, pier, and abutment construction, July 4 to December 15, '95; structural steel erection, January 15 to March 15, 1996. And the bridge hopefully will be completed by September 1 of this year.

Mr. McLane: — Total cost of the bridge?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — We estimate the total cost to be \$6 million, and that was approved under the infrastructure program. There was \$2 million contributed from the local community and the band at Cumberland. There was \$2 million contributed from the federal government and \$2 million from the province.

Mr. McLane: — Under an agreement signed sometime ago — back in about '89 I believe it was — with the government of the day with the group in Cumberland House, in the community there, there's been an ongoing funding mechanism that's been in place with that group funded through SaskPower.

I'm wondering if you were aware of that group, if there were discussions that took place with that group. Evidently it appears that there were since some of the funding came from that group. And it's my understanding that through this agreement that projects such as that bridge would have completely come out of that funding package that was provided by the provincial government through SaskPower. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I can't answer where the community got their money, but it could very well be. There is a package. I believe that SaskPower and the Cumberland House people came to some agreement under the previous administration. And certainly part of that funds could be used for transportation, so it could very well be part of those funds that are used in this case.

Mr. McLane: — It appears under the agreement, Mr. Minister, that any cost pertaining to such a construction project such as the bridge would totally have come out of that fund. Are you aware of that, and indeed should that have been the case?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Probably that question would be better put to the people of Cumberland House. But I believe it is the case.

Mr. McLane: — So then if the funding should have come strictly . . . the funding for the bridge should have come from the community using those funds provided in this agreement, then I guess why did the province provide additional funding of \$4 million — two from the province and two from the infrastructure from the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well it is my understanding that the \$13 million . . . I am thinking that that's the right figure; I'm not even sure of that. But whatever that fund is was in compensation from when SaskPower in fact put the dam in, near Cumberland House, and it was to be used for economic development. It was to be used, if my understanding is correct, for transportation needs.

The community will receive that money, and it's up to them to decide on how to spend it. They would get that money regardless if there was a bridge constructed or not. If they did — and it's my belief that they are using some of that money for this project — that is, I believe, within their rights.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. I guess the question is, should not the funding for the total cost of that bridge come out of that agreement? Should the Cumberland House group not have bore the complete \$6 million cost? And if that is the case — if they should have — then will the agreement signed with the government through SaskPower be clawing back \$4 million out of that agreement of 13? I think that's an accurate estimate of total funding that was going to the Cumberland House group.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — As the member will be aware, that the Department of Highways has an obligation to provide the people of Saskatchewan access. In all likelihood, if they would have had to wait for the Department of Highways alone, it would have been years yet before that could have been completed.

They sought a partnership, and the partnership they sought was under the infrastructure program which was a federal program where different municipalities could contribute one-third, one-third, one-third. The people of Cumberland House suggested that a partnership like this may work in this situation. We agreed it would mean that those people would finally have access to the rest of the province for 12 months of the year. Certainly there were several fatalities in crossing the river in spring and fall before . . . as the ice was melting and as it was freezing. There were some bad times there. Health care needs were another issue.

So certainly it was the belief of the Cumberland people that we should try and work through this partnership. The federal government agreed because, as you know, there was a

committee under the infrastructure program, a federal-provincial committee, and the province also agreed. So it was a very good working relationship . . . a good partnership, I believe, and I think a very successful conclusion.

Mr. McLane: — Did the provincial government have the final say in the allocation of the infrastructure money, the \$2 million, for that project? Was it your department or you, as the minister, that allocate those funds?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — No. The infrastructure funding was . . . There was a committee set up, a provincial-federal committee, that would approve that. It was not the Department of Highways.

Mr. McLane: — Okay I guess I clarify myself again. Through the agreement, as I understand it, that the funding for that bridge should have come out of the funds that were allocated to the Cumberland House group through SaskPower . . . I guess I'm asking why then, if that's the case, why has the province committed another 2 million to the project as well as 2 million from the infrastructure grant?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well as I mentioned earlier, the funds . . . And I don't know much about the agreement. Certainly in Crown Corporations, when you have SaskPower there, you can certainly ask SaskPower about the agreement. It was an agreement that was signed under the previous administration. And it's my understanding that those funds could be used for several different reasons, but they would receive those funds no matter what.

And some of those funds could be used, if decided by the people of Cumberland — the Cumberland development authority — for transportation, that in fact it could be. And this was their decision.

Mr. McLane: — I did indeed ask that question in Crown Corps to the minister responsible for SaskPower and it appears that they were in agreement. We'd have to go back and check the actual comments by the minister, that one of the projects that would come under that agreement would be to provide service to the community. If they wanted to build a bridge then they'd use that money to build a bridge.

My question that I'm again going to ask is, if that is the case, then why did they receive an extra \$4 million and/or is the government going to recover that money through the payments that they're still funding toward that group? And I believe there will be a 1.8 or 9 or \$2 million payment at the end of the year, in '98 or '99.

Will that money then . . . has some of the money already been allotted to cover those costs or are they going to get an additional \$4 million for the bridge?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — As I mentioned earlier to the member, that normally the whole responsibility would be of the Department of Highways to provide access to a community. So we believe as a province that this was a good deal for us.

It's a good deal for Cumberland House as well because they

have the bridge sooner rather than later. Because if we . . . if they would have had to rely on Department of Highways funding only for the bridge — and it is the responsibility of the Department of Highways — they would have had to wait a lot longer, and it would in fact cost the Department of Highways the full \$6 million.

In this case, we were able to receive some money from the community, receive some money from the federal government, and cost us a lot less; in fact a savings of really \$4 million for the Department of Highways.

(1245)

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, thank you. However, my understanding of this agreement is that the reason for the agreement was to provide funding to that community to do with what they wanted. They decided to build a bridge; they had the funding to do it.

And so they had already, by the time this bridge started I would guess, that they'd already seeked roughly 6 or \$7 million through the program.
I'm asking why they received additional funding for it.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I'm going to try once more to explain to the member opposite that if the Department of Highways would have had to do it — and it is their responsibility — would have had to spend the full \$6 million. Cumberland House believed that with a contribution from them, with contribution from the federal government in Ottawa, the federal Liberal government, and a contribution by Saskatchewan, that we could in fact complete the bridge now.

We believe it was a good deal for the people of Saskatchewan, in fact a savings of \$4 million. It was a good deal for Cumberland House because they did receive the bridge sooner than they likely would have had to if they would have had to wait for funding direct just from the Department of Highways. The federal government agreed too that it was important to give these people access and participated in the partnership.

Mr. McLane: — Yes, I too am very happy that the federal government is pumping in millions and millions of dollars into the Saskatchewan economy to help prop up your government's lack of commitment to highways and to agriculture.

My question again would be, Mr. Minister, that . . . I'm not disputing the fact that it was a good deal for Cumberland House to get their bridge made. What I'm saying is they'd already received the money to build the bridge, and now you've propped it up again with another \$4 million, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I'm sure you might have to check your arithmetic. But the federal government put in \$2 million, the province put in \$2 million, and the community of Cumberland House put in \$2 million, and the bridge was built. Do you not think that's a better deal than the Department of Highways putting all \$6 million?

Mr. McLane: — The government already paid \$6 million for the bridge through the agreement through SaskPower with the

Cumberland House group. They received initial start-up money; they received a million dollars a year, plus at the end of this term and end of 10 years they receive another 1.9 or whatever the figure is. So they've already received the money to build the bridge.

So it wasn't a good deal for the taxpayers of Saskatchewan because they'd already received money through SaskPower, through an agreement signed back in '98 with the previous government. So no, it's not a good deal for the province if we're providing another \$4 million for that project.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I would ask the member if he would check the agreement. And I think if he checks the agreement, that the compensation package between the community of Cumberland House, the band at Cumberland House, and SaskPower was for other reasons than transportation. There were economic development considerations and many others.

Certainly the community of Cumberland House has the right to spend that money as they wish. In fact maybe they would not have had to spend any on the bridge and then it would have been in fact the responsibility of the Department of Highways to put a bridge to the community of Cumberland House at some point in time.

And we consider this a good partnership. Three levels of government involved in doing something that is good for the public, good for the safety of the public, good for economic development, good for not only the community of Cumberland House but people that want to visit there —tourists and other people.

We believe that it was a good partnership and one that certainly made the bridge happen a lot sooner than it would have happened in other circumstances.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to change focus a little bit to an area that's much more familiar to you perhaps, Mr. Minister, and that's right at home.

I would like to ask you first of all in your decision of the Highways department in terms of prioritizing your capital projects, how does the proximity of a major industry in the community or on that piece of road figure into the formula? For example, I'm thinking particularly of St. Brieux where Bourgault Industries is a major contributor to the economic development of the whole area. How does that figure into your decision or your decision making in terms of 368, for example, north and south of St. Brieux?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I want to thank the member for the question. Certainly 368 has been brought to my attention several times. As the member will know, north of St. Brieux to Highway 41 is in pretty good condition. South of St. Brieux towards Humboldt is not as good and certainly needs some work.

Right now, how we decide the priority list for highways is based on the capital cost of a particular road, how much it's going to cost us, what are the current maintenance costs on that particular piece of road, what are the . . . what is the traffic

count, what is the accident rate, what is the fatality rate. Those are some of the issues that we consider.

At this moment the economic development portion or tourism portion is not part of the consideration. We are working with Economic Development to attempt to adjust somehow the formula to consider economic development and tourism. You have to understand that it's a hard process to put into a formula, but hopefully within the next year we'll have more consideration for economic development, job creation, and tourism.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister, I think it's an important factor as we have to prioritize what we're doing and how important the added job creation, the economic activity is, particularly to rural Saskatchewan. I think that that becomes a very significant part of the formula that you should be using.

I wonder as well, Mr. Minister, another example that I'll cite to you, which is a little different, is the decision that you'd make to move municipal grid roads into the provincial road system. And I'm thinking particularly of that piece of road from Star City to Brooksby which makes the linkage to a major manufacturer, if you like, an exporter of lentils, particularly in Walker seeds. And I think that one of the great problems that they face very often is the fact that the roads may be not kept up to the proper standards for the truck traffic for their major industry. And I wondered if the provincial . . . if there's a formula or how it's decided in terms of removing that grid road into the provincial road network.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you for the question. The criteria before Highways will consider accepting a municipal road into the highway system, the roadway must form a logistical extension of the present highway network; two, the road links may be considered if traffic volumes are in excess of 250 vehicles per day; roads with lower volumes have the majority of local traffic and therefore should continue to remain under the municipal jurisdiction; requested roadways should be at least 25 kilometres from any existing parallel highway — that's 15 miles; special consideration may be given to roads accommodating heavy industrial traffic; prior to transfer of a roadway jurisdiction, the rural municipality shall construct the subgrade to gravelled primary grid road standards; and no commitment to improving the roadway to industry standard will be made as a consequence of the transfer of jurisdiction.

Mr. Gantefer: — Minister, a final question on that. Do all of those criteria have to be met equally, or are some of them weighted more or less than others? Because I think if you had to meet all those standards, you probably wouldn't transfer any. But some are very critical. I wonder, again using the example — and I know you're very familiar with the location of the road I'm speaking of — how would that apply to that particular road between Brooksby and Star City?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — They would have to meet all those criteria. The only area that . . . you know, if it was a heavy-haul situation, we could look at it.

But I want to tell the member opposite that we do fund rural roads. Between 50 and 80 per cent of the cost of a rural road is

funded by the province of Saskatchewan. So there may not be not as much benefit to the municipality as what some municipalities think because they are already funded by the province.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Mr. Minister, we've had an opportunity to discuss this highway between Archerwill and Greenwater a number of times. The construction was initiated about three years ago, I believe, and it was on the list for completion. And it has now been bumped to the extra list, I think it's called.

This highway is very important for the park at Greenwater, and I'm hoping you can tell the constituents that this one is probably going to be on your list for this year and why it wasn't on the list.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Highway 349 — I'm very familiar with that road; in fact we did spend some money a few years ago to try and get it into better condition — is on the possible additional projects list. And you would've gotten the construction projects list from the department. And right at the bottom, there are several projects that are listed as possible, additional projects for this coming year. Of course that will depend on budgets. That will depend on whether all the other original projects can be completed. And if there is a delay or something happens that one of those projects would not go ahead, then we would look at the additional projects list.

We do spend a considerable amount of money on maintenance. The cost is about \$1.6 million, I believe, for that 11 kilometres, and the maintenance cost is quite high at this point in time. And that's why it's moving up on the list.

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — It now being 1 o'clock, the House will stand adjourned. Before you depart, I wish all members a very enjoyable weekend back in your constituencies and with your families. This House now stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly adjourned at 1 p.m.