

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I rise today to present petitions from people from Dysart in the main. And I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the municipal revenue-sharing reduction and commit to stable revenue levels for municipalities in order to protect the interests of the property of taxpayers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present petitions on behalf of concerned citizens throughout the province. Their concern revolves around the government's refusal to commission an independent study to review the effects of gambling expansion policy on the social fabric of Saskatchewan. And the petition reads . . . the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take some responsibility for the ill effects of its gambling expansion policy, and immediately commission an independent study to review the social impact that its gambling policy has had on our province and the people who live here.

These petitions are signed by people from Fulda and Humboldt, Saskatchewan. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present petitions on behalf of people from the Englefeld, Watson area concerned about the social devastation caused by the NDP's (New Democratic Party) gambling policy.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take some responsibility for the ill effects of the gambling expansion policy, and immediately commission an independent study to review the social impact that its gambling policy has on our province and the people who live here.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions from citizens . . . (inaudible) . . . The prayer for relief, Mr. Speaker, reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan, in light of the most recent wave of property crimes, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, and the charge of attempted murder of a police officer;

such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise on behalf of citizens of this province who petition this Assembly:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan, in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, including the charge of attempted murder of a police officer; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

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

The people are from Melville, Killaly, Duff, Ituna, and Balgonie, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions on behalf of people throughout Saskatchewan that were affected by big game damage. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to change the Saskatchewan big game damage compensation program so that it provides more fair and reasonable compensation to farmers and townfolk for commercial crops, hay bales, shrubs and trees, which are being destroyed by the overpopulation of deer and other big game, including elimination of the \$500 deductible; and to take control measures to prevent the overpopulation of deer and other big game from causing this destruction.

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

People that have signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Glenbain area, Hazenmore, and the Vanguard area. I so present.

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.

Petitions to reverse the municipal revenue-sharing reduction;

To establish a task force to aid the fight against youth crime;

To change the Saskatchewan big game damage compensation program; and

To urge the government to commission an independent study to review the social impact of gambling.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Monday next move the first reading of a Bill, the trade union amendment Act, repealing successor rights.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give notice that I shall on day 23 ask the government the following questions:

To the minister responsible for Sask Environment and Resource Management: how much funding did each regional park in Saskatchewan receive from the provincial government for the fiscal year 1996-97?

And I also give notice that on day 23 I will be asking the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Sask Environment and Resource Management: how much funding will each regional park in Saskatchewan receive from the provincial government for the fiscal year '97-98?

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 23 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: (1) how much revenue was collected under the victims' fund as defined in The Victims of Crime Act in fiscal 1995-96; (2) of the revenue collected for the victims' fund, how much of that fund was spent on compensation for victims of crime; (3) once compensation for victims of crime was withdrawn from the victim's fund for the '95-96 fiscal year, how was the remainder of the revenue of that fund allocated?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, today I would like to introduce to you and through you, two people who represent the Al Ritchie Health Action Centre which officially opened this morning here in Regina.

We have in your gallery today, Rhonda Rosenberg — and I'd ask Rhonda to stand — president of the Al Ritchie Community Association and Diane Lemon — I ask Diane to stand also — who is the supervisor of the health centre.

And this morning I was very happy, Mr. Speaker, along with the member from Regina Victoria, to take part in the official opening of the centre and meet some of the people who have worked to bring it all together.

The goals and services of the Al Ritchie Health Centre are really excellent examples of community involvement, increased emphasis on wellness, and better coordination. And I really have to congratulate these individuals for the work they're doing both in the community and as health care professionals, Mr. Speaker.

I know all the members would like to join me in that and I'd ask the House to join me in welcoming Ms. Rosenberg and Ms. Lemon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to make an introduction this afternoon on behalf of my colleague, the member from Rosetown-Biggan.

Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is a group of very fine young people. They are the Beechy and Kyle Scouts — so they've travelled a long way to be with us today. They're accompanied by their Scout leaders, Keith Andrews from Beechy, and George Akister from Kyle. They're also accompanied by a chaperon, Jim Powers. I understand that they are going to spend some time with us here and then have a tour of the building, and I look forward to meeting with them later on for conversation and drinks. So I ask all members to join me in extending a warm welcome to this group of fine young people.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and members of the Assembly today seated in the west gallery, constituents and friends of mine, Ray and Jackie Sedley, and their two young sons, Steven and Brian.

Ray is an employee with Saskatchewan Property Management. Rarely does he ever get a day off but today he has a day off, and Jackie is a home day care operator in Yorkton, and their two sons got a week off from school. So they're here to observe the proceedings of the legislature, and ask all members of the Assembly to welcome them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the Assembly, I would like to introduce a few people in the chambers. In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to stand, is Mr. Steven Cady, president of SSC Marketing of California. During his visit to Saskatchewan, Steven is meeting with a number of private companies.

Some of Steven's successes include Slim Fast Foods, Sweet'n Low, Sudafed, Healthy Choice; and also has been working successfully with groups like ConAgra, Sara Lee, Faberge and Revlon. And accompanying Mr. Cady and showing him to Saskatchewan is a former member of the Legislative Chamber from Bengough-Milestone, Mr. David Lange.

Mr. Lange was from the Mossbank area, currently resides in Vancouver. And I'll be meeting later today with David and Steven. And I would ask all members of the Assembly to join

with me in giving them a warm welcome to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, if I just might take the liberty of introducing a couple of more people. In the west gallery sits Peter Volk, for SPI Marketing Group. And accompanying Peter . . . or sitting beside Peter is Frank Hart from KMPG, and Jim Morris, the CEO (chief executive officer) of SPI. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Shaunavon Woman Makes Impact with Canada's National Women's Hockey Team

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, everyone in the Assembly will be well aware that hockey has become our country's national sport and also that Saskatchewan hockey athletes play an integral part of building that sport. And since international competition began, Canada has shown the rest of the world that we have, if not the best, some of the best athletes in that sport.

Well today, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* recognition has been given to one of those hockey players from Saskatchewan. The headline of the story is "Passion for hockey drives teen to top women's player."

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud and pleased to stand here today and recognize the achievement of our national women's hockey team competing in the world championship, particularly Hayley Wickenheiser who was raised in the Shaunavon area and now makes her home in Calgary.

Ms. Wickenheiser, like many Saskatchewan hockey players, began her hockey career playing in the backyard pond, learning the basic skills of puck handling before moving to organized minor sports in Shaunavon.

Since joining the national team at the age of 15 in 1994, Mr. Speaker, Wickenheiser has proven herself to be one of the world's best female hockey players. In 1995 she was named the Pacific Rim championship's most outstanding forward.

I want to extend my congratulations to all members of the national women's hockey team and to the family of Hayley Wickenheiser. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this demonstrates that our country's dedication to hockey excellence is in good hands, and wish the best to the women's hockey team as they approach the national championship.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Code of Ethical Conduct

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the first order of business for this or any Assembly is the maintenance of public confidence in our elected officials. For it is on this foundation that the whole process of democratic government

rests, here and everywhere. This public confidence, as we all know, has been sadly shaken in the last few years.

In 1994, this Assembly took a first step in restoring public confidence through the adoption of the Code of Ethical Conduct for elected members. Later this day I will be moving first reading of a Bill, the integrity of members Act, which attempts to provide a mechanism by which the Code of Ethical Conduct, already adopted by this Assembly, may be enforced and also to provide some teeth to that code.

I am hopeful that all members of the Assembly will adopt this Bill unanimously. And I am pleased, on behalf of our caucus, to note that the hon. member for Saskatoon Greystone has agreed to second this Bill, as she has done more than any other member of this House to place this matter on the public agenda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Al Ritchie Health Action Centre

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I was fortunate today to have attended the official opening by the Regina Health District of the Al Ritchie Health Action Centre, located in my constituency. The goal of the centre is to work with community members to provide programs that meet the expressed health needs of area residents. The centre aims to improve access to Regina Health District services.

This is no small task. There are many people who will only try to obtain health services when health conditions reach a critical point for them. Yet we all know an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The centre will provide health assessment, screening, education, and outreach services. It will provide an important bridge between area residents and our health care system. The centre is guided by a steering committee including a representative of the Regina Health District, members of the community, and service providers. As always, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people can be counted upon to volunteer their time to serve their community.

I ask you and the other members of this Assembly to join me in thanking these volunteers for their commitment to improving the quality of health enjoyed by the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Heroic Rescue of Accident Victim

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this time to honour those involved in a life-saving effort this week. On April 1 a terrible accident almost claimed the life of a young exchange student. The 14-year-old was trying to push free a car when he was knocked over by a semi which ended up jack-knifing and pinning him under the front axle.

When workers first arrived there was a feeling of despair as the young man lay submerged in a ditch full of icy water. To make matters worse, a winter storm was battering the area. But rescue workers persevered and for almost two hours they battled the

terrible blizzard conditions. Some of the rescue workers were suffering from frostbite, but they refused to give up.

Finally a tow truck arrived on the scene and the workers were able to pull the 14-year-old free. The young man is now recovering in the hospital.

All those involved in this life-saving effort, from the bystanders who initially held the teen's head above water, to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), the fire-fighters and the paramedics, to the back hoe and tow truck operators, a heartfelt thank you for your dedication in saving this young man's life.

I can only imagine how difficult it was for everyone at the scene of this accident as they struggled to save the young teenager. But their dedication and hard work paid off in a big way.

This is just another example of Saskatchewan people pulling together in a crisis and beating the odds. I'm proud to be part of a province that has such wonderful people and I'm sure the other members will join me in thanking each and every one of you for your commitment to saving this young man's life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with my colleague in commending the heroics of Tuesday's event. This event grabbed both the local and the national headlines. I mention it once more because I believe we should recognize the heroism of the people involved in the rescue and the strong will to live of a young man.

I am referring to the accident and near tragedy that took place just west of Regina. We are all familiar with the story. A 14-year-old boy was the victim of a bizarre traffic accident during the terrible and unpredicted blizzard that struck the province. He was pinned under a semi-trailer and lay for nearly two hours with a broken leg and freezing water up to his neck.

Members of the RCMP, Regina fire-fighters, paramedics from Regina emergency services, and passers-by worked to free him. He was finally freed and taken to hospital where he is now apparently in stable condition.

The rescuers deserve our gratitude and thanks, because as we who live in this province know, we are all one ice-slick away from a similar crisis. It is good to know that rescue is possible regardless of the conditions.

And the boy, a visitor from Hong Kong, deserves our admiration for staying calm and, frankly, for staying alive while the work to free him was taking place. We can all imagine how we would act in a similar situation.

Saskatchewan challenges us in many ways, Mr. Speaker, and fortunately, Saskatchewan people are always up to those challenges. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fund-raising Event Held in the North

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to bring to the attention of the House a fund-raising effort in northern Saskatchewan. Over the past few years my office has received numerous requests for donations for school trips and sporting events. Since there was no money allocated to MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) offices for sponsorships of such events, I approached the mayors of my constituency to see if they would take part in the best-of-three hockey game fund-raising series against the chiefs of our regions.

The objectives of the games was threefold: one, we would promote fitness and unity amongst our people; second, we would fund raise for minor hockey associations and community groups in our region; and third, we would show another side of our northern leaders.

Both groups agreed and as a result, three games were held. Buffalo River and Dillon hosted the first game; the northern village of Beauval hosted the second game; and the final was held in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan.

First game the mayors won with much help from their MLA. The second game was won by the chiefs with much help from their grand chief. And the final game was held, again in Meadow Lake, and the tribal council chiefs won that game and won the series.

To make a long story short, the chiefs were led by Vice-Chief Isadore Campbell, Chief Archie Campbell, and band councillor Morris Iron, while the mayors countered with Mayor Bobby Woods of Buffalo Narrows, Mayor Joe Daigneault, Beauval, Mayor John L. Mongrant of Turnor Lake, Councillor Cliff Coombs and Mayor Henry LaPlante of Michel Village.

These games were a tremendous success and a total of \$4,200 was raised for 11 community groups, and I ask the members of the Assembly to applaud the significant efforts of the mayors and chiefs and the corporate sponsors that made all this possible. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Cooperative Dairy Industry Celebrates 100th Anniversary

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cooperative philosophy has been used throughout history in numerous societies to overcome many injustices and inequalities, both social and economic. Until 1844, Mr. Speaker, much of that cooperation was informal.

It wasn't until the incorporation of the first cooperative at Rochdale, England and the principles that its founders established, that formal cooperative organizations began to grow.

Mr. Speaker, the ideals and principles that many cooperatives follow today resulted from the first co-op at Rochdale. One of these cooperative enterprises has been in dairy producing which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

In addition to the celebration marking the 100 years of dairy

producing in Saskatchewan, the merger of Dairy Producers and Agrifoods International in 1996 created the largest dairy cooperative in Canada. This merger will increase the competitiveness and security of the co-op within the dairy industry while at the same time ensuring that dairy cooperatives continue to flourish. The cooperative sector has played an important role in developing Saskatchewan's economy in the past and will play an integral part in farther developments in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is appropriate that all members of this Assembly honour the accomplishment of our cooperative dairy industry for 100 years of commitment and success it has given to the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Legislative Building Security

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. According to the media reports, there was an unfortunate incident in this building yesterday when the Minister of Justice was apparently accosted by a citizen. The reports we received indicate that the minister's reaction was instantaneous in demanding beefed-up security for the Assembly and for elected officials.

Earlier this year when 72 citizens in Regina had their cars stolen in a single day, the minister's reaction was to say that car theft was not a common problem. He has still not responded to the many petitions filed in this House by members of the Liberal opposition from citizens all over the province demanding some action.

Members of the public are concerned that the Minister of Justice is giving a higher priority to the safety of elected officials over members of the general public. I would ask him what reassurance he has today that safety of the general public is at least as high a priority as that of elected officials?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the Board of Internal Economy, I would be pleased to respond to this issue with respect to the security of the building and this legislature. And I want to begin by saying that, Mr. Speaker, all of us realize that this legislature is a public building. It houses an institution that has been in place for hundreds of years — the British parliamentary system of which we are all part. We also understand that this building is a building owned by the people of Saskatchewan — this is their legislature. So quite clearly we are well aware of the fact that access to the general public has to and will take place.

With respect to security, I think it's fair to say that members of all sides of this House have been asked to submit recommendations, suggestions, and ideas as to how we can ensure public safety and safety for all members of this legislature.

Mr. Speaker, those are discussions that are ongoing — they

have taken place, and they will continue to take place to ensure that the public, as well as members of this legislature, are adequately protected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I asked a question for the Minister of Justice; instead the minister responsible for the Water Corporation provided us with a watered-down answer. I do request . . . will all members, will all members agree that security in this building is a serious issue? The public wants to know that security for the general public is at least as important an issue for the Minister of Justice as security for himself. And that is what he is ducking, that is what he has not dealt with, and I ask him if he will now respond to the concerns that have been brought before this House rather than just saying that it is not a common problem.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the member that this . . . as it is a public building and security within this building is a responsibility of all of ours. I would want to say if the member has concerns he may be concerned with respect to the security of members of the Liberal Party within his caucus. The reports I get is in fact that there is a great deal of insecurity in there and dispute happening. But that's another issue.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, as the member of this legislature representing our caucus in the Board of Internal Economy, security certainly is an issue, as it is within this building, outside of this building, all throughout this province. It's a collective role that we all share. And I want to say on behalf of the government that we will do our best to work with members of the third party and the opposition to ensure that the adequate procedures and measures are in place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Teaching Licence Revocations

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, delegates attending this week's Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation spring council in Saskatoon are debating whether the public has the right to know when a convicted sexual abuser has been barred from teaching. A media report this morning indicated that when a teacher's certificate is revoked, the Minister of Education decides if the public will be told.

Mr. Speaker, teachers in the Humboldt area want public disclosure whenever a teacher is barred because of child sexual abuse. They feel that this measure would ensure the public that the teaching professionals do not tolerate, condone, or support this crime.

So will the Minister of Education please explain why this is not presently the case.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — For the member's edification, Mr. Speaker, I think what I need to do is review the process for

cancelling or suspending a teacher's licence in the province of Saskatchewan.

At present, the Government of Saskatchewan, through the Minister of Education, regulates teacher certification. But under The Teachers' Federation Act, the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) has the responsibility to investigate situations involving teachers' misconduct or incompetence. Once a teacher has been found guilty of sexual misconduct and the STF has investigated that misconduct, they then make a recommendation to the minister to cancel the teacher's licence.

The STF discipline process has served the province extremely well over the last several decades. And I can tell you that the role of the minister is to ensure that teachers who have a cancelled licence no longer teach in Saskatchewan or any other jurisdiction across the country.

I can tell you this as well: the Department of Justice now has a procedure in place where they can notify the public of people who are dangerous sexual offenders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, when a teacher has been charged and convicted of child sexual abuse, it is incumbent that the people of Saskatchewan know. It is simply not acceptable that teachers who are convicted of this offence have the ability to move from province to province and continue teaching. Nor is it acceptable that convicted teachers can move from the public system to reserve schools because a registry is not readily available to everyone in the province. In addition, it is bad enough that the children are being sexually abused, but the good name of the teaching profession should not also be abused.

Mr. Speaker, under pressure from our caucus, this government enacted legislation so that people are notified when dangerous offenders have been released from prison. So does the minister not agree that the same rules should apply when a convicted sexual abuser has been barred from teaching?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, obviously the member did not hear the answer to her first question. She was obviously reading and preparing for her second question.

The Minister of Education, upon recommendation from the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, when a person has been found guilty of sexual misconduct, cancels the teacher's licence. The minister or the department then notifies every other provincial and territorial jurisdiction in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member of this, and the public: any teacher found guilty of gross sexual misconduct, upon recommendation from the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, has their licence cancelled. They can't teach anywhere.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Short-line Railways

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities raised concerns yesterday about this government's lack of action in addressing the future of short-line railways in this province.

The Minister of Agriculture says companies are willing to work with unions. However, according to yesterday's edition of the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, at least one union has already rejected changes to existing contracts. The Moose Jaw-Outlook Transportation Council also expressed concerns about successor rights and suggested the present labour policies of this government are preventing interested groups from looking at our short-lines.

Because of the watered-down answers, Mr. Speaker, and the deflection of responsibilities over there, I will ask either/or to answer this question. Will the Minister of Agriculture or Minister of Transportation explain what they are doing to address these obvious roadblocks that are standing in the way of groups wanting to operate a short-line rail.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. And I want to say first of all, workers are talking with short-line operators, and short-line operators are talking with workers, and they will come to an agreement and we will have short-line railways in the province of Saskatchewan.

But it surprises me, Mr. Speaker, that the member would attack workers when he should be attacking the Liberals in Ottawa who passed the transportation Bill to begin with. This is what the problem is, is the railways are allowed to abandon track. The federal government allows the railways to abandon track much easier today than they could in the past. There was not a word from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, not a word. But they would rather attack workers. This government does not believe in that concept, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is just not listening. If he had've been, he'd know we were also lobbying the federal government. But the responsibility is not just with the federal government.

We have indicated in a letter to the federal Minister of Agriculture that he must work with this government — and I reiterate work with this government — to address growing concerns relating to the abandonment of branch lines. We also believe there is an onus on this government to talk with the railways, because once railways are abandoned, they fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial government — I repeat, the provincial government. Obviously, Mr. Minister, planning must take place now.

Will the minister explain what leadership role his government is taking and what plans are being developed to provide solutions?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I want to thank the member for his second question, Mr. Speaker. And I want to say that this

government joined with SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) in instituting a short-line rail conference, was held in the province just a few weeks ago — very successful short-line conference.

Within the Department of Highways, there is a short-line unit, Mr. Speaker. We have people that specialize in the development of short-line. They will go into a particular area and help that area decide whether a short-line is viable or not.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, also in a balance between the companies, the proponents of short-line railroads and workers. And we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker. We do not believe in the Devine approach which has been now accepted by the Liberals, where you try to divide and conquer — you know, you have workers against business and you have rural against urban, and the division continues.

We believe in a balance, Mr. Speaker — workers and business working together to accomplish what needs to be accomplished.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gross Revenue Insurance Program Court Case

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Madam Minister, now that you've admitted there's a good chance you're going to lose the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) lawsuit and that you do set aside lawsuit contingency funds to deal with this sort of situation, it begs the question: where are you hiding this contingency fund? Where are you hiding hundreds of millions of dollars? In fact it must be really hidden, Madam Minister, because you haven't even bothered to give us advance knowledge.

Madam Minister, do you have a contingency fund set aside in case you lose the GRIP case? And how much is it and where are you hiding it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, what I have said is that in certain cases such as the farm fuel rebate program, there is . . .

An Hon. Member: — And the GRIP.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Not about GRIP at all. There is an internal decision made as to whether or not there should be an addition of funding put right into the budget — not hidden anywhere, right there in the budget — for the farm fuel rebate program, in case the program has to be changed. But what the members opposite know full well is the GRIP issue is before the courts and nobody on this side of the House is in a position to comment on the GRIP issue.

Short-line Railways

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my

question is to the Minister of Transportation as well. Mr. Speaker, we read the papers as well, but we particularly took an interest in the news release that the minister released on rail line abandonment and we're very happy that he is concerned about this problem. We do think though, that after listening to the questions from the two sides and the blame-throwing that goes back and forth, that both the Liberals and the NDP are wrong in this matter. They need to take a look at what farmers' concerns are.

Unfortunately, Mr. Minister, your concerns are unfortunately not enough, and they're not going to keep the rail lines open. Farmers don't need concern, Mr. Speaker; what they need is action. They need you, Mr. Minister, to remove your successor rights. And the successor rights legislation is your legislation, provincial legislation.

Mr. Minister, we would ask you, will you take the steps today? Will you clear the tracks for short-line railroads by releasing and removing your successor rights legislation?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well the attack, Mr. Speaker, on workers by the third party is understandable, because we're very used to that. It surprised me coming from the Liberals a few minutes ago.

But I want to say, this government believes in a balance between a business and working people. And there is discussions going on between workers and between short-line proponents, and this will continue and there will be agreement. We are not going to take the stand of your previous boss, the Mr. Devine government, that said, you know, minimum wage, we're not . . . I don't think we need to support workers there; occupational safety regulations, well I don't think we need those either; Trade Union Act, I don't think we need those.

We support the balance between workers and business, and cooperation, not division — rural against urban, native against white. We're not going to get into that talk.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another question for the Minister of Transportation. Mr. Minister, what's better — a job with the short-line or no job at all? And that's what we're faced with in this situation.

The people at the Moose Jaw-Outlook Transportation Council say that successor rights is a roadblock to what needs to be done. SARM says it's a roadblock to what needs to be done. The short-line railroad company, Railtex, says it's a roadblock to what needs to be done. Yet you continue to do nothing except blame the federal government or anybody else you can point a finger at.

Mr. Minister, it's time for you to put your NDP ideology aside and do something that will help farmers instead of your union leader buddies, and friends. Just before question period, Mr. Speaker, you will recall that I gave notice that the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus will be introducing legislation to repeal this destructive successor rights legislation.

Mr. Minister, will you wake up, smell the coffee, and support this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank the member opposite. And I wish the member would have joined with Saskatchewan, Alberta, which happens to have a Conservative government, and Manitoba, who happens to have a Conservative government as well, who approached the federal government, and in fact approached the Standing Committee on Transportation, the Senate committee, Mr. Speaker. And of course there is . . . I don't know if the member doesn't believe that there are Conservatives in the Senate, but I think there are. And you know what the Senate Committee on Transportation said to us? No, we'll allow the railways to continue to abandon rail lines as they please.

There was no support from the third party. There was no support from the official opposition when we were attempting to have the federal government take a second look at Bill C-14, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a little hypocritical to come with some of the questions he is today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Cabinet Ministers' Travel

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wonder what the following places have in common: China, Hong Kong, Israel, Germany, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, London, Cologne, Dublin, Brussels, Amsterdam, Zürich, Mexico, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and South Africa. Mr. Speaker, these are all locations that have been visited by the NDP cabinet ministers in the past few months at taxpayers' expense.

And, Mr. Speaker, while our caucus understands that travel is necessary, we're also concerned on behalf of the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan as to the reasons for these trips.

Mr. Speaker, many people are asking and wondering whether or not many of these trips are necessary. My question is to the minister with the most air miles, the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Minister, don't you think ministers should be required to release a report each time they take an international trip, outlining the costs of the trip and exactly what was accomplished in terms of new contracts and new trade opportunities for Saskatchewan people?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that trade is very, very important. Since 1991, trade and exports from this province have increased over 50 per cent, and it's one of the fastest, it's one of the fastest growth areas in job creation in the province, is that area of export.

I want to say to the member opposite that it's difficult to keep up with the opposition as to whether they think trade missions are good or whether they're bad. I have here a headline, "Romanow . . ." and I quote, "Romanow urged to participate." This is a Team Canada where the then leader and I quote: "Lynda Haverstock says Prime Minister Chrétien has invited the Premier from Saskatchewan . . ." and basically she says he should go — it's an important part of his job.

Then I've got one here from the member from Kelvington-Wadena, and this is on February 28 where she says, on February 28, we shouldn't do trade missions. And then later on August 11, she said, we should go on trade missions.

And the Conservatives are the same way. When in government, they flew all over the world. They could never be here in the House because they were so busy travelling.

I want to say to you, trade is important and it's increasing every day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I earlier indicated, we certainly are not opposed to trips abroad. We certainly recognize the benefits. But we also are concerned with the number of trips.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The Chair is having difficulty being able to hear the hon. member from Moosomin put his question. And I'll ask for the cooperation of all members of the House to allow the — order — to allow for the question to be heard and to be properly considered according to the rules of the House.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are trips, however, that are questionable — like the Deputy Premier's recent African safari.

Mr. Speaker, very little news came out of this trip. I don't recall any specific announcements regarding contracts or real benefit to the province. A few reporters you did talk to decided there was no real news and largely ignored it. And the one news conference that was scheduled was cancelled after the African official didn't show up.

Mr. Minister, can you tell us exactly what did you accomplish on the trip, the Indian link, and the trade mission of doom?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, if I had time I would go through this whole file, but here's one headline: "Saskatchewan trade mission heads to Africa." And it quotes Flexi-coil, saying that Africa is a very, very important part of their trade. Half of the air seeders that go to Australia come from Saskatchewan, from Flexi-coil.

They say that South Africa is a very important new market. They were on the trip. They agree that it's a great place to go.

Brandt Industries. I have a letter here from Dave Fletcher of Brandt Industries. It says, "Just a note to thank you for what appears to be some very significant interest in our products in Zimbabwe." Zimbabwe of course being in Africa. The member would appreciate that Brandt Industries was much involved in that trade mission.

And finally, "Schulte's sales expanding to South African market," says Jim Carnago. Recently announced his participating in the recent trade mission sponsored by the STEP

(Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership Inc.) has already paid off in selling farm equipment into South Africa.

So I say to you, I'm not sure what the member wants from trade missions, but if it's sales and contracts, here they are. Look at them. Try to read the newspaper, or get someone to read them to you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

La Loche Hospital

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An insurance policy was recently renewed for the La Loche hospital, if one can call a number of old ATCO trailers pushed together a hospital. The insurance policy is based on cash value, not replacement value as would normally be the case, because the building is so old, so run down, that insuring this makeshift hospital for replacement cost was out of the question.

Mr. Speaker, if anything, this points out the fact that people of La Loche and area have done without an appropriate health care facility for too long. We continue to hear this government point fingers at Ottawa yet what we have here is an issue that is under provincial jurisdiction; a provincial responsibility; a situation this provincial government and the provincial Minister of Health would like to continue to sweep under the carpet; but an issue that this provincial government can no longer run from.

Will the minister explain when the people of this area can expect action from this government to address their substandard health care facility?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — As the member will know, Mr. Speaker, actually we have been taking some action in this regard. We created a West Side Facility Planning Committee — as the member knows because the mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse, where the member is from, is on that committee — to look into the situation of the health care facilities in the North. That committee, as the member knows, Mr. Speaker, has recommended that the facility in La Loche should be replaced. We will be making an announcement within the near future with respect to some of the items in that planning committee report. I think the member should be optimistic about some changes.

As the member knows, we've built a new health centre in La Ronge in the North. We're building a new health centre with the cooperation of the first nations and the federal government on the Chicken Reserve. And in due course, Mr. Speaker, we're going to take action on the west side as well, and I join with the member in looking forward to replacing that facility in due course, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In due course — it's been 17 years since we've had those ATCO trailers. Due course means quick course in northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health often speaks about the threat of the two-tiered health care system yet that's exactly what we have in this province. There's a dramatic difference in the level of health care offered between urban and rural citizens and against . . . and between rural and northern people. As each day passes and this government does nothing to address this injustice, they simply feed the cynicism that our northern people have about this government.

We continue to hear the Minister of Health talk about how his government is moving to improve health care in the North but there is no action. Will the Minister of Health make a commitment in this House today to address the concerns of our northern people? Will he make a commitment on behalf of this government to build a new hospital in La Loche — yes or no — and when? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say, as the member should know, that in the budget of this government delivered on March 20 there was a substantial increase to the budget of the northern health services branch, because we are doing more, Mr. Speaker, to spend money on health care in the North and providing more services than we ever have before.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that that is contrary to what the leader of the member's party says. Because as has often been said, to the denial of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Liberal Party in this province is on record as saying we should cut hundreds of millions of dollars out of the health care budget.

And I want to point out to the member, Mr. Speaker, that in today's issue of the *Star-Phoenix*, the Leader of the Liberal Party has this to say, he says — he's referring to a budget of the commerce students, and it says:

But Melenchuk applauded the fiscal conservatism of the budget. "I like it better than the provincial budget," he said.

And I have this to say to the member from Athabasca. We're increasing health care spending in the North. Your leader says not to. Where do you stand?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 215 — The Cabinet Travel Accountability Act

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 215, The Cabinet Travel Accountability Act.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 212 — The Integrity of Members of the Legislative Assembly Act

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. member from Saskatoon Greystone, that Bill No. 212, entitled The Integrity of Members Act be introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I beg leave of the members to make a statement of a personal nature, brief statement, if I may.

Leave granted.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Birthday Wishes to the Clerk

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the Premier and the Government House Leader and the caucus Chair and my colleagues for not having consulted with them about this statement. Sometimes things happen so rapidly that the normal channels of communication fail us. My apologies as well to the opposition members for not informing them beforehand about this important matter.

Mr. Speaker, we all try hard to separate our political and personal lives. We try, although not always successfully, to leave our political obligations outside our homes as we try to fulfil our obligations as family members.

By the same token, we try to leave personal matters at the door of this Chamber. We must be able to make our contribution to debate on public policy unimpeded by personal considerations. When significant personal events happen to anyone in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, it is then incumbent upon us to recognize this.

And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I must inform the Assembly that today is Gwenn Ronyk's birthday. And I would ask all members to join with me in wishing our Clerk a very happy day.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the hon. member from Saskatchewan Rivers on his feet?

Mr. Langford: — Before orders of the day, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask for leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly, I'd like to welcome the reeve from the RM (rural municipality) of Buckland, which is located just on the north side of P.A. (Prince Albert).

He met with the minister from SARM this morning and will be meeting with the Minister of Highways right after question period here. So I'd like to ask all members to welcome the reeve. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 1 — The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 1 amends The Northern Municipalities Act. As many of us know, The Northern Municipalities Act is the major statute setting out the powers and responsibilities of northern towns and villages. Last year we introduced amendments that responded to evolving local government needs, particularly with respect to assessment and taxation processes. Administrative issues are also considered on a regular basis, and many times are brought to our attention by local municipal administrations and department staff. I will briefly touch on a few highlights of this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, some of the changes reflect a recognition of certain duplication and overlap between local authorities. Three amendments in this Bill will resolve some overlap in jurisdiction between northern municipalities and health district boards. Clarification of their roles will help locally elected officials fulfil their respective mandates.

Proclamation of the three amendments will be delayed until a northern health district is established and able to assume these responsibilities.

Another amendment provides municipalities with the authority to pass bylaws regulating bicycle safety and operation. Such authority allows local bylaws to be fashioned according to local conditions. Concern particularly for the safety of our children lies at the heart of this amendment.

Last year we made amendments affecting assessment and taxation. Concurrently with other municipal legislation, we have identified some fine-tuning that is required to this northern municipal legislation. Issues such as mailing certain notices by ordinary rather than by registered mail; clarifying responsibility as to who is responsible for the cost of a transcript in an assessment appeal; confirmation of the exact date upon which an appeal period runs — these are some of the minor amendments in this Bill.

A key issue in respect of reassessment and which is included in this Bill, as in the rural and urban Bills, is the introduction of an extended phase-in period for tax increases resulting from reassessment, from three years to six years.

Although this may not be widely used in the North, its inclusion here illustrates that we are supportive of municipal governments in the North and believe that they should enjoy the same decision-making powers that their southern counterparts enjoy.

These amendments should be supported by all members of the legislature. They are in the best interests of northern

municipalities, their municipal councils, and ultimately all Saskatchewan residents.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 1.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to stand up and express my concerns and questions on behalf of the people of the Athabasca constituency on Bill No. 1, The Northern Municipalities Act.

The Bill before us changes the law regarding the operation of northern municipalities in the area of property assessment rules and public health matters. First allow me to address the issue of property assessment rules.

Although on the surface this Bill may appear to be non-controversial, it is important for the government to consult extensively with those people to which this Bill will apply.

To this point, despite what the government might say, adequate consultation has not been conducted on the Bill. Nor has it been conducted with respect to tax reassessment — especially tax reassessment. We have been talking to northern administrators and mayors. These people have several serious questions about tax reassessment. We will continue to consult and bring forward the concerns of northern administrators and others whom this Bill will impact.

(1430)

But it is also essential that the government hold public meetings in the North. It is essential that it consult with northern administrators and, Mr. Minister, it is essential that it consult with stakeholders in the mining sector and forestry industries to determine what affect tax reassessment will have on land leases. Until the government engages in such consultations, we do not understand the Bill, Madam Minister.

Any time the government changes property assessment rules in northern communities, given that there is a minimal tax base, then the value of property is substantially lower than that in rural Saskatchewan. As well there is relatively no real estate market and unemployment is staggering. The government simply continued to scratch the surface, neglecting the real problems plaguing northern Saskatchewan.

There is a possibility that a tax shift will occur and that the appeal process will get bogged down. If this happens people's frustrations and the blame will be placed on municipal mayors and councils, not on the minister and her colleagues.

The government has very little foresight into the impacts of tax reassessment in Saskatchewan, let alone northern Saskatchewan. This is reflected in the fact that today the government must amend a legislation to allow for a six- rather than three-year adjustment period. Although the lengthened adjustment period to six years is welcome, the government did not get this legislation right in the first place and it has cost

some unnecessary burden. This excessive increase in property tax bills is magnified by the government's constant financial offloading onto the municipalities.

Moreover, we have concerns regarding the repercussions of this Bill on the mining sector. What impact will tax reassessment have on the lease payments paid by mining companies? Will these payments increase or decrease?

The people of the North need answers to such questions. And lease payments are put into the Northern Revenue Sharing Trust Account. Then this money is redistributed amongst northern communities to be used for capital projects.

So as you can see, Madam Minister, these are not trivial questions which should be taken lightly by your government.

The government has also failed to address the fact that there is virtually no real estate market in the North. Until this happens how can northern property be accurately assessed? Property in Stony Rapids simply cannot be compared to property in Regina, or even rural Saskatchewan, to determine its true value. Nor has the government addressed the low tax base in the North. What impact will this have on property reassessment?

Mr. Speaker, these are the questions that need to be answered. These are the questions which, had the government engaged in more meaningful consultation, might have been answered. More consultation needs to be done. And since the government continually neglects the concerns of the North, it is incumbent on the official opposition to ensure that these questions and concerns are raised.

However, Madam Minister, as I stated earlier, it is the government's responsibility to conduct meaningful consultation with all the people who will be affected by tax reassessment and The Northern Municipalities Act before this Bill can be passed.

Next, allow me to briefly address the section of the Bill that will transfer authority over many public health matters which are currently being controlled by municipal councils and eventually onto health district boards.

The Bill proposes to transfer authority from, amongst others, appointing health officers, pasteurizing milk, slaughterhouses, inspecting and regulating dairies, fish packing and processing plants, and managing and operating hospitals, from municipal councils, which are entirely elected, to district health boards which, as we all know, are not.

We are concerned that in transferring these authorities, less money will be given to the municipal council and given to the health districts, which will resolve in a decrease in service and control for northern municipalities.

Before this Bill can be passed, it is essential that this government finally realize that life in the North is a lot different from life in Regina, and even life in rural southern Saskatchewan.

People in the North face unique challenges. Any legislation the

government introduces should reflect that uniqueness. We believe it is essential to consult extensively with those people in the North whom this Bill will affect. Therefore, until these people can be consulted and all the questions which I've raised today are answered, we will not be supporting this Bill.

Until such a time, I move adjournment of this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker: — Before proceeding, I do want to remind all hon. members that rule 28 of our rules do require that members direct their debate to the Speaker and not directly to members within the Assembly. And I'll simply remind all members and ask themselves to conduct themselves accordingly when participating in debate in the House.

Bill No. 2 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 2 amends The Rural Municipality Act, 1989. This Bill adjusts and improves upon amendments that were introduced last year. Many of those changes were made in response to evolving local government needs and changes made at that time to assessment and taxation processes.

Every year a number of administrative issues are also brought to our attention by local municipal administrations and department staff. These amendments contain changes to a few administrative practices in keeping with our ongoing efforts to maintain up-to-date legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I will briefly touch on a few highlights of this Bill. Some of the changes proposed here reflect a recognition of certain duplication and overlap between local authorities. Just as in the urban municipality amending legislation, three amendments in the Bill will resolve some overlap in jurisdiction between rural municipalities and health district boards. Clarification of roles will help these important locally elected officials achieve efficiencies and effectively deliver appropriate services.

One area of shifted responsibility is with regard to waste disposal. RMs have relied on public health legislation to make many bylaws governing waste disposal. With the new Public Health Act that authority has been removed. An amendment to this Act ensures continuing authority for RMs to develop bylaws respecting waste disposal.

Another amendment provides municipalities with the authority to pass bylaws regulating bicycle safety and operation. Such bylaws should be welcomed by everyone who sees safety — particularly of children — as a major concern. The prevention of head injuries is ultimately a goal of this amendment. Again this authority is being introduced into all three of our municipal Acts.

Last year we made amendments affecting assessment and taxation. We have since identified some fine-tuning that is

required. Issues such as mailing certain notices by ordinary rather than registered mail; clarifying responsibility as to who is responsible for the cost of a transcript in an assessment appeal; confirmation of the exact date upon which an appeal period runs — these are typical of the minor nature of a number of the amendments in this Bill.

Another issue in respect of reassessment which is included in this Bill, is the introduction of the extended phase-in period for tax increases resulting from the reassessment from three years to six years. This amendment was announced by the Premier at the 1997 SUMA convention. Although it responds to a request from the cities of Regina and Saskatoon and their business communities; it may not be something that many RMs will use.

Before moving forward with this change, we did consult with SARM. Sinclair Harrison, president of SARM, has since noted that this change is not one that the RMs requested and he suggested it could be rather complex for those who choose to implement the longer phase-in. I don't disagree. However, the tool will be there and rural councils can decide locally whether it's an appropriate action for them or not. We also continually strive to keep our municipal legislation parallel wherever it makes sense to do that.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I believe I've provided an adequate outline of this legislation and only add that these amendments should be supported by all members of the legislature. They are in the best interests of municipalities and all Saskatchewan residents.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 2. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak to Bill No. 2, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act. And upon reviewing Bill No. 2, I find that it does make many changes that were necessary to facilitate the reassessment process.

Actually, I believe that this Bill is sort of a band-aid for many of the minister's mistakes relating to the entire reassessment process. These proposed amendments to The Rural Municipality Act will finally give the rural municipalities and the school boards the tools that they need to properly adjust their mill rate factors for specific property classes.

But I view some of the other changes proposed within this Bill as admissions that the government has made many mistakes in this reassessment process. While this Bill will now allow local governments the option of extending the reassessment phase-in period from three to six years, the government should have implemented a reasonable phase-in period for these extensive changes in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, it's really tragic that the minister and her officials did not listen to suggestions and concerns that local governments raised about the reassessment phase when the program was first being drafted. The resulting mess and confusion is testimony that the reassessment process was rammed through without enough careful planning and

calculations.

The average Saskatchewan property owner finds the assessment calculations complicated enough already. But this government has now bungled up the issue even further because the program was not properly planned. Even the explanatory notes on this Bill outline the minister admits that she has made a grave error in reassessment. The explanatory notes relating to clause 330.2 state:

Upon re-examination of the impacts that reassessment will have on some specific economic sectors, it has been recently determined that some of the shifts are more dramatic than originally anticipated.

No kidding. Just let's have a look at this whole process. The provision that allows for the addition of the agricultural property factor to be included in the reassessment process is long overdue. But once again, why was it not thought out thoroughly beforehand, before it was implemented?

This lack of planning and lack of accountability and lack of leadership and a refusal to accept input on the reassessment process are all symptoms of a total botching of the NDP government's handling of this whole reassessment process.

Because of this ineptitude, Mr. Speaker, RMs who had already sent out their assessment notices will now have to issue new notices in order to make the adjustments for the ag property factor.

Once again, this means that local governments are shouldering the costs for the minister's mistakes. The government's lack of foresight on the reassessment issue and the continual downloading of funding cuts to local governments is now triggering some bitter mill rate fighting between neighbouring RMs.

This government's failure to provide adequate funding is pitting community against community, Mr. Speaker, and school boards unfortunately are caught in the middle of this chaos. It is extremely unfair that the funding for our children's education has now been placed at the heart of the reassessment debacle. Local school boards are fending off criticism and risking further ill will while planning out their future mill rate adjustments.

Aside from the amendments pertaining to assessments, this Bill contains changes to laws governing waste collection in municipalities. And there are many housekeeping sections that municipalities have in fact long awaited in order to make their responsibilities more clear. But there are other sections of Bill No. 2 that we are gathering input on and we will require some further time to study their implications. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of this motion.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 3 amends The Urban Municipality Act, 1984. This Bill follows on amendments that were introduced last year in response to

evolving local government needs and changes made at that time to assessment and taxation processes. Every year a number of administrative issues are also brought to our attention by local municipal administrations and department staff. These amendments contain changes to a few administrative practices in keeping with our ongoing efforts to develop user-friendly legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I will briefly touch on a few highlights of this Bill. First we've included an ability to make regulations regarding treatment of assets and liabilities for municipalities who are interested in restructuring. Although we don't have all the answers on restructuring, we will be ready to help municipalities develop their own solutions. This is a means to that end.

The regulations will be developed in consultation with SUMA and SARM. These will help to clarify municipal expectations and remove the uncertainty that exists now for small communities contemplating a move into the surrounding rural municipality.

We are also requiring that smaller urban municipalities retain qualified administrators to manage their affairs. Only the magnitude, not the complexities, of municipal issues vary with the size of communities. It is very important that administrators are competent to deal with changes in technology and practice.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, some of the changes reflect a recognition of certain duplication and overlap between local authorities. Three amendments in this Bill will resolve some overlap in jurisdiction between urban municipalities and health district boards. Clarification of their roles will help these important locally elected officials fulfil their respective mandates. Issues such as the pasteurization of milk and bathing in public waters are more profoundly issues of health rather than civic administration.

Another amendment provides municipalities with the authority to pass bylaws regulating bicycle safety and operation. Such bylaws should be welcomed by everyone who sees safety, particularly of children, as a major concern. The prevention of head injuries is ultimately a goal of this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, we have an amendment that removes the requirement that the form of tax receipt issued by the municipality be approved by myself as minister. Although amendments like this aren't the stuff of headlines, they can improve the efficiency of local administrations.

Last year we made amendments affecting assessment and taxation. With a year under our belt since then, we have identified some fine-tuning that is required. Issues such as mailing certain notices by ordinary rather than registered mail; clarifying responsibility as to who is responsible for the cost of a transcript in an assessment appeal; confirmation of the exact date upon which an appeal period runs, are typical of the minor nature of a number of the amendments in this Bill.

A key issue in respect of reassessment and which is included in this Bill is the introduction of an extended phase-in period for

tax increases resulting from reassessment from three years to six years.

This amendment was announced by the Premier at the 1997 SUMA convention. This change responds to a request from the cities of Regina and Saskatoon and their business communities in particular, and illustrates our commitment to providing legislation that works for people. The amendment also received approval from SUMA before it was announced.

Mr. Speaker, these are refinements in an ongoing process to modernize a system, an assessment system that has not been revised in over 30 years. There have been extensive consultations with all affected groups — northern, rural, and urban — throughout this process. These are ongoing. They continue. And many times that the requests that came from municipalities were issues that could not be foreseen until the actual numbers to be used from the 1994 base became available last fall, in the fall of 1996.

So these refinements that we are bringing forward to the changes we made last year are in no way meant to correct what some people might see as deficiencies in the amendments last year, Mr. Speaker, but still an ongoing refining process which will continue, as we continue to consult with all municipalities, municipal officials, administrators, businesses, farmers, all ratepayers in this province, to work together with them to refine this system until we will again have the finest assessment system in North America.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I believe I've provided an adequate outline of this legislation, including the premiss that this is an evolving process, that it will continue. I have no doubt whatsoever that there will be more amendments to all of these Acts this year, next year, and in future years, in order to keep our legislation modern, current, and responsive to the needs of all local governments in this province. These amendments should be supported by all members of the legislature. They're in the best interests of municipalities and all of Saskatchewan residents.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to move second reading of Bill No. 3.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have a number of concerns regarding this Bill. Last year this government embarked upon an extensive program to reform the property tax rules in urban municipalities of the province. You will recall that last year's Bill No. 70 made sweeping changes to the way lands and buildings were assessed for municipal taxation purposes in urban municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, we had strong concerns about many of the changes made in that legislation and those concerns are well documented and recorded in the debates of this House recorded last year. We still have many of those same concerns.

This year's Bill amounts to a recognition by the government that certain measures they brought in last year were flawed and need to be gone through again. The most obvious example of

the government's acknowledging that it committed a serious error last spring, is the change from three-year phase-in to six years, Mr. Speaker.

Let me shed some light on this subject by recounting the history of reassessment. The government made great political hay out of the fact that it was tackling the difficult issue of reassessment after 30 years of delay and dithering by the previous provincial governments.

We heard the Premier state again and again how this is a difficult and thorny issue which required the courage and determination by his government. We heard him say how previous administrations didn't have the fortitude to deal with changing property values over a 30-year time frame. Of course the Premier didn't mention that a great part of the problem arose during the 1970s, from the failure of the NDP administration to reform those same assessment rules.

The present Premier served as minister in that NDP government which held power from '71 until '82, so he bears some of the responsibility for the present mess that we are in. If reassessment had occurred regularly in the '70s and '80s, these drastic changes in assessment today could have been avoided. Instead of the present drastic mess, we would have had regular adjustments every few years. Last year's Bill allowed urban municipalities to phase in the changes in assessment over three years if they wished to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the complaints about the three-year maximum for the phase-in were loud and clear. Now we see the government has decided to extend the time frame to six years. The trouble is that the Bill is coming too late. Most cities, towns, and villages have already made their phase-in plans and those plans call for a three-year phase-in.

The other problem with the six-year phase-in is that the government's own stated tax policy is that there will be another reassessment in the year 2000. I will help the Minister of Municipal Government with arithmetic on this point, Mr. Speaker. Six years after this reassessment will be later than the year 2000, and if a municipality adopts the six-year phase-in on the current reassessment, how is it supposed to implement the next reassessment currently scheduled for the year 2000? Will it also be phased in over several years?

All of this is left uncertain, Mr. Speaker. All of this is very uncertain. We see this year's Bill as an attempt to fix the problems created by last year's Bill, but it's far from clear that the attempts is anywhere near successful.

Then we have the ongoing problem of the business improvement district levy in cities that have decided to abolish their business tax. In last year's Bill, the Minister of Municipal Government asked cities and towns with business improvement districts to charge the levy essentially using the assessed value of the lands and buildings as a basis and then setting the rate and then dividing the levy up among the tenants in a commercial building on a proportional basis according to the amount of rent they paid to the landlord.

That plan didn't work, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of

Municipal Government has been sent back to the drawing board to try to design a system that will meet the needs of small business and municipal governments. The result of her work is the new, supposedly improved version of section 111.1.

The new formula will allow the city councils to pass a business improvement district levy, again based on property value, the assessed value of the building in which the small businesses are located, and then divide that levy up according to a much more uncertain formula.

This year the apportionment among the business tenants will be either on the basis of the rent they pay or on the basis of the area they occupy. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not clear whether this choice is to be exercised by the municipality or by the business occupants. And it's not clear whether the choice is to apply to one building at a time or to all the businesses in a particular business improvement district.

Furthermore, the whole notion of charging a business improvement that goes up as the value of the property goes up is one that I think we have to study very carefully.

Mr. Speaker, we have other concerns about this Bill which my colleague, the hon. member from North Battleford, will be addressing later.

One thing must be said about municipal taxation whenever we look at a Bill such as this one, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing home-owners in our cities crying foul, and they have a point. The pain of reassessment is real; that pain could be lessened somewhat by this government.

The government could lessen the pain somewhat if they would stop offloading their financial responsibilities onto the municipalities.

If the government would at least maintain municipal revenue-sharing grants at previous levels, which are already been low and been downloaded on, then the mill rate charged by the towns, villages, and cities could in some cases be lowered or at least maintained at a current level.

With the March 20, 1997 we see that the revenue-sharing grants to urban municipalities have fallen once again. In the case of the city of North Battleford, we see that the revenue-sharing grant will fall from \$856,385 down to \$453,733. Mr. Speaker, that's a reduction of 47 per cent. And that's just the city of North Battleford.

An Hon. Member: — Glad I'm still not in council.

Mr. Bjornerud: — By the member . . . My colleague has made a good point, Mr. Speaker: who would want to be on council at this point in anywhere in a municipality in Saskatchewan.

It's the same in urban and rural municipalities across the province, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of the province is offloading the costs of running his government onto the municipalities and the municipal taxpayer. And the people know exactly what's going on and they're not being fooled.

We in the official opposition are telling the people exactly what

is going on and we are not going to let the Premier and his government get away with it. We are going to make sure that they pay the price for their two-faced attitude towards transfer payments.

On one hand they cry bloody murder when the federal government transfers some small measure of fiscal responsibility to the provinces in areas that they are clearly within exclusive provincial jurisdiction. Then on the other hand, they starve their own people, the good urban and rural, northern municipalities of Saskatchewan, by cutting back on revenue sharing, in the case again of North Battleford, to the tune of 47 per cent in one single year.

Mr. Speaker, this follows already much downloading from '91 when they were elected, and now this is another 47 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we have much more to say on this Bill and on the issues which are raised by this Bill. Therefore I move adjournment of debate on the motion to give second reading to this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 17 — The Dental Disciplines Act

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Dental Disciplines Act.

This new Act will address two issues. First it will include all dental-related professionals under a single Act, streamlining the regulation of these professionals and improving accountability to Saskatchewan people. Second, it will allow dental therapists, hygienists and assistants to work in a variety of new settings, such as nursing homes. This will help improve public access to these important preventative health services.

Mr. Speaker, this new Act is based on extensive consultation with all the dental-related professional bodies. I'm very pleased to say that the Act has the full support of all these bodies. The new Act will regulate dentists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, dental assistants and dental technicians under one statute instead of six, Mr. Speaker. But at the same time the statute will allow, for the first time ever, each association to regulate its own members.

Mr. Speaker, in the course of upgrading their statutes, the Saskatchewan Dental Hygienists' Association and the Saskatchewan Dental Assistants' Association told us they wanted self-regulation. And after careful review, we decided to support this initiative.

The new Act contains a number of measures to ensure public accountability. For instance, the discipline process will be clarified and expanded to ensure each association can effectively respond to public concerns should they arise. Disciplinary hearings will be open to the public and public members will be appointed to sit on the dental association councils and their disciplinary committees. As well, each professional association will be required to file an annual

report, and proposed bylaws that may impact the public will have to be approved by the government after a consultation process involving all stakeholders.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to say that this new Act will recognize the changing roles of health service providers in our new health system. In addition, it will allow dental therapists, hygienists, and assistants to work independently in new settings such as special care homes or community health centres. This initiative will make regular preventive dental care more accessible to people who may not otherwise get the services due to factors like age, infirmity, or lack of transportation.

Mr. Speaker, this approach is entirely consistent with our renewed health system. With these changes, we're bringing services closer to people, giving them the support they need to maintain or improve their health. And we're also encouraging the formation of teams of health service providers who can bring a whole range of health services closer to where people live.

Another feature of the new statute is the approach taken to scope of practice. Simply put, this new Act is saying that certain dental services can only be performed by the professionals that are trained to do them. Similar models have been used with great success in other provinces. The approach is seen as more flexible than a rigid list of tasks which some of the dental professions are now subject to, and it helps protect members of the public.

I'm confident that this statute will serve the six dental professions and the people of Saskatchewan well into the future. It will streamline regulation, ensure public accountability, and for some, improve access to dental care.

Because this new Act will regulate all the dental professions, the repeal of The Dental Profession Act, The Dental Technicians Act, The Dental Therapists Act, and The Denturists Act is required. I want to once again recognize the efforts of the dental professions themselves in helping us bring this Act forward. We appreciate their participation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Dental Disciplines Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, there are a number of points which are of concern to the Liberal opposition, but I think first and foremost the question raised by this new omnibus Bill is, how will it improve dental care to the people of Saskatchewan. Now will this improve dental hygiene generally and the provision of dental services?

Well we know that Saskatchewan children have a higher level of tooth decay than the national average. Canadian standards call for 50 per cent of our children with no tooth decay by the year 2000. Again sadly, Saskatchewan's figures lag far behind the national average. In the case of the Battlefords, only 39.73 of our children, kindergarten to grade 6, have no history of

tooth decay. In the North, Mr. Speaker, that falls to only 17 per cent — 17 per cent of the children, grade 6 and lower, have no history of tooth decay. And yet Canadian standards call for 50 per cent by the year 2000.

How is this Act going to address that problem? Now you'll recall at one time we did have an aggressive program in this province, a school program for dealing with dental hygiene of our school children. And then a few years ago when the Conservatives were in office, that program was cut back substantially.

Now the NDP of that day were very, very critical of cut-backs to that program. They were going to fix it when they got back into office. And so of course when they got back into office we thought they would indeed fix up the problem with the cut-back to the school dental program.

Well as my colleagues here have said, they sure fixed it. The solution turned out to be to cancel it all together. So what the Tories scaled back, the NDP cancelled. What the NDP criticized as a half measure was instead pulled back to a zero measure.

Well they don't seem to be very fazed by that, but the problem of decay of teeth in school-age children is a serious problem in Saskatchewan. It is higher than the national average. I wish that hon. members opposite would display some of their same concern for the problem now, when they are government, as they showed when they were sitting on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — And I feel confident, Mr. Speaker, that I can assure you that members opposite, the concerns we have today, sitting in opposition, we will not lose in the migration across the floor in a couple of years time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the government has recently taken the initiative of the community schools program, and I would like to congratulate them for that.

The community schools program is an attempt to provide some enriched programing in schools in which a significant percentage of the pupils come from disadvantaged homes. And it is an attempt to provide a range of services outside the narrow purview, the narrow confines of education generally, in areas dealing with the problems attendant on poverty and malnutrition.

I would like to say that I congratulate the government for taking this initiative after being prodded along by the federal government. And I think that they are to be congratulated, as I say, for taking the initiative of the federal government and going with it. However, Mr. Speaker, one big hole I see in the community schools program — and I commit it to the Minister of Health — is simply this: there is no dental health component whatsoever in the community schools program.

Now why would that not be? We know that in the schools that will be served by the community schools program, that dental

health is a serious, serious issue. I already gave you the figure, Mr. Speaker, that in the North only 17 per cent of children do not have some tooth decay.

I think that the community schools program should have a dental health component in it. We know that 30 per cent of our school-aged children have active dental decay. That means that 30 per cent of our children, at least, are not getting dental services that they desperately need.

Will this Act address that problem? I don't see how it will. Will that Act demonstrate that this government, which was so concerned with children's dental decay when they sat over here, still have just a tiny, little bit of that same social conscience now in the brief period that they are occupying desks on the other side of the floor?

Mr. Speaker, there are some other specific issues I would like to address in this Act, specifically the issue of discipline proceedings. Mr. Speaker, until now, discipline committees in the college of dental surgeons had immunity from legal suit provided that the membership was acting in good faith. This is now being removed and I have to question why.

Why would a dental discipline committee be open to legal suit while, for example, the province's prosecutors are exempt from legal suit so long as they are acting in good faith?

Why do we allow more protection for members of the law society in Saskatchewan and members of the college of physicians and surgeons than we do for the college of dental surgeons? Why the distinction, Mr. Speaker, between treating these various professional bodies differently?

Mr. Speaker, my concern is that these various pieces of legislation appear to set up a hierarchy of professions and a hierarchy of professional organizations. Is the college of dental surgeons considered less professional in their dealings with their members, Mr. Speaker? Is there any evidence of arbitrary disciplinary proceedings by the college of dental surgeons?

I am not aware of any, Mr. Speaker, and therefore I am not aware of any reasons why the disciplinary powers and the immunity granted other professional organizations should be denied to the province's dentists.

Also, Mr. Speaker, by taking away immunity from being sued, are we making discipline more difficult, and therefore less likely to occur? Are we making it so that the college will be reluctant to institute discipline proceedings?

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we probably are. If we are telling the members that they are open to legal suit even when they are acting in good faith, they may not wish to institute discipline proceedings. And if they do not, Mr. Speaker, then this Bill in fact lessens protection for the public rather than strengthens it.

Another point I would like to make on discipline proceedings in this Act is that when a member is disciplined he has only one appeal, namely, to the Court of Queen's Bench. Now the Liberal opposition does not object to an ultimate appeal to the courts. We accept that. But while we don't object to an ultimate

appeal to the courts, I note that other professional bodies have an intermediate step in the appeal process.

For example, the registered nurses association has a provision where, when the discipline committee disciplines a member, they may appeal to the full council of that body. There is a similar provision under the Saskatchewan registered psychiatric nurses association and the Saskatchewan embalmers association.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me to only make sense that there should be an appeal process within the body itself, within the professional organization. I don't think it is in anyone's interest that the only appeal is to our courts. We all know that an appeal to our courts is lengthy and costly. And I think that it is far preferable, from a number of standpoints, that these difficulties and these discipline proceedings, whenever possible, should be dealt with within the professional organization itself and our courts are a last resort only. We do not wish to go to the courts whenever that can be avoided. Surely having an appeal level within the full council of the college of dental surgeons makes more sense than going directly to the Court of Queen's Bench.

Another example of what I am saying about the flawed disciplinary process in this Act is that, if a complaint is dismissed summarily, there is no appeal. Now under The Legal Profession Act, Mr. Speaker, if a client complains about the legal services he received, if there is an initial investigation and the results of that initial investigation are that there is nothing to the complaint and it ought not to proceed and no action is taken, the aggrieved client still has a right of appeal. However under this Bill presently before this Assembly, there is no such right of appeal and the matter simply dies.

Mr. Speaker, I think that if the complainant does not accept the initial results of the first investigation, the first investigator, he or she should have the right to appeal the matter further to the full council. The initial determination that a complaint is not valid is not the final word. They say under The Legal Profession Act there is another provision there, and the aggrieved client can demand a second opinion.

(1515)

In the case of the dental professions amendments before us, the professional conduct committee decides summarily that a complaint is not valid and should not go forward and there is no right of appeal to the full council.

Mr. Speaker, one of the more disturbing aspects of this Act is that it gives the minister the right to unilaterally make bylaws for the college of dental surgeons. Mr. Speaker, no such parallel right exists in the operations of other professional organizations; again, such as the benchers of the Law Society of Saskatchewan.

And I have to ask the minister why he would consider it necessary to be able to unilaterally make laws for the college, particularly when the college of dental surgeons is being set up under this Act as a self-regulating, self-governing body. Why does the minister have the right to make bylaws for a self-regulating body here and not under other professional

organizations Act?

Mr. Speaker, we have many self-regulating professional groups in this province set up by Act of the legislature. What puzzles me is why they are all set up differently. It seems to me that a professional, self-governing body has basically the same rights and obligations and powers as other professions.

In each case the purpose of the Act is, one, to provide for registration and admission to the profession, but what is the process by which one is certified and recognized to practice in that profession; and secondly of course, a mechanism for dealing with complaints and for disciplining inadequate members.

So the two issues are the same no matter what professional body we are talking about. And yet, Mr. Speaker, each professional group seems to have a widely different Act covering it. Different procedures for certification, different procedures for discipline.

I cannot see why there would not be one standard Act in the province whereby all professional organizations are basically controlled in much the same manner by their self-regulating body. There could be changes obviously as required from profession to profession as circumstances require, but basically I don't see those requirements varying a great deal, whether we are talking about health care professionals or legal professionals, or architects, and say the same basic principles still apply; that each of these professional organizations has an executive or council or body in place who decides who may practice that profession in our province and how discipline will be carried out when required.

I think that if there was a standard professional Act in this province which was then adopted for the various professional groups, it would make it much easier for the public to follow, much easier for the public to know how complaints are made. Complaints against a lawyer as opposed to a complaint against a doctor or a dentist should be handled in much the same way. Discipline against a doctor or dentist or lawyer should again be handled through much the same process according to the professional organization which he or she is in.

I think it would be much easier for the public to understand their rights and to understand the procedures if these Acts ran parallel and if the principles were the same in each. Surely a standard Act would give a greater appearance of fairness and would be more easily understood by members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue raised by this Act is that the hon. member said that the various related dental professionals will be able to practise independently. Well of course that's not, strictly speaking, the case. They will be able to practise their professions provided they are employees. They are still prevented from hanging out their shingle.

Now the issue arises as to whether, especially in our rural areas, better service could be provided to some of our smaller towns if, say, dental therapists were allowed to practise independently. These are the people who basically kept the school program together.

Many of our small towns of course have no dental professional services at all, and the question to be resolved is whether some of these smaller communities would be able to support a dental therapist. But that is not allowed in this Act in spite of the minister saying that independent practice was provided for the related dental professions. I think that's an issue which needs to be examined and needs to be looked at.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that when dental therapists were running our school program, that there was not one single complaint against them for their services. So I don't think there is any evidence that some of the related dental professional fields have been inadequate in the service they have provided to their clients, nor is there any evidence that they have exceeded their area of expertise and tried to take on cases which they ought not to be doing.

Mr. Speaker, the dental therapists were very successful when they ran the school program. But then we had an example of the NDP-Tory conspiracy. The Tories started a program to kill . . . the Tories started a conspiracy to kill dental services to young people in this province and to end the school program. But they didn't totally kill it, Mr. Speaker, they only half killed it, because this was a joint conspiracy and it required the members of the NDP to kill it totally and end it completely.

So my question, Mr. Speaker, is first of all, how will this Bill improve the difficulties of dental services in this province, especially to our children? How will this program address the needs of school-age children and the high level of child tooth decay in this province, higher than the national average.

And finally, I would ask the minister to have another look, another look at the discipline procedures outlined in this Act. And I would ask the minister, would it not make sense for the discipline procedures under The Dental Professions Act to run parallel to the discipline proceedings we see under other professional Acts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oh, Mr. Speaker, I think it is obvious from these preliminary remarks that there are a number of issues that the Liberal opposition sees in this Bill. We don't see it as just a housekeeping Bill. We see it as a serious matter. And for that reason, I now adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Motions for Interim Supply

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

Yesterday, Mr. Deputy Chair, I was asking some questions of the minister regarding some of the expenses, and I was given the response that I didn't understand the process, and that there was a respect for the process and an understanding that I didn't

have. And so I felt that probably I shouldn't proceed because maybe I was the only one in this province that didn't understand what I was supposed to be doing.

So last night I was pleasantly surprised to get a number of calls from people who also didn't understand, and they encouraged me to continue questioning until I understood, because they felt confident at that time they also would.

So I think that maybe when the minister is talking to me and she sees, not only the members of my constituency, but the people from across the province that are watching and trying to understand how the government is spending our money and why they think we should just give quick approval to \$675 million without any response except wait until the real . . . until the committees come up, I would suggest that perhaps we should spend a little bit of time before we just vote this off and understand that the cheque is in the mail, or whatever the response usually comes from government.

Yesterday I asked a question; the minister made the statement: "(We) . . . don't know next year at this time what in fact equalization will come in at." So I guess my first question to the minister would be: how do you decide, and what process is gone through to determine what you will use as an equalization number?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. Yes, I've had a number of comments made to me as well about understanding of processes and the lack thereof, so I think it's worthwhile going over what's occurring here and what is not occurring here.

Each and every year the government brings forth a budget. We provide you with extensive documentation on budget day and then we provide lots of opportunity for detailed debate about the budget. And when you want detailed debate, what you need to have are the people here who are responsible for the departments that you want to debate, and that's called estimates.

And it's up to the opposition to move as quickly as they want to to the estimates process so that the proper people are here to give you detailed answers. And when these people are here you will get those answers. We welcome this debate. We think this is an excellent budget and we welcome spending lots of time debating it.

Now we're doing interim supply, which is essentially saying there are groups out there who require money because we're into the fiscal year — the fiscal year starts April 1 — and they're relying on this government to provide them with interim funding until the budget is passed . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I wish the member from Rosthern would allow me to continue, please.

So what we're doing is we're not debating the budget here. We welcome the opportunity to debate this budget. We think it's an excellent budget and people from across the province have said that; stopped me on the street and said, we really like this budget. But we have to be sure we have the people here who can provide you with the detailed answers that you require, and

you will get that as soon as we move to that process.

Now with respect to equalization, what happens is, first of all we don't do the estimates for equalization; the federal government does because equalization is a program that involves all of the provinces.

So we can make some assessment about how well our province is doing, but only the federal government is in a position to compile all of that information from across Canada and give us an estimate as to what our payment is going to be. So what happens is in their budget, in say February or whenever their budget is in a year, they give an estimate as to what they think equalization is going to be.

(1530)

But there are re-estimates done in the fall and again in the next spring. And so what occurs regularly is when those re-estimates are done . . . First of all, the re-estimates go back three years, so they cover a three-year period, and the provinces — all 10 provinces — have an opportunity to provide more information. They say, well you gave us this estimate in February and we have some more information going two years back that we'd like to put into the new re-estimate. So they come out with a re-estimate in the fall and there can be massive swings in what their estimate is.

Last year the swing was over \$400 million. From one year to the other they said, you're going to get this amount of money — 600-and-some million was their initial estimate. When in fact we got to the end of the year, all we got was 200-and-some million. So that's what occurs on equalization.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, thank you for your reply. I guess most of us that are listening and watching do realize that equalization is based on the fact that the province's economy is also growing and prospering, as we all need it to do, and so that should be seen as good news as well.

I guess the other point that I'd like to make is the point that maybe the process is wrong. We are asked to spend two-twelfths of our budget immediately, before we actually have a chance to talk to each department official. So maybe we should be starting earlier so that by the time you need the money, we can actually have gone through everything. Maybe we should have a fall session so we don't have to be constantly sitting up here and asking . . . the government asking to spend money before we really know what you're talking about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — The other comment I would like to make when we look at this budget, Madam Minister, is there's one very obvious thing when looking at our expenses, the two great big drops for expense budgets occur for rural Saskatchewan.

And I'm wondering if . . . When I look at Agriculture and Municipal Government and see that this government has decided to cut back those two departments significantly, if it doesn't indicate that there is actually no . . . that rural Saskatchewan has no importance in the eyes of this

government. And could you please explain to me why you would decide that, if we have . . . the economy is bustling and booming, why these two areas are the two that were decided to be picked on?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. First of all, in terms of when the budget is presented to the legislature, the year end is March 31, 1996-97, whatever year. Any organization would wait till close to the end of the year before they present their new budget, to find out exactly what their position is.

So traditionally in this province, budgets have been into the new year. In fact our budgets have been earlier than any other budgets in this province. So there's obviously a time problem. And we've ensured that the budget is presented to the legislature before the end of the year.

But I mean you have to ensure that you have all the information, that you don't decide, well let's have a budget in October, halfway through the year. I mean what kind of organization would have a budget halfway through its year without the information as to how you're going to even finish off that year, never mind how much you're going to have for the next year.

Now with respect to rural Saskatchewan, the Agriculture budget is declining because farmers are becoming more self-reliant. Because they are in a better position, they're not requiring as many safety net programs.

There are significant things in this budget though that do benefit rural Saskatchewan. This government paid off \$150 million in crop insurance debt to ensure that the new crop insurance program could start with stable premiums, low premiums. Significant reduction in premiums occurred because the province of Saskatchewan paid down the crop insurance debt.

If you look at the new money in Highways, that obviously benefits rural Saskatchewan. If you look at the new money going into health care, a lot of it is for emergency services.

But let's be clear where the Liberals are at. Once again your leader is on record as of yesterday. We put 50-some million new dollars into health districts; 70 million increase in the health budget, 50 million going to districts. Just yesterday your leader said what he really approved was the University of Saskatchewan students' budget which put \$3 million into health care over five years. I would say to the member opposite, she should tell her constituents in rural Saskatchewan what a mere \$3 million over five years would mean for health care in rural Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, at this moment we're talking about politics and parties, and what I'm actually trying to talk about is the money that the people of this province are trying to understand being spent at this time. I think that it's . . . And I'm also talking about rural Saskatchewan, which is something that this government doesn't like to talk about. Crop insurance was barely . . . was not offset with the money that was taken from GRIP.

And also when you're talking about the whole budgeting process, anybody who has ever had a business knows that you have to do cash flow projections. And you have no idea what's going on there, and when you're starting at the beginning of the year either. It makes it very difficult for district health boards and for school boards and other agencies who are working for two or three months without their budget at hand either.

Madam Minister, maybe you could explain to me how some of these things like the corporate capital taxes has been estimated to go up. Corporate income tax is going to be going up. What kind of figures do you use to arrive at these numbers?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I would say to the member opposite, I don't think it's credible to be in this legislature and come and say, well we're just here to understand your budget and to ask you questions. The opposition has to be accountable as well and there has to be some coherence to what the opposition says. It's not credible to have members of the legislature coming and saying one thing here and then saying another thing somewhere else. The public has to hold both sides of the House accountable.

You asked a question about rural Saskatchewan and I want to go back to that. There is a lot in this budget to benefit rural Saskatchewan. A million dollars for added RCMP officers, particularly in rural Saskatchewan. More money for the 911 system. One of the two main tax changes was a tax credit system geared to promote the expansion of the hog and livestock industry in the province.

And as I say, the biggest benefit to rural Saskatchewan is the money going into the health care system. And if you want to ask us what we've done for rural health care, we've told you. We've laid out our numbers and we've said that 50-some million will go in new money to health districts. But you also have to answer the other part of that question which is, what would it really mean to rural Saskatchewan if all the new money going into health care was \$3 million over five years?

Now as far as the tax information, we get our estimates based on our economic forecast for the province. This one is also coordinated with the federal government because the federal government collects all of the major income taxes, the corporate and individual income tax system. So they have a major role to play in the estimates that are developed.

Ms. Draude: — I think we would be able to discuss for a long time what members on this side feel you are doing for rural Saskatchewan because I think we're not on the same wave length at all. We talk about things like 911. Well I'll tell you, in rural Saskatchewan in most places we don't even have cellular coverage, so sometimes using 911 is a difficult item.

The hog-buying expansion of course is a good thing. It's going to be helping the whole province. And I would think that we shouldn't be just taking from rural Saskatchewan; we should be putting back into rural Saskatchewan as well.

Madam Minister, we talk about the . . . I notice that there's going to be a decrease in the sales tax, which of course results

from the 2 per cent decrease in PST (provincial sales tax). But it leads me to believe then that the government doesn't really actually believe their philosophy that by cutting taxes you're going to actually increase jobs and get the economy going. Because if you did believe that, there should actually be more money coming in. If you believe that we would all have more money to spend, then it's going to go back into the province again.

So I guess I'm wondering if you think that you're going to . . . the province is going to lose \$143 million from the 2 per cent sales tax decrease. Is that the number you're working on?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — That's obviously the estimate for the sales tax revenue. But this government has never said that you could cut the sales tax and get all the money back from growth in the economy. I think at one point that was your party's position, as I recall one of the places that you stopped in terms of your policy meandering. It was 9 per cent growth, I think, 8 or 9 per cent growth.

But we've never taken that position. What we have said, and what the small-business community has said to the government is this. If there was one single thing that the government could do and afford to do to promote growth in jobs in the province, it would be to reduce the sales tax. That's the small-business community saying that. And they would say that that would spur the economy onto greater growth.

But you can't recoup \$180 million. The economy would have to grow it and assume 9 per cent, as you assumed during the last election, in order to finance that. And there's no economist that is going to say that that is going to result from a sales tax cut.

But I go back to consistency. The budget that your own leader yesterday approved said that he liked the students' budget better than our budget, did not have a cut in the sales tax. The sales tax was not cut. In fact there was no major tax reduction in that budget. So now I think we have three positions, by your party, on sales taxes.

The overarching one is harmonization, which means the average person in Saskatchewan will pay twice as much in sales tax as they do now. The second one was when we came out with our budget, you tried to get behind the Leader of the Third Party and say you supported the sales tax cut, but you didn't, because it was harmonization that was your position. Now it looks like the third position today is the leader of your party saying that you would not support the sales tax cut because the budget that he's endorsing, the students' budget, had no tax cut in it.

So as I say, we have to explain what we did, why we did it. But there also has to be some consistency and credibility in the opposition. We stand by our sales tax cut. We think it is good for the economy of the province. We think it is good for the average person in the province. But I would like the same consistent answer from the members opposite.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And, Madam Minister, I'd like to welcome your officials today. And I'd like to speak about the interim supply for Social Services.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I'd like to ask if the amount of money requested for Social Services is exactly one-sixth of the Social Service budget.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — To the member opposite, yes it is.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, is the income support portion of Social Service considered statutory spending?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No, there is no statutory spending in that area.

Ms. Julé: — Okay, I imagine that — because I believe it was just yesterday when I had the comment made to me and I'm not sure if it was from Madam Minister or who it came from — but that any ongoing support that is needed is considered to be statutory spending, and so that's why I'm asking the question. Would you comment on that, please?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No, to the member opposite, statutory spending means spending in which there's a law saying that you have to spend this amount of money on this particular item. So that's what's meant by statutory.

So social assistance is not statutory. That is, there isn't a law that says you have to spend this amount on social assistance for these reasons.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, just a couple of minutes ago you made the comment to my colleague that there are groups out there who are waiting for this money and so we'd like to get the show on the road. And so what I'm asking, Madam Minister, is could you give us a copy of the list of expenditures requested by these groups and could you give us a list of the groups that are requesting this spending at this time?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Well I can give you some examples. I mean the groups would be covered in the budget.

But let me give you some examples in the area that you're talking about: The Battlefords Boys and Girls Club; the Boys and Girls Club of Yorkton; Child Hunger and Education Program; Circle Project Association; Family Service Saskatchewan; Hunger in Moose Jaw; Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan; Infant Hunger Action Group; Kinsmen Community Group Home Society for Boys; Lestock Women's Centre; Nipawin Nutrition for Kids; Prince Albert Society for Services to Children and Youth; Rainbow Youth Centre; Salvation Army; Saskatchewan Crisis Intervention Service; Saskatoon Group Homes; Weyburn and Area Child Abuse Council; YWCA of Regina; Dales House; Kenosee Youth Camp; North Battleford Youth Centre; Paul Dojack Youth Centre; Prince Albert Youth Residence; Yarrow Youth Farm Resident Trust Account. And the list goes on.

So there's significant numbers of groups of this kind who will be looking to the government to provide funding in the near future because they're into their new year and they need the funding.

(1545)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I believe you've had this question put to you by other members of our caucus, but I'm going to ask again because I didn't hear clearly — as you know, I have a problem hearing. But anyway why is it necessary to ask for one-sixth or two-twelfths instead of the customary one-twelfth?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, that's a good question and I welcome the opportunity to explain that again. In the past — it's an issue of timing — in the past, we had interim supply at an earlier date, so it was possible to do just one month's interim supply and then come back later for another month's interim supply.

This year what's going to happen is because of the lateness of the date, we're actually into the spending year. What would happen is, we're going to get this interim supply passed and then have to come back immediately, within a matter of days, for another interim supply.

So our assessment in talking to the departments and the groups, is that their life is going to be a lot easier if we can do two months interim supply, and then of course come back to the legislature if the budget isn't passed at that time and return to the old process of one-twelfth. But it's for the convenience really of the groups, so that there isn't the uncertainty about are we going to get our cheque in time to pay our bills.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I respect the fact that you want to get the interim supply out in time and that you want to have the budget passed quickly, in order that areas like the district health boards get their money.

I have to make this comment because I know in our Central Plains Health District, even though the budget has been passed in previous years, the district health board there did not deliver that money to the district health board until it seems like sometimes three months, three to four months after. And I guess whether or not you can do something about this is at question here, but I would like you to make note of that and to see that possibly the people that are in management within the district health boards are compelled to deliver that money to the facilities in time so that they are not held up also.

Although the government right now seems to be trumpeting increased spending to alleviate child poverty, Madam Minister, the Social Services budget has actually declined by \$.04 million. In the budget, it says another 13.8 million has been redirected to child and youth initiatives in the form of various programs. So will the money being requested for interim supply cover the interim costs of these initiatives, the street youth initiative, the child nutrition and development program, etc.?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, to the member opposite. Yes, the interim money will go to the new initiatives in the budget.

And I will note the member's concern about health boards and the money getting to them as quickly as possible and look into that. But you may want to raise that when the Department of

Health is here as well to get either an explanation or else a change so that the money does go out as quickly as it can.

Final comment — I am in no rush to get the budget through at all. I like debating this budget; I like talking about it; I use every opportunity to talk about this budget because I think it's a good budget for the people of Saskatchewan. So as far as I'm concerned, talking about the budget is something I welcome.

The concern is that these groups . . . my concern is about interim supply. That the money gets to these groups quickly enough so that they're not concerned about their capacity to pay their bills. But the budget, that debate, I welcome it and welcome a long debate on it.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, do all of the initiatives that I have just spoken of, the new initiatives, etc., from the Department of Social Services begin immediately? Do those programs and those initiatives begin immediately? Or do some of them or all of them need some time to be implemented, and therefore can it wait for the budget to be passed?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Well I would say to the member opposite, you may want to ask the Minister of Social Services that question when the Department of Social Services is here because here is an excellent example of — I don't know all the detail of the different initiatives.

A general answer is though, some of them will obviously be able to be initiated immediately. But I'm sure many of them, because they are partnerships with community groups — the department is working in partnership with different groups in different communities — will take some time to get the two partners deciding the best way to spend the allocated funds.

So as I say, when the Minister of Social Services and the Department of Social Services is here you can ask them more detail. But I'm sure there's a mixture. Some of them obviously will be able to go right away, others will take some time to work out the details.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. My concern with that question was just simply that if these initiatives are not beginning immediately, then I question the necessity of having an interim supply of money dedicated to these initiatives at this time if the initiatives are not even being put forward right now.

Is the spending for each of the new initiatives and for each component of the Social Service budget spread evenly throughout the year? For example, again the street youth and youth prostitution initiative may need a large, immediate expenditure to start the program, then the spending may decline. Or the bulk of spending for other programs may need to be done later in the year. So could you answer that for me?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, well again what I would say to the member opposite is, this is the kind of question you should ask the minister when he is here with all the details. He can go through the different programs and tell you which ones will require most of their funding at one time of the year and which ones will require most of their funding at

another time of year.

But to go back to the first comment the member made, this doesn't mean . . . just because you're allocating two-twelfths doesn't mean that they are going to spend two-twelfths. It's permissive. It is saying if in fact they have expenditures that have to be made within this time frame, they can spend up to two-twelfths, but it doesn't mean that they will spend it. And if the programs aren't ready to go in this time frame, obviously they won't spend the money and it won't be approved to be spent.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, just as a matter of curiosity, in the past has the government taken the full interim supply of money and used it immediately, or do you generally take the interim supply and throughout the year use it some other way? Like why the great amount of money at this time? And how can the public be assured that the amount of money that is being supplied in the interim in fact . . . how can they be sure that the government is accountable for expenditures that are on time?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — A couple points of clarification. First of all, the interim supply becomes completely redundant once the budget's passed — this no longer exists. It's just a bridging mechanism to ensure that groups that will need money between April 1, which is the beginning of the year for the government, and whenever the budget's passed, to be sure that in that interim groups who need money get the money they require. The minute the budget's passed, interim supply is no longer valid — it's gone.

And again, the only money that can be spent under interim supply is money that's in the budget. So it has to be in the budget and the controls that exist throughout the year are there. That is, you have to say here's the budget — here's the bad budget allocation; here's what it said the money was going to be spent on, here's what we're spending it on. And the control is the *Public Accounts* which come out every year at the end of the year — they usually come out in the summer or in the fall — and they say, yes, the government did spend the money according to where they said.

And probably the best evidence that the system is working and the money is being spent where the government said it was going to be spent is the auditor who said last year in the summary financial statements all government spending — where we spent our money — he gave us an unqualified opinion. He said, complete stamp of approval. No qualification whatsoever — they spent all the money exactly as they said they were going to spend it.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, Social Services has increased the amount of grants that it gives to various organizations — for instance, grants to family and youth services has increased by approximately two and a half million dollars. Could you tell me exactly where this money is being spent? And I presume that what you're going to be saying is to check with the Minister of Social Services, so I will do that. But could I ask you if these grants are one-time expenses, and if so, do they need to be given out right now?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Well I think what the member opposite is referring to is one of the parts of the budget that I am most proud of which is that we are beginning to give to people who work in small organizations that benefit children and families — child care workers, people who work in women's shelters — we're beginning for the first time to give them pensions and to provide them with a decent standard of living.

So it's a very important part of the budget. I think it's a very important symbolic first step to actually begin to pay properly the people who look after our children and our families.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I notice that you were in conversation with your officials for part of my question so I'd like to refer again to the grants. Are these grants that are being put forward right now, are the grants one-time expenses and do they need to be given out right now?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Well, Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. This is the point I keep making. There would be many different items in that subvote, so the Minister of Social Services is going to be here shortly. What I would do is ask him what the . . . how many of them are one-time grants and how many of them are permanent grants. That's where the detail of the budget comes out is in the *Estimates*, and so I think that's where you need to get into that sort of detail.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, applications for grants normally take months to process, so what type of grants can be given out now, like within the next two months, that do not require such an application?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Well I'm not sure how to respond to the member's question. We don't just decide today to give somebody a grant. There's a long process whereby you have to qualify and there has to be a program; there has to be criteria.

So we don't decide just today that we're going to give somebody a grant. There has to be a program that exists that has parameters, that has criteria, and you have to apply and you go through a process. And that would be done; that would be an extensive process. It's not something that happens overnight.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Madam Minister, it's interesting to listen to your responses today. And I think I sense a bit of cooperation in some of your answers today which is very, very nice to hear after your chastising of us yesterday for our direction, and then you going all over the map criticising the leader, criticising . . . You name it — I guess you did. And so maybe since I do detect a bit of commitment on your behalf today to respond, I'll ask you a question again that I asked yesterday that you were reluctant, or wouldn't answer.

But before I do, I'd just like to quote to you a couple of statements from a few years back in this House in this very type of debate on interim supply. And the first quote is from the Minister of Agriculture and Food, the member from Watrous, and I quote:

And the Minister of Finance and the Premier of this province have a commitment to things like this interim supply Bill. They have a commitment to put forward a

position that is clear, concise, and adequate to cover the needs of rural communities out there.

Again, and I quote, the member says:

I mean they can use all the excuses. He can give me every excuse in the book and use the rules to get around this question. But it isn't going to work because I tell you we have to know. The farmers are entitled to know what position and how much they are getting from the provincial government. Mr. Chairman, I don't need a lecture from the hon. member as to what questions I should be asking and I don't doubt that he wants to get off this issue.

Now that's your Agriculture and Food minister back in 1989 when you were debating in interim supply and were talking about a drought in Saskatchewan, as you all remember, from that time when farmers were in dire straits and indeed in a lot of trouble.

(1600)

I go on to quote the member from Regina Coronation Park in his questioning to the Minister of Finance in the interim debate. And I quote:

I want to address some questions to you in relation to SaskTel and some of your financial jiggery-pokery that you have done in relation to SaskTel and in relation to this annual budget.

The member goes on, and I quote again:

Minister, the people of Saskatchewan have lost faith in your administration.

Not a lot different than right now in your administration, people have no faith.

And you're exhibiting today every reason why they have lost faith.

And your example . . . examples of your answers yesterday just indeed did reflect that. I go on to quote:

You have refused to answer the question in a direct manner. You have ignored the major question, a quarter of a billion dollars that went into your black hole Consolidated Fund to hide the defeat and hide it until after the next election, whatever that means.

Well that's a quote from *Hansard*.

Madam Minister, yesterday when we asked you about the emergency measures in this province and we asked you about what types of money would be going to the people, to the RMs to help them cope with the flooding that we're seeing in southern Saskatchewan, you're all over the map, all sorts of answers, and wouldn't really answer the questions the people of Saskatchewan are asking.

So I'll ask you once more today. In your interim Bill here, in

your two-twelfths, is there money in it that will rectify the problem for rural municipalities and small urban ones in this province to help them cope with the flooding that we're now seeing?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — What I would say to the member opposite is, of course, when we get to the estimates process he will get a detailed answer to that question. What is included in interim supply is two-twelfths of spending for all departments. So when we get to estimates we will of course answer you that question.

But if the member wants to get into a discussion of his leader, which he introduced into the debate today — I did not. You don't have to worry about what I'm saying about your leader. What you have to worry about is what his home town newspaper is saying about your leader. The good doctor has been watching far too many episodes of the *X-Files*, and it goes on to criticize your leader and the outlandish comments that he's making.

So I am here to talk about interim supply. But I will tell the member opposite if he wants to get into comments about his leader, I have a number of different quotes about his leader that we could discuss at length if that's what he chooses.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Madam Minister, your side of the House, and you in particular, are great at criticizing everybody under the sun for all the problems that you've got, whether it's the provincial Tories and their administration or whether it's from Mulroney days. You can blame the federal government of today; you're now trying to blame everything on the Leader of the Liberal Party.

And I guess the people of this province are getting a little tired of it. I get calls asking why can't you get those people on the other side of the House to answer a question? And, Mr. Chairman, I guess here we are again today — and I thought maybe the minister had a turn of faith, but I guess she hasn't — and refusing to answer a question that is so important to so many people in this province. We're in emergency situation, we have water rising almost daily, and yet you continue to talk politics on this issue.

Part of the interim supply, as I understand it, is to — in your own words, I think — to get monies out there to the people that need them right now so that they can go on with their lives and get their budgets in place and spend money on services and supplies that they need.

To me this is an emergency, Madam Minister, so why can you not tell us and why will you not tell us what money there is for emergency relief in this province to the people that are affected by the flooding?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I will say to the member opposite is if he wants that information, he wants a detailed discussion of people's budgets, we're quite prepared to move to that right now, to get the ministers here so they can give you those sorts of answers.

But what I will say to the member opposite is that you as well

have to be accountable. We've laid before the people of Saskatchewan a budget which, you say, people talk to you. People talk to me as well; actually come up to me and say, darn good budget for the people of Saskatchewan. You may want to tell them why you voted against such a good budget.

And what I said is that if you want that detail, we're more than willing to provide it and we will call the departments forward that can give you the detail that you request.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, I don't want all the details. All I want is a simple statement, a commitment from you that there is money there to help the municipalities in this province cope with the flooding. Will you make that commitment today?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, what I would say to the member opposite is let's proceed to the estimates process, let's go through it, and let's get the detail out before the people of the province. It's up to the members opposite to decide how quickly we move to that process.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I can see that the minister is unwilling to answer the question. I can see that she doesn't really particularly care what's happening out there today in the emergency situation across the province. And if the minister is willing . . . not willing to answer the question and commit to the people of the province, then we may as well quit wasting taxpayers' money in this forum right now.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Chairman, I move we report progress.

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

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Chairman.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Chairman, through you and to all members of the House, I would like to introduce to you an MLA that sat in this House from 1971 to 1975. He is now the mayor of Carrot River, Saskatchewan, and principal of the high school in Carrot River. Please join with me in welcoming Mr. John Comer back to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

General Revenue Fund Social Services Vote 36

The Chair: — The next order of business is Social Services and I would ask firstly that the minister introduce his officials please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to introduce to members Mr. Con Hnatiuk, who's deputy minister;

Mr. Vic Taylor, assistant deputy minister; Mr. Bob Wihlidal, director of our budget management branch; Mr. Richard Hazel, executive director of family and youth services; Mr. Phil Walsh, executive director, income support services; and Ms. Deborah Bryck, who's director of our child care services.

Item 1

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And welcome — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Deputy Chairman — welcome to the officials that are with the minister today.

Mr. Chair, I would like to just put forward some very direct questions and the first of them will be, how many social assistance cases were there in 1995 and how many were there in 1996? How many cases?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I wanted to get the precise figures for the member. They are as follows: in the budget year 1995-96, the average number of cases — they will vary on a monthly basis — but the average number of cases over the course of that budget year was 39,990 — 39,990.

In the budget year '96-97, the budget year just finished — again this is average number of cases over the course of the year — 39,307. And so we've seen a reduction in the course of that year of approximately 683 cases.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And while I'm up, I guess I would ask you also, maybe not at this time but if you could forward it to me in the near future, the number of cases between '94 and '95.

How many of the individual recipients that were on social services . . . how many were individuals in total in 1995 and 1996?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I can provide to the member the case-load in '94-95. That case-load that year was 40,224 cases, and so we've seen what we believe is a good trajectory. Perhaps not as rapid as we might desire, but a good trajectory showing the case-load numbers coming down year over year.

In terms of the actual number of people that the case-load represents, a case will be a household. The household may be a single person; it may be a couple; it may be a family with children. So when we take all of the individuals for the years that you've . . . that we've discussed, in 1994-95 the number was 82,341 individuals — again, these are the average numbers for the year. In '95-96 the number was 81,963. And in '96-97 the number is 80,747.

So again we're seeing the trajectory with the numbers falling year over year.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Of these recipients, Mr. Minister, how many were between the ages of 18 and 22?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we don't have the breakdown of 18- to 21-year-olds over the annual yearly period. I can tell you what the average has been in the last year. If the member would like to see that number, over the year, we can provide it

to her.

But currently there will be approximately 4,800 individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 who will be receiving social assistance. Of those, 1,300 — and this is prior to any of the new programing we'll be offering through this budget — of that 4,800, 1,300, approximately, are today involved in some form of education or training, and 3,500 who are today not involved in education, training, or employment.

(1615)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, how many are single parents with children? And if you could give me the numbers and also the percentage in comparison to other categories, I would appreciate that.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, what I can do for the member is provide a snapshot, the most recent snapshot we have of the case-load which would be February 1997, and the breakdown would be as follows.

Children who will be receiving social assistance would represent 34,880 or 43.6 per cent of the case-load; single employables are 12,787 or 16 per cent of the case-load; single . . . I'm sorry, single unemployable, single unemployable are 12,787 or 16 per cent; single employable are 8,241 or 10 per cent; the single parents, 12,220 or 15.2 per cent — to the question you asked — and adults in couple relationships, 11,864 for 14.8 per cent.

So single parents represent 12,220 individuals or 15 per cent of the case-load.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would appreciate also if you could give me sort of the yearly breakdown within the last year, of those same categories. And I am certainly willing to wait but not very long. Thank you.

Mr. Minister, the *Estimates* show that your department has cut about \$17 million in income support payments for this year, and that funding appears to have been shifted to Post-Secondary Education. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, Mr. Chair, that is correct. The shift in the funding has gone from Social Services to Post-Secondary Education, primarily as a result of Post-Secondary now taking responsibility for the Youth Futures program, directed particularly to 18- to 21-year-olds we were talking about earlier.

Ms. Julé: — Is that 18- to 21-year-olds that you're targeting there, or is that 18- to 22-year-old?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — It's 18 to 21 inclusive. The Education Act speaks to the age 21, and so it is inclusive of 21-year-olds.

Ms. Julé: — Okay, in regards to the shift of funding to Post-Secondary Education, what specific programs have been designed for reallocation of income-support funding? You know, with the income-support funding, what are some of the specific programs that you see that could be developing through the Post-Secondary Education funding? I'd just like to know if

you have an indication that you can give me on what kind of programs are there.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, let me speak to a couple of programs we believe will grow out of this new initiative. One will be the provincial training allowance. Up until now, we have provided living allowances for individuals who may be taking some training, some education, and there may have been other sources of funding through Post-Secondary that provided for their education, the schooling and supplies and so on.

What we're doing is bringing those together into one program — a provincial training allowance to provide one source of financial support for these students that will cover living expenses, their education expenses, and so on. This has the benefit of course, of reducing a fair amount of duplication, so we don't have two departments working opposed to one another, or at least in duplication of one another — to bring that together into one program for those people generally, who will want to improve their education and training.

The other will be the more specifically targeted Youth Futures program and this will involve, first of all, a pilot initiative in the city of Prince Albert where we will be targeting staff and resources to the young people in that region, developing hopefully for them, almost on an individual basis, programs that can put them in education and put them in work experience and move them . . . give them that leg up from dependency on social assistance.

We're starting in Prince Albert with a pilot project because we want to really ensure that this can work and we develop it before we move to a more general, provincial program.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. I do agree with pilot projects to test the waters as such, but \$17 million has been shifted, you know, over to that and so I am wondering if you can give me an estimate about how soon you'll be able to assess whether this pilot project will be successful or not.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we have had some experience. The member may know that, several years ago now, we did a similar kind of thing with the 16- and 17-year-olds who were on social assistance. At that point in time it was quite easy for a 16- or 17-year-old to simply leave home or leave school and access social assistance. We've changed that now and we've had some demonstrable results.

Where at that time we had in the neighbourhood of 350 16- and 17-year-olds just directly receiving social assistance, as a result of intervention, almost on an individual basis with them — targeting some programing for each individual child — we've seen that number drop very considerably.

We're confident that we can see the same kind of drop in the 18- to 21-year-old age group but we want to . . . We understand this is a big project. It's not easy always to find appropriate training or education or work opportunities for these individuals. And so we're starting in Prince Albert where we know there's a . . . there's good community support, there's a very active department, and there's a high need. So that's where we're starting, but we're confident that we will see some very positive results.

Ms. Julé: — Can you tell me of when will the programing — excuse me — in this regard in Prince Albert be put in place? Will that be immediately? Does it look like it's down the road three months, four months? Can you tell me?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the notion of the Youth Futures program was sort of part of our redesign of social assistance; the proposals that we discussed with many, many people in our province. The initial proposal has gone through some change, as you will understand. One of those changes is now that it becomes the responsibility of Post-Secondary Education.

In some ways I am very supportive of that because I believe we should see this as an educational and a growth opportunity for these young people. In another way I hate to see this good idea sort of leaving our department and moving into another department.

Our hope is, in working with Post-Secondary Education, that discussions are beginning immediately in Prince Albert with the community and the various supports that will need to be in place. What we're doing is targeting September as the beginning point to coincide with the beginning of the new school year. So our target is September.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. September is what, about six months away or so? Again I have to comment on the fact that \$17 million is being targeted for initiatives for training for youths. A good idea. However that's an awful lot of money to be standing still you could say, or without use, if we're not in fact maybe making a bigger effort throughout the province.

I know that it's a quandary that you certainly have, because we do need to look at pilot projects and still the need in the province is so great for training programs.

So I'll just go on, asking you, if the youth that are going through this training do not participate well in the program or for some reason cannot achieve throughout that program, will these same youth still qualify for benefits and will a portion of that \$17 million then be redirected to support ... income support for them?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No, Mr. Chair. We have dedicated this portion of money fully for the provincial training allowance and the Youth Futures program.

Now if in the circumstance that we have, let's say a 21- or a 20-year-old who for some reason we simply cannot find an individual plan that works, we're not going to leave someone without support. We're just not going to do that. But they will then be accommodated through our more traditional programs and our traditional budget.

So we've targeted this money because we ... And it is a lot of money, as the member points out. That's for sure. But we know ... I sincerely believe that money invested at this point in a young person's life is some of the best money that we can invest for the long-term benefit of that individual, of his or her future family or current family, and for the future of our

community and province. So it's a lot of money but we think it's going to be money very well spent.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if for some reason our youth go through these training programs and cannot find employment after, or simply do not have the right attitude, I guess, to the work ethic as such, will they be then granted income support?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, with anyone who makes application for social assistance, if the person has ability to work, we insist that there be active work searches going on continually.

What I am pleased to learn, after becoming Minister of Social Services, is that most of our single employables who access social assistance are relatively short term in receiving social assistance. I think the average is somewhere around six months that they will be receiving assistance before they move back into the workforce. Now there may be new people coming in, but we do see a transition of those who are able to work. And that's encouraging.

We ask every individual who will be accessing social assistance, if they're able, to be out pursuing every available opportunity for work. Now we know in some circumstances — there will be circumstances where it's difficult either because of perhaps lack of training or other personal issues going on in their lives or the particular circumstance where they live — that it may not be possible immediately to find work. But we will ask every young person or older adult who has the potential to work to be out searching diligently for work, and records would show that in fact most of these folks do find opportunity and move out of the system.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I think as you well know there are different qualification standards, I guess you would call them, in other provinces for how soon youth or any person can access social assistance in a particular province if they come from another province.

Now in regards to the training program that this province will be putting forward, are there going to be any stipulations in this regard? Will people have a waiting period when they enter our province before they can qualify for training programs? How do you see the department dealing with that?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker ... Mr. Chair, there will not be any residency requirements. This we see as an important principle. There will not be a residency requirement. If you are a resident of Saskatchewan you are a Canadian and welcome in our province and we don't expect that there will be any significant migration of individuals in search of this program. There may be some, but if you're living in Saskatchewan we believe you to be a Canadian and we believe you to be a resident of our province and therefore you are available for the benefits of our programs.

This does take us to that discussion, that important discussion, about national standards and how, as Canadians, we should feel free to move in our country and understand that, as a Canadian anywhere in this great country, we should have access to the

programs available. The programs will vary province to province but we should have access by virtue of our Canadian citizenship.

And if I may say, that the Premier of our province and certainly ministers here and I know members of the opposition have spoken out very publicly about the need to preserve and maintain national standards, and in some cases to be building some national programing. So back to your very specific question the answer is no, there would not be a residency requirement.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure that you realize I asked that question because there are a number of citizens that are taxpayers that are concerned that somehow there may be an influx of people that are using our educational facilities for training, and in the long run will not be able to find jobs within the province and so the taxpayers will be paying for this training.

And they're already under a major tax load and tax burden, not only through PSTs, GSTs (goods and services tax), etc., but all kinds of taxes. And they're afraid that it might end up being sort of the same scenario that we have looked at with doctors being trained in this province, or a number of people being trained, and then scooting out of here to have to find employment elsewhere.

So that's why I mention that and I bring it up on behalf of the taxpayers of the province. Would you like to comment on that?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes I would. I think we could have a long discussion about this very issue.

Let me say that another aspect of the good news that we're seeing in our province is for the last, I believe it's the last 13 quarters in a row, we've seen now a net migration into Saskatchewan — people coming into Saskatchewan. Our population is growing.

(1630)

And that tragic out-migration that happened during the Tory administration of the 1980s when we were seeing our young people particularly, and people of all sorts, leaving the province by the thousands, that has turned around. We're beginning to see now people coming to Saskatchewan. And my view is we welcome, we welcome those who come.

Now it has been traditional — although I suppose other jurisdictions in Canada could make the same argument — that we would educate people and then find that they'd leave our province and pursue their careers elsewhere. On the other hand, we're the beneficiary of some who have been educated in other jurisdictions and who come to Saskatchewan.

I think what is important in the discussion is to remember that we're part of one country. And this is where I think the discussion that's been going on and continues to go on about our federation and how we do in fact need to support one another through transfer payments, through equalization funds, and so on — this is the important discussion; so that no single

province should be left divorced from the country and expected to do all of its education of all of its people on its own, with its own resources.

And so it's been a Canadian tradition that those provinces who have a greater ability to pay, contribute; where provinces that have maybe a lesser ability to provide have the support of the nation. And in that way we educate ourselves, not just as Saskatchewan people, but as Canadians.

My view is that if folks are wanting to come to Saskatchewan we welcome them and we hope they can make a long and happy career here.

Ms. Julé: — I do hope so too. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, do you have any understanding . . . I guess maybe the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Training could probably answer this better, but I will ask you. Is there provision for programs that . . . are there provisions for some of the programs to be targeted towards entrepreneurial skills training and . . . well not so much skills training, but entrepreneurial activity being stimulated?

And I know that a good number, or a good amount of these programs will be geared towards training for the existing industries in the province, but I wanted to know whether or not your government has looked at entrepreneurial programs also.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, actual programing is now sort of the process we're moving into with . . . if we're speaking of the Youth Futures program and the pilot in Prince Albert, that the discussion will be happening in the community there. And we're talking about education, and we're talking about work placements and so on. And part of that may well be an experience in a business setting or a small-business setting where there is some of that kind of entrepreneurial learning that you're talking about.

I have been saying most recently to some of my friends and colleagues in the business community, who have said to us quite directly, as the Minister of Finance pointed out earlier, that from their point of view one of the most effective tools for the creation of employment would be a reduction in the sales tax, I think we agree that reduction in the sales tax has potential to create employment.

Secondly, I think we all agree that perhaps the best social program is a job. And so I'm now saying to many of my friends in the business community, well this tool is now at your disposal; we invite you to create some of that employment.

And I invite them particularly to direct some of that employment to folks who may be today receiving social assistance or in need of an experience as a young person or who may be disabled. If just one position could be created in every business in the province for someone who's receiving social assistance, for a young person without experience, or for someone who's disabled, we would see a dramatic decline in the welfare case-load that we've talked about.

So I'm hoping that as we pilot in Prince Albert around Youth Futures that we will be working not just with the traditional educational community but also with the business community,

looking at opportunities for those people in that sphere.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm glad that you brought up the disabled, because I'm also wondering whether or not there has been some thought given to the numbers of disabled people we have in this province. I'd like to know right now what the numbers are that are on social assistance and I'd also like to know if there are programs regarding training, etc., that has been specifically designed for our disabled people.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, from my experience now within the department and travelling the province, I would say to the member there are some tremendous things happening within the community, particularly through SARC, the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres, the SARCAN experience of the recycling. There are some very, very dedicated people in the group homes that are working now with the disabled.

It is difficult to single out from our case-load, people with disabilities. We're able to do it in a broad stroke. But many of those who will be receiving benefits and who we describe as unemployable will be individuals who have some form of disability.

We're not quite comfortable with that word unemployable, because we've learned even in the last few years that some folks who because of disability may in . . . even 10 years ago not had the ability to be in the workplace. Now with new technologies and new tools and new training, many of those who may have been considered "unemployable" even five years ago, today have potential to be in viable occupations.

And I know that when I visit with our group homes, our community-based organizations, the centres, and so on, they are making every effort, with much success in some cases, at moving those who had been considered unemployable or disabled into very active and productive places in the workload.

My officials tell me that about one-half — about one-half of the case-load which are described as not fully employable or unemployable will be disabled.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, you make reference to some of the disabled working in group homes, etc., and I too am very proud when I hear about the successes through SARCAN, etc. But there are a number of people that are not within those group homes that are in our society, and are looking for a specific programing designed to meet their needs and their training needs. And they do tell me, from the ones I have spoken to, they do tell me that they feel a little bit like their specific needs are being neglected or not understood.

And so I'm concerned that if some of this training money is going to be allotted for training, that we would ensure that there are programs that are specifically designed in a very sensitive way towards the disabled.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, yes, and I appreciate the member's concern and point that she makes here.

For the member's information, I've been provided a sheet by

my officials that describe in more detail those in that case-load which we describe as not fully employable. And this is rather interesting. Of that case-load, employed part-time or casual are 932; undergoing training, 860; involved in employment and sheltered workshops, 1,449; short-term unemployable would be 4,433. And so a significant number of these people are finding experiences of work in the community or in the workshop model.

I want to report to the member that while there has been much public discussion, and appropriately so, about a new national children's benefit and concentrating efforts as provinces and the federal government on the issues of child and family poverty, almost equal in terms of attention being given by the Council of Ministers is income security and support for the disabled across Canada.

This is not reached as definitive of conclusions yet, but there is much work going on between provinces, between the province and the federal government and the Council of Ministers' table around issues facing the disabled in Canada, and therefore in our province. It hasn't received the high profile yet, but it's very much a part of that discussion.

And I can report also that within our own province, the community of those who represent the various disabilities have come together now in an interagency kind of fashion and are working very much together, and if I may say, are working very, very closely with the Department of Social Services.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, I see that \$250,000 has been allocated for youth outreach programs. How is the minister planning to allocate that money? Are there specific designations at this time for this money?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No, as we speak today there are not the specific allocations. We want to work very, very closely with the communities where we . . . with those communities which have identified to us they feel that they have a problem with children on their streets.

In our two most urban largest centres, Saskatoon and Regina, as the member is well aware, one of the major issues has to do with children involved with prostitution. In some of our other communities, there may be children who are finding themselves on the street but are not involved in any prostitution activities or sexual abuse activities. And we want to be able to work there, too.

And so we're very much wanting to work with individual communities, with community associations, with people who are as close to these children as we can get, and then build and make our decisions from there.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So I understand that you're planning to allocate some of this youth outreach funding for transitional safe houses and/or treatment programs associated with victims of child prostitution. We have definitely . . . And I know that you have been given some proposals that seem to me very commonsensical, and some of them incorporate the idea of recreation centres within Saskatoon and Regina and Prince Albert and North Battleford, etc., etc.

Is there no chance that we can get immediately started with some of these right now? If we could possibly have cities donate buildings to us for these purposes . . . I'm not sure that the \$250,000 is going to be enough, but I believe that we should start somewhere and we should start very quickly. Has the minister given this some consideration?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — A big, very, very active consideration. I would want to assure the member that discussions are starting immediately — immediately — with the various communities involved. There are some good ideas already existing and people have done a lot of thinking, a lot of work. So I'm hoping that we can see some very tangible things happening quickly.

As the member pointed out in her comments in discussion of the interim supply Bill with the Minister of Finance, I think she realizes that there may be need for initial funding or there may be periods of the year where more is required than other periods of year. We know the summertime has a certain . . . the number of children will likely rise during the warm summer season, and we see people coming from other provinces and so on. But we are working on an immediate basis with the communities.

Now this particular money I'm very pleased that we have in this budget, and it is very specifically targeted. But there are also many other resources contained within this budget and contained within the child action plan that will also impact in some ways on these same communities and same groups and same children.

So this should not be seen, I think, as the only initiative but a very specific and targeted. But that will also be . . . will fall within the much larger package of initiatives for children and family under the child action plan which this year has reached the budgeted amount of about 25 million.

Ms. Julé: — Well I'm happy for that. I really hope that you can take that money and put it together and use it wisely immediately.

Mr. Minister, what is the Social Services communications budget for this year?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I can give the member a total, approximate total if my math is good, and then I can give her the breakdown of the allocations, if that would be appropriate.

The total will be around \$300,000 — \$301,000. And that will provide for direct communications of \$140,000. There will be salaries in our communications wing, of \$161,000. The career placement ads that we provide to advertise when we need staff will represent 62,100. And then there will be some long-distance telephone, other charges, of around \$5,000.

(1645)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, what was the communications budget for last year, for '96-97?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the budget is the same.

There's been no change.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. How many communications staff are employed within the Social Services department?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there will be five people involved in the communications of the department. That will be three who are described totally as communications and two who are support staff to them.

Ms. Julé: — Are you referring to the staff within the immediate department, or are you referring to staff that work in the field as such also on communications, or are there staff working out in the field? There aren't?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I've described the entire communications department wing of the Department of Social Services, which in relative terms is a very small, small unit for a department with a very large number of employees, and of course dealing with thousands of people on a daily basis in many, many, many community-based organizations. But our unit is smaller and a very effective unit. They produce many of the informational materials that are provided to people who are getting social assistance, or the disabled and so on. They do a great deal of work, I think. A very small group of people.

Ms. Julé: — I know that if I were one of those five I would feel quite stressed.

Mr. Minister, how does the minister's department publicize changes to regulations . . . or regulation changes?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — If it's going to be a change to a program like social assistance or . . . The seniors income plan is maybe a good example because it's a very current example. There has been, as the member knows, a change in the SIP (Saskatchewan Income Plan) plan where now we've coordinated our efforts with the federal government so that there's no longer two cheques coming, but one cheque with both programs.

How we communicated that to SIP recipients were several months ago to begin putting just a stuffer in their cheque, so with the cheques leading up to the change there was information included with the actual cheque. We would do this too if there were going to be a change in social assistance rates and so on.

We will then . . . if that mechanism is available to us, we'll use it. We'll also use some of the more traditional techniques of providing brochures, printed brochures. We often will put in our regional offices and in our offices, posters hopefully that attract attention and provide information.

Rarely, if we believe it's important, we would take some paid media ads — newspaper or radio or television. And we do . . . we have enjoyed the support of media outlets with free public service broadcasts and we've tried to access them as much as we can.

Ms. Julé: — Actually last May, Mr. Minister, you authorized widespread changes to social service regulations. How many clients were really informed of these changes properly? Because

we have had some notification from people that they don't know about these changes until their social workers tell them, and it's often down the road after a great deal of confusion and frustration, phone calls trying to get things straightened out.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we obviously attempt to do our very best. When we're talking about providing benefits to 80,000 or 79,000 individuals, we recognize that sometimes we may fall short in reaching all those who should be made aware of the changes.

When we talk about our communications wing and while the professional communications wing is a group of five people, we do hope that all of our people, all of our social workers, are in the arena of communicating with the people they serve. And I think in the vast majority of cases they're good communicators sharing information with their clients. Obviously there will be times. I've worked in an MLA office; you've worked in an MLA office. We have appeal boards and there can be confusions and there can be misinformation on occasion. We try our very best not to have that happen.

We're hoping as we can redesign social assistance, that as we can simplify these programs — we talked about the youth training, the provincial training allowance earlier where we begin to combine programs — simplify that that alone will make communications somewhat easier and make changes somewhat simpler to understand and simpler to explain.

Over the last 30 years, and we're talking about social assistance, the program has become very complex, very complex. You know the Act. It's a very complex circumstance. So if we can, through our redesign, hopefully make it more simple and straightforward, we're hoping that the communication therefore becomes easier.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So, Mr. Minister, the Social Services agencies, how are they informed of these changes? Are they informed directly, immediately, or how are they informed?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Again I think we could have a very tangible live example. We were able in this budget to provide some new benefits to costs, to supports for the community-based organizations.

What has happened since the budget day is that each of those community-based organizations has received a letter, direct mail, explaining what's happening. Each of them will be contacted by the staff of our department in their region for further discussions. And so we use that very direct vehicle of communication, the direct mail vehicle. It's a large group but it's a definable group. It's a large group of community-based organizations, but it's a group that we can define and address an envelope to each one.

We also try and communicate as best we can with their provincial representative organizations. In terms of any changes that might be coming, we try and consult and discuss, and when changes have been made, then we want to meet with them as soon as possible and describe to their provincial organizations what's happening. At the same time, we also provide the more

general media releases that we hope can be picked up by the press and the media, and share information in that way.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I've had a concern brought to my attention by a family member who was notified that there was a regulation change made last November regarding travel allowance to transport one of his children to see other members of the family, and this was in the case of a divorce.

Now this person has said that he was receiving some funding for travel in order to take his son to see the siblings, and out of the clear blue there was indication that there had been a regulation change, that this was not going to be provided for any more. So why does the department change things in the middle of a year before the public can be assured that there is some good reason for this? Or how does the department assess what needs to be changed, and be changed that quickly?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, without discussion of the specific case which the member knows we wouldn't or shouldn't do in a more public circumstance like this, it's my view that there was not any policy change made. Now there may have been a circumstance — but because again we're dealing with 39,000 cases, 79,000 people, and many, many workers — there may have been a circumstance where someone was in fact receiving a benefit in error of the policy. And then when that was determined and the policy then was applied, that person would be losing a benefit that he or she may have been receiving in error.

We've not in the last, to my knowledge, in the last 12 months made a change in policy in this regard. I hear the member's point generally, that when policy changes are made, that we need to find as good a mechanism as we possibly can to inform the recipients of benefits and our workers and the public generally about those changes in policies.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, we have received many complaints from social assistance recipients between the ages of 60 and 64 who have been informed by your department that they must now attempt to access their Canada Pension Plan early. How many social assistance recipients does this policy affect?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we don't have an exact number. My officials tell me that our best estimation here in the House would be a few hundred — a few hundred individuals would be thusly affected.

We understand the difficulty here and the concern. But at the same point, also recognize that social assistance and welfare must be funding of the last resort, of the last resort. And so we have always considered other sources of income to be income, and that welfare payments, social assistance, must be funding of the last resort.

We may be able to — I'm not sure we can, exactly — find the exact number. We can do a little research and see if we can get a more proximate, but our sense here today is that it's a few hundred.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would assume then that the department hopes to save some money by this measure. How much money does the department hope to save by people having to access these pension funds so early?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — It would save the provincial taxpayer in social services benefits about \$400,000 or free up \$400,000 that we might dedicate to where need may in fact be greater.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, but if you don't know how many people exactly, how do you know how much you're going to save?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we don't have the exact numbers. Again, the 400,000 is an approximate number based on our estimate here in the House that it's several hundred. We will try and get for the member some more precision on those numbers.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, some social service recipients with children have deductions from the federal child tax benefit on their support payments. When they inquired about this adjusted wage deduction, Social Services officials said that it's to offset the old baby bonus allocation. Could the minister please explain this deduction to me?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there has been a change, as the member will know. We used to have the program federally, of the family allowance. Now we have the child tax credit. When the family allowance program was in place, Saskatchewan considered the family allowance to be income to the household, again the social assistance representing income of last resort. That has continued now through the change to the child tax credit.

What we're hoping to do is move as quickly as we possibly can and hopefully in cooperation with our counterparts in Ottawa to the national child benefit. And so that all of the resources now . . . that we won't have this issue, we won't have this problem. It will become one benefit to the child, the child in Saskatchewan, to the children of Canada, and hopefully that benefit can be, if not immediately at least incrementally, a stronger benefit for Canadian children.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to thank your officials and I will certainly resume questioning another day. Thank you.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

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