

The Assembly met at 10:00 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting a petition from concerned citizens of Regina and Balgonie. I'll read the prayer for relief:

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 your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present petitions on behalf of people of Saskatchewan:

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 signatures on these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from Balgonie, Yorkton, Melville, Whitewood.

Thank you. 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 asking 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. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Tuesday next move first reading of a Bill, titled the naming of the northern municipalities airports Act. And I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Tuesday next, move first reading of a Bill, the government whistle blowers Act.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning on behalf of the hon. member for Regina Northeast and introduce some special guests here this morning, who are seated on the floor of the Assembly.

On your left, Mr. Speaker, are six . . . sorry. On your left are seven members of the life skills program, of the life skills program of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council. And on your right are six members of the life enrichment program of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council. Mr. Speaker, these students are here today for a tour of the legislature. They're here in the Assembly till after question period, at which time they'll be taking a tour and be joined by myself or one of my colleagues at 11 o'clock this morning to answer some questions. I would like on behalf of all the Assembly that we welcome these special guests here this morning.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you . . . through you to the rest of the members here, I'd like to introduce in your gallery, Kim Schneider and her two sons, Michael and Derrick, from Cedoux. Kim is a home care worker in the province and she's active in the provincial home care bargaining and dispute resolutions. I'd just like everyone here to acknowledge her work in this area, and to welcome her and her sons here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with the member from Regina Sherwood in welcoming our special guests here today. In particular I would like to welcome a friend of mine, Kirby Silcox, sitting on the end there. I'd ask all members to welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Get Well Wishes to Member from Regina Northeast

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a familiar face missing around the legislature this week, Mr. Speaker. And my colleagues and I would like to bring to the attention of the Assembly that we do miss this face.

The hon. member from Regina Northeast's presence in this Assembly was the one thing that those of us who knew . . . could count on as we tried to make a familiar routine out of a place that never seems routine. When we came into the House last year we could never be certain of which of the seats in the front row would be filled on any day except that of the Government House Leader. He represented to us your rock and your stability, and we counted on his presence, as I'm sure all of your members do also.

As new members we strive to become part of this Assembly and we look to the old-timers for guidance; their ease of dealing with rules, regulations, and nuances in the House. Their unflappability in, a lot of times appears to be, very tense situations and their laughter which keeps life in perspective.

The member's presence in this Assembly started in 1975. From my research I understand that he holds the record for being elected the longest without a defeat. This record is one that all of us as elected people should hold in high esteem.

The first time I wandered through the gallery downstairs to check out the picture of those who represented citizens in this province over the last years, I couldn't help but notice this member as one who only got better looking with age.

We're all delighted to hear that the member from Regina Northeast's operation was successful and he'll be gracing our hallways before long. I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in wishing him a very speedy return. I'm very afraid that without his constant vigilance this whole Assembly may become unglued from its foundation and be washed away by the waters of the Wascana.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

University of Saskatchewan 90th Anniversary Celebrations

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday a very important birthday party was held in Saskatoon — the 90th birthday of the University of Saskatchewan to be exact.

A special convocation ceremony awarded honorary degrees to nine extraordinary people associated with the university and began a year-long celebration of an institution that makes a big difference in the life of our province.

Recipients of the honorary degrees include Guy Vanderhaeghe, Elvie Smith, Freda Ahenakew, G.W. Cameron, Stepan Kostyshyn, Walter Kupsch, Marketa Newman, David Olson, Herbert Pinder Sr. The achievements of these nine individuals show that Saskatchewan people enjoy the quality of post-secondary education that is second to none, Mr. Speaker.

The official ground breaking for the Nobel Plaza, a new speaker's corner, was also held yesterday, Mr. Speaker. The open-air plaza is a gift of the Meewasin Valley Authority and honours the two Nobel prize recipients associated with the university. Both Dr. Gerhard Herzberg and Henry Taube won the prize for chemistry.

Yesterday's celebrations concluded with cultural programing including the performance of an historic drama that charts the history of the university, a play written by the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) drama professor, J.D. Fry.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and the Assembly to join me today in thanking the students, faculty, and staff of the university, past and present, for helping making Saskatchewan the envy of Canada. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battleford News

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, this past week has been a great week in the Battlefords. First the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced construction of an \$11 million grain-handling facility at Brada, just outside of North Battleford. It will have a capacity of 35,000 tonnes and a 52-car spot. Congratulations to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and its Battlefords' members.

Also Wednesday evening in the Battlefords, the North Battleford North Stars won the northern division of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. First the North Stars swept Melfort in four games straight. Nipawin was a little bit more of a challenge. It took six games, double overtime, before the Nipawin Hawks were also defeated. We are now confidently predicting disaster for Weyburn in the SJHL (Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League) championships to commence Saturday.

Congratulations to both the Wheat Pool and the North Battleford North Stars.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Powwow

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, Canada has been created by many diverse and unique cultures. Saskatchewan's cultures are also very distinctive and make important contributions to our diverse society. The native population of Canada, and indeed that of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, strengthen our diversity and add important elements to our cultural make-up.

This upcoming weekend will be highlighted by an annual event that not only raises public awareness to the culture of first nations, it celebrates, promotes, and preserves its many traditions. The event, Mr. Speaker, is the 19th annual Saskatchewan Indian Federated College powwow that will take place here in Regina.

The powwow includes over 600 participants and 25 drum groups from across North America. The event is sure to be

filled with excitement, with many different types of traditional dancing such as grass and jingle dancing.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations are in order for the many organizers and participants of this extraordinary event. I would like all members to join me in welcoming the many participants and applauding the SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) for its efforts in arranging the powwow. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tartan Day

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, April 6, this Sunday, is Tartan Day across Canada. And I am pleased to extend the best wishes of the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus to the people of Scottish descent across the province.

In the 1992 legislative session, our caucus had the privilege of introducing the legislation that allowed for a day of appreciation for the Scottish clans in Canada. We are pleased to have the cooperation of all members of the Assembly on the passage of that Bill — as you know, a very rare occurrence for Bills presented by the opposition.

Tartan Day allows those of Scottish descent an opportunity to acknowledge their heritage and the role it played in the building of our province and our country. On behalf of the PC caucus, I wish all those of Scottish descent a memorable day on April 6.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Dairy Youth Ambassador

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure for me to recognize the achievements of individuals from my constituency, individuals who demonstrate leadership and community spirit. I am therefore very pleased to acknowledge the achievements of Miss Aretha Parkin of Bulyea for being named 1997 Dairy Youth Ambassador.

Growing up on a mixed farm that included a dairy operation, Aretha is aware of the importance of the dairy industry to our province and the benefits that dairy products have in ensuring a healthy diet. Today, Mr. Speaker, Aretha is attending the University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture in the animal science program, part of her desire to continue her education into agriculture.

As Dairy Youth Ambassador, Miss Parkin will represent the dairy industry in numerous public relations activities ranging from parades to speaking engagements. As part of her commitments, Miss Parkin will represent all dairy producers in promoting the benefits of milk and other dairy products.

Working with the Saskatchewan Dairy Foundation, a non-profit organization working on behalf of all dairy producers, Aretha will help to coordinate the efforts of the dairy industry in providing consumers with reliable information in order to aid the public in developing and maintaining healthy and balanced lifestyles.

Aretha is a person who has never shied away from a challenge and I'm sure will be a great ambassador for the dairy industry. I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating Miss Aretha Parkin for being chosen 1997 Dairy Youth Ambassador, and congratulations, Aretha. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Repair of Moose Jaw Bridges

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of Moose Jaw are now tallying up the bill from heavy flooding. As the river surged its banks, ice jams damaged two bridges and destroyed another. The cost of the damage is estimated at a million dollars.

Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, the city will find it more difficult to rebuild damaged and destroyed public works due to cuts to municipal grants in this government's latest budget. In addition, the deductible under provincial disaster assistance is simply too high and too expensive.

While raging rivers inflict economic damage to Moose Jaw, a river of money continues to flow out of that city to this government in VLT (video lottery terminal) revenues. This government collects some \$4.94 million from that city, far in excess of the \$2 million it gives back in municipal grants.

Before Moose Jaw taxpayers are forced to pay large repair bills, I urge the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow to remember his moral opposition to gambling. Do the honourable thing and urge your cabinet colleagues to put some of those revenues to good use, helping your constituents rebuild damaged bridges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wildlife Columnist Doug Gilroy

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, in 1954 Doug Gilroy wrote his first "Prairie Wildlife" column in *The Western Producer*. Last month Doug completed his 1,500th column, a record achieved by very few if any columnists.

Doug and his wife Mary farmed for many years along Boggy Creek north-west of Regina. Doug acquired one of his first colour film cameras available on the market in the late 1940s and utilizes his wide assortment of photographs to illustrate his columns.

With his educational writings on prairie wildlife, Doug reaches upwards of 160,000 readers regularly. His informative columns contributed greatly towards instilling in his readers a knowledge and an appreciation of our natural world. In addition to his involvement with conservation organizations and schools, where he provided illustrated talks on prairie wildlife, Doug has had four books published by Western Producer Prairie Books. A fifth book containing some of his columns will be published later this year.

It is impossible to know how many thousands of people have

been touched and inspired by Doug's knowledge and appreciation of nature. I do know that my interest in wildlife was certainly influenced by this dedicated man when he visited our farm 30 years ago. Doug's column no. 1,501 shows a mountain bluebird that he photographed at one of my nest boxes during that visit 30 years ago.

Doug and Mary retired to Regina Beach in the mid-1970s where they continue to pursue their lifelong interest in the great outdoors. Congratulations on a job well done, Doug. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Saskatchewan Transportation Company

Mr. McLane: — Mister Speaker, when the former head of Saskatchewan Transportation Company resigned his post two months ago, it was suggested that Peter Glendinning and STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) parted company by mutual agreement. Many of us thought otherwise and of course now it appears that is the fact.

An article in today's Regina *Leader-Post* quotes a letter that Mr. Glendinning wrote to the Minister of Highways and Transportation four days before he resigned. In this correspondence, the former STC president outlines his fears that the Crown Investments Corporation is moving to privatize the bus company:

"It is sale, not termination, that they . . . have seized as the solution," . . .

he says.

Can the minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) today explain if privatization is what is in store for STC?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be pleased to answer on behalf of the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. As the member has indicated, there is a new president that has been appointed to head the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. It was felt by the board and by members of this government that a fresh set of eyes to have a look at the problems facing that corporation would be appropriate. As the member will know, the transportation company has served a very positive public policy for many, many years. The problem being the amount of money that that corporation has been losing in the recent past has been what we believe to be not sustainable.

The corporation is looking and the management of the corporation is looking at all options with respect to the future of the corporation, keeping in mind the number of people who are employed, the service that is delivered to rural Saskatchewan. I think the approach that the new president will take will recommend options to the board that in the long term will ensure a very positive situation for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, as you are aware and members of this House are aware, that there is a review of Saskatchewan's family of Crown corporations taking place. Therefore it comes as something as a surprise, if one uses Mr. Glendinning's letter as a basis, that this government appears to have already made a decision to privatize STC.

And we find particularly offensive suggestions in Mr. Glendinning's letter that CIC is attempting to paint STC's financial picture worse than it is so that it would be much more palatable to the public to buy into the privatization.

The minister should explain why his government is not being honest with the people of Saskatchewan, who after all are the shareholders of this Crown corporation, and they deserve to know how it works and what's going to happen to it. They also would want to know and deserve to know why you are distorting the true financial situation, as Mr. Glendinning suggests.

Mr. Minister, what are you hiding?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to this in this fashion. This government has been very open with respect to the Crown review, indicating that all of the options are on the table with respect to the future of the Crown corporations. What I want to know is what position the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Opposition, or that member, or any other members of the Liberal Party have with respect to the Crown corporations and their future. Do you support privatization? Do you support public ownership? I don't know, Mr. Speaker; the people of Saskatchewan don't know.

I want to say to that member that this government has and will continue to take, a very pragmatic approach to the \$8 billion of assets that the people of this province own.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we would like the support of members of that side in this review. I think it's a very positive initiative. The future of these corporations and the assets are a very important part of the future of this province.

I wish that member would stand up and publicly indicate what the Liberal caucus position is with respect to these Crowns. We don't know where they are in gaming; we don't know where they are on taxes; we don't know where they are on this budget.

All I say, Mr. Speaker, is you've got a political party in disarray who stands in this House every day and no one knows what they're talking about, including themselves.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what the people of this province want to know and have a right to know is what does this government have in plan . . . have in store for

the Crown corporations, in particular in this case, STC. It's their right; they're the people that own the company.

I must stress, however, that the official opposition has said, and I'll respond to the minister, is that we're not against privatization of STC. If you would open up your books and be upfront . . . And what are you trying to hide with CIC interfering into STC, Mr. Speaker? What are they trying to hide? That's what the people want to know.

Also I must stress that privatization does not have to mean a loss of service to rural Saskatchewan and the northern areas of this province. We are committed to ensuring that the service continues to be appropriate for both passenger and parcel service for both rural and northern Saskatchewan. If this government moves to privatize — and they should tell the people of the province what their plan is — there must be a commitment made to ensure that this valuable component of the bus company is maintained.

What commitment will the minister make in this House today to ensure the people of rural Saskatchewan they're going to have the service, whether it's in privatization or not?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, there he is, there he is, solidly on the fence — solidly on the fence — the position taken by that member one more time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share from the annual reports, the track record and the cost to the people of Saskatchewan to deliver this service — and I agree, a much-needed service for rural Saskatchewan — 1995, a loss of \$5.472 million; '94, a loss of 3.531; and it goes on, Mr. Speaker. This corporation has been facing difficulties with respect to changes in people's attitude towards public transportation and it's something that needs to be dealt with.

For the member to suggest that Crown Investments Corporation not have an eye on all of these Crown assets, he has a lack of understanding of the process and the governance structure. The holding corporation of all the Crown assets is Crown Investments Corporation, who is ultimately responsible to the shareholders, the people of Saskatchewan.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the leader of his party, Mr. Melnychuk, supports — the other day I note in the newspaper — the privatization of every one of the Crown corporations. I want . . . I know what his position is. At least that day I know what his position is. What's your position today and what's the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Child Pornography on the Internet

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the protection of our children is of great concern to me as you well know, and I'm sure other members of this Assembly share my sentiments. We all have a responsibility to protect their welfare.

I have introduced a private members' Bill in the hopes of helping young children victimized by johns. But, Mr. Speaker, street prostitution isn't the only area where children are being abused and exploited.

An Ontario police officer was in Saskatoon yesterday talking to about 250 police and social workers about the explosion of child pornography on the Internet. The officer says the Internet is the most perfect tool for pedophiles to distribute their child pornography and they do this virtually undetected.

Mr. Speaker, SaskTel is this province's largest Internet provider. It has indicated it monitors home pages to try to crack down on pedophiles, but what about the millions of other sites spewing out this garbage.

Will the government today agree that the problem deserves some scrutiny?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is very concerned about this issue and we are examining all of the options that we have to deal with this. It's an international problem that has been reviewed by various organizations, including the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), but also we know in the United States and around the world. And also we know, working with the police, that they are extremely concerned.

We think that the conference in Saskatoon was a very good step towards raising this issue in the public. We are going to be working with all of the various actors in this whole situation to obtain the best information we can to provide protection for Saskatchewan people. This is a very serious problem.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we too recognize that this problem is being scrutinized nationally; however the province does have the responsibility to its residents in this regard until 1998. So a media report quotes a SaskTel spokesperson indicating that the company would require some sort of court order or authorization from police to intercept or monitor communications. This procedure, Mr. Speaker, can — and appears to — complicate the hunt for pedophiles on the Net and it leaves more and more children open to the monsters who prey on them.

Will this government look at both legislation and policy tools necessary to make sure that the fight against child pornography on the Internet does not become mired in red tape?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The type of information that the hon. member is talking about is clearly against the Criminal Code and there are provisions in the Criminal Code to deal with these matters. And that is the kind of comment I think, that the official of SaskTel was talking about, is that when the information is provided or given to the police, the police will investigate and lay charges.

One of the great difficulties with the whole Internet system is trying to find out where the source is around the world. And that's why it takes a coordinated effort of all of us to develop some international standards, some international controls. But here in Canada we do have the Criminal Code, and we do have the ability to use some of those provisions at this point.

I am also agreeing though that there are many more things that we need to look at. And we will be looking at those things.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Construction Tendering Agreement

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the CIC minister.

Mr. Minister, you now have 9 more million reasons why you would want to scrap the union tendering . . . union-preference tendering policy. Construction contractors are getting ready to yank as much as \$9 million of business away from SaskTel if you continue to cling to this unfair agreement. And that's on top of the already \$30 million that this policy is costing in the first place.

Mr. Minister, what are you going to do about the boycott that's being proposed by the Saskatchewan Construction Association? Will you do the right thing and simply scrap this union tendering policy of yours?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to stand on my feet today, which I was anxious to do.

I want to say to the member that we do not, we most definitely do not, share his view that there is anything unfair about the Crown Tendering Agreement. We certainly do not agree either that the cost is anything like \$30 million. As far as we can figure, there is no cost element to this thing at all. But we just, we just completely disagree with the premisses for the question.

Now as to whether the SCA (Saskatchewan Construction Association) have any plans with respect to SaskTel and a boycott, they will do what they will do. But that will not lead us to reconsider our views with respect to the Crown Tendering Agreement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, this is a rational response to an irrational policy. SaskTel won't do business with non-union contractors. It only makes sense that the contractors are refusing to do business with SaskTel.

Mr. Minister, Crown corporations simply cannot continue to follow stupid policies in an increasingly competitive world which we live in. SaskTel isn't the monopoly any more. If you make people mad, they're not going to take it; they take their business elsewhere, no matter how much taxpayers' money SaskTel pumps into advertising.

Mr. Minister, \$9 million is a huge blow to the revenues of SaskTel, and can you really afford it, to pay another \$9 million on top of the 30 million you're already paying for the policy?

We have legislation before the House to repeal the union-preference tendering policy. Will you work with us, Mr. Minister, to pass that legislation and cut off this unneeded expense and unneeded loss of revenue to SaskTel?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, the premiss is stupid — the premiss that the agreement cost the government \$30 million is stupid and unfounded and cannot form the basis for any rational question.

I say again to the member, the fact of the matter is that the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement) has been working very well; that we're quite satisfied with the way in which it's performed.

We tried, at the urging of that same party last year, to initiate a mediation process which would try and satisfy some of the concerns about the agreement including . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Now the Chair is having difficulty being able to hear the answer being provided by the minister. Order. The question was easy to be able to hear and I ask that the House extend the same privilege to the minister for the response. Order.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I was saying that last June we agreed to the request of that same party to set up a mediation process. When the process got up and running, the Saskatchewan Construction Association refused to participate in it. So how can we deal with their concerns when they refuse to go to work with an independent third party in order to meet some of their concerns?

Mr. Speaker, as to the boycott, it is the right of any organization to take any position they like. This is a free country. We don't think there's any basis for the boycott and we don't think their members will support it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Transportation Company

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, it looks like the government may be about to adopt another PC policy and privatize the STC.

Now of course, Mr. Speaker, it depends on who you talk to over there. We used to know where you people stood over there. We've always known where we stand. We've never known where the opposition stands.

But today we're confused about the government as well because they seem to be on both sides. Because it depends on who you talk to, Mr. Speaker, over there. CIC wants to privatize. The president of STC represented by the minister over there, they and Gordon Nystuen, the new president, of course they don't want to privatize.

But I guess it's not too surprising that the head of the new bus company there would not want to privatize because of course it means a one-way bus ticket for poor old Gord right out of government.

Now I hope, Mr. Speaker, that they're not just doing this because the Nystuen family has married into my family.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct my question to both the ministers of STC and CIC, and I would like them to both answer this question, Mr. Speaker: will you support our concept of privatizing STC?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, it's interesting how things change when you get in opposition. Now it's true that they do believe in privatizing. It's true they do believe in privatizing. Let's go through the list of what they privatized, or gave away if you look at the price they sold it for.

The Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, Potash Corporation, empty holes in the ground. They sold the coal mines. The coal mines. They kept the power plant but sold the coal mines. They sold off the highway equipment so they couldn't fix the roads.

What did they keep? What did they keep? They kept STC and bought buses from Texas. You remember that one. I remember that.

You had nine years to privatize STC. You kept it. You sold off all the good properties we had for next to nothing to your buddies and kept STC and bought the buses in Brownsville. Some of you should have stayed down in Brownsville because there's another little plant near Brownsville, that is better known than a bus company, where some of you might have ended up over that deal.

But you kept the bus company and sold off the coal mines, you sold the oil wells, you sold the potash mines, and increased the debt to \$15 billion while you were doing it. You've had your chance to privatize.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a supplement for the minister. Well, Mr. Speaker, Peter Glendinning's letters seem to provide proof that the government shouldn't be running business. We've always said . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Chair is having great difficulty being able to hear the question being put. Order, order. Order. Order. All members will recognize it would facilitate the process of question period if the questioners would ask the questions and the ministers would provide the answers and everybody would stick to their roles.

Order, order.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It definitely must be Friday.

Now STC management has said, through Mr. Glendinning's

letter, that things have been so badly screwed up, that the present and future finances of this company are in such bad shape, that there's only one option, Mr. Speaker, and that is — according to Mr. Glendinning — to privatize the whole operation.

Mr. Minister, as long as it is run by government, STC will be a money loser. There is no question about whether the past was good or bad. The question is how are we going to handle it today because today, Mr. Glendinning, who is trying to deflect the problems that he has had to you folks, is definitely out of the job and he should have been. It's time to cut your losses though and to privatize the enterprise and to get rid of STC and turn it around. Let the private sector do that, Mr. Minister. Will you take our recommendation and privatize it while this session is still on?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Well, Mr. Speaker, round two coming up here on the bus issue. But I want to tell the member opposite in a serious way that when we're looking at the Crown review and whether or not our Crowns are doing well or not doing well, one of the issues is, is whether the customers — the people of Saskatchewan — are using the buses to the extent that at least they would break even. And the mileage is down, the number of ridership. We have questions in some areas whether the people are using the bus as much as they need to in order to keep the bus. These are obvious questions that we have to ask.

But I want to go back to your issue of privatizing and why one of the problems . . . STC is having trouble. And in a serious way it goes back to the purchase of buses from a U.S. (United States) company — Eagle buses from down in Brownsville, Texas. It got so bad at one point when we were in opposition, we designed a song that became our theme song in the 1991 election. It's called "The Eagle Bus of Texas." And if I had time I'd give you a rendition of it but I'm not going to here today.

But I want to tell you that you're on very tricky ground when you talk about STC and buses and these buses you bought from Brownsville. The bus drivers' feet froze while they were driving in rural Saskatchewan because there is no insulation in those buses . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Guyana Project

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I gather we just got an explanation of why the NDP (New Democratic Party) only won eight seats in 1982 — it was their singing.

Mr. Speaker, last month when I raised the issue of whether the President of Guyana's death would affect, and whether the political instability of that country would affect SaskPower investment in that country, the minister scoffed at the notion. Today we learned the entire project has been put on hold because of the president's death and political instability. It also now appears that the Guyana electrical is looking for more than \$70 million, not the 31 first reported, and it's promised a much lower rate of return than first expected.

Mr. Minister, in light of these new developments, will you now admit it's just a bad deal? Will you now stop risking Saskatchewan taxpayers' money and pull out before it's too late?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's Friday morning and I understand the nature of some of these questions because Friday is a very difficult day in this legislature. But I want to say what is not difficult, Mr. Speaker, is the explanation with respect to the discussions that are going on in Guyana with respect to the purchase of that corporation.

Number one, they have not been completed. Number two, the officials from the Guyanese Electric Company are in discussions with SaskPower Commercial. Number three, no decision has been made because number four, Mr. Speaker, no recommendation has come from SaskPower Commercial to the SaskPower board of directors.

I want to ensure, Mr. Speaker, when that recommendation does come, it will not be based on decisions as the members opposite were part of in the 1980s that resulted in the purchase of Eagle buses and other silly deals. We don't do government that way. We don't run our businesses that way, and this deal will be based on sound economic basis. Due diligence will be done before any decision is made.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Districts' Labour Standards Violations

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's come to our attention that the majority of health districts in this province have been found to be in violation of the call-out provisions in The Labour Standards Act. As a result, the province's chief bargaining agent, SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations), is trying to reach a settlement with close to a thousand claimants.

Will the Minister of Health confirm if that's the case and explain what is the anticipated cost of settling those complaints?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I'll take the question because of its implications for labour standards. I'm not aware that these complaints have been filed. If they've been filed with the department they'll be handled in the normal way. And that's about all that we can . . . that's about all we can say in this Assembly.

The matter is dealt with in legislation which has been passed by this Assembly and any complaints that are filed will be handled pursuant to The Labour Standards Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, Mr. Speaker, that might be all that the minister can say about it, but I think we have a few more things to say because conservative estimates indicate that claims filed by close to a thousand employees may total at least a half a million dollars. And I might add, small "c" conservative, small "c" conservative.

This is a cost that clearly should not be borne by the health districts but rather by this government. As we know, these complaints are expensive and cost substantial time and money to resolve. In fact the costs related to each of these complaints will far exceed the cost of just settling them.

Will the minister admit that his government's bungling is going to cost health districts far more money than if the NDP government had followed its own Labour Standards Act in the first place?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Now it really is Friday, Mr. Speaker, when you get a question like that. Practically the whole of the health industry, practically the whole of the health industry is under collective agreements which have been in existence for many, many years.

The provisions of those agreements are well known to all of the employers and all of the trade unions and through the trade unions all of the employees.

Why the member would even suggest for a moment that it was a result of government policy, I can't imagine. The provisions of The Labour Standards Act with respect to call-out pay have been in existence for many, many years — decades — and are certainly no news as far as the employers and the trade unions and the employees in the health industry are concerned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 44 — The Wakamow Valley Authority Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 44, The Wakamow Valley Authority Amendment Act, 1997, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 16 — The Occupational Therapists Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Occupational Therapists Act, 1997. For the past two years, we've been consulting with the Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists to develop this new Act. I'm pleased to say that it contains some very positive changes for both the profession and the people they serve.

Not only does the statute update the profession's legislation, but it will improve public access to occupational therapy services.

As a result of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, the public will be able to directly access the services of occupational therapists without getting a physician's referral first.

In 1994, Mr. Speaker, our government made similar changes to the legislation governing physiotherapists to give people direct access to their services. This has been well received. In many cases, this means greater convenience for people and fewer barriers or delays to receiving care.

This legislation will provide the same benefits for occupational therapists and their clients. It is consistent with our renewed health system and its emphasis on increasing the public's access to health services in community settings.

Mr. Speaker, our government agrees with the Saskatchewan college of occupational therapists that in many cases a referral is an unnecessary expense and duplication and denies the public access to primary health services that they need.

For example, sometimes a person who is seeing a therapist might need to resume therapy after some time away. It makes sense for that person to go directly to their therapist without being reassessed by a physician. That being said, in many cases residents will continue to seek a physician's opinion before beginning therapy – and they have the right to do so. If required, occupational therapists, or the health districts who employ them, can request that a client see a physician before undergoing therapy.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the college of occupational therapists, this Act also has the support of the Saskatchewan College of Physical Therapists, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations. As well, similar changes have been made, or are under consideration, in a number of other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, this new Act will also ensure that occupational therapists are accountable to the people they serve. The Act contains a number of updated public accountability measures that are standard in today's professional legislation.

For example, representatives of the public will be included on the society's council and disciplinary committee. Disciplinary hearings will be open to the public and the entire discipline process will be open and transparent. This will enable the society to more effectively respond to public concerns, should they arise.

This Act will also require the association to file an annual report. As well, bylaws which may impact the public will require the government's approval. The approval process will allow for consultation with key stakeholders, such as physicians, therapists, educators, and health districts.

Mr. Speaker, these are some very positive changes developed in close consultation with the profession and in a spirit of cooperation. I believe this Act will serve occupational therapists, their clients, and the province well into the future by improving accountability and access to rehabilitation services.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of The Occupational Therapists Act, 1997.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to spend a few moments today, before moving for adjournment of Bill 16, to address some of the concerns that we've heard regarding this Bill. We're still in the process of reviewing the details of the entire Bill before we decide whether or not to support it. However, some reservations have been brought to our attention.

Mr. Speaker, obviously at any time that we want to move towards making health care delivery more accessible to the people of Saskatchewan, that's positive. According to the minister, this change to the Act will provide people in need of the services of occupational therapists easier access since they'll no longer need a referral by a physician.

However, Mr. Speaker, any good that this change does is muted by the fact that health districts themselves may continue to require a doctor's consultation before a resident can obtain the services of an occupational therapist.

A major concern as well is that, since it is the health districts that employ occupational therapists, the ongoing budget crunch faced by every health district in Saskatchewan may in fact impede the public's access to these services. We all know that many very vital health care services have been disappearing in many parts of our province in the last few years as health districts attempt to stay within their budgets and the funding formula set out for them by the provincial government. And I can't see how occupational therapy is any different.

And this Bill, Mr. Speaker, does not address who has adequate access to this type of therapy and who does not; where therapists are needed, and where they're not available. So while the minister can stand in the House and claim that this Bill will improve access for the people who need occupational therapy, the main problem faced by our health care system remains.

Just as in the case with many other services, this government's policies has resulted in a rationing of services. And this is just the opposite of improving access; it restrains access. And that is a concern when we're dealing with any type of health care service in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we also have concerns similar to those expressed by our member from North Battleford yesterday in this House over the proposed Dental Disciplines Act. Those concerns deal with the process that people have at their disposal when they have a complaint against an occupational therapist.

Just as in the case with The Dental Disciplines Act, a person unhappy with service he or she has received from a therapist has the option of taking those complaints to the occupational therapist society's professional conduct committee.

However, if the professional conduct committee decides no further action is necessary, that's the end of the matter, period. There is no appeal mechanism for the complainant. The matter

is decided once and for all.

I compare this to the process that's in place for The Legal Profession Act, which has an extensive review process. If a complainant doesn't receive a satisfactory result at one stage of the process, they have the process of appealing to another level. This would seem to offer patients more protection from problems they might encounter.

As well, Mr. Speaker, just as in the case with The Dental Disciplines Act, this Bill does not offer immunity from prosecution for the Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists if the society decides disciplinary action is necessary against one of its own members. There is nothing stopping the person targeted by the disciplinary action from turning around and launching a suit against the society itself; though individuals are protected.

We do have concerns that this could create a chill against complaints from the public. If the society no longer is afforded such protection, it may be more unwilling to launch disciplinary action against one of its members.

This will not be to the benefit of the people using the services of occupational therapists. If something goes wrong, they may not have any recourse at all if the society is uneasy or unwilling to take action simply because it no longer has this immunity from legal action.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the concerns that have been brought to our attention regarding Bill 16, and we'll want to take a little while longer to discuss the proposed Bill with affected parties to ensure that what is contained in this Bill is right for the people of Saskatchewan who need these services.

Therefore, at this time I move to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 28 — The Family Maintenance Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of the family maintenance Act, 1997. This Bill authorizes child support guidelines to be enacted in provincial legislation. It proposes the following specific amendments:

The court will be instructed to order maintenance in accordance with the child support guidelines. The guidelines will apply unless special provisions have otherwise been made for the benefit of the child and the application of the guidelines would as a result be inequitable.

The section providing for maintenance to continue past a child's 18th birthday is amended to specifically provide that the maintenance may continue if the child is pursuing reasonable education. Where the court is considering the appropriate amount of maintenance to be paid by the parent of a person who is over the age of 18, it is not required to apply the guidelines.

Child support guidelines are given priority over spousal support orders, with the proviso that a reduction or termination of child support gives a spouse an opportunity to ask the court to review the amount of spousal support.

Also there will be regulation-making power added to the Act to allow for guidelines to be established or adopted. Regulations can also be made respecting how the court calculates a parent's income. For example, the court will be allowed to attribute income to parents in cases where parents are deliberately unemployed or under-employed or where they refuse to provide information to the court about their income.

Mr. Speaker, determining the cost of raising a child has always been a difficult task for the courts. Rather than having a judge try to decide what level of support should be paid based on a family's income and expenses and the child's estimated needs, this Bill implements the use of standardized tables.

These tables, the child support guidelines, will be easy for the public and for the legal profession to use. They make the law more accessible. They represent what Canadians at various income levels actually spend on average to support a child.

The availability of standardized tables is a welcome improvement in the law. This is borne out by the fact that the tables have been used since 1995 in Saskatchewan by a number of judges and lawyers to assist them in determining an appropriate amount of maintenance.

The approach used in the guidelines is based on a report prepared by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Family Law Committee after extensive consultation over many years. The purpose of adopting guidelines is to encourage child support awards that are adequate for the child's needs, as well as more consistent, predictable, and equitable. Child support guidelines are currently in place in Sweden, all of the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, and Germany.

The amendments I am introducing today maintain consistency with provisions in the Divorce Act. This federal legislation ensures that the rights and responsibilities of parents are consistent under both federal and provincial legislation. Amending this Act to maintain consistency with the federal Divorce Act, ensures that children of unmarried parents will be treated equally with children of married parents.

Mr. Speaker, adopting child support guidelines will improve the adequacy, consistency and predictability of child support awards in this province. Experience in Saskatchewan and in other jurisdictions indicates that guidelines reduce the number of cases for which an application is made to the court to set the amount of child support. This is beneficial for the court system, but more importantly, it is beneficial for families.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Family Maintenance Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to thank the

Minister of Justice for his comments this morning.

It seems to me that one of the hallmarks of any good justice system is predictability. Indeed it might well be argued that without predictability there is no justice.

In criminal matters, we all accept that while our courts require some latitude to deal with each factual situation and each accused as an individual situation and an individual person, nonetheless, basically the same offence ought to receive the same treatment by the courts and the same punishment.

Likewise in civil cases, we all accept that while there will be variation from case to case and party to party, there again it is very important for a society that similar cases are dealt with in a similar fashion.

(1100)

Unfortunately this has been all too often missing from child support. Child maintenance awards have been all over the map, and this has led to unnecessary litigation, unnecessary time spent in trying to resolve these difficult and often emotional matters. It has resulted in money going to the legal system which might better have been spent on the children. And it has resulted in aggrieved and bitter parents who then find it more difficult to deal with the other emotional issues of separation and divorce, such as child access.

I think it is important that issues of child support be dealt with quickly and fairly, and that the parties involved understand that they are being treated in a similar fashion to other people in the same situation.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, all too often a non-custodial parent, usually the father, is aware of other men in a similar financial situation as himself paying far less. This obviously leaves him bitter and angry.

Likewise the custodial parent, often the mother, is aware of situations where a former husband is paying far more child support on basically the same income. Again, this leads to unnecessary bitterness and anger, and it makes the problem of dealing with issues of child access far more difficult than they ought to be.

If we can settle quickly the issue of child support and the other financial issues which arise out of separation, I am confident that then the other non-financial issues will often be much easier to settle.

About 20 years ago this House adopted The Matrimonial Property Act which of course, Mr. Speaker, provides for an almost automatic division of matrimonial assets on separation. There was some concern at that time that having an automatic 50/50 division didn't take sufficient account of individual circumstances.

I think we now understand that the automatic division has had a number of advantages and benefits. Not only lawyers, but the general public is now quite familiar with what their respective rights and obligations are. And clients coming to a law office

generally do not have to be told what they can expect to have happen in division of matrimonial property on separation.

Far fewer cases are going before the courts simply because of that fact. Lawyers and their clients know in advance what the judge is likely to do, and consequently it makes good sense to settle the matter quickly and expeditiously as opposed to wasting unnecessary time and money on a court case.

Hopefully, the adoption of child maintenance guidelines will have the same effect. Lawyers, and hence their clients, will know in advance what the courts are likely to do, and hence it only makes good sense to settle the issue quickly.

The other advantage I see in having standardized child support guidelines is that it brings to a close something like 20 years in this country of a rather thorough — a rather silly — investigation into how much it costs to raise children in Canada.

For a long time, we were conducting various studies trying to decide what the cost of raising a child is, which of course necessitated trying to decide how much a child should eat, how much a child should be clothed, how much recreation and sports a child is entitled to do and whether or not these costs are significantly different in Toronto than, say, in Regina.

At the end of 20 years of these studies we have hit on a very basic and very simple conclusion. Namely, it costs to raise children what the parents have available to do the job. If parents are wealthy, then the cost of raising a child will no doubt include a big home, a fancy car, trips, lessons, and other such amenities. For a single mother on welfare, the cost of raising a child will unfortunately, of necessity, be seriously scaled back.

In short, Mr. Speaker, we now accept and I think the guidelines accept that the children ought to have the right to participate in the financial circumstances of their parents. Indeed they do for an intact family. In an intact family, if the parents' income rises, the children can anticipate an improved standard of living. They can anticipate the family being able to do more than previously. So why should the child of a separated family not have the same rights?

Indeed if there is a financial downturn, of necessity the child is going to have to accept lower child support payments. Therefore if there is an improvement in the circumstances of the parents, the child surely has a right to participate in that improvement as well.

I mentioned The Matrimonial Property Act and its almost automatic division of property on divorce. I think that child support guidelines are even more important, not only because they are directed at the children rather than at the adult parties, but what's more, in the case of child support, the parties to that agreement or to that litigation are of necessity going to have to have further, ongoing contact because of their children.

As lawyers, Mr. Speaker, we are always fond of saying to our clients that we should not mix up the issue of child support with the issue of child access. Reality is quite different. If child support is a bitter and emotional and divisive issue it is almost inevitable that visits by the non-custodial parent will be a time

of turmoil and fighting.

I am hopeful that with the adoption of child support guidelines, we will accomplish being able to allow the non-custodial parent the chance of having a good, warm and harmonious relationship with his or her children.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is also important to note that the adoption of child support guidelines is something coming in all across Canada; it is something that has been initiated by the federal Minister of Justice; it is something now accepted by all jurisdictions in Canada as an advance in family law.

Again, I congratulate the government on following the lead of Ottawa and accepting the benefits of our federal system in positive and forward-thinking legislation from the federal government.

There are certainly specific issues to be . . .

An Hon. Member: — That would be novel, wouldn't it?

Mr. Hillson: — Well I think it's far from novel, Mr. Speaker, although members opposite may be slow to give credit where credit is due. Nonetheless if they follow the lead and follow the example, whether they give credit or not, I suppose that is the important matter.

Mr. Speaker, there are certainly specific matters to be discussed and to be decided in this matter. There are many issues before us. But nonetheless, I would like to say that bringing some standardization into the thorny issue of child support is indeed a very hopeful development in family law, and one I am pleased to see. And I am very hopeful that it will take some of the bitterness and anger out of the difficult process of families separating. And I'm hoping that the children of Saskatchewan will be the winners in this process.

Mr. Speaker, there are however still some issues on this Bill that our members are anxious to consider and to discuss with stakeholders and with groups representing separating parents. And for this reason there are many people we still wish to consult and consider as to some of the details on this Bill. For that reason I now move adjournment of second reading.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 31 — The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 1997.

This Act is being amended to give the Public Trustee the opportunity to be heard, or consent, before receiving an appointment under any other Act to provide for administrative changes, and to authorize the Public Trustee to invest funds from the victim's fund and other sources as part of the Public Trustee common fund.

In addition, the powers and the responsibilities of the Public

Trustee are being clarified in several important ways. For example, the amendments will ensure that the Public Trustee can act as a committee under The Absentee Act, a trustee under The Trustee Act, and in exceptional cases, as a power of attorney for property.

In the future the Public Trustee will only actively monitor those estates where children are involved in cases where this is appropriate. If the Public Trustee intends to monitor an estate involving children, the executor or trustee will be advised expressly. In this way, the Public Trustee will continue to focus resources on files requiring attention.

The Public Trustee requires a will in order to administer an estate. Most often, wills are willingly surrendered. However, in at least one instance this has not been the case. Another amendment will ensure that the Public Trustee has the authority to request and receive a will.

In some instances, even though there is an order for an executor or administrator to provide an accounting of the estate, this is not done. An amendment will allow the Public Trustee to take further steps or proceedings to protect an infant or dependent adult when the executor or administrator of the estate is uncooperative or unscrupulous. Steps to protect the interests of the dependent adult or infant could include obtaining a court order discharging the executor or administrator and replacing him or her with a judicial trustee.

The courts have the authority to appoint the Public Trustee to act in certain capacities such as a trustee. As a result however, the Public Trustee's office often receives a court order without having been aware of the court application and without having had an opportunity to appear in court to speak to the matter or to have input into the wording of the order.

The proposed amendment would ensure that the Public Trustee can make representations to the court in applications for the appointment of the Public Trustee as trustee for an individual or estate. This would ensure that the Public Trustee's office is not surprised by unexpected appointments.

As well, the changes will enable the Public Trustee to decide whether to consent to such orders. The Public Trustee Act allows the Public Trustee to assign duties to the deputy public trustees. The Act will be amended to permit delegations of tasks to others, including trust officers and other support staff. It is anticipated that such delegation will result in more efficient service.

The Act is also being amended to allow the common fund to accept monies from other sources, specifically the victims' fund. Money received by the Public Trustee is held and invested through the Public Trustee common fund. The fund is invested in accordance with policies and performance objectives. Fund performance is reviewed quarterly.

The victims' fund is made up of surcharges on fines imposed on offenders for offences under federal and provincial legislation. Being part of the larger Public Trustee common fund will provide an opportunity for the victims' fund to earn a greater return, depending on the overall performance of the common fund. Any additional earnings will be used to fund

victim services and programs.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the amendments will clarify the Public Trustee's powers and responsibilities. They will achieve some administrative efficiencies within the office. They will also provide an opportunity for the victims' fund to earn additional investment income to be dedicated to developing victim services.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Public Trustee Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1115)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 31. I believe it's an important Bill, and I also believe that whenever the handling of public funds are concerned, that it is important that it's done in a most meticulous, fair, and judicious manner.

The major amendments proposed within this Bill will empower public trustees . . . one of the things will be to administer the money collected in the victims' fund. And I certainly do not have any objections to having qualified officials handling money that is collected in the public's interest.

I do have some reservations however, about the minister's intentions for the victims' fund. If this fund is large enough to warrant the use of public trustees to overlook the management and investment of these public monies, I would like to know why there may be a surplus building up. It's a tragedy — it really is — that victims of crime are often forgotten in a legal process. That's become better now, however, even though these people have scars that remain long, long after their attacker or attackers have served time and subsequently been released.

And I recognize that this government is taking some steps to remedy this flaw by employing victims' services coordinators. And these people, without a doubt, are doing good work. It's come a long way in that respect — in recognizing that victims of crime are people that deserve a great deal of attention. And just to reiterate, that in the past few decades, the entire Canadian judicial system has come a long way in developing new programs to assist these unfortunate victims of crime.

But I am concerned that all the money collected by the victims of crime surcharge is not all being directed back into compensation and counselling for Saskatchewan victims of crime. Surely even if the entire victims' fund was returned by way of compensation or services to the victims, the amount collected by way of the surcharges would not nearly be enough.

So I am somewhat curious to know why the victims' fund is substantial enough to now require some investment planning. It seems to me that if Saskatchewan was in the midst of a period of a low crime rate, the victims' fund might not need to be dispersed as rapidly as it is collected. But on the other hand, why would the minister even consider building up the victims' fund if he is directing his attention to lowering the crime rate further in this province?

If the amendments contained within Bill 31 are intended to enable the victims' fund to build up, I have to wonder if the minister and Saskatchewan Justice officials are anticipating perhaps a greater increase in the crime rate? I would hope not.

Mr. Speaker, because we still have some questions with respect to the current use of the victims' fund and if it is meeting with the objectives for which it was established, we require just a little more time to gather some input into the amendments proposed, and therefore I move to adjourn this motion at this point. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

**Bill No. 35 — The Victims of Crime Amendment Act,
1997/Loi de 1997 modifiant la Loi sur les victimes
d'actes criminels**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of The Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 1997. This is a companion amendment to those found in The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 1997 which authorizes the Public Trustee to accept money from the victims' fund. The victims' fund is made up of surcharges on fines imposed on offenders for offences under federal and provincial legislation.

Money received by the Public Trustee is held and invested through the common fund. The fund is invested according to policies and performance objectives; fund performance is reviewed quarterly. Participation in the larger Public Trustee common fund provides an opportunity for the victims' fund to earn a greater return, depending on the overall performance of the common fund. Any additional earnings will be used to fund victim services and programs.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this amendment will provide an opportunity for the victims' fund to earn investment income for users of victim services through the investment activity of the common fund.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Victims of Crime Act, 1995.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These Bills and amendments that are being proposed and put forward are extremely important to the needs of people within the province of Saskatchewan. There is a need however, to examine some of the impacts that this legislation will in fact have. And therefore, I'm again pleased to be able to share the concerns of the Liberal caucus and also the concerns of the growing number of victims and potential victims of crimes in Saskatchewan.

This is truly a sad issue that we must discuss today and deal with. It is horrible to think that our communities are plagued with continuously increasing crime rates. It is a difficult and a sad topic, Mr. Speaker, but one that definitely cannot be avoided for discussion.

We all know far too well that crime statistics are on the rise. The community of Regina, as we've all heard about . . . and experienced perhaps in some cases, the rash of car thefts in the

not-so-recent past. And we must not think that these were isolated incidents. In one year alone — this is hard to imagine — 3,000 cars were stolen.

The statistics in that respect are staggering, Mr. Speaker, absolutely staggering. And the crime is on the rise and there needs to be something done about it. But we must get beyond statistics, Mr. Speaker, and look at the ramifications of these crimes and the ramifications they have on the victims of these crimes and the people of Saskatchewan.

These people are not just statistics; they are not just numbers. As a former RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officer, I saw firsthand how violent crimes against a person and crimes against property and, yes, even white collar crimes, how they can traumatize the victims. These crimes leave scars on people that last a very, very long time.

We've come a long way, as I'd mentioned earlier, in trying to alleviate some of the hurt but we still have a long ways to go.

As a police officer, I want to recognize those people . . . the good work that are done by the victim service coordinators, which I also talked about earlier. We want to applaud these people and the good work that they do to alleviate some of the pain.

However today we must recognize that a large portion of the crimes occurring in society are not covered, unfortunately, by victim services. The victims' fund unfortunately does not apply to crimes of property.

And, Mr. Speaker, the minister opposite may say that crimes of property are different than crimes of violence. The minister may say that such crimes should not be eligible for compensation because people should carry insurance on their homes and on their properties.

This is not to say, Mr. Speaker, that this assumption does not have a great deal of legitimacy but, Mr. Speaker, it is high time that the minister opposite recognizes the psychological costs of crimes of property. I think it must be recognized that the line between crimes of property and crimes against the person is indeed a very fine line.

Because crime has gotten so out of hand in many areas of some communities, insurance companies refuse to insure property in those locations. Even if insurance companies will cover property, oftentimes the premiums are so high that, particularly seniors on fixed incomes, cannot afford to pay the price.

Again it is the people in our communities which need protection and compensation the most, that do not receive it; those people that cannot protect themselves, that become victimized and traumatized through no fault of their own.

Insurance premiums aside, financial costs are most certainly not the only cost of crime. Arguably these costs may not even be the most significant costs of crime. People who are violated in any way, whether their body is violated or their property, often experience emotional costs which far surpass any financial costs that one could imagine.

All too often as a society we neglect to recognize in a meaningful way the physical, emotional, and psychological scars which stay with the victims of crime long after the media has lost interest. The pain which these people experience is a real pain whether their scars are visible or not.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, I have some serious reservations about the implications of some aspects of this Act and we are still gathering input. Therefore at this time, I move adjournment of this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Motion for Interim Supply

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Deputy Chairman. Welcome to the minister and officials, just several questions on the interim supply.

In reference to budgets, and for the sake of many of the viewers of the Assembly back in my constituency, could you briefly explain what the interim supply purpose of the budget is, and basically give us a rundown of the purpose of interim supply?

(1130)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes. To the member opposite, I would be very pleased to do that because I think it's . . . sometimes it's a difficult concept to understand — why we're doing this at this time.

Essentially what happens is the government brings in a budget, usually in February or March, because the government's year end is not December 31; it's March 31. So it's close enough to the year end that you know what your situation is, but it's before the year end so that, you know, you're not into the next year.

And the difficulty becomes, the legislature, quite rightly, wants to debate the budget for a long period of time. And they want to go into detailed discussions about the budget, which is the estimates.

They bring the ministers in. The Minister of Education comes in with all the officials and all the detail. So you can ask all the detail about what's in the Education budget and you can be sure that you understand or accept what's in the Education budget, etc. So it's a long time between the budget being introduced into the House and the budget actually becoming formally passed by the legislature.

The problem is that beginning April 1 there are a number of groups out there that depend on the government giving them the money that is going to be approved in the budget. So in order to get to the date between April 1 and whenever the budget is eventually passed, you have what you call interim supply. And all it does is it authorizes the different departments of

government to make the payments that have to be made in that interim period before the budget's approved. And then as soon as the budget's approved, interim supply lapses and the budget's in place. So that's essentially what we're doing today.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And again the purpose of the budget is to determine where allocations of the provincial government will be allocated to various departments. As we know, we have roughly, in this department of summary for the two-twelfths interim supply, we have roughly 33 allocations.

And again when you budget for a home or you budget for a business or you budget for a municipality or you budget for a corporation or you budget for the government, basically the theory is very simple, in which you try and balance your incomes with your projections. And you're certainly trying to operate in a sound fiscal manner in which you make sure, by what you get in as government, that you don't exceed what you give out as government. So really it's a planning process.

And again the theory of balancing your budget and the theory of budgets in general is to see how you can operate with all the dollars you have to make sure you're operating in a sound manner.

Just in reference to the PST (provincial sales tax) reduction in your budget, I don't believe there was no question that it was a very good move for the people of Saskatchewan in the reduction of the budget, I think, from 9 to 7 per cent. We simply had no choice as a province but to reduce the high taxation that we have, and that in turn reduces investment to the province and it certainly reduces consumer confidence.

And I think as time progresses and perhaps over the next several years, the next year's question that people have to ask about the budget — is a further reduction to a 5 per cent PST possible over the next coming years? Or the second part of the equation is: can perhaps people look at retaining the 7 per cent but increasing government services, increasing allocations to such areas of health care or highways or education or post-secondary institutes, or perhaps developing a better environment for the economy to thrive?

These are all choices that Saskatchewan people have to make in the future, and I think many people in northern Saskatchewan. And there may be some students watching this today, Madam Minister, and we do this basically for explanation to them as to what budgeting is all about and the choices that governments have to make. But what we do want to explain as well for many of the people out there listening, that budgets are simple in nature but very complex in terms of designing and implementing your priorities as government.

The first question I have in reference to budgeting. The Premier of course is meeting this week with several bond agencies and the Leader-Star of today, and I quote from the Friday, April 4 paper:

Saskatchewan will know in six or eight weeks whether Romanow's budget presentations have translated into a higher credit rating.

The question is, in terms of addressing our debt issue, the better the rating we get from the bond agencies, of course the lower interest costs will be the end result. We look at the six- to eight-week period in which we are confident that we'll get a better bond rating and therefore lower interest rates.

In view of this particular statement, are you fairly confident as Minister of Finance that the low . . . or the better bond rating will indeed happen? And if it doesn't happen, will that affect your surplus in terms of your budget allocation, and by how much?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, the member opposite raises a lot of good points, which I'll address — a number of the ones that he raises. I thought that that was a very good explanation of balancing the budget. That you know you really have to have a balance between how much money is coming in and how much you're spending. And it sounds pretty basic but it's what got us into this mess into the 1980s, because in the '80s, each and every year, there was more money being spent — about a billion more a year, actually — than was coming in.

And I think it's a good explanation because it also makes another point. Things that aren't in the budget are not necessarily things that are bad or things that . . . There can be a lot of things that are good and should be done, but you can't afford them all. And part of what budgeting is, is saying here are the most important, the highest priorities, and that's why they're in the budget. There's a whole series of other things that are good things as well. They're just not as high in the priority list of the people of Saskatchewan as what we've done.

Now the member talks about the sales tax cut, and we think it's a very important and good part of the budget, and we believe that it will help the economy. It will create jobs. And we believe that the average person welcomes the sales tax cut.

He talks about where we go from here. But I think in a way, the answer to that question is in your own preamble. What we're saying in this budget — as we look four years out because this budget goes right to 2001 in terms of the projections — we can afford all of this and we won't have to reverse any of this. This is all affordable as far out as you can possibly see.

But that question about what comes next has to be answered only when this situation changes. That is, when you've done better than you think or you actually can afford the next step. Because the only real danger is taking the next step before you can afford it. Which again is what happened in the '80s. The gas tax was cut; it was cut dramatically; wasn't affordable; and within a number of years you have the gas tax back.

Now you're asking about the Premier's trip to Toronto and New York to talk to the rating agencies. It's difficult to know what the result will be and we'll just have to see. But I do want to make two points. One about government travel. When you go to see these investors, you've got to remember that investors around the world see a map of Canada and often . . . I mean I've gone to places to talk about Saskatchewan's credit rating and they think Saskatchewan's a company. The secretary said: is this a company? No, it's a province within a country called

Canada. Oh, of course. Now these aren't the analysts but this is the secretary for the rating agencies thinking that Saskatchewan is a company somewhere.

So one of the things you're doing, and the Premier's doing, is you're spreading the word. You're saying, please look at these numbers; they speak for themselves. And the numbers say that in 1993 we were here, and in 1997 they were here. And the reason they want the minister there, by the way — because the officials can give the numbers — is they want the political commitment; where you're going next.

But what are you going to do next? Are you going to continue to . . . Yes, you talk about reducing taxes — good point. You talk about spending — yes. They also ask you . . . And I must admit the member from Melfort concerned me a bit budget day when I heard him on the radio saying he thinks we've done too much of the balancing of the books. You've got to keep on reducing that debt because they want to hear the commitment to do the other things.

They also want to hear that the debt is coming down. And it's an essential message because the reason we have the money to reduce taxes and do all the other things is because we're saving so much on interest payments. So it's not possible to say, well you wouldn't have done all the tough stuff to balance the books and pay down the debt, and yet be willing to spend the money that comes from the benefit of reducing the debt.

So by persuading these agencies that, not only have you made incredible progress as a province, but as the people who are going to be leading the province you're still committed to making further progress, this can save you what, to the average person, is infinitesimal amounts of money in terms of basis points and the interest you pay. It comes down . . . a basis point is a 10th of a per cent. It comes down, whoa, a 10th of a per cent? You say, well you're saving a 10th of a per cent on the interest you pay on the money you borrow? But that can translate into millions of dollars of savings because of the amount of money you're borrowing.

So often, I have to confess, I become some annoyed when people say, well where's the Premier staying when he's travelling or what's he doing? These trips can save the province millions and millions of dollars just on the interest that you save. And it's important to have the key ministers — and obviously the Premier is the most key — there because they want to see what your resolve is for the future.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And I think the clear thing that we wish to clarify here is, certainly as a member of this Assembly I support some of the travel that's necessary to conduct government — the trade missions and the discussion with the bond agencies. In order to get things done, we obviously have to travel. If we sat in this Assembly every day and every day of the week, and debated amongst ourselves the value of our bonds, then certainly we'd never see the interest rates go down.

And there is no question that the irresponsible spending of the Tory government in the early '80s is certainly going to have ourselves and our children pay for that debt for many, many years. And then we see the further irresponsibility of getting up

in the Assembly and debating the merits of travel when they done the very same thing when they were in office. So it was really a question of how much longer can the irresponsible Tories continue to drag this province down to silly games in this Assembly, and their past spending habits. So certainly from my perspective there is no question that travel and government is necessary — and very necessary — because the dollars you save in the future can certainly help out not only the constituency of Athabasca but the province as a whole.

So in reference to the interest payments that you have indicated in your budget, at one time the interest amount was \$850 million a year. And that \$850 million could translate into a tremendous amount of investment into roads and into schools and into hospitals and so on and so forth.

So, and I guess in essence there is no question that if we didn't have the interest payments to make, then we could of course spend more money on a number of areas. However, in saying that, I think the people of Saskatchewan know. I'm not going to belabour the point of Tory mismanagement. That's going to be around for the next 10, 15 years, if not longer. So we won't sit here and debate the whole issue at all.

But going back to the drop from 9 per cent to 7 per cent, you indicated roughly that's \$80 million per point in terms of percentage of provincial sales tax. That's \$160 million. Would it be fair to say that some of the Cameco shares that were sold several years ago, some of the increased activity in natural gas and drilling in general, is that where the balance of the \$160 million will be coming from to compensate for the reduction of the PST?

(1145)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, no, the Cameco shares, not directly; indirectly because our interest payments are going down. The Cameco shares all went to reduce debt. Our balanced-budget legislation tries to deal with the problems of the '80s. One of the problems of the '80s was, major assets were sold — the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan privatized at a loss, a huge loss — and money was just spent. So according to our balanced-budget legislation, if a major part of a Crown is sold, it has to be used to reduce debt. You can't spend it.

So any of that one-time money went to reduce debt. But because we reduced the debt, we're saving less on interest . . . or we're saving money on interest. We're not paying as much on interest. So indirectly. And the benefit of that is when you save money on interest, you save it each and every year. When you sell something like Cameco, it's once. But if you reduce the debt and the interest payments come down, you have an interest saving each and every year.

So there's two reasons why we could afford the sales tax cut and the new spending. Our interest payments are coming down, and they're going to continue to come down. And the only reason they're coming down is because we did make the difficult choices quickly and we continue to pay down debt. And the other reason is the economy has turned around.

And there's all kinds of factors as to why the economy has turned around. But some of them have to do with, the first fact is if you're thinking about investing in a province like Saskatchewan, what you want to know is what the fiscal future is going to be like. And in the '80s you would be very nervous about investing in Saskatchewan because you'd look at the fiscal future and you'd look at the deficits and you'd say, it's not sustainable. And you would be afraid that your taxes were going to go up at some point to pay for those deficits. One of the comments that Grant Devine made that was accurate was deficits are deferred taxes.

So the fiscal stability has helped investment because people say, what I see here is a fiscal regime that's stable and because it's stable and improving — the debt is coming down — I actually see a fiscal regime that's going to be better for my company because the tax regime is going downward, not upward.

And I think the other thing that the government did to promote the growth in the economy is it changed the royalty structure for the oil companies, sat down with them and said okay, we need money from oil companies for our services. We need royalties but we also want to have you here. How can we restructure this to meet both of our needs? And I think that was another factor in the economy moving, plus our other measures to keep the economy moving.

So in short, we can afford this because our debt is going down. Our interest payments are declining, and our economy is doing well.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. On the interim supply motion, you know certainly servicing the provincial debt is something most, many people support. And looking at the interim supply again, we noticed that the debt reduction balance here in terms of under Finance, Servicing the Public Debt, we're looking at 765,000 for 1997-1998, and for the two-twelfths interim supply it says, zero balance. So is that to say that for this next two months, as a province, that there will be no payment made on the debt, that zero dollars sent to reduce the debt? Because in general mortgage terms, would it not be wise for a person that's entering into a mortgage to pay their mortgage payments once a week so in essence you're borrowing some money at lesser time.

So the question I have is on the interim supply motion. Why is it that the servicing of the provincial debt is zero?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I explained the other day that the only things that are not in interim supply are what is statutory; that is, where there's statutes that require the government to do this. This isn't included in interim supply and this particular item is statutory.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And the federal . . . or the provincial budget roughly runs over \$5 billion per year, and obviously the federal government does contribute to the province. Is this contribution in quarterly payments or is it contributed monthly? And if so, what are the total transfer payments from the federal government to the provincial coffers?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The total amount for today is 650 million. But I think the number that has to be laid out because it puts this into the proper perspective. When we became government, about 30 per cent of our revenue came from the federal government.

We've been talking about the federal government offloading and the problems it's causing for health care and the problems it's causing for education. And we've been upset with the members opposite for not taking a stand.

When you think about the fact that it was about 30 per cent of our revenue, when we became government in 1991, came from the federal government; do you know what it is this year? It's 12 per cent — 12 per cent. That is a massive, massive withdrawal of funding from priority programs. So that's the issue that we've been trying to drive home to people in this province — a massive withdrawal.

And I guess part of my concern is I've become very sceptical when I hear the same government now deciding that they've rediscovered social programs. That government in Ottawa has done more than any other government in the history of Canada to undermine social programs. You just think about that number — 30 per cent of our revenue came from the federal government in '91. And not to the province, but to people in the province for services like health, education, social programs.

Now it's down to 12 per cent. No wonder there have been problems in areas like health. And no wonder we and other provinces are so upset about what has been going on here.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Just a few questions left. In reference to the whole federal allocation to the provincial government, is it safe to say that the federal Liberal government in Ottawa has been making contributions to the provincial government in Saskatchewan over the last seven or eight years for Social Services, for Justice, for Health, for Municipal Government, and the list goes on? Is it safe to say that at this point in time, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, it's difficult to define exactly where the money comes to because, for example, some money that might be for Health might actually go into Social Services, depending on the nature of the program.

But I think the key thing about it is that sort of decline, when you're going from 30 per cent of your funding coming from that source to 12 per cent, is putting pressure all across the system. So it's in Health, massive reductions in federal funding for Health. It's in for Post-Secondary, massive reductions in funding for Post-Secondary. It's in Justice — reductions of commitment to legal aid. It's in Social Services — reductions of commitment to status Indians, social assistance payments and other payments.

So it goes across the piece and the effects are felt across the piece. It's in Highways with the shift of the Crow benefit. When you lose the Crow benefit all of a sudden there's more pressure on roads.

So lots of, lots of departments are affected. But the thing is it's not the departments — it's the people. The people of Saskatchewan have suffered huge losses of services because of the reductions from the federal government.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Just to the closing remarks, I want to make it abundantly clear today that over the last 20, 30, 40, 50 years, the federal governments have been contributing to Saskatchewan in terms of dollars for a number of sources. And in Saskatchewan when the provincial economy is doing well, obviously the equalization payments will drop.

The simple fact is we look at the whole problem of allocation. And what the northern Saskatchewan communities should know is, for years the federal governments do have allocation to the provincial government in education, health care, highways. There has been money constantly funnelled to the province for northern Saskatchewan communities.

So what we have to be very careful and very clear here is that the federal government do contribute to northern Saskatchewan in a number of other sources. And we always see that every time there's some initiative happening, it's the provincial government that's usually in the front row taking the credit.

So my problem that we have today is that if we get allocations from the federal government, it's been done over a period of the years, the Saskatchewan economy's doing just great, why are we having continual problems in the North in reference to housing, to highways, to education, to training, to health care? And the list goes on and on. Thank you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I think, to the member opposite, if you looked at the reductions in funding and you looked at the regions of the province that are dramatically affected, the North would be one of the regions really dramatically affected by the federal government withdrawing from certain areas.

For example, housing. The member opposite would know the kind of commitment the federal government had at one point to housing, and the removal of that commitment. The member would know the removal of the federal commitment to status Indians and the impact that has on the North. And reductions in health of course affect the whole province.

So I think that when you look at the problems in the North, the federal withdrawal has had a dramatic effect on them.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, we over here have noted that many national commentators have taken note that our provincial government has oftentimes criticized the Hon. Paul Martin for following basically the same fiscal policies that Madam Minister has followed — namely, coming into office with a large deficit and attempting to deal with it.

The difference is of course that when Madam Minister attempts to deal with the deficit and debt of this province, she is entitled to a hero's medal and the undying thanks of the people of Saskatchewan. Well when Paul Martin attempts to deal with the deficit and the debt he inherited, he is insensitive, cruel, and

destroying the country.

Many national commentators haven't seen the sense in that, and I guess I'm one of the people who doesn't understand that and doesn't see much sense to that.

The other thing that troubles us over here is that Madam Minister and members opposite are continually accusing us of not using this legislature as a forum for running the federal election campaign. Now I'm sorry that we haven't been doing that. It's not because we are embarrassed about the government of the Rt. Hon. John Chrétien — far from it. The reason is that we see a somewhat different role for the Saskatchewan legislature and the Government of Saskatchewan . . .

(1200)

The Chair: — Order, order. I'd like the member to come to order, please. I have been listening very carefully this morning and this . . . the latitude of the comments and the replies and so forth are extremely . . . varying substantially beyond the provisions of interim supply.

I would ask both the minister and the members to narrow their comments down to interim supply, and remind you that the purpose of the interim supply is to grant money for the operation of government departments, of programs on an interim basis, while reserving the Legislative Assembly right to complete detail review of estimates later.

So I remind the members and the minister that the debate should focus on the need to grant, reduce, or refuse the supply in respect to the resolution before the committee. And so therefore I would invite the members to discuss departmental policies and details of programs, and political comments to be put under the appropriate place. And this, I don't believe that interim supply is so. I would ask them all to narrow it up and stick within what interim supply is.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I will be pleased to say . . . to pass on from the federal election. I agree that it's really not an appropriate matter for discussion at this time.

Mr. Chairman, we here are pleased with the improvement in the province's financial situation. We are pleased with the lower interest rates, the improved picture in the balance statement of our province, and the lowering of the provincial sales tax.

However the question here on the interim supply I have for Madam Minister is that, unfortunately while we do see many bright spots, it still appears to be a jobless recovery. Now I would like Madam Minister to please tell us how the interim supply will deal with the issue of why we still don't seem to be creating a lot of jobs in this province; why that continues to be one unfortunate area of what otherwise is an improving financial picture for our province.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, I certainly respect your admonition. I just want to take one moment to answer in technical terms the point raised — why we have concerns about what occurred in terms of the federal cuts to the province, problems that we had and other provinces and other social groups have out there — it's not

other governments, it's other social groups.

The money that the federal government provides for health, education, social programs, is only 14 per cent of the federal budget. It's a very small part of the pie, yet over 70 per cent of their cuts came from that part of the pie. So we are saying this is grossly unfair to the people of Canada. And the other thing we're saying is the priorities of the people of Canada are health, education, social programs, where 70 per cent of the cuts came in funding for those priority areas.

Now just in general terms, I'm always pleased to talk about the budget in terms of what it does for jobs. I would point out to the member opposite that the employment picture in Saskatchewan does look very optimistic — 6,000 more people working than a year ago. Small businesses told us the most important thing that we could do to create growth and jobs in the province is to lower the provincial sales tax, which of course occurred in the budget. We have taken other measures to promote the hog industry; we have expanded our spending on roads. So I think our employment picture in Saskatchewan looks rosy. We have significantly more people working than last year. Our unemployment rate remains the lowest in Canada, and I think this budget is an excellent budget to keep the momentum going and to even pick up steam there.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, I thank Madam Minister for her answers. I hope that her projections on job recovery will prove to be correct and I hope that we will leave aside the federal election campaign and deal with the issues of this province. Thank you.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, we had an opportunity yesterday to begin asking you some questions that we think are important to the people of Saskatchewan with regards to your request for monies in interim supply which would amount to two-twelfths of your total budget.

Now yesterday we established some of the groundwork, in that you had conceded to us that each month has a different amount of money that is required from the government treasury. In fact you said, as I recall, something to the effect that third parties' demands on government would influence how much money was required on any particular month and that that was not completely predictable. Therefore the question remains in my mind, how do you decide how much money to ask for in interim supply if it is a varying amount. Now I've taken a look and it appears that you simply are looking for two-twelfths of the total bundle. Now obviously there would be times of the year when government would spend more than one-twelfth in each month. Just as in a farming operation you find that about two months of the year are extremely heavy in terms of expenditures. And I would think that the relationship should be somewhat the same in principle.

For example in farming, as you know, at seeding time people have to buy fertilizer; they have to buy fuel; they have to buy seed; they have to buy oil; they've got to put filters on their tractors. And likely they would be spending probably two- or three-twelfths of their yearly expenditures in that one-month period of time — the great megaproject of the province being

seeding.

Now it would seem to me that government would be in the same situation; that in the springtime when all of the winter's activities of frozen-up ground and frozen-up province and things not moving all that much . . . It would seem to me that springtime would be the natural time for the province to start to blossom and to bloom, the same as the grass and the flowers do. And that economic activity, at that point speeding up, would similarly contrast the farming operations of our province, and that the expenditures of the province would go up as well.

So, Madam Minister, is that philosophy somewhat accurate, I guess, is my question? And if so, then how can you possibly look to two-twelfths of the total budget being enough to sustain you through the first two months of this fiscal year at a time when most probably your expenditures are going to be very much higher than two-twelfths of the total budget?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite: I guess the first comment I would make is that what we're doing today is exactly the same thing that was done when the Conservatives were in power, when the Liberals were in power, when the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) was in power. It has been absolutely traditional that, in order to bridge between the budget being introduced into the House and the budget actually being passed, there's interim supply.

Now in terms of the amounts, the Department of Finance has canvassed the different groups. The money, by the way, that is urgently needed is needed for social groups. And I will begin, as we proceed here, to start reading some of these groups out to you. And we are going to find information about some of these groups that are now operating on lines of credit and paying interest because this money is urgently needed.

So it's absolutely traditional to do it this way. What the Department of Finance did was check and be sure that two-twelfths is enough to ensure that they can continue to operate for the time frame involved, and they've assured us that it is.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Madam Minister, I find that a strange comment to a relatively lengthy and important question. And that of course being that you have suggested, I think, in your answer that somehow, if we don't pass this really quickly, some social groups in our province may be going to suffer. I think maybe it would be appropriate if you would identify those social groups for us, and tell us exactly who is going to suffer and how much they're going to suffer. We might as well get this right out in the open because I have a feeling that you're not telling everything just exactly the way it is.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the member opposite — the Chairman may want to note that particular comment; it has a certain tinge to it — I would be most pleased. And this is not all the groups; these are some of the groups: the Battlefords Residential Services Inc., Biggar Community Group Home, Cheshire Homes of Regina, Cudworth Columbus Society, Cypress Hills Ability Centres, Harvest Community of the Prairies, Weyburn Group Homes,

Wilkie Independent Living society, Buffalo Narrows Day Care Center, Cumberland House Day Care Center, Borden Place Child Care Center, Kerrobert Day Care Center, Melfort Day Care Co-operative, North Battleford Day Care Centre, Shaunavon Daycare Centre, and the list goes on.

And what happens is that these groups, their fiscal year starts April 1. They have bills that they have to pay. They depend on government providing them with the money to pay those bills, and traditionally governments have provided them with that money. If they don't get the money in time, they have to operate on a line of credit and they end up having to pay the interest, obviously, on the line of credit.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Madam Minister, I noted a couple of interesting comments there. The Borden Place Child Care Center and the Shaunavon Daycare Centre sound like somewhat similar.

So, Madam Minister, in those two situations, rather than to deal with each one individually — I expect that there's an awful lot of similarity in the way that each of these institutions operate — so in general principle if you explain how it works in a couple of them probably we'll have an understanding of how it works for the rest. If not, of course, you can clarify that.

Now you're saying to us that in the Shaunavon Daycare Centre, for example . . . First of all perhaps you'd outline what kind of work they actually do and what kind of folks would actually get services from that centre so that we'll have an understanding of what we're paying for.

And then carry on to tell us how it is that at the first days of the month . . . And I think we're at what, about the 4th now? April 4. You started on April 1. How is it that you now have expenses that need to be paid?

It's a little strange for me, you see, because in the farming business — and I'm a farmer — I get my bills on April 1, 2, 3, 4. I don't have to pay those bills until at least the last week of April. I don't have any creditors that demand payment.

Now employees, of course, sometimes get paid bi-weekly. So that would be on maybe the 14th or the 15th. People that work for me, I pay them every two weeks. I don't pay them before they work; I pay them after they work. Is there something different about the way government does business?

Oh I see the member from Regina, south Regina here, thinks he knows how to run a government. I rather suspect that the whole thing would collapse if this was in his hands because we've seen some examples of the way he thinks in some of his speeches.

Madam Minister, I will reiterate that it seems passingly strange to me that you feel that you are in a crisis situation here about needing to meet payrolls and government obligations to third party interests when we are at April 4 and the bills that had to be paid only start to accumulate as of the 1st, which was the start of this week.

So, Madam Minister, explain to me how it is that you're on the hook or that somebody might suffer or somebody might lose

their job or some creditor might not be paid in time if you don't have your money available by the end of this day.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, I'm not on any hook. The people who are on the hook are the people who are running these agencies, that run often on a shoe-string budget, and they're requiring their money as soon as we can get it out to them. And if the member would like a list of the types of groups, I'd refer him to *Public Accounts*. There are pages and pages and pages of those groups listed there.

So it's the members opposite, it's not me. I'm saying to those groups that I made myself available for three days. I said let's get this through — through as quickly as we can after the budget has been through the process in the legislature. Let's do this as quickly as we can so that we ensure that you don't have to go out and run a line of credit to pay your expenses. Because some of them are going to have to do that.

It's up to the members opposite. If they say through their actions that they don't care about these groups having to run a line of credit, I would say that this perhaps reflects on their sense of compassion for some of the groups who do not have the capacity to find extra money sitting around and will be out borrowing money to ensure that their operations continue.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Madam Minister, this grows more and more interesting. I think, to tell you the truth, Mr. Chairman, this is probably the biggest snowstorm we've seen all year. Now it's been a tough winter, a long, hard, cold winter, a lot of storms. But we're getting a snow job in this Assembly today the likes of which I've never seen before in my life.

To expect ordinary folks even, not even geniuses or smart people, to believe this story would be probably the most amazing thing that could ever possibly happen in any Assembly in the world. I mean it is phenomenal that you could stand in your place and try to tell us that folks are going to basically be in financial, extreme crises as a result of our not passing interim supply for you this very day. It is absolutely ridiculous, Madam Minister, and you know it.

Everybody in this province that runs a business, 90 per cent of people — at some time 100 per cent would have a line of credit — 90 per cent would run a line of credit almost every year. I would be willing to bet that if you went into a bank in Saskatchewan, you could not find a bank that doesn't run a line of credit for business people. They all do it. It is a part of the cost of doing business in life.

(1215)

Running a line of credit is nothing to be afraid of and it's nothing to get all alarmed about, and if a few folks have to go on a line of credit for a few days in order to keep things going, it is not going to be the end of your world and it won't be the end of their world.

What will be the end of the world politically is if we don't get answers from you about how you are squandering and wasting the money of this province — \$5.2 billion, all of it wasted and

gone, thrown away on all kinds of hare-brained schemes that we can't even find out about. There's all kinds of stuff that money is being spent on nobody ever discusses because you're in a hurry. And why are you in a hurry? The only people that are in a hurry when they're spending other people's money are people that are spending it where they shouldn't be spending it.

Imagine, Madam Minister, if some of the people in a company called Bre-X would have done their research before they bought shares, how much more relief there'd be in a town in Alberta?

Mr. Chairman, I want the minister to tell us about two-twelfths of the budget, interim supply. I want her to tell us how she's going to spend that money, and I want direct and reasonable answers about where that money is going and how she is going to attribute money out of the government coffers for such important things as flood control at this particular time.

We've got some specific things that need to be dealt with, and you coming up with red herrings like people are not going to be paid will not wash today. Today we want answers, Madam Minister. Where are you going to get the money for the municipalities of this province that the minister of the Water Corporation promised us two days ago in question period; promised us that he was going to alleviate the problem in cabinet through regulations; promised us that he was going to set things up so that relief would be on a fair, level playing-field, the same as before? Where is that money going to come from, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. He's putting a lot of heat onto this subject — absolutely no light, I would say. What the member opposite knows full well is that if he wants those sorts of details, he can move to the process whereby he can bring the department here and get those sorts of details.

But you know? Today has been a very revealing day. I am taking this *Hansard* and I'm going to look through this very carefully because we had some tough things to say about the other group that sits over there. But I'll say one thing about them. They at least have some understanding and compassion for the groups who will be jeopardized by what's happening right now in this House. They at least have that understanding and that compassion.

That they know that if you're talking about the Infant Hunger Action Group — yes, the Infant Hunger Action Group — and to have the Conservative Party stand there and say, well if a few folks have to go out and borrow some money, what's the problem? How much capacity do you think the Infant Hunger Action Group has to go out and borrow money?

I thought you folks would try to turn your backs on the '80s and the hard-heartedness of what you were all about. You're right back where you were before.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, how much money is being budgeted for flood control in the province of Saskatchewan today?

Apparently the minister wasn't listening as usual, so we will allow her to get back her officials to consult while we ask you a very simple question. How much money are you allocating to flood control for this spring?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite: the member opposite knows that if he wants that kind of detailed information, he can move very quickly through this process and get that kind of information. And he knows very well that I do not have the detailed budgets here of every department, but we're more than willing to talk about those issues when we get to that process.

But what I want to bring the member opposite back to — because it is striking what's happening in this House. You talk about defining moments; we have a defining moment here — there are groups in this province who provide vital services for families and children in this province. I am putting the member opposite on notice that they have told our government that if we do not begin to process this money as soon as we can, they are going to have to go out and figure out how to borrow money on a line of credit. And I want the member opposite to reflect on the fact that he has said to these people, well if a few folks have to go out and borrow some money, what's the big deal? That's what's happened in this legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite can do what they want today, but they're going to be held accountable for it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Madam Minister, we will all be held accountable in the democratic process on election day and of course the quicker that comes the better for me because I think we can wipe you out. The way that you handle money is an absolute fiasco. The way you answer questions is a disgrace to this Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, I will ask the minister once again. In the absence of a fixed, budgeted amount, how much do you intend to spend to provide relief and compensation for the current flooding crises?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, the member opposite is continuing to ask a question which I have given the answer to many times. I'm not going to change my answer because it is the correct answer.

The answer is this: this government welcomes the opportunity to lay before the people of Saskatchewan, through the legislature, the detailed answers to those sorts of questions. And we're quite willing to move to that process so we can bring the proper people in here to provide those sorts of answers — the estimates process.

But for the members opposite to say that because I'm not prepared to bring in all of the details right now they're going to hold up money to these groups, that's a choice that they're making and we will be sure that they are held accountable for this choice.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Madam Minister, this is a choice that you have made. It was your choice to bring in a budget this late in the season instead of starting this Assembly in January when you should have. There's absolutely no excuse for this government to be sitting around all through January and taking flights off to everywhere in the world while every cabinet minister has an all expense paid trip some place under the guise of doing business for this province.

You should have been here working. There's absolutely no excuse for this delay. You're the one that made the choice. We're not the government, you are. You decided to do this, nobody else.

Now, Madam Minister, the province has a budget for disaster relief in foreign countries, and you have specified how many dollars you have. And yet you stand in your place today and say you couldn't be bothered to tell us how much money you've got for flood relief in Saskatchewan. You couldn't be bothered to figure out how much money you have available, or even how much it might cost. It would be an imposition on you to have to do such a terrible amount of work. But you knew exactly how many dollars to allocate to foreign countries through some kind of a scheme that you've got going there.

So, Madam Minister, how is it that you can find the time to budget an exact amount of money for somebody else, but you can't find the time to tell us in this Assembly how much money you've got available for flood crises relief in the province right today?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the members opposite, you know, to have lectures by the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan on how to prepare budgets and how to run the finances is almost laughable if it weren't so tragic, if it weren't so tragic.

When you think back . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, the year end for this government is March 31, 1997. We bring our budgets in in February and in March.

In 1991, the province of Saskatchewan had no budget because the Conservative government of that day didn't bring one in. They brought it in — they couldn't get it passed. They prorogued the legislature without a budget, without a budget. Because they couldn't get it through the legislature, they had no budget.

But what I want to say to the member opposite is: who is interim supply for? It's not for the Minister of Finance. It is for the groups out there that require funding.

And I want to remind the member opposite that when he says if a few folks have to go out and borrow money, what's the problem, let me remind the member opposite of another of the groups of "few folks" who will be borrowing money: The Parkland Society For Aid To The Mentally Handicapped. Do you think they have the capacity to go into a bank tomorrow and say, we need some extra money . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes.

And what we're saying to the members opposite, one part . . .

two-thirds of this House understand this problem. We understand this problem. The Liberals understand this problem. The Liberals didn't even support this budget but they understand the problem. They do not have the hard-heartedness of the Conservatives who say who cares if some of these groups operating on a shoestring budget have to borrow some money? Who cares about the child care centres? Who cares about the mentally handicapped? You will be held accountable.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Madam Minister, I sat around in my kitchen all through January waiting for that very important call from the Premier, waiting for that very important call from the Premier to tell me . . .

The Chair: — Order. I would ask the members to come to order. The Chair cannot hear the member's question and I'm sure that the minister cannot. I would ask the members to please come to order.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, last January I was sitting in my house waiting for a call from the Premier; waiting for him to phone up and say, Jack, let's go back to work. He never called. No calls in January.

We waited halfway through February thinking, boy, it's going to get pretty tough to get a budget in and for folks to get paid. It's going to be awful hard for municipalities to make some plans for the year because they don't know where the government's coming from in their offloading or downloading, or whatever loading they happen to think up next.

Well, Madam Minister, the truth of the matter is that the choice to be here today, behind, and not having your work done, is your choice. Your Premier, you and your cabinet couldn't get your act together, couldn't get your work done because you were too busy off holidaying around the world under the guise of trade missions.

And what did we get for it? A minister that comes in at the last minute and tells us we cannot have grievance before supply in the democratic process in Saskatchewan because she got behind. She didn't get her homework done. She never had the will or the inclination or the desire to do her job.

Well, Madam Minister, if you're tired of your job, resign. We'll find you somebody that can do it right.

Now, Madam Minister, you've had all kinds of time to figure out whether or not you're going to help a foreign country. I see in my notes here that one of the countries that would have qualified for foreign aid money was Guyana where they endured severe flooding last year, according to our research. Now because Guyana is so poor, the relief effort was almost entirely underwritten by foreign agencies.

Now can you tell us if Guyana received flood relief from Saskatchewan last year and if you have budgeted for that kind of disaster in those kind of countries out of your two-twelfths this year?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. I think the member's condescending tone speaks for

itself and I think his lack of understanding of the process speaks for itself.

There are certain deadlines. Why don't we bring in a budget in October? Because there are certain deadlines.

The end of the year for the Government of Saskatchewan is March 31. Because we care about running the province's finances properly — unlike the record, the record of the members opposite that are chirping from their Tory seats speaks for itself, speaks for itself — we want to wait till as close as we can to the end of the year to know exactly what our situation is. It's like a business — you don't do a budget halfway through the year, you wait as close as possible to the end of the year. So there's one deadline, March 31.

The other thing we want to wait for is the federal budget. The federal budget has an impact on the budget of the province of Saskatchewan as does on every other province. We want to look at that budget, do the analysis, see the effect it has on our budget. So it means a budget in March, which is a very appropriate time for a budget, a traditional time for a budget in Saskatchewan, an early time for a budget in Saskatchewan.

Now the members opposite know that because of the problem of some groups requiring funding immediately and the members wanting — which is their right and we welcome it — to talk about the budget for many weeks in the legislature. We have to provide interim funding.

(1230)

But I will remind the members opposite what they're doing. The members opposite are saying to the child hunger, an education program group: look, if you folks have to go out and borrow some money in order to make your payments, what's the big deal? That's the Tory approach — what's the big deal if people who are providing vital services to children and families in this province have to go out and borrow money in order to get through so that this can go on in the legislature, this particular process. What's the big deal? I think that comment speaks for itself, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I wish I would have heard an answer out of that; I could somehow feel justified to go on to a different line of questioning, but I haven't heard an answer. I hear the minister spending most of her time, while we've been in this Assembly, pointing her finger at Ottawa saying that all of the province's problems are because Ottawa done it all wrong. And probably they did.

Once she gets done with those folks, though . . . And people aren't listening in the media anymore and nobody cares anymore what she's saying about Ottawa. She blames the Liberals in the province here for having created all of her problems, and when that doesn't work anymore, of course, she digs up the past and blames the governments of decades back for all the problems that she inherited.

See, Mr. Chairman, there they are, there they are singing the praises of the past. Living in the past . . .

The Chair: — Order. I would ask the members that the questions cannot be heard and the answers cannot be heard . . . Order. All members will come to order and listen to the questions and the answers.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now as they live in the past, what they fail to understand, Mr. Chairman, is that we have to have justification in this Assembly for why money is being spent. We are being asked for two-twelfths of the budget to be spent before we finish the debates, before we go through interim supplies and discuss these matters. Give us the money first; we'll explain where it went later. It's not the way it's supposed to work in a democracy.

You see . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, I guess the member opposite would like to stand on his feet and make a speech. Well when your turn comes, you go right ahead. You talk to me, you talk to me about the past. Let's talk about the past. We've got folks down in Minot right now, in North Dakota, that are thanking the . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. I will ask the members to come to order, on both sides.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now as the members opposite are pointing out, the Rafferty-Alameda dams were things of the past that people criticized and unfortunately for them, they've had to eat crow because those dams are filling up and stopping floods and keeping people alive.

And it is nice to know that some people can recant and actually admit that they were wrong. And I'm glad that those members opposite today are starting to eat some of that crow because they were wrong, they were wrong about everything. In fact they were so wrong about everything in the past . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. I will like to remind the members that we are into interim supply, and therefore the members should reserve their detailed questions for later when the estimates are up. Interim supply is the granting of interim supply and I would ask the members to narrow it up. We're getting far ranging here now again.

So I would ask the members . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I would ask the members on the government side to come to order.

Order. So I would ask the members to keep in mind that we are in interim supply. Government departmental estimates will be at a later date.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chairman, rather. Mr. Chairman, we are determined to stay on the track of why we are here, which is to ask the minister to give us answers about where she's going to spend the interim supply that she is asking for.

What the members in the government side seem to want to avoid is an explanation of where those monies are going to be spent and how it was determined how much monies would be spent where. They somehow don't want to have to answer those questions. They want the minister to have access to a great pool

of money. What is two-twelfths of five point something billion? It must be a fair few dollars. And yet they would expect us to stand here and listen to their rhetoric about how all their problems come from the past, instead of answering the questions that we have directly asked.

We've asked a very simple question here this morning and I haven't had an answer. I've asked it three times now. How much money has been delegated for flood relief in the crisis that we're in? Have you heard an answer? I haven't heard an answer. Has anybody heard an answer that I've missed somewhere?

Madam Minister, the truth of the matter is that you don't have your answers because, like yesterday, you don't have your homework done. I asked the minister yesterday this same question and she babbled on about a whole lot of other things, but never answered the question. And why? Does she not know? Or is she afraid that the numbers are so high that it will wreck the balancing of this budget?

The Chair: — Order.

An Hon. Member: — I think the member's questioning and line of attack is completely out of order. Nothing in giving approval to interim supply . . .

The Chair: — Would the member wait to be recognized by the Chair.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, I would submit that the comments by the member from Maple Creek are out of order. Nothing in voting approval for interim supply precludes the opportunity for the member to ask questions about anything of interest to him when those specific departments come before Legislative Assembly during the course of discussion on the budget, during our estimates process.

That's when the member should be asking detailed question about spending priority for a department, and he will have that opportunity during estimates. Those are not the kind of questions, Mr. Chairman, that should be brought up here during interim supply.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just in response to the point of order raised by the member from Regina Victoria. It's unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, that I didn't have a moment or take the time to go back and review the type of questioning that the member of Regina Victoria used to get into when we were into interim supply.

Mr. Chairman, you're right. Mr. Chairman, you are right in talking about interim supply. But, Mr. Chairman, the interim supply Bill that has come before the Assembly is a request for an allocation of funds for two months supply . . . two months funding for the province of Saskatchewan — that means expenditures in the province of Saskatchewan — and some of the questions that are being asked by this side of the Assembly are asking of the minister how she intends to expend that.

Now the minister has pointed out a number of areas where there

are expenditures, but there are other areas that we've been trying to get a bit of an idea as to where this total funding will be going. And I think it's certainly appropriate, Mr. Chairman, that while we are talking interim supply, interim supply covers the whole gamut of expenditures and fiscal responsibility in the province of Saskatchewan and how the monies . . . it goes to every one of the departments.

And while we're not asking to get specifically into all the details, we certainly need to know how the government intends to cover the expenditures over the next two months that they're asking for today. And I believe that's what we've asked for and those are some of the questions that we are raising. That's my response to the point of order raised by the member from Regina Victoria.

The Chair: — I want to bring to the attention of the House that when the Chair has intervened in the past two times that certainly the same statements have been that the member from Regina Victoria brings up — that there is a place for line estimates, and that is departmental lines. This is an interim supply.

We have in the past allowed a fair bit of latitude in this. I have been trying to bring it back to what it is supposed to be on interim supply, which is an interim supply for the departments not a line-by-line estimate of the departments.

I would take that the point of order from the member from Regina Victoria is well taken. I know that a lot of the questions have been in order. Some are, however, becoming very irrelevant to interim supply. And I would ask the member that is now on his feet or asking the questions, and any former . . . or members that are going to be, to please make your questions relevant to interim supply, not line-by-line estimates of departments. We are on a line by line . . . We are in interim supply and I would ask them to hold their remarks to that.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Chairman, I would like the minister to explain to this Assembly how she is going to spend two-twelfths of her budget and know for sure that she has allocated the right amounts of money when we find that this province is presently in a court case over the government's illegally breaking of the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts that has finally of course made it to the stage of trial.

Now according to legal experts across the country, the farmers have a solid case, Madam Minister. And as well there is some precedence — Manitoba Pea Growers won a suit against that government and its attempts to unilaterally change the GRIP program. Now you will recall that. And from our own estimates you could be looking at repaying in excess of 800 millions of dollars if the farmers win.

Now what is your estimate of that potential liability yourself? And have you allocated those kinds of monies to be available for those farmers in these next two months? You say that you're very much concerned, you have a bleeding heart for all of the people in day care centres. How much does your heart bleed for the farmers who may be demanding as much as \$800 million in the next two months? Have you got that money available?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the members opposite. I'm sure the people of Saskatchewan will be rightly suspicious of the Tories when they start using numbers. And the members know very well that this is before the courts and the government can make no comments about any issue before the courts.

But I will keep reminding the members opposite of what is occurring here. We have in this House 58 members; 53 of them — 53 of them — from two different parties understand the importance of what we're trying to do here today; 53 of them, Liberals and New Democrats, and the Liberals have not supported this budget and have many questions to ask and many concerns which I'm sure they're going to raise because they understand when the time comes.

There are five people in this legislature who are saying to the people of Saskatchewan that they still lack the compassion that they exhibited in the past for groups and people who are struggling out there. So the members opposite have to be prepared to tell the women who run the Lestock Women's Centre, have to be prepared to tell them when they call because we'll be forwarding the call, you have to be prepared to say, women at the Lestock Women's Centre, if you folks have to go out and borrow some money, what's the problem?

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, we've been talking over the last couple of days about interim supply, the expenditure and the allocation of I believe two months supply of funding for the province to operate. You've been telling us this morning that there are a number of groups that are going to be out money.

I would like to know, Madam Minister, when do cheques start rolling out of the departments to groups. It's the fourth day of the month of April, first part of the month. It seems to me, Madam Minister, that most individuals or groups either receive by middle of the month or at the end of the month. Your suggestion today that if you don't have this interim supply passed today that somebody is going to be out of funds doesn't seem to have a lot of weight. I would like to know when the process is in motion. And it would seem to me also, Madam Minister, that you wouldn't also have that process moving. The cheques will not leave even if this motion is passed today. The cheques are not going to go to different partners at least till the middle of the month and certainly in some cases till the end of the month.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, this is exactly the problem. The lack of . . . Why didn't you ask us this question a long time ago? We could have told you. The Department of Finance . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Chairman, I have been here for three days — and I will not say the same thing for these people — answering these members' questions. The Liberals have been available for questions and I appreciate that. They have been very thorough in ensuring that they took up their time to ask the appropriate questions.

The Department of Finance cannot start issuing cheques until you have the legislative authority to do it. What you're saying to me is frightening — why can't we start printing cheques before

we have the legal authority to do it? That's exactly what happened in the '80s.

(1245)

And I'll say to the member opposite, they are making a very clear point here today and it won't be missed on the people of Saskatchewan. What the members opposite are saying, that the Kipling and District Association for Handicapped Adults — they're saying to this group: don't worry, don't worry if you have to go out and borrow money because we, the Tory Party in the legislature of Saskatchewan, aren't worried about you having to go out and borrow money. Even though the other 53 Liberal and NDP members understand that this is problem, the Tories don't.

Mr. Toth: — Well I guess, Madam Minister, you've just proven a point. We didn't have a response to the question. When do cheques normally leave departments and go out? When can the Kipling handicap centre . . . when would it normally get its cheque? Does it get its cheque on the first of the month, ahead of when they've expended their . . . or done the work?

Madam Minister, I don't get my cheque until the end of the month. You don't get your cheque until the end of the month. Other groups don't get their cheques till the end of the month.

And, Madam Minister, no one is saying that groups are going to be out of funds as a result of the debate that's taking place in this Assembly today. And nobody's saying that the Department of Finance or that groups are not planning ahead and already have in motion a process. They will not cut the cheques certainly, until the funding is available.

But for you to stand here and tell us that people are out of money because they didn't receive their cheque on the first day, I haven't seen anyone be paid for services done until those services are done. And so, Madam Minister, whether you receive your approval for interim supply this morning is irrelevant to the fact of whether individuals get their money on time.

The fact that you . . . Does it take your department that long? Are you telling me that you're expecting us to sit in this Assembly and discuss interim supply for the next three weeks? You're afraid we're going to hold you that long?

I'm not sure why we would. We certainly haven't given that indication. But I'm not exactly sure why, as a Finance minister, you should expect to walk into this House and ask for an expenditure of a sum of money and just have the Assembly give it a *fait accompli*; rubber stamp it, including the . . . Some of the members of the official opposition say, well I guess that's the way we do it and away we go. We don't hold you accountable.

It seems to me, Madam Minister, that there have been some legitimate concerns raised. And I would also suggest, Madam Minister, if you think that the bow has been quite wide in some of the questions here over the last couple of days, maybe you should review what took place prior to 1991. See how broad the bow was at that time, what ministers of the day had to deal with.

But let me ask again, Madam Minister, when are cheques normally processed? When would individuals and groups expect to receive their cheques — middle of the month, end of the month, or the first of the month before they even expend any, or before they've done any of the work?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite. What I'm trying to tell the member opposite is that these groups get their cheques traditionally April 1, May 1, June 1 — the first of the month.

Each and every day that goes by these groups are facing the possibility of bills coming in that they will not be able to pay. And you know, I would say to the members opposite though, what I would say to the members opposite is this: this is reflective of an attitude. It's reflective of an attitude because we have 53 members in this legislature . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You know, if the member from Cypress Hills would like to have an answer, he should listen to it.

The 53 members of this legislature understand that they have other opportunities to ask all of the detailed questions about the budget that they want to ask. But my understanding is that the Liberals are prepared to vote this off today. And do you know why they're prepared to vote this off today?

Because, like us, they understand that the Weyburn and Area Child Abuse Council provides vital services to the people of this province and they can't go to the bank and get a loan as easily as the Conservatives would allow us to believe. What the Conservatives are saying to the Weyburn and Area Child Abuse Council is, look folks, if you've got to go and borrow money at the bank, no big deal to us. The same old hard-hearted Tories who lack an ounce of compassion.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Chairman, it's certainly interesting to listen to the minister and all of a sudden, she's got this ounce of compassion for individuals or this government or many of its members.

The interesting thing, Mr. Chairman, in the whole debate that we have before us, it's as if we're facing a crisis in the province of Saskatchewan. And I don't know of any organization that goes out and borrows money on the first of the month. I don't know of any organization that all of a sudden finds . . . and doesn't believe the funds will be there. I don't know of any organization that relies on government expenditures and many . . . I'm not exactly sure how many receive the money up front.

It seems to me the cheque may have gone out on the first of the month, Mr. Speaker, but that's basically addressing last month's expenditures, and either they're paid the end of the month or the first of the month. And we can check our own cheque stubs and find out when we have those funds deposited into our accounts, and it wasn't for something I had up front.

But I think, Mr. Speaker, when you look at it . . . Well we can talk about the handicap centres. If the minister's talking about an expenditure to the handicap centres, I would suggest to you that some of those centres may find that while the minister's saying we can't get the cheque out, I'm sorry we can't get it out

tomorrow and you're going to have to borrow money; I don't think they will.

The one thing that they will find, Mr. Chairman, and I'm sure if you talk to any one of them, when that cheque does arrive, it certainly is not going to meet the requirements that they've been asking of this government — the services they are being asked to provide. And as a result then they end up going back to local organizations to seek more help as this government continues to offload services onto local governments and onto the local tax base.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I think it's certainly a concern when you talk about individuals receiving their cheques on time. But I don't know if the minister can just hide behind the fact that if the cheque isn't out tomorrow, these organizations are going to be in difficulty when they rely on when government funding is coming out.

I don't think the hospital in Kipling is going to close down because the funding doesn't get out to the district health board tomorrow so that they can make sure that a cheque is made available to the hospital in Kipling. Or to the Willowdale lodge, or to the other handicap services in . . . And I happen to be talking about my constituency because of the fact of the services that I'm aware are available there.

But, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chairman, when we talk about interim supply . . . And we can talk about the social agencies. There are other agencies as well out there that are looking for some funds, that need some funds to survive. And you ask yourself . . . the Minister of Municipal Government was just talking about the fact the other day that they may face some exceptional circumstances as a result of flooding taking place this summer. My colleagues tried to get some questions answered and so far we haven't got any answer.

So, Madam Minister, we're talking of a two-month supply, we're talking of funds made available to agencies to operate in this . . . at this current time. We're talking about them.

And, Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to remind the minister of the fact too . . . the minister always says, I think my colleague from Cypress Hills pointed out, and I could . . . we could certainly go back through the . . . prior to the 1991 period. And we could go through a number of days of debate on interim supply.

And if you thought that some of the questions today were frivolous, I guarantee you, Mr. Chairman, you would have a heyday looking at some of the questions. In fact I should dig some of them out so that Madam Minister would have a chance to respond to similar type questions. But I won't do that, to save the members who were in the Assembly at the time the embarrassment of the type of questions that were asked.

But I find it interesting that rather than responding . . . And you know, Mr. Chairman, whether or not a question is directly related and may be involved in some way in a department, it seems to me the Finance department, when they do their homework, are quite well aware of the number of circumstances that they face on an annual basis. They're well aware of the fact that they must plan. And the minister talked about planning.

The minister talked about how they have to plan.

The reason we couldn't have the budget until the end of March, because they had to know what the federal government was doing, they had to know how much they were going to have cut in transfer payments, they had to know how much more was going to be offloaded by the federal department. And therefore it took them some time.

We understand that. That isn't . . . certainly isn't a concern. I understand the problems the Department of Finance faces. They want to know exactly what they will be receiving and what they can anticipate receiving.

When the minister prepares her budget, Mr. Chairman, what does she do? Does she say that oil prices are going to be at \$25 today? I doubt it. I would guess that her department would look at where oil prices are in general, and they will pick a good average so they can anticipate what they hope to achieve in returns to the Finance department; so that they can put the programing in place or let groups know what they can anticipate receiving from the Department of Finance, and the expenditures as far as funds that they can use to operate.

And so, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Chairman, as we stand here this morning, and when we ask questions about what the Finance department is doing to address some of the problems that may arise as a result of the flooding problems . . . The other day I noted in the paper that the Minister of Finance has indicated that provided there aren't major problems in the forest industry with fires this summer, that they have so much money available to expend on those circumstances; if more is needed they may have to look for it elsewhere down the road.

I guess, Mr. Chairman, if the Finance department and the Finance minister are doing their job, which in many cases I believe they are doing their job commendably, they would anticipate not only what the revenues may be, but they would also be anticipating what they may face over and above their expenditures, and having a bit of money put aside to address these shortfalls.

And I guess when it comes to discussing finances in the Province of Saskatchewan, the Minister of Finance said they are certainly doing a much better job than they were in 1991. Well I guess that's her prerogative, that's . . . She's the minister; she would want to think that she is doing a better job of managing the funds of this province.

But I find it interesting, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about finances . . . and everyone was all excited about the 2 per cent reduction in the provincial sales tax. And I guarantee, Mr. Chairman, that people in your constituency were more than pleased to see the reduction. People in my constituency were pleased to . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. I would advise the hon. member not to involve the Chair in debate.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And my apologies. While I was trying to make sure my remarks were going through the Chair, yes, I did inadvertently draw the Chair in and

although . . . I can certainly say that in my constituency people were certainly pleased to see the 2 per cent reduction in the sales tax.

And I think the Minister of Economic Development or the Premier — I'm not sure which — just a day or so ago did comment about a report in the *Moosomin World Spectator* talking about the fact that 2 per cent was more than welcome.

But, Mr. Chairman, it wouldn't be real positive for each one of us on the opposition side of this Assembly as well to just stand up and applaud the government for everything, when there were areas in the budget debate that people have a lot of questions, a lot of concerns.

And so I think you will have to admit that over the past number of years this caucus has certainly applauded the government when they have made moves that we felt were beneficial to the taxpayer.

There's even just a Bill that was brought forward today that we're going to be debating in the near future, Mr. Chairman, regarding maintenance and regarding enforcement — child enforcement — and those funds. And there's funds as well that I'm sure that the department are quite well aware.

Mr. Chairman, when we discuss all of these things, over the period of time we have certainly given credit where credit is due. But at the same time, before we are totally prepared to endorse an expenditure, I think it behoves us as opposition members to bring the concerns that taxpayers have as well, as to how these monies are expended; how much is needed for certain services.

We've had a number of individuals on this side of the Assembly today, or in the last couple of days, have been trying to get some answers from the minister as to some of the emergency funding that they may foresee, or they may have even set aside today in . . . or in this budget, to address some emergency measures that may come up.

But I would like to just come back to one other point, and that was when the minister talked about how well they are managing the books. I found it interesting that the day after the budget the Provincial Auditor, while he applauded the government on a number of cases, still brought out the fact that there are areas of concern that he has with the way money is moved in and out of accounts. And on many occasions, why is it moved back and forth from the Crown entities to the general revenue, or vice versa.

And, Mr. Chairman, we're aware of the fact that the reason the auditor pointed that out is because, when the government moves from one entity to the other, all they are doing, Mr. Chairman, is trying to show the government whether or not — whether or not they need — whether or not they, Mr. Chair . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. It now being 1 o'clock, this committee will rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — It now being past the normal hour of adjournment, and with the encouragement to all members to enjoy the weekend home with their families in their constituencies, this House now stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:03 p.m.

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