

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned with youth crime:

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 are from Melville, Duff, Saltcoats, MacNutt.

I so present.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from the community of Dubuc.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I also present petitions. I will 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 criminal charges; 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.

The petition is signed by citizens from Regina, Mr. Speaker. 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.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to establish a task force to aid in the fight against youth crime.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sunrise Community Futures Development Corporation

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses are tremendously important to the growth and development of our provincial economy. The role and importance of small business to the economy is most apparent in rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, our rural communities survive because of small businesses and the economic activity they generate. That is why I am very pleased to stand before this Assembly today and congratulate the creation of the Sunrise Community Futures Development Corporation, which is dedicated to community development in the south-eastern region of the province.

This new community futures corporation, one of eight that exists in the province, will identify, promote, market, and enhance business opportunities throughout the area. Mr. Speaker, our rural communities cannot survive if small businesses do not survive. The community futures corporation is attempting to provide enhanced and additional opportunities for businesses which can lead to many positive returns for communities.

The viability and sustainability of our rural communities rests with the success and growth of their small business. The local efforts of community futures corporation will help secure many of those business developments.

I applaud the new Sunrise Community Futures Corporation for its dedication to the business, to the people, and to the communities of the south-east region. Through cooperative effort our rural communities can prosper.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Flood Disaster Assistance

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are thankful they were spared the storm which dropped record snowfalls across southern Manitoba. With a major employer in

the area at risk due to flooding and ranchers hoping for dry weather during calving, everyone is thankful.

Despite our good fortune to escape such a storm, the significant cost of repairing flood damage already incurred still remains. Some RM (rural municipality) officials I met with on the weekend suggest that, even without high deductibles under disaster assistance programs, they expect to lose the equivalent of 8 mills due to this government's cuts to revenue-sharing grants. This will place a difficult burden on already strapped communities.

Thunder Creek residents fear compensation will just be another matter of give a little, take a lot. While this government sticks to its inadequate compensation program, it will continue to see some \$1.338 million in VLT (video lottery terminal) profits flow from terminals located in Thunder Creek, to its coffers, on an annual basis.

It's clear, Mr. Speaker, even if the members opposite give a little more, they'll still be taking a lot.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Thorablott

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people have been blessed with a rich and vibrant cultural tradition; one that draws on the strengths of many nations from around the world. Saskatchewan Icelandic pioneers banded together in the grand Saskatchewan tradition of community and cooperation, to settle the region around Foam Lake, Fishing Lake, and the Quill Lakes.

Naturally, being Saskatchewan people, they were overachievers, and settled the largest land area of any Icelandic community outside of Iceland itself.

The Icelandic Club of Saskatchewan, Vatnabyggd, takes its inspiration from these early pioneers in their name, which translates as lakes settlement. This past weekend, the Icelandic Club of Saskatchewan honoured these pioneers by hosting Thorablott in Wynyard, Saskatchewan.

This event pays tribute to Icelandic culture and includes a fashion show, traditional folk singing, folk dancing, and the telling of Icelandic fairy tales. There will also be an Icelandic buffet . . . there was an Icelandic buffet including such dishes as rúlpýlsa, which is spiced lamb, and skyr which is similar to yogurt, only better.

Mr. Speaker, events like this don't happen by accident. This happened through the efforts of committed volunteers working together in that spirit of community and cooperation that has made Saskatchewan a model for all of Canada. Some one hundred people donate their time to this event, including the dancers and the choir.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to live in a province with the highest rate of voluntarism in Canada, and I ask you and the Assembly to join me in congratulating Vatnabyggd on their hard work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Daylight Savings Time

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge an editorial by Bruce Penton, owner of the *Miner-Journal* in Esterhazy and the *World Spectator* in Moosomin, and I quote:

We are pleased last week to hear that the Government of Saskatchewan has decided to adopt daylight savings time on a two-year trial basis.

Mr. Speaker, I was ready to congratulate the government on their timely common sense. But after some thought, I seem to remember that it was the past minister of Municipal Government, Carol Carson's statement that said if we switched to daylight savings time, we would lose an hour a day. Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat sceptical.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, on a serious side though, for our farmers and the many people involved in sports activities in the province, we would gain an hour at the right end of the day without having to get up at 4 in the morning.

Mr. Speaker, the people on the east side of the province agree with Bruce Penton but, woe to us, it was written on April 1 — April Fool's Day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Documentary Film, *Percy, Me and Bobby McGee*

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, today I want to draw to attention of members an award-winning film documentary that's been produced by two Moose Jaw film makers and stars two very special Moose Jaw citizens.

The documentary is entitled *Percy, Me and Bobby McGee*. The documentary stars Percy Rothwell and Bobby McGee, two very special constituents of ours, two best friends, two individuals who spent the first 40 years of their lives in institutions — many of them in the Valley View Centre, Moose Jaw — and two who now for some years have been living independently.

The film is the documented version of their trip to Florida to witness the launch of the space shuttle *Columbia*. They travelled in a 40-foot motor home. Behind the 40-foot motor home they pulled a 30-foot blue Cadillac Eldorado convertible.

Mr. Speaker, they were accompanied on their trip to Florida by Doug Patterson, producer of the documentary, and Jeff Beesley, director, from "light over canvas productions."

Mr. Speaker, the film is the very touching story of Percy and Bobby's journey — not only their journey from Moose Jaw to Florida, but their journey from institutional life to life in the community.

Mr. Speaker, *Percy, Me and Bobby McGee* has already won the best documentary in the 1996 Saskatchewan Film and Video Showcase. It has been awarded one of the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living media awards, and now is

nominated for Canadian awards.

Mr. Speaker, this legislature extends its congratulations to Jeff Beesley, Doug Patterson, Percy Rothwell, and Bobby McGee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tribute to Barb Gibb

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of the Assembly the contribution of a young woman named Barb Gibb, who was a teacher in Dillon, Saskatchewan, which is a small community in my constituency.

On Friday, February 14, Barb passed away at the age of 24 as a result of a motor vehicle accident. I want to spend a minute and share with the members of the Assembly the contribution which I am told Barb made to the community where she lived for two years. I do this in the hopes that maybe we can all learn from Barb's example, that one person's caring and compassion can have an enormous impact on communities such as Dillon.

In the words of Don Thompson, the principal of Dillon school, quote:

Barb was a teacher of great things. She taught her students how to read and to wonder about all things around them. She had a very special group of students who she was very proud of, proud of their progress and proud of their heritage. She believed that their heritage was so important that she done things to try and learn more about their culture.

This young woman came from Dillon fresh out of university and truly became a full member of this northern community. I'm told that Barb understood life in the North was different and sometimes difficult, but she always understood that her life and her love for her students would really make a difference in their lives.

In order to honour Barb's memory, the community made a decision to create a special room in the school, called Barb Gibb Reading Centre. Barb Gibb's short life taught us a valuable lesson. Saskatchewan needs more people like Barb who care to understand the rich culture of the northern people and challenges that they face. The problems of the North cannot be solved without the understanding, caring, commitment of everyone in this province, north or south. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gloria Lennox Honoured as Best Principal in Saskatchewan

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take a short period of time to offer my congratulations to Ms. Gloria Lennox. Ms. Lennox is the principal of Queen Mary Community School in Prince Albert and will be given an award this week in Saskatoon for being the best principal in the province. This honour has been awarded to her by the Saskatoon school-based administrators' group.

She has been the principal at Queen Mary for the last seven years and vice-principal for nine years prior to that. To be recognized as the best principal in the province is certainly a remarkable achievement, and I would ask that all members of the Assembly join with me in offering our congratulations to Ms. Lennox on receiving this very important award.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battlefords Community Players Win Saskatchewan Drama Festival Awards

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to pay tribute to some of our very talented people in the Battlefords. This past week was the Saskatchewan Drama Festival, and the North Battleford production from Battlefords Community Players won the entry as the best play in the festival.

We also won the best director award. It was directed by Donna Challis who is a remarkably talented person. It is a credit to her remarkable abilities that as my campaign manager she was able to get me elected. But she has other talents as well which were recognized by the drama festival.

The Community Players in the Battlefords have a long and illustrious history and these two most recent awards again underline the strength of drama in the Battlefords. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Public Prosecutions Report

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I am extremely concerned that public confidence in our Department of Justice has been seriously eroded in the last several years. Indeed it may not be much of an exaggeration to say that the Thatcher prosecution was the last high profile prosecution in this province that did not come to grief and lead to embarrassment.

We now have a situation where our government, after reneging on a deal, is involved in litigation with its own judges that it appointed. We have for the first time in Canadian history, prosecuting a prosecutor for the conduct of his duties. Also possibly a precedent in Canadian history. We have the department re-prosecuting an accused when it publicly admitted that the first prosecution was wrong because of mishandling by the department.

With widespread allegations of satanic ritual abuse that came to nothing, now we have a report. Why was it delayed for six months? Why has it sat on the minister's desk for six weeks? What will be done to restore confidence to the public in our prosecution office and to the Department of Justice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is obviously anxious to get a copy of the report which he will receive within the next couple of hours. And I think that a number of his questions will be dealt with and answered at

that time. I think that it's appropriate that we wait until the report is provided to everybody.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — I appreciate that the minister will be addressing as to what steps are being taken now to restore public confidence in our department, but can he tell us, though, why it has taken a year when it was supposed to take six months? Can he tell us if he is prepared to release the entire report and not just a laundered version of the report? And can he tell us why it sat on his desk for six weeks before he was prepared to release it to the public?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I will happily answer those questions, as I have very clearly over the last number of weeks. Basically, the report has been on my desk so that we can look at recommendations, and we're providing that as well. The full report will be revealed, as I've always said.

And I guess the big worry that I have is that a member of this legislature — and also a member of the law society — is taking on the independence of the prosecutorial branch. This is an extremely difficult job prosecutors have to uphold and work in our justice system. And the job is made even more difficult when members such as that person opposite raises the kind of questions that he does in a political manner; when they're not political questions. And I think that he should seriously examine his role as a person who is part of this government and as part of this legislature and make sure that he understands also his role as a lawyer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, you talk about respect for the independence of the judicial system, and yet it was the minister's government that said we needed an independent judicial commission, and that was set up by legislation. It was promised by the Minister of Justice's predecessor, and now it has been cancelled. At the time this government said this was integral and essential to the proper and independent administration of justice. And yet this government cancelled this independent judicial commission and now accuses me of interfering in the justice process and the independence of the justice.

Will you reinstate the independent judicial commission you said was so important to the independence of the judiciary and the proper administration of justice in this province and quit accusing the opposition of interfering in the justice system and its independence?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I will just reiterate what I said before, that we all have a role as legislators to respect the independence of the prosecution, respect the independence of the judiciary. And it's unfortunate that many of the comments that are made by members of this legislature end up causing great difficulty for the proper administration of justice.

All I would say today is that, take a look at the report when it comes forward; ask some questions based on the review of the prosecutions; and we will then have some further discussion about how we can make sure we have the best justice system in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prairie Hog Processing Plant

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was interested to notice in today's *Leader-Post* that it indicates that there are over 30 Alberta communities that are bidding for a Maple Leaf hog processing plant that's proposed for operation anywhere in the three prairie provinces. Mr. Speaker, this plant would employ as many as 1,500 workers and I think that it's absolutely essential that Saskatchewan, being the centre of the prairie provinces, does everything it can to make sure that this plant is located in Saskatchewan.

My question is twofold. Number one, do you know, Mr. Minister, if there are Saskatchewan communities competing for this very significant plant in Saskatchewan? And number two, if we're unsuccessful and this plant goes to Alberta, what impact will that have on drawing the production that we hope to increase in Saskatchewan away from the Saskatchewan base and into Alberta?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that the member opposite has become aware of this important project because the stellar group who are involved in the request for proposal approached our department, I believe on March 17, on behalf of Maple Leaf. And there have been a lot of discussions with an interdepartmental committee — Sask Water, Ag and Food, Department of Economic Development and other agencies that would be involved in providing services if Maple Leaf was to decide to come to Saskatchewan.

A number of communities have been involved in discussions. I don't have exactly the number but there have been a number of cities and other communities in the province that have been involved. So I think all of the work that necessarily has to be done is being done.

The member opposite will know that there is a lot of excitement, particularly about pork production in Saskatchewan at the present time, with the Wheat Pool's announcement. And I'm very optimistic that we will have very positive result in processing as well as production here in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Multiple Sclerosis Treatment

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, Canada has the highest rate of multiple sclerosis in the world, and Saskatchewan unfortunately has the dubious distinction of having the highest MS rate in this country. The development of Betaseron is thought by many to be a major breakthrough to those who are afflicted with this disease, yet this drug is not presently insured under the

Saskatchewan drug plan. I think it is important for the minister to recognize that British Columbia announced just last week that Betaseron will be insured under its drug plan, joining Ontario and Quebec.

Can the minister explain today how much longer he is willing to make MS sufferers in Saskatchewan wait before they can improve their lives through their use of this drug?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the member and the House that we have been looking at the issue quite seriously. I've been talking to some people from the multiple sclerosis society in Saskatchewan and talking to some medical people as well. I have spoken to several people out of the College of Pharmacy, and I can advise the member that it is an issue certainly under active consideration, and I expect to make an announcement in the relatively near future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well it's nice to hear, but the government has been looking at this drug for well over a year — close to two years — and there's people waiting anxiously to hear his announcement.

The drug of course will allow many people to resume normal lives, which most of us are allowed to lead. It allows them to hold jobs where they could not previously hold jobs, and it gives them an opportunity to enjoy life to its fullest, the way much of us do.

Mr. Speaker, my staff spoke today with Michelle Mostowich, a Prince Albert resident, whose brother and sister are both afflicted with MS. Her sister is able to afford the purchase of this drug, her brother cannot — another example of two-tier health care system that this government has created. Obviously this is a bittersweet situation as her sister can now enjoy such activities as horseback riding; her brother is nowhere close to meeting the same kind of success because, once again, he cannot afford the drug.

Will the minister tell us today in this House why is he delaying this decision to put Betaseron under the drug plan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, in answer to the question, I believe I have largely answered the member's question.

But I want to say that much of what the member says is somewhat overstated in the sense that unfortunately there is no cure for multiple sclerosis. The drug Betaseron is not touted as a drug that allows people to lead normal lives. It is a drug which may allow certain people with multiple sclerosis to have a better quality of life for a relatively short period of time. But that does not mean it should not be looked at, Mr. Speaker.

But when the member gets up and suggests that there's some cure for multiple sclerosis, I have to advise the member and the House that, quite tragically, that is not the case. We hope

someday it will be.

But I also want to say to the member, Mr. Speaker, having answered the question, that when the member gets up and talks about two-tiered medicine — a system we do not have in this province — I would remind the member that the member has publicly called for a two-tiered health system, as has the leader of the member's party. We reject that. We think we should keep the medicare system, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Dorsey Report

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today my question is to the Minister of Labour. And today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a question that's been brought to our attention.

Mr. Minister, the Dorsey report was originally going to improve our province's bargaining and negotiations for both employers and employees. But, Mr. Minister, we're finding that some people are falling between the cracks.

One woman has contacted our office — a long-time employee of the Wascana Rehab Centre is on long-term disability because of rheumatoid arthritis. She can barely walk, let alone work. She has been told, Mr. Minister, by SGEU (Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union) that her disability benefits will be terminated on May 17 because your government adopted the Dorsey report. Further, Mr. Minister, the woman says she has been informed that others are being cut off as well.

Mr. Minister, I think you had indicated that anyone on disability would not be hurt by the Dorsey report. Clearly this seems to be happening.

Mr. Minister, why are you allowing the SGEU to cut members off benefits when you promised that they wouldn't?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, the member will know of course that the plan, the disability plan in question, is not a government plan; not a plan to which the government or any part of the government is a party.

The disability plan is a plan established by the SGEU for its own members, and the premiums are paid by the members to the trade union, and they run the plan all by themselves. Now if they're cutting off coverage to those people, obviously the union and the person concerned has something to talk about.

But I want to add to that answer by saying that I am aware that there are discussions going on involving SGEU and SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) and I believe other parties, to determine on what basis those benefits can continue into the future.

We are aware of those discussions and we will assist them in any way we can, but we are not directly a party to it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I think as this lady has pointed out — and she's certainly written the SGEU; she's written, I believe, your office; the Health department — the concern she has is, despite all the letters she's written, she really has no assurances.

Mr. Minister, I guess what we are asking of you today, can you give this lady or anyone involved with SGEU assurances that your government, whether you're responsible for the plan or not — SGEU has supported your government for many years — that you will support the workers of this province, and people such as this lady, and make sure that indeed proper and informed discussion takes place so that people like this one in question will not fall between the cracks.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The question does not become the member, Mr. Speaker. He knows perfectly well that the SGEU does not support any political party and hasn't supported our party ever in its history. And that is a fact. And if the member doesn't know it, it shows how deplorable their knowledge is about how the trade union system works and how the SGEU works.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we feel no sense of obligation about picking up the union's plan and somehow extending that plan to people who will no longer be members. It's a plan set up by the union, developed by the union. The terms and conditions are laid out by the union and they're going to have to figure a way out of it. And as I said to the member, we're prepared to help facilitate that in any way we can.

This business about the Conservative opposition trying to divide and conquer here, drive wedges between people, make unions the bad guys, just doesn't contribute anything at all to some of these difficult issues.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Young Offenders Act

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

Mr. Minister, the four students from Miller High School that have spent a lot of time and effort researching changes to the Young Offenders Act came to the Assembly a few weeks ago seeking our support. These young people are going to head to Ottawa, I understand, this Saturday to present petitions to the Liberal Justice minister, Allan Rock. Unfortunately we've been informed that Allan Rock will not meet with them while they're in Ottawa.

Mr. Minister, you met with the students last week. Did you give the students the support they were asking for from your government on their initiatives? And if so, in what form will your support come?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to answer that question.

I have a great deal of respect for these young people. The Minister of Social Services and I spent almost two hours with them going over all of their proposals in their petition. We had

a very enjoyable discussion but also what we did do was show them the kinds of things that we were doing that related to some of the issues that they had. We've invited them to participate and work with some of the officials in our departments who work on these specific issues. We also explained to them the process and kind of discussion that they would probably have with the federal government officials, and we encouraged them to present a Saskatchewan perspective on this so that they can have their points as well as our points presented to the federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Transportation Company

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today, Mr. Speaker, is to the minister in charge of STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company). There is one simple question, Mr. Minister, that I would like to ask you today and that is, just what is your government's plan for STC?

The former president and former VP (vice-president) of sales and operations claims CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) wants nothing but privatization, that they have been doctoring numbers so STC looks worse than it really is. Either way, the people of Saskatchewan lose. On the one hand, you're feeding people inaccurate numbers which aren't true, and on the other, your false numbers will mean Saskatchewan people will have to absorb smaller offers for the Crown.

Mr. Minister, if you're bent on privatizing STC at least paint the real picture so private companies will give the Saskatchewan people a fair deal. If you're not, then stop playing games with the numbers.

Mr. Minister, once and for all, are you or are you not going to privatize STC?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to answer on behalf of the minister. And let me begin my remarks by saying that STC, as other Crown corporations, has been under review for very obvious reasons. The environment in which these corporations are operating has been changing fairly dramatically over the past years. And I would want to say specifically, to address his question whether or not a decision has been made to privatize the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, the answer is no.

The new president of the corporation has been mandated to look and reflect upon options, make a recommendation to the minister and to the board of directors. I want to say to the member opposite though, one of the decisions that government did make early on in its mandate was to get rid of the Eagle buses that his political party was part and parcel of purchasing on behalf of the corporation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Foundation Grants

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when this government delivered its budget back on March 20, school

divisions were informed that there would be a two-week delay until they receive specific details about their foundation grants. Nearly three weeks have now passed and school boards have nearly spent 40 per cent of their 1997 budgets.

School divisions are unable to set mill rates because of this delay. Communities like Englefeld, Annaheim, Weekes, Windthorst, just to name a few, are also concerned because the school division boards cannot yet tell them about the likelihood of program cuts, grade discontinuance, or even possible school closures.

Will the Minister of Education explain why her government has forced boards to play this waiting game?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well as the members will know, we did not receive assessment information from the two large cities in this province until a day or two before the provincial budget was delivered on March 20. At that time we indicated to school divisions that we would be able to indicate to them their operating grants after the Easter vacation.

Mr. Speaker, it's our intention that we should have information to school divisions in the province by the end of the week. And we're optimistic that if we're able to do that, school divisions will be in a position to indicate to their ratepayers, their mill rate.

If we're not able to get that information to school divisions by the end of this week, it's our intention to extend the deadline for the setting of mill rates until the end of May.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The question, Madam Minister, though, is that school boards are in a predicament. There are many that have passed resolutions to terminate classes, to discontinue grades, to close schools. That time period, as you know, by law is nearing. Okay.

And the situation that we're going to have is that reassessment has caused a problem. Reassessment has caused a problem in that we see a shift from urban school divisions to rural. The foundation grant formula addresses that. Boards of education have not heard from your department as to whether or not this will occur.

My question, Madam Minister, is can you explain how you are going to address the fact that rural school boards may face a serious financial hit because of the government's reassessment plan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well first of all, Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate to the member that this government did not bring in reassessment. In the fall of 1995, municipalities and school divisions across this province voted at an annual meeting to go forward with assessment through SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency). So I would just say to the member, get your facts straight. Reassessment is as a result of 85 per cent support by municipalities and school divisions

across Saskatchewan. That's point number one.

Point number two: as we know, we have all gone through reassessment and reassessment is just now starting to settle out in terms of the implications. If you look at the provincial average, reassessment has gone up some five times in this province. There are parts of Saskatchewan, particularly some parts of rural Saskatchewan, where reassessment has gone up some seven times, and then there are parts of urban Saskatchewan where reassessment has not hit the provincial average.

All I can say to the member is this government supports rural Saskatchewan. We already introduced an agricultural factor of .84 per cent, and I can assure the members that when school boards get their information, further consideration will be made for those rural school divisions that have seen their reassessment balloon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is correct. It is the plan of SAMA in terms of reassessment. The question though still is, Madam Minister, is that the urban municipalities will have a multiplying factor of three or four. Rural school divisions, as you've indicated, have a multiplication factor of maybe seven. The foundation grant is a provincial grant. How will you address those concerns for rural school divisions who may face a double impact?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As I indicated to the member, one of the difficulties that our department experienced a couple of days before the budget, was no numbers from the city of Saskatoon and city of Regina. We now have those numbers in hand. Obviously their reassessment has come in lower than the provincial average. It does have implications for some — and I want to stress some — rural school divisions. And I want to assure the member that it's our intention to have this information to school divisions by the end of this week or the end of the following week.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that response, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister has indicated that there may be a delay. She's hoping that there will be a response by the end of this week, but there may be a delay. My question then to the minister is: if indeed there is a delay and we have numerous school divisions that are facing possible school closures and that period of time is not May 1 — that decision must be made before that, by law — how will you address that potential problem that school divisions will face?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, our . . . we now have all of the information about reassessment in this province at the Department of Education.

As I indicated, we have parts of Saskatchewan that have come in below the provincial average and some parts above the provincial average.

As you know, reassessment is based on market value. Because farm land has increased in value in some parts of Saskatchewan much higher than in other parts, what we have done is bring in an agricultural factor for school divisions to implement so that, on average, farm land will not increase — in terms of school taxes — more than 5 per cent across the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are now dealing with the operating grant. As I indicated to the member, we are April 7; it's our intention to have this information to school divisions by the end of the week or the end of next week.

I can assure the member that we are working diligently on this issue and it's our intention to have this information to school divisions as soon as humanly possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I would like to introduce a series of motions — seven motions which would change the . . . which would substitute names of members on standing committees of the legislature.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Standing Committee on Communication

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the name of the Hon. Eldon Lautermilch be substituted for that of Mr. Doug Anguish on the list of members composing the Standing Committee on Communication.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the name of Mr. Walter Jess be substituted for that of Mr. Dale Flavel on a list of members composing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

Special Committee on Nominations

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the name of Ms. Doreen Hamilton be substituted for that of the Hon. Glenn Hagel on the list of members composing the Special Committee on Nominations.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the name of Mr. Mark Koenker be substituted for that of Mr. Jack Langford on a list of members composing the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on the Environment

Mr. Kowalsky: — I move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the name of Mr. John Wall be substituted for that of Mr. Mark Koenker on the list of members composing the Standing Committee on the Environment.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Education

Mr. Kowalsky: — I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the name of Mr. Larry Ward be substituted for that of Mr. Mark Koenker on the list of members composing the Standing Committee on Education.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Mr. Kowalsky: — And last of all, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the name of Mr. Andrew Thomson be substituted for that of Mr. Myron Kowalsky on the list of members composing the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling Under Rule 36

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day I would like to bring to the House a ruling of the Chair.

Rule 36 — order — rule 36 of the of *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly Saskatchewan* entrust the Speaker with the duty to ensure that no Bill that necessitates an appropriation of any part of the public revenue is considered by the Assembly without having first been recommended by the Lieutenant Governor. Numerous rulings of the Chair have underscored the constitutional principle that only members of the Executive Council may initiate legislation involving the expenditure of public funds or for the raising of any tax.

The practice in this Assembly is for Bills to be introduced and read the first time with their further progress being contingent upon the Speaker affirming that they are in order.

I have now had the opportunity to review a number of Bills that have been introduced and wish to draw the attention of the Assembly to three in particular. All three Bills are presently standing on the order paper for second reading under private members' public Bills and orders.

Bill No. 208, The Employers of Babysitters Restitution Act was introduced by the hon. member for Cypress Hills on March 18, 1997. Clause 2 of Bill No. 208 directs the Minister of Labour to make restitution to those individuals who made certain higher payments in regard to their child care-givers pursuant to recently enacted regulations to The Labour Standards Act. The effect of this provision is to require that an amount equivalent to taxes already collected is to be paid from the General Revenue Fund to employers of babysitters.

Erskine May, 21st edition, chapter 28 at pages 713 and 714 clearly states that, and I quote:

The authorization of a single payment out of the Consolidated Fund (requires a recommendation).

Accordingly, I find that Bill No. 208 contravenes the parliamentary principles of Crown initiative in financial matters because it requires a recommendation from the Lieutenant Governor.

The member from Cypress Hills is not a member of the Executive Council and cannot obtain such a recommendation. Therefore, I must rule Bill No. 208 out of order and direct that it be removed from the order paper.

On March 19, 1997 Bill No. 207, The Saskatchewan Government Post-employment Code, was introduced by the hon. member for Melville. Bill No. 207 proposes to establish a post-employment code which would govern the conduct and activities of public office holders during their tenure with the government and in the period afterward.

The Bill proposes that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, an existing officer of the Assembly, would act as the post-employment commissioner and be charged with carrying out the provisions of the Bill.

It is a well-established parliamentary principle that, I quote: "expenses arising out of the imposition of new duties on an existing department or authority" require a recommendation from the Crown.

I refer members to Erskine May, 21st edition, chapter 28, pages 713 and 714, and rulings of the Chair in this House dated March 24, 1966 regarding the Provincial Secretary's department; dated March 20, 1980 regarding the Provincial Auditor; and dated May 1, 1990 regarding the Ombudsman.

When comparing the provisions of Bill No. 207 to existing legislation regarding the Conflict of Interest Commissioner,

namely The Members' Conflict of Interest Act, it is apparent that the effect of the Bill is to impose new and significant duties on the commissioner over and above existing responsibilities.

I therefore find that Bill No. 207 requires a recommendation from the Lieutenant Governor. Because the member for Melville is not a member of the Executive Council, I must rule Bill No. 207 out of order and direct that it be removed from the order paper.

On March 26, 1997, Bill No. 206, The Saskatchewan Health Ombudsman Act, was introduced by the hon. member for Moosomin. This Bill seeks to create, as an officer of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, the position of the health ombudsman.

As I have just noted, a royal recommendation is required where monies are to be provided by parliament when new duties are imposed upon an existing department or authority or where an entirely new department, agency, or position is established.

Although Bill No. 206 does specifically direct in clause 5 that the health ombudsman, and I quote, "... shall not be remunerated or reimbursed from the General Revenue Fund, but may act on a fee for services basis," it does not address the attendant operating costs of this proposed new public agency, such as accommodation, equipment, and other administrative expenses. It is reasonable to expect that such operating costs will be incurred, which consequently will create a charge on public monies.

Therefore I find this Bill requires royal recommendation. The member for Moosomin, not being a member of the Executive Council, is not entitled to obtain a royal recommendation, and so I must rule Bill No. 206 out of order and direct its removal from the order paper.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I hereby request that question no. 2 be converted to a notice of motion for order for return, and with leave of the Assembly, that questions 33 to 36 also be converted.

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — Items 1 through 5 are converted to motions for return (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Motions for Interim Supply

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I don't know if we're ever ready for the question. I'm not sure if ... the Madam Minister probably will be, but I think there's a few questions that need to be asked first.

First of all I just wanted to commend the Premier on his new look. I was just looking across the way, and I thought to myself that there's a terminology, and I'm not exactly sure where I've heard it, but something about the term, baby face. I think the Premier put on that new look to go to New York with. And I guess as he was indicating, he's hoping it works. I think he mentioned that Wayne Gretzky scored a goal when he was down there, so it obviously worked for Mr. Gretzky. And the Department of Finance, I think that's something he's hoping that in the area when it comes to the bond . . . or the creditors, that they indeed will take a more favourable look to the province of Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Chairman, coming to the point at the hand and the expenditure of the 600-plus million dollars or the interim supply Bill for two months, of funds for the government and its entities to operate. Over the past number of days, Mr. Chairman, we've been asking . . . opposition members have asked a number of questions. We've asked for some input and involvement as to what plans the government has in place should a disaster take place, and we've seen it even this past spring already in the area of southern Saskatchewan with the number of floods that have afflicted many communities.

And up until now the minister basically has said that she really doesn't have those numbers. I guess what I would like to ask of the minister, whether the minister has any numbers on hand. I would like to know if the minister has and if her department has certainly discussed some of the probable . . . or probabilities of problems that may arise and how her department is planning to meet those problems, whether it takes place over the next two months or even ongoing.

(1430)

We're talking two months right now. And right now the big concern is going to be the expenditure, the availability of funds in the next two months, this appropriation of two months expenditures, to cover some of the losses that may take place as a result of flooding that comes from phenomenon of nature that we really don't have any control of.

And I would be very surprised if the minister and her staff have not at least had some discussions as to what they may or may not do should some requests come in from RMs or communities or individuals to offset some of the problems that they are facing in the area of compensation for flood damage that may not be covered under their current insurance policies.

And I'm wondering if the Madam Minister could give us a bit of an idea of what her government and her department plans to do in the event this transpires.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, first of all I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome back Bill Jones, who's the deputy minister of Finance, and he's sitting with me today.

And again, just to reiterate what we're doing here. The budget has been presented to the legislature. It provides details in terms of estimates as to where the money's going to be spent that the government has put in the budget. And interim supply is an interim measure which takes us from this point in time until the

point of time in which the budget is passed.

And what I would say to the member opposite is, that is a long and complicated question and I would wait till the appropriate departments are here and ask them for some more details. We're quite anxious to provide details about this budget. We're quite pleased and happy about the budget and we welcome the opportunity to proceed to estimates and answer those sorts of questions.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, a quick question and . . . Well I don't have one. I'm wondering if the minister would have a copy of the appropriation expenditure that's being asked of this Assembly and if we could have a copy of that expenditure. And while the minister and her staff are getting it, the minister made a comment . . . I'll just go onto another question or raise another matter.

The minister made a comment, Mr. Chairman, about the fact of whether some of the questions that have been raised get into some of the specific detail and maybe getting it from departments. And I was . . . I went back, over the weekend, I went back over some of the responses made by members, current government members, while they were in the opposition side. And I note out of *Hansard*, August 14, 1989, and this is Mr. Shillington speaking:

Mr. Chairman, in past times we have enjoyed a fairly . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. I would remind the members that when referring to members that are in the Assembly, unless it is a quotation, that they not use the proper name but use the constituencies.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, this comes out of *Hansard*. It's a quote from *Hansard* and this is the . . . I'm quoting the member's name from *Hansard*, August 14, 1989.

And, Mr. Chairman, and this is what . . . Mr. Chairman, this is what Mr. Shillington did say in *Hansard*, and I quote:

In past times we have enjoyed a fairly wide-ranging . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. The member is still out of order in referring to the proper name of a constituent . . . or of a member of the Legislative Assembly. If it is not in quotations or a quote, direct quote, then it has to be referred to as his constituency and not the proper name.

Mr. Toth: — Well I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but in *Hansard* unfortunately it doesn't refer to the member by his seat. But I will abide by the chairman's ruling and we'll certainly follow up on it. But the chairman I think, may have to just take a moment just to review some of the rules as well and the fact that it's . . .

The Chair: — Order. I must remind the members that the ruling of the Chair is not debatable and not to be commented on. And the comment is not asked for.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, I find it very interesting. I find it interesting that all of a sudden . . . and I guess it comes back to the point, the point that the Premier's making from his chair

right now. And I think the Premier takes an interest in the debate that's going on because the Premier and Minister of Labour are quite familiar with some of the comments that were made. And I'd just like them to be reminded again of comments that were made by members when they were in opposition.

And unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, the unfortunate part I have today is the best comment I did find happened to come from the member who is currently recovering from an operation in Toronto. We've acknowledged that and we wish him well. But I have to read this into the record because it's an interesting comment. He says this:

It has, I think, always been regarded as unfair to put detailed questions to the minister with respect to the expenditures of the department, but that is certainly within the realm of what's being discussed. It's just been thought not to be practical to do so.

Mr. Chairman, the questions that have been raised by a number of members . . . and I appreciate the Minister of Agriculture all of a sudden saying . . . his comment was, that was then, this is now. And I can appreciate government members not wanting to be reminded of what took place when they were on this side of the floor. And I can appreciate, Mr. Chairman, we can go back and we can dig up all kinds of comments, even where members used other members' names. We can dig all of that up. I can see why government members wouldn't want that to be raised.

In all due fairness to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Finance wasn't here, so she's not aware of what took place prior to, and the types of questions that used to be raised. Such as a question, Mr. Chairman, a question at the time raised by the member from Regina Victoria about are you going to allow Saskatchewan transit systems to apply for rebates of the gas tax, which is very much a provincial tax and has to do with the budget. That was interim supply in August of 1989.

Or again the member from Regina Victoria talking about the bond credit rating. And I guess, Mr. Chairman, we could ask that today because the Premier is available today to respond to his trip down to Toronto and New York to talk to the bond credit agencies. And I'm sure the Premier's just waiting with bated breath for the bond agencies to come out with their approval or disapproval of the budget.

And, Mr. Chairman, there's so many other things, like the home improvement program. And today in question period a question was raised about — or not in question period; I think it was a ruling by the Speaker — about a question and a motion, a Bill before this Assembly where we had asked the government if they've taken into consideration the problems that may arise when they review the babysitters' legislation that has put a lot of parents in a difficult financial position; if they have taken into consideration what kind of dollars that they'll be dealing with and whether or not those funds would be available.

And I'd like to ask the Minister of Finance whether the Minister of Finance has any idea as to the amount of dollars that the government may be looking at in compensation to parents for something that they were not aware of as far as paying their babysitters under the new Labour Standards Act. I wonder if the

Minister of Finance could respond to that, please.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, I think what we have to do again is remind ourselves what we're doing here. Those sorts of details we welcome the opportunity to supply and we would like to move to that process where we can get into a detailed discussion of this budget. Because as I said, we quite like this budget and we'd like to have lots of opportunities to discuss the details of it.

But I just want to remind the members opposite why there is some urgency to passing interim supply. It's got nothing to do with me needing the money. I don't get any money from this. It has to do with small agencies in the province who depend on getting their money on a timely basis. Their fiscal year starts April 1. The budget won't be passed for some time after April 1, and we welcome that opportunity to discuss the budget.

However, what I want to make clear to the member opposite is that these agencies need their money. And last week when I mentioned the fact that if they didn't get their money on a timely basis they would have to go out and borrow money, I want to remind people in the province what the response of the members opposite was. And I quote from *Hansard*:

Running a line of credit is nothing to be afraid of and it's nothing to get alarmed about . . . (And I thought back to exactly the Conservatives saying it wasn't . . . no problem running lines of credit) . . . and if a few folks have to go on a line of credit for a few days in order to keep things going, it's not going to be the end of your world and it won't be the end of their world.

What I want to ask the members opposite is whether they think the Big Sisters of Regina have a line of credit and have a capacity to run a line of credit until the members opposite decide to pass interim supply.

And I would also remind the members opposite that perhaps they might have done something quite remarkable. They may have finally achieved something that is noteworthy. They make the Liberals in the legislature look good because the other members on the other side of this House, although they want to debate the budget in great detail, have understood that there are groups out there that require their money as soon as possible and they're supporting interim supply.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, that's incredible. I guess it's hug a Liberal today. I don't know whether the polls are changing a little bit and now you've got to change . . . rock them back the other way or what the situation is. But I would just as soon, Mr. Chairman, not be totally linked with the Liberal Party as being part of the opposition.

I think we have established our own level of . . . amongst the people of Saskatchewan as far as our credibility. And I think, Mr. Chairman, the questioning we have divulged in and gotten involved in over the past two sessions and the questions that we will raise in a number of areas are going to speak for themselves.

And the ability of our caucus to work and to cooperate and to

bring issues to the floor of the Assembly, such as the one we raised today regarding the Dorsey report and SGEU members, the interesting thing is while I appreciate the fact that the minister can hide behind the fact that they don't have control of SGEU and the way they handle their finances, the fact is, Mr. Chairman, people are going to be left on the hook because SGEU didn't implement the Dorsey report. The province, the government, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Labour implemented the Dorsey report to consolidate unions in the province of Saskatchewan.

So it would seem to me, Mr. Chairman, that the Minister of Labour and this government should be responsible to make sure that SGEU follows up with its responsibilities.

And the interesting thing as well, I find, is that if it was any other organization, say a business group, that business group would be . . . this government would tackle them right now and say you have an obligation to meet the promises and the obligations you have to your membership whether there's a change or not.

And so, Mr. Chairman, that's some of the things that I think as an opposition we will continue to bring before this Assembly and raising these questions that affect individuals.

The minister was just crying the blues a moment ago about the fact that there will not be funding available for a number of organizations. I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairman, that the Department of Finance has the ability, has the wherewithal, already has it in motion — they know where they're going to be once this interim supply Bill is in place.

And if you tell me that, that you're sitting there . . . When you go to the bank, Mr. Chairman, you don't go to the bank to . . . and I'm not talking about borrowing money; I think other members may have talked about borrowing money — but when you've got funds coming in or when you're going to disburse funds, you don't go without having a plan in place. And the Department of Finance has operated in this province for a number of years and I think they have operated very well.

But I would like to just say, Mr. Chairman, while we haven't been able to get positive responses to a number of the questions, the Minister of Finance has indicated that they're . . . and I've listened as all . . . many opposition members, members from the Liberal Party caucus, and our caucus have raised questions. I've listened to the Minister of Finance continually telling each member individually that well, I don't really have those numbers here but ask those numbers of the department — that particular was the Department of Highways; whether it's the Department of Health, whether it's the Department of Agriculture, you can ask those questions individually of those departments. And, Mr. Chairman, we will.

(1445)

But, Mr. Chairman, as well I think there's a number of questions have been asked over the last few days that the Minister of Finance will have to come prepared to answer in this session once we get into specific questions on the budget presented by the province of Saskatchewan. And while the

Minister of Finance is quite pleased about this budget, I would like to remind the minister that the auditor has already indicated that there are a number of holes. There are a number of concerns that our caucus has raised, a number of concerns we will continue to raise.

And I would just like to say that while it might, it might please a person just to hold up an interim supply Bill for another period of time, whether it be till 5 o'clock or till 10 o'clock this evening, it's not, it hasn't been our intention, Mr. Chairman, to just hold up the Bill for the sake of holding it up.

I think we've raised some points. We certainly are looking forward, Mr. Chairman, to the fact that when we get into line-by-line debate in the Committee of Finance we expect the ministers, regardless of which department they're involved — and whether it's the Minister of Education in a response to the questions today about how school boards are going to operate since they don't really have an idea of what's available in funding, or whether it's the minister responsible for Highways and the flood conditions down in the south-west or any other portions . . . there are a number of questions that we will certainly be raising.

And I would like to suggest, Mr. Chairman, that at this time I really have no further questions unless the Minister of Finance, unless the Minister of Finance wants to respond and give me an opportunity, raise another point or question that I can speak to. I think we're at that point that we can allow this interim supply bill to go forward.

However, one question. I still haven't received my copy of the amount of supply that's been asked for, the line-by-line, I believe for 19 . . . or this two-month interim supply. And I'm wondering if that could be sent over before we've completed the debate this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, to the members opposite. Yes, we sent you one over. We'll send you another over so that you can look at it again. Sorry about that. This is especially for the member opposite.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I thank you for the copy of . . . that's just been forwarded to me about . . . just showing the total for interim supply that we've voting on — \$675 million. Unfortunately I regret the fact that I never thought to ask for this on Friday, so I could have had a chance to review it even more. I think there's maybe a number of questions here.

I see there's . . . in certain areas I notice it says the less . . . amounts more or less the twelve . . . the two months . . . or two-twelfths. But, Mr. Chairman, I think as I've indicated earlier we do have . . . we have asked a number of questions. We certainly are looking forward to ongoing debate with the Department of Finance.

And I trust, Mr. Chairman, that we will have sufficient time; we will not be called by the Government House Leader towards what the government would presume to be the closure or the termination of this current session, and they indicate that the Minister of Finance really only has Friday afternoon or Friday

morning or whatever to debate. We trust that we will have ample opportunity to not just debate and sit down with ministers for the other departments but certainly sit down with the Minister of Finance in good time, well before we may arrive at a time when the session will certainly disband for the summer.

So at the present time, while it's difficult to say thank you for the responses because I think we're still looking for a lot of responses to the questions we've given, I want to indicate that at this time now we're more than prepared to allow the interim supply Bill to move forward.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would hereby move resolution no. 2:

That towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty on account of certain expenses of the public service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1996 the sum of \$675,429,000 to be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, I just want to take a moment to thank the minister and her officials, and we certainly look forward to having further discussion as we get into line-by-line debate on the Department of Finance. Thank you.

The committee reported progress.

FIRST AND SECOND READING OF RESOLUTIONS

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the resolutions be now read the first and second time. Motion agreed to and the resolutions read a first and second time.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — By leave of the Assembly, I move:

That Bill No. 43, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of Money for the Public Service for the Fiscal Year ending on March 31, 1998, be now introduced and read the first time.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to and the Bill read a first time.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — By leave of the Assembly and under Rule 55-2, I move that the Bill now be read a second and third time.

Motion agreed to and, by leave of the Assembly, the Bill read a second and third time and passed under its title.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 9 — The Wanuskewin Heritage Park Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 9, The Wanuskewin Heritage Park Act, 1997 replaces The Wanuskewin Heritage Park Act and is intended to improve the ability of the park to carry out its business.

These changes will also increase the representation by first nations and community members on the board. Wanuskewin Heritage Park officially came into existence in September, 1989. It is a nationally recognized heritage park that contributes to increasing public awareness and understanding of the cultural legacy of the northern plains Indians. It is one of the top 10 tourist attractions in Saskatchewan, based on attendance, and attracts visitors from all over the globe.

Wanuskewin marks a concentration of pre-contact historic sites which date back 6,000 years. Here people gathered to reacquaint themselves with their traditions, hunt bison, gather food and herbs, and escape the winter winds.

The new legislation will change the name of the Wanuskewin Heritage Park Corporation to the Wanuskewin Heritage Park Authority. This will achieve consistency with other urban park authorities such as Meewasin Valley Authority which is one of the park's partners.

(1500)

The new legislation now lists the board membership of Wanuskewin Heritage Park, which includes representation from the park's eight partners. The board membership has also been expanded to increase representation from first nations, as well as the broader community.

The reference in the original Act to the interpretation and preservation of native culture has also been changed to Indian culture to provide the correct legal terminology for referring to the first nations peoples, as referenced in this country's constitutional framework.

The legislation also increases the borrowing powers of the park to provide it with greater operating flexibility throughout the fiscal year. This has been accomplished by removing the limit on borrowing that can be done by the park without the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This is also consistent with the legislation for other urban park authorities.

I'm confident that the new Act will enable the Wanuskewin Heritage Park to continue to operate effectively as a not-for-profit enterprise and to provide a unique and memorable experience for its visitors.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of this Bill, Bill No. 9, The Wanuskewin Heritage Park Act, 1997.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the amendments proposed within Bill No. 9, The Wanuskewin Heritage Park Act. There are many wonderful tourism attractions in Saskatchewan and Wanuskewin Park is a fantastic complement to Saskatchewan's tourism industry.

Wanuskewin means "seeking peace of mind" and thousands of visitors seek out not only peace of mind but a taste of the overpowering spirituality of the park. During my own visit to the park, I found a wide range of cultural attractions including interactive displays and historical trails and overnight camping. It gave me some great, tangible examples of the origins of Saskatchewan native culture.

Wanuskewin has now been in operation for five years and will celebrate its anniversary this summer on June 27. The park designers and the Saskatchewan bands that are all involved in this project are doing a remarkable job of passing down the traditions and diverse experiences of 6,000 years of history of the northern plains Indian people.

I am hopeful that some of the amendments proposed within Bill No. 9 will enable Wanuskewin to continue to grow and develop into one of the leading tourism attractions in Canada.

Having a year-round historical attraction such as this rounds out many other Saskatchewan events that celebrate the rich native of history of this province. For example, thousands of people were fortunate enough to have taken in the 19th annual Saskatchewan Indian Federated Powwow in Regina this past weekend. The event featured over 600 dancers from across North America and drew visitors from a wide range of backgrounds.

One great benefit of this event is that the display of traditional costumes, drumming, and dancing reaches people from every age and racial background. The pride these people feel about sharing their culture with non-aboriginal people is displayed in the remarks of one of the dancers, Wavell Starr, in today's *Leader-Post*. Starr says, and I quote:

"People don't understand why the powwow is so important to me . . . But this aspect of my life is just as important . . . as . . . my education. It's really satisfying to know (that) you're playing a part in keeping the culture alive."

And they are keeping their culture alive for future generations and Indian people. Many of the participants in this weekend's powwow were children.

Thousands of native youth were also in Prince Albert this past weekend for the Prince Albert Indian Winter Games. This event is also gaining an international reputation as a venue to promote Indian culture. The youth competed in a variety of events including hockey, curling, broom ball, boxing, and traditional hand games. The Indian Winter Games promotes healthy living and leadership skills among our aboriginal youth.

Too many people these days are quick to criticize the development of Saskatchewan aboriginal communities. But facilities such as Wanuskewin and events like the SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) Powwow and the P.A. (Prince Albert) Winter Games are all forums for highlighting the rich and colourful history of these people. They also emphasize how the spiritual and traditional customs of the past can be used by all Saskatchewan communities in order to effect positive future development.

Saskatchewan people do a fantastic job in promoting our province's multicultural mosaic by staging hundreds of different types of events throughout the year. Celebrating our heritage and the traditions of our ancestors gives Saskatchewan communities a unique flavour. I am proud to say that I come from a province that embraces its expansive history instead of one that uses its ethnic differences as the grounds of dissent.

When Wanuskewin was included in provincial legislation relating to Saskatchewan's urban parks in 1989, it was introduced as a non-controversial Bill. That is because all parties of this legislature recognize the need for a year-round facility that would promote and educate people about Saskatchewan's aboriginal cultures.

Saskatchewan's breathtaking natural landscape and colourful history provide a solid foundation for a successful tourism industry in this province. But members of Saskatchewan's tourism industry have long debated the issue of government involvement in regulating tourism enterprises. The recent changes to the structure of Saskatchewan's Tourism Authority reflects some of these opinions.

I recognize that Wanuskewin is rapidly becoming one of Saskatchewan's more popular tourist attractions. And in doing so, I also recognize that many of the amendments proposed within Bill No. 9 are intended to clarify the duties and responsibilities that go along with this growing enterprise.

Because this heritage park is a joint project funded by the provincial and federal governments and by Saskatchewan Indian bands, the amendments proposed within Bill No. 9 should clearly define the responsibilities of the Authority's board members.

While I wholeheartedly support expanding the composition of the board to include greater representation from the first nations community, I have a few concerns about the other amendments pertaining to the fiscal operations of the park.

The Liberal caucus certainly supports open and accountable government, so the amendments requiring the Wanuskewin Authority to provide an annual report are welcome. But many private business people in Saskatchewan do question the amount of control the Saskatchewan government exercises over the tourism industry.

While Bill No. 9 should create some of the necessary tools the Wanuskewin Heritage Authority will most certainly need in order to facilitate growth and the future development of the park, I do have some reservations about Saskatchewan taxpayers being ultimately responsible for guaranteeing future loans taken out by this Authority.

I also have some concerns about the powers of this Bill that are left to be prescribed in the regulations. Once again, this legislation leaves too many of the details to regulations and subject to the power of the minister. This technique does not surprise me because this government continually takes the power of decision making out of this House to behind closed doors, where it can rule by regulation.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I question why this government

would not prefer to include major legislative changes within the structure of the Act itself so that proper public scrutiny of these changes could be made before they become law.

This government shows us time and time again how its lack of foresight and planning can adversely affect Saskatchewan people. I hold the babysitting wage fiasco and the chaos surrounding reassessment as two solid examples of this government's abuse of power and mismanagement. Who pays for this government's mistakes? The Saskatchewan people. If the minister and her colleagues would make the legislative process truly open, some of these problems could be avoided.

I am still gathering input on the amendments relating to the fiscal operations of Wanuskewin Heritage Park and how they could impact Saskatchewan taxpayers. Therefore at this time I move that this motion be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

**Bill No. 10 — The Apprenticeship and Trade
Certification Amendment Act, 1997**

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to speak to the proposed amendments to The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act.

Members will be aware that this government has engaged the public, employers, workers, and our training institutions in designing a new provincial training strategy. One year ago in this Assembly I released a discussion paper outlining the reasons why we need a new training strategy and the principles on which that strategy was to be based.

Training is a shared responsibility among learners, industry, education institutions, communities, and governments. Apprenticeship is a crucial part of any effective training policy. One of the areas where we received good feedback was on improving the existing apprenticeship legislation.

The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act is an essential component of the training system in this province. The amendments I'm introducing in this Bill will address shortcomings that industry, employers, and workers have identified as restrictive. The proposed changes are directed at developing a more cost-effective apprenticeship and trade certification system.

The proposed amendments address seven areas of concern: eliminating gender-biased language throughout the Act; increasing the fines for failing to comply with the apprenticeship and trade certification regulations; allowing the director to approve joint training administrative committees; reducing the length of training time required to designate a trade from two years to one year; allowing for endorsements to reflect technological change or specialization; allowing for the designation of a sector; and providing for a representative of the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology to be appointed to the provincial apprenticeship board.

Mr. Speaker, employers and employees have asked for these changes in training and certification. The changes proposed in this Bill will allow for the development of better regulations to

address the specific needs of trades. They will help provide for a more effective training system in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, presently job trades require a minimum of two years of work experience for designation. A number of trades have said that an apprenticeship period of less than two years is appropriate, particularly in the case of sub-trades. The amendment to a one year minimum allows regulations to be developed that match the training with the needs of the trade and not artificially restrict and delay training and certification.

Mr. Speaker, a number of trades identified a need to provide some type of certification that would indicate the holder is current with changing technology and work practices or has met the requirements of a specialty area. For example, plumbers could have their gas fitting qualification reflected on their journeyperson certificate as an endorsement. This amendment will allow this and provide for a more efficient certification process.

Many existing and emerging sectors are interested in the apprenticeship and trade certification model to address their training needs. Tourism is an example of a sector which has recently received approval for two apprenticeable trades and which will likely request designation as a sector. This amendment to the Act will allow for the designation of sectors in the regulations, thereby facilitating sector approaches to apprenticeship and trade certification.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize again that the amendments proposed in this Bill were drafted at the request of industry, employers, and workers as represented by the trade advisory boards and the Provincial Apprenticeship Board. They will allow the apprenticeship and trade certification system to better respond to the industry's needs in Saskatchewan.

These proposed amendments will contribute to the strengthening of the relevant, flexible, high quality training system that helps Saskatchewan people get jobs. These proposed amendments have been endorsed by the Provincial Apprenticeship Board.

I'm pleased to move therefore that Bill No. 10, amendments to The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act be now read a second time.

(1515)

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Liberal opposition and raise our concerns and questions regarding Bill 10, The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act.

The Liberal opposition welcomes some of the proposed amendments to the current law. No doubt some of the people affected by the changes will welcome them as well. But we would not be doing our job as opposition if we did not carefully scrutinize this Bill and raise the concerns brought to us today by the people of Saskatchewan.

One of the main purposes of the Bill is to make training in Saskatchewan more responsive to the new economy. And the

government does say, existing and emerging sectors want to use the apprenticeship and trade certification model to address their training needs.

The government says the proposed changes to the current legislation will allow for more flexibility in matching training needs to work needs. New industries like multi-media and communications will be able to set up apprenticeship programs like plumbers and mechanics have had for years. Instead of two years, students will only have to apprentice for the one year.

Apprentice education will move more and more out of the classroom and into the workplace. The Liberal opposition has long encouraged the government to develop partnerships between education and industry. And this Bill does appear to be a move in that direction.

Getting our youth ready to work in fast-growing sectors of the economy is vital to our economic health as a province, but we have to ask the question, is the government going about this in the best possible way?

I'm concerned that the Bill will not address the problem of full-time employment. Currently about 21 per cent of Saskatchewan workers are employed part time. This is the highest rate of part-time employment in this country. Many of those people wanted to work full time but couldn't find work.

As we all know, part-time work often means financial insecurity — 4,600 people in this province who receive social assistance work part time. They can't find enough work to support themselves and their families.

The high rate of part-time employment in this province also affects our youth. Youth have the highest unemployment rate in this country. The prospect of part-time, insecure employment no doubt has contributed to the numbers of young people who leave this province every year.

This Bill proposes to make the apprenticeship system more responsive to industry's needs, but some suggest that perhaps this isn't the best balance. In the long term we are in danger of ending up with a workforce that is too narrowly trained, some would suggest.

A one-year apprenticeship may not be enough time to become well rounded in a particular field. Workers with little theory and narrow practical experience will have a tough — a very tough — time making a transition to another sector or skill area. What we would see then is a demand for additional training, or people standing in the unemployment line because they could not make the cut.

Surely industry needs a flexible workforce. A broadly trained workforce will be able to move quickly with minimal additional training to other sectors of an industry. We need to always seek the best balance between a broadly trained, technical workforce and quick, responsive training to meet immediate job growth.

I'm glad to see the legislation open up to include new and emerging sectors. Hopefully this will serve to alleviate some of the burden on post-secondary education. I'm encouraged that

the government is proposing to include educators such as SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) on the Provincial Apprenticeship Board. Times change so rapidly and there needs to be an all-inclusive process to meet the challenges of the new workplace.

But one thing the government is overlooking is that SIAST has training programs for these new and emerging sectors. Some of them, like the new multi-media program, are already up and running; others are on the way. More would be possible if they were not faced with serious government cut-backs.

We've all heard the NDP (New Democratic Party) whine about federal cut-backs — from the state of our highways, our health care system, to our education system. They blame it, in a self-interested and disunifying way, on the federal government. But nine other provinces have faced the same cut-backs, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan is not unique in this and we have to find progressive ways of dealing with difficult times; ways that embody the Canadian values of patience, compromise, and understanding.

Let's hope the government does not forget that SIAST is fully capable of responding and adapting to changes in the workplace. They provide excellent training to Saskatchewan people but right now they are under increased financial strain. The NDP would like to take full credit for the quality of education in Saskatchewan, but they are all too quick to blame the federal government for any problems. The province has held the line for this year on education cut-backs but this does not mean education isn't suffering.

I've one more concern, area of concern, regarding the proposed amendments we are discussing today, Mr. Speaker. The Bill proposes to make the language of the Act gender neutral, and that's great. But gender-neutral language is just one small step in eradicating inequality.

On average, women earn 70 cents for every dollar a man earns. This is because women can be found working in part-time, in poorly paid jobs, with little chance for advancement. Traditionally male-dominated sectors like mechanics and welding and new sectors such as high-tech communication offer well-paid job opportunities.

Apprenticeship opportunities in the new job areas may offer women the opportunity to access these jobs. This would be a great opportunity for women, but evidence suggests it'll take more than gender-neutral language to accomplish this.

Women have been entering non-traditional occupations in increasing numbers. SIAST has an education equity program in place since 1990, but women are not staying in these jobs, Mr. Speaker, and somewhere along the line we have to ask why.

So gender-neutral language is a welcome step, but it is a small step.

This NDP government claims it has made significant advances for women. When you consider the facts, the picture isn't as rosy as the government makes it out to be — 82 per cent of the government's clerical positions are filled by women; 60 per

cent of the temporary and part-time government employees are women; 50 per cent of women hired in management and non-traditional jobs are not permanent employees. The government's record on equity leaves a lot to be desired.

It appears that this Bill will help link students and employers in emerging economic sectors and reduce the training time, but there are other sections of Bill 10 on which we're still gathering some input and will require some more time to study the full implications of the Bill. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to at this time move adjournment of this motion.

Debate adjourned.

ROYAL ASSENT

At 3:24 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

Bill No. 43 - An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of Money for the Public Service for the Fiscal Year ending on March 31, 1998

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name, I thank the Legislative Assembly, accept their benevolence, and assent to this Bill.

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 3:26 p.m.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 20 — The Small Claims Act, 1997 Loi de 1997 sur les petites créances

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Small Claims Act, 1997.

Small Claims Court is sometimes described as a citizen's court. This court provides easier access to justice for people with claims of a small monetary amount. The procedures in Small Claims Court are simplified and informal. They are understandable and easy to use. This enables people to represent themselves in court.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments being introduced today have resulted from the efforts of the Advisory Committee on Dispute Resolution. This committee was appointed by the previous minister of Justice in 1994. Its members represent a broad range of groups and individuals, including the Canadian Bar Association, The Law Society of Saskatchewan, the consumers' association, Mediation Saskatchewan, the Arbitration and Mediation Institute, Saskatoon community mediation, the John Howard Society, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, and the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan — certainly an impressive array of groups and individuals, Mr. Speaker. The committee also includes persons representing labour interests, the academic perspective, government, and the judiciary.

This advisory committee made it a priority to conduct an extensive review of appropriate measures for the resolution of smaller disputes. They have recently forwarded their recommendations for improvements to the Minister of Justice.

Most of their recommendations deal with non-legislative matters. However the committee did provide a number of comments as to how The Small Claims Act could be improved. Their recommendations form the basis for the Bill before us today.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments to The Small Claims Act are put forward as an entirely new Bill for two reasons. First, this approach allows us to review the language of the Act in detail to ensure that it is clear and can be understood by people who are not legally trained, which of course is of great importance in Small Claims Court where we want citizens to have the right to represent themselves. Second, this is one of the Bills which is being put forward for re-enactment in French and English this session. This is another step in fulfilling our commitment to Saskatchewan's francophone community.

Specific amendments are proposed in a number of areas. One amendment replaces the current monetary limit of \$5,000 for Small Claims Court with an ability to set the monetary limit by regulation. This change will allow us to pursue a recommendation of the advisory committee which suggested adopting different monetary limits in different parts of the province. This would enhance access to court-based dispute resolution in areas of the province not fully served by the Court of Queen's Bench. And I think members will understand, Mr. Speaker, that there are more Provincial Court centres around the province than Court of Queen's Bench centres.

Another amendment reduces the number of exemptions from the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court, leaving only those that are constitutionally required — in other words, people will be able to take a wider variety of cases to Small Claims Court and represent themselves.

A third amendment gives the Small Claims Court the ability to transfer a case to a different geographic court location or to the Court of Queen's Bench if that would be a more appropriate place for the matter to be heard.

A fourth amendment authorizes the Court of Queen's Bench to transfer matters to the Small Claims Court with the consent of the parties. This will eliminate the need for parties to recommence an action if they decide they want the matter to be heard in Small Claims Court.

A fifth amendment expands the kinds of orders the court can make. Currently Small Claims Court is limited to ordering the payment of money or the return of property. This change will ensure the court has the ability to respond with an order that makes the most sense in the specific circumstances of the case before it.

A sixth amendment eliminates the requirement for a party to prove their claim if the other party does not appear at the trial. A seventh provision of the Bill allows for judges to make orders detailing how judgements are to be complied with, such as a schedule for payment by instalments. This will assist parties in assuring the judgements are complied with.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the Dispute Resolution Committee also recommended a number of additional, non-legislative improvements to the way in which smaller

claims can be resolved. Officials in Justice are working with the groups represented on the committee to address many of those items. For example, the information provided to claimants and defendants who approach the court will be revised to ensure that information about both court and non-court options for resolving disputes is complete and easy to understand.

As members of the House may know, Mr. Speaker, one of the initiatives taken by the Department of Justice over the last several years has been to encourage people to go to mediation and alternate dispute resolution as opposed to going to court. And that will continue under this legislation.

Under the leadership of the Small Claims Court in Regina, a voluntary mediation program has been developed. And I think that's good news. I think we welcome it, and the opposition welcomes it as well, I think, Mr. Speaker. This program provides another option for parties to resolve their disputes. The potential use of mediation in small claims matters is also recognized in the Bill before us today.

Mr. Speaker, we should acknowledge the contributions of another group to the development of the Bill before us today. In 1994 the law society, the Canadian Bar Association, and the provincial court judges' association cooperated to submit a report on improvements to the Small Claims Court process. They provided the former Minister of Justice with recommendations on ways to alleviate problems they observed the public encountered in the Small Claims Court process.

In some instances, this Bill adopts alternative solutions to the problems they identified, but there is a consensus that the improvements made by this Bill are consistent with the principles that these people identified. These principles are: improved access to justice; keeping the cost of litigation for small claims within reach of all citizens; and ensuring that the process is effective, efficient, simplified, and speedy.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act respecting Small Claims.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1530)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to begin debate for our caucus, the official opposition, on Bill 20, The Small Claims Act, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, the entire issue of access to the courts is of extreme interest to me, given what has happened in my constituency over the last year, and what is continuing to happen in the current year.

Mr. Speaker, in our system of government, and our system of justice, it's of extreme importance that everyone in our province has an equal opportunity to access our courtrooms and our justice system. And that in itself makes the small claims process so vital to our entire system of justice.

The Small Claims Court allows people a fairly quick and easy access to a court and a judge to settle disputes involving

relatively small monetary values. And, as important, it allows people this access without needing to hire legal counsel, which not only speeds up the process considerably but also offers more affordable justice to those who need or desire a quick solution in disputes. It's sometimes a sad truth in the legal system that you get as much justice as you can afford.

Without the small claims mechanism, our courtrooms would be even more clogged than they already are, and the judicial process would grind to a virtual halt. So obviously any amendments to the small claims courts Act that may make the process even more accessible for people is indeed of great interest to us.

And, Mr. Speaker, we also recognize the work and the input that has gone into the process of updating our small claims system. We recognize and sincerely thank the members of the law society, the consumers' association, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, and all the other organizations that have been involved in the process of reviewing the small claims system since 1994.

Obviously all of these groups do have a stake in this system and this Act, as do all Saskatchewan residents who may potentially need the use of small claims courts. And our hope is that the government has taken their recommendation seriously, though we obviously have some doubts.

Mr. Speaker, the changes that are being put forth in this Act are extensive and comprehensive, and we want to make sure we have the opportunity to study all of these changes in their entirety. On the surface, some of the changes in the Act do seem warranted, though like I say, we'll be doing extensive consultations of our own before voting on this Bill.

In particular, expanding the jurisdiction of Small Claims Court seems to be a way to free up more of our courtrooms for matters that may be of a more serious nature.

Mr. Speaker, in a few of our preliminary discussions we have heard that there is justification for possibly raising the current limit for small claims action from \$5,000. Some have suggested \$10,000; others have said \$15,000 would be a reasonable limit, given the expensive nature of employing the legal counsel that is necessary for taking action in Court of Queen's Bench.

And we could have potentially supported such a change. Obviously in this day and age \$5,000 certainly doesn't go as far as it used to. And currently if a person's complaint is over that magic figure, they're headed to Court of Queen's Bench, which means hiring lawyers and incurring what could potentially be great costs. In fact if this is the route forced on people whose claim exceeds that \$5,000 figure by only a small amount, legal fees could potentially eat up most, if not all, of any award that may be coming to the complainant. Given these facts, many individuals or small businesses who would otherwise seek redress through the courts don't, because it's simply not economically feasible.

So possibly a higher small claims ceiling would have been something worth considering, but this legislation does not do that, Mr. Speaker. Instead of taking the sensible approach to

this question and looking at a higher limit, the government is seeking to introduce an imbalance into our judicial system.

The way the Bill is being proposed in fact, Mr. Speaker, causes us considerable concern. I've always thought that one of the basic tenets of our judicial system is a fair and equal system that applies to all no matter where you live in this great province — that the law that stands in Melville is the same law that stands in Yorkton or Moose Jaw or Regina or anywhere else in Saskatchewan.

However it now appears, through this Bill, the government is beginning to move away from this very concept. It appears that the government is now willing to implement a system where the action you are allowed to take depends not only on what your case or complaint is but also where you happen to be in the province.

The Bill proposes to give the Minister of Justice an extraordinary amount of discretion when it comes to the small claims system.

No longer will one law apply equally across Saskatchewan. With this Bill the minister will now have the power, through regulation, to set varying limits across the province. This is of great concern to us, Mr. Speaker, and it should be of great concern to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I raise this issue only briefly today and will be raising it again along with other issues as we continue to debate Bill 20. But this particular section caught my attention in particular. Because most likely this new ministerial power will be used in the cases of those areas of the province that do not have easy access to the Court of Queen's Bench.

Obviously this is of great interest to me since the city of Melville will likely be one of those locations that will be affected by this new power. That's because this same Minister of Justice last year moved to shut down Melville's Court of Queen's Bench, leaving it the only city in Saskatchewan without such a facility.

Furthermore, the government passed legislation making it very easy for the province to shut down any Court of Queen's Bench facility in Saskatchewan without so much as a word of debate. And the people were among the first to feel the pinch of this legislation.

The decision to close Melville's Court of Queen's Bench was another in a long line of slaps in the face to the people of that community, Mr. Speaker. And like I said last year when we were debating that Bill, it was very likely that more communities in Saskatchewan would be facing the loss of their Queen's Bench seats. Now it appears the government also indicates that very likely this will happen, given the nature of this provision.

And no, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't appear to me that this government is interested in raising the ceiling in small claims action in order to give people more reasonable access to that system. Instead, what they're proposing is keeping that limit in place in many areas of the province, including the larger urban

centres which will continue to have Court of Queen's Bench service. So this will not be any help to them.

What it will do however, Mr. Speaker, is to get another roadblock out of the way to take away Queen's Bench service from other smaller centres — centres such as Melville.

Mr. Speaker, if this was not the case, wouldn't the government have simply raised the limit on small claims actions? Why this move to set different limits for different areas unless they knew that there were about to be several more communities which currently have Queen's Bench that will no longer have it in the near future?

Like I've said, Mr. Speaker, when Melville lost its Court of Queen's Bench it was yet another slap in the face, just as it is for any community that has lost this service or is about to.

Through last year's Bill, and now this one, Mr. Speaker, the government is quickly moving us away from the tenet of equal system for all Saskatchewan residents. And it is doing so by giving the minister an extraordinary amount of discretion. It centralizes more power in the minister's office by making many of the future changes not subject to legislation that will be debated in this House.

Rather, the minister will be able to close court-houses or set small claims limits through a simple stroke of the pen. He won't have to consult anyone to make these changes. He especially won't have to consult with the people in those communities that are facing change. Ask the people about this, Mr. Speaker. The people of Melville, and I suspect many other places, can attest to this government's lack of consultation.

This is not a government that listens easily. We've seen this government do that in other areas as well, Mr. Speaker. Virtually every piece of legislation that comes our way dealing with health care has as its underlying goal, a movement to centralize more and more power in the government's hands.

(1545)

This is a government hungry for power. It doesn't want the bother of actual consultation. It wants nothing but to centralize decision making and do so outside of this legislature. No discussion. The people of Melville only found out about the move to close their Court of Queen's Bench because the mayor of that community happens also to be a lawyer. Little thought was actually given to going to talk with city council prior to that decision being made and thought through.

And even after such a discussion was undertaken, it came only after the Minister of Justice had already signed off the closure of Melville's court. It was a cynical action that showed the people of Melville and the people of Saskatchewan what a sham it is when we hear about this government's consultative process. If that wasn't driven home to the people of Melville last year, it certainly was this year, when we learned that now the city's Provincial Court is sent packing.

The Provincial Court now has to pull up stakes and find a new home because it's being kicked out of its present location. This

too was done with no discussion with the people of Melville. The court-house has to find a new home, probably in a community hall somewhere, to make room for the city's newly gutted SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) office.

Most of the jobs have been moved out of Melville to Saskatoon. But the government thinks it's wise to spend thousands of dollars to renovate what was once a courtroom, into office space for what's left of SERM in Melville. Of course the decision to take SERM out of Melville was also made with limited discussion with Melville city council. It was another stroke-of-the-pen decision made by another of the ministers in this government.

How much the government is spending on renovating the court-house for SERM is a mystery. However as the minister declined to answer the written question I put to him a few weeks ago, I think we know why he declined to answer his question — because the government is embarrassed by the answer. But I think the people of Melville deserve an answer. They also deserve an answer as to how the government expects security to be enforced at Provincial Court from now on, if it is to be held in an ill-equipped community hall.

What about all the money that was spent only a few years ago on increased security at the current court-house in Melville? Again the government has no answers for this, because frankly it was probably something they hadn't thought of before those decisions were made.

Had they bothered to talk to anyone prior to deciding, these problems may have been brought to their attention. But once again consultation went by the wayside, as this government moved to impose its will on the community regardless of what the people there might have to say.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The question before the Assembly is second reading debate on Bill No. 20, The Small Claims Act, and I've been listening carefully to the debate of the hon. member for some minutes. Recognizing that second reading debate is debate in principle and by its nature does tend to be somewhat more wide-reaching than individual clauses of the debate, it is becoming less clear to the Chair what the direct relationship is between the remarks made by the hon. member for Melville and the second reading debate of the Bill before us. And I'm sure that the hon. member from Melville will want to tie the point that he's making, to the item of The Small Claims Act . . . Bill that is before the Assembly.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your wise decision and I will come back to the gist of my comments with respect to this particular Bill.

And as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, we certainly do recognize the contribution of the organization who put in their 2 cents on this particular Bill. However, getting back to the Bill, in looking at the result, the government appears to have used the process to further some other goals, namely reducing the level of court service in more areas, which goes back to the accessibility for court dealing with small claims, Mr. Speaker.

And as I've stated, its solution to the problem of closing Queen's Bench service in other areas is to introduce an inequitable small claims system to our province. And such an action is of grave concern to me, Mr. Speaker. To give the minister such extraordinary discretionary power puts us, I'm afraid, on another very slippery slope. Once again let me say that I do agree with trying to give people easier access to the courts, but this government has not shown any interest in doing that.

Yes, raising the limit of Small Claims Court may be a worthwhile discussion, but setting different limits in different parts of the province simply because of the lack of Court of Queen's Bench service in more and more settings is something that we must thoroughly discuss before allowing this Bill to go through this House.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other sections of this Bill that we are also studying very closely, and others of my hon. colleagues will have something to say with respect to the Bill in Committee of the Whole.

However at this time, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 36 — The Health Districts Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Health Districts Amendment Act, 1997. The Health Districts Act introduced in 1993 has been fundamental in our renewal of the health system. The creation of health districts has opened the way to many major improvements in our health system, including allowing local control over health services to ensure they meet the needs of district residents.

As well we're reducing administration of our health system from over 400 governing boards, all appointed, to 30 elected and accountable district health boards. And we're securing our high quality health system for future generations.

Today, thanks to the diligent efforts of these diligent district health boards, our health renewal is the most successful in Canada. And with the introduction of this year's provincial budget, the restructuring process is nearly complete. We have increased funding to ensure needed health services are available now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, The Health Districts Act and the changes that it ushered in have been truly ground breaking. But as is the case with anything that is leading the way, we have come across some areas where improvements are required.

The amendments before the House, Mr. Speaker, are intended to improve the legislation and provide clarification. The first amendment will ensure the district health boards have the flexibility to set appropriate rates for board members, either at or below the maximum level.

District health board members have a challenging job. They deserve fair compensation for the tremendous amount of time and energy they put into managing health services. That district health boards should have the flexibility to set compensation for board members at a level below the maximum set by the government, if they so choose. That was the original intention of The Health Districts Act. This amendment will clarify that intention.

These amendments before you also address the matter of property taxes as they relate to district health boards and their affiliated organizations. There are a number of statutes on the books that exempt hospitals and nursing homes from paying property taxes, but those statutes do not recognize the health districts that today own many of these facilities, nor do they specifically recognize health centres.

By and large, municipalities have not chosen to levy any property taxes on these facilities and organizations. The purpose of this amendment is simply to clarify in legislation the tax exempt status of district health boards and their non-profit affiliates. For-profit affiliates will continue to pay local property taxes.

There have been consultations on this matter with the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. All have indicated their support for this clarification.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I believe the amendments before you will clarify these two important issues for district health boards, their affiliates, the municipalities, and school boards. In doing so, they will support and improve upon the operation of our health system in Saskatchewan.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Health Districts Amendment Act, 1997.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to stand in the House today and express some of the many concerns I have with The Health Districts Amendment Act and this government's performance with respect to health care reform in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that as official opposition we carefully scrutinize any health care legislation put forward by this government. And it is important because the people of this province, especially those who have been touched by the painful consequences of health care reform and those who work within the system and know all too well the pain that this government has caused, no longer trust the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have lost faith in the minister and in his government. They simply do not believe that government promises that no more beds will be cut and no more jobs will be lost. The people simply do not believe that the pain is over.

Allow me to step back for a minute and reflect on the faith Saskatchewan people once had in their health care system.

We are constantly reminded, Mr. Speaker, by the members opposite of the key role their predecessors played in the implementation of medicare. For the record, I'd like the Assembly to note that it was a Liberal government in Saskatchewan which first proposed publicly funded hospital insurance, and a Liberal government which legislated medicare at the national level.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite continually tell the people of Saskatchewan that they should trust their government to preserve medicare. Mr. Speaker, today I'm going to say to the Assembly yet another time, and I can only hope that this time the members opposite will listen, it is no longer enough for this government to ride the coat-tails of its predecessors and claim that they are the solitary protector of medicare in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the people of this province no longer trust this government and their health care system. They no longer trust the government, because they promised to save medicare, and what they have done is throw our health care system into turmoil.

It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite did this without any clear indication what the end result would be. When the health care reforms began, Mr. Speaker, the government could not quantify what was wrong with the health care system. Moreover, the government jumped head first into the district formation and cost-containment process without putting any evaluative tools in place.

What does this mean in 1997 now that the members opposite tell us the cuts are over? I will tell you what it means, Mr. Speaker. It means that we have no idea if we're better off in terms of quality of care or even efficiency of service than we were in 1991.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to quote from Roberta McKay when she said, quote:

I have been involved in the health care field for 35 years. Never in all that time have I experienced the level of frustration that I now feel. I also have never seen morale so low and animosity so apparent amongst the various groups of care providers and support staff. The environment is unhealthy and, in spite of the rhetoric, communication and coordination is at an all time low. There are caring and talented people in Regina Health District and it's sad to see them struggle in a demoralizing atmosphere.

Mr. Minister, allow me to repeat that in case the minister neglected to listen to the words: "The environment is unhealthy . . ." It is sadly ironic that every day our health care providers must work in an extremely unhealthy environment.

Mr. Speaker, the minister and the members opposite often talk of wellness and the expanded detriments of health. They say that factors such as the individual's work environment and stress level can have a greater impact on individual and population health in the health care system itself.

So, Mr. Speaker, what does a minister say to an individual whose place of employment is the health care system? Let me

remind the minister what he told health care workers only a few short weeks ago. Mr. Speaker, after the budget was presented on March 20, the Minister of Health stated that nurses and health care employees should no longer worry about losing jobs, and communities should no longer worry about losing hospital beds and nursing home beds.

(1600)

According to Roberta McKay's description which incidentally is reinforced by many individuals and health care worker providers who share their grave concern, what this government's health care reforms with us, and again according to Ms. McKay's description, the minister's promises is too little too late.

Mr. Speaker, it is essential that this government begin to listen to the serious concerns of the health care providers and home care workers. Since the government has not been listening to these people, Mr. Speaker, let me share with the minister some of the concerns their representatives have put forward.

The unions which represent health care workers in this province are concerned about the continual layoffs; the shift away from full-time jobs towards more casual, part-time positions; the increase in the number of workers on lay-off recall; the replacement of health care workers with volunteers; the deterioration in housekeeping, lab, and dietary services; and yes, Mr. Speaker, the more stressful work environment which is resulting in more sick-leave.

And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I do not believe the government when they say that the pain is over, nor do the people of this province. That is why before we will support any health care legislation this government proposes, we intend to further scrutinize the legislation, and consult with individuals and groups which this legislation will affect.

However little further consultation or analysis is necessary to determine that this legislation will do very little to alleviate the crisis which our health care system is currently experiencing.

The Health Districts Act is a flawed piece of legislation. As a matter of fact The Health Districts Act was flawed from its very inception in 1993. When the district formation process first got under way, the members in this Assembly and the people of Saskatchewan were told that enabling legislation was absolutely necessary for authority to be transferred to the health districts in the province.

This may have been acceptable in 1993, but is not acceptable that since 1993 the government has done nothing to address the serious problem in this legislation. For example, Mr. Speaker, when the government embarked on the health care reform initiative, it applied only to the southern portion of the province. Although we now recently see the formation of two northern districts, very little else has been done by this government.

Mr. Speaker, very little else has been done to address the serious condition of health care in northern Saskatchewan. We can only imagine that now that districts have been formed, this

government will adopt the same policy as it adopted in the South.

Mr. Speaker, the key reason this government set up health districts in this province was to provide a political buffer to protect themselves from the consequences of politically sensitive decisions. Under the new health care system, all of these decisions are now made by the health district boards. These are decisions, might I add, that are still effectively made by government. Not only does the government control the level of funding for the health districts, but they insist on appointing one-third of the board members.

Mr. Speaker, it is because this government controls the purse-strings and because it continues to underfund health care, especially in the North. People in La Loche continue to receive medical attention from a series of ATCO trailers.

Mr. Speaker, there are serious problems with the health care system and the legislation which established it. This government must open its eyes to the mess which has been created and begin to do something to rectify the crisis our health care system is in.

We see nothing in this legislation which proposes to alleviate the obvious problems in the health care system. We plan to further consult those individuals and groups which will be directly affected by this health care legislation. We would like to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the government begin to do the same.

Therefore at this time I move adjournment of this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 7

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 7 — The Cancer Foundation Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe that the debate on The Cancer Foundation Act is something that we've been trying to get some more information on and taking some time to consult with a number of concerned parties. And it would certainly be inappropriate to allow the motion to go through second reading on such short notice, and therefore I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Labour

Vote 20

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

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated beside me is Sandra Morgan, who is the deputy minister of the department. Behind Ms. Morgan is Cheryl Hanson, assistant deputy minister. Behind me is John Boyd, the director of planning, policy and communications. Also present in the Assembly, Mr. Chair, sitting in the back row are Doug Forseth, senior labour relations policy analyst; Eric Greene, the assistant director of labour standards; and Sharon Little, manager of administration.

Item 1

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And also I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the minister and his officials here this afternoon.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if we could start out this afternoon's session by providing a list of all of the out-of-scope personnel in your department who are appointed by order in council and are subject to the Crown contracts Act. And would you be able to also provide us with a list of their salaries as well?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, I can send across the list to the member if he likes. He'll just have the list then. I won't take the time of the committee to talk about it. You can just have the list.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chair, thank you. Mr. Minister, I'll have a look at this here a little bit later. But also with respect to that legislation that governs Crown employment contracts, it's my understanding that employees appointed by order in council have to file their contracts according to provisions of that legislation, and any subsequent amendments to the contract due to a raise or a promotion also have to be filed and made available for the public to view.

And on that topic I'd like to ask the minister if he could tell us how many individuals from his department have failed to file since the legislation was introduced. And in addition, I'd like to know what controls, if any, are in place within the department to ensure that these employees file their contracts and amendments thereto with the proper authority.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the member, I am instructed that the only person in the Department of Labour, on the employment list of the Department of Labour, that has a contract of the nature that the member refers to is Ms. Bilson, the Chair of the Labour Relations Board, and that her contract is on file as required by the Act. And as far as I know, it is . . . the Act has been fully complied with, with respect to her appointment. The other appointments were made pursuant to The Public Service Act.

Mr. Aldridge: — Could I, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, could I just ask for one further clarification? When you say within compliance of the legislation, do you mean now or do you mean that it had occurred within the appropriate amount of time as

governed by the Crown contracts legislation?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Ms. Bilson has been in that position for more than four years — I think nearly five years — and as far as I'm aware, her contract has been filed as required. And if not, it'd come as a surprise to me. And she is the only one now employed by the department who'd fall into that category.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, in viewing the *Estimates* provided with the budget, I read with some interest some of the information regarding accommodation and central services, and I see that less is budgeted for this purpose this year — about 21,000 less than last year. My interest with this item is not so much with the cost but with the method by which it's handled.

It says here in the book that this particular item, item 2, provides for the payments to the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation, and I guess I find the wording a little bit confusing. Does it mean that the department actually receives the money, or is the money simply allotted to you by the Department of Finance and held by the Department of Finance to pay for office space and minor renovations and other services on your behalf?

(1615)

I guess in other words, is it really the cost of accommodation and central services or is this just the Department of Finance holding the money for that purpose, but knowing that it might actually be lower or possibly higher? And I ask how it's handled because I'm concerned that those preparing those sorts of estimates can use accommodations and central services items as a means of inflating departmental spending for political purposes, and particularly in fields like post-secondary education where buildings would play a significant role. And I just ask the minister if he might respond to this concern at this time.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, we actually pay the amounts referred to in the *Estimates*. The leases are of course negotiated by SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) and the cost, the rental costs involved are made known to the department so that we can include an appropriate amount in our estimates that we bring to this House.

The payments are made biennially — is that the term? — semi-annually. Yes, every six months; not every two years, every six months. And they are in the actual amount of the amount in the *Estimates*.

The member noted that there was a decrease in the payments to be made this year. And that is because of the renegotiation of a lease and the fact that the department occupies slightly less space in this coming year than was the case last year.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, with respect to staffing of the department I see there will be a net increase of about six staff this year over last. And I would like the minister to explain what additional person-hours will be used, what they'll be used to accomplish, and for what particular subvotes would the additional labour be required.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, and to the members, the member is quite correct. There are six new employees coming into the department this year. Three of them will be occupational health and safety officers; one labour standards intake officer; one person to be employed in the Labour Relations Board, and I believe that the plan is to make that person the registrar of the board; and a conciliation and mediation officer in the labour relations section of the department. There'll be a total then of six. I'll just repeat that for the member — three occupational health and safety officers, a labour standards officer, a Labour Relations Board person, and a conciliation and mediation officer.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister. I note with some interest one additional in the labour standards area. I guess it sort of gets into a topic that I know that you've heard the tremendous outcry about in the province, and that's about bringing the babysitters under the jurisdiction of The Labour Standards Act. Now we see that your government has responded to some degree by changing the regulations and the policy in including only live-in domestics under the provisions of The Labour Standards Act.

One of the complaints that I've heard from many of the parents is that the documents provided by your department were conflicting and unclear. And there's some indication even that the definitions in the regulations themselves conflict with each other. And this also has made those who look to them for advice very uncertain as to whether they or their employee fell under the Act.

Now I know it's quite common for governments to publish pamphlets that provide information on programs so that the public can have a better understanding of the programs. Regardless of what the pamphlet does say, it is the statutes or the regulations that are the final authority. But many people do rely on these publications for making their decisions.

Granted that many of the people are concerned that your department provided them with written information which was inaccurate, I wonder what steps you have taken to ensure that the pamphlets and publications that your department might put out in the future are a bit more accurate.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — It is my impression, Mr. Chair, that the documents the member is talking about, the brochures and the information, was not so much inaccurate as it was incomplete and that this may have caused some of the problems that the member referred to.

And as to the steps that we've taken, an incident like this certainly does point out the need for complete information. And the structure of the department, from the deputy minister on down, is there to ensure that these sorts of things don't happen and won't happen in the future.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, with respect to the lack of information perhaps in these pamphlets and also just the lack of information or advisement and consultation that occurred in this issue, I know I have a number of people concerned, and I'm sure you've heard from every one

of these as well.

But for example, here's one who is saying in closing:

I just want to state that I do not understand how the government can take an unregulated industry, regulate it overnight, and not inform the people that it directly affects. The government should be held accountable.

Here's another example from another parent stating, and I quote:

The bottom line is that we were not properly informed about the new law and how it would affect us so that we could decide if we could afford to pay this amount of money based on our wages.

Another concerned parent here, again I quote:

The lack of publicity on this law has had a devastating impact on families and for those people who provide the child care. The child care providers have been laid off and therefore are out of a job and possibly on or back on social assistance. Where is the justification in these actions? I thought we as a country were trying to solve problems, not create them.

Just a few examples, Mr. Minister, of some of the people who have wrote me and undoubtedly have also wrote you with their same concerns.

Now I know you mention here that we're talking in many instances about the information or lack of information in the pamphlets that have been distributed. But getting back though to an issue, I think, that does pertain to the regulations themselves: some of the people that are concerned on the issue have pointed out that there seems to be some discrepancy concerning the definition of what constitutes a domestic. I guess it might conflict with one another within the regulations.

And I'd like to hear from the minister what he might intend to do to rectify that particular situation for the future. And what do you intend to do to make certain that these sorts of similar mistakes don't happen again on these sorts of policies?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well, Mr. Chair, and to the member, we are of course at some pains to ensure that mistakes don't occur, and I think that overall our record is pretty good. All governments make a concerted effort to ensure that there are no loopholes in their laws or any inconsistencies such as the member has referred to. And I freely and openly acknowledge the fact there had been a mistake made. There is no secret about that.

I want to just share with the member, as he may well know, that there was a very high level of consultation with respect to the changes in The Labour Standards Act. There were countless meetings held all around the province and a lot of information sent out to people. But the problem is to whom is it sent out?

It is relatively easy for us to identify the persons who you would normally consider to be employers — the restaurant owners, the

hotel owners, the clothing store owners, the garage owners, and so on. We can access those people because, for one thing, we have access to the Workers' Compensation Board list of employers, and so we can reach those people. And of course they cover the majority of employers in the province.

But when you come to the question of who is an employer of a domestic worker, who are those people? And unfortunately they're not readily accessible. They're not registered in one place as they are with Workers' Compensation. Workers' Compensation for domestic workers is a voluntary matter and so that we are in a position of not knowing who to send them to. And that's one of the problems that has confronted many jurisdictions with respect to getting out the information as to changes in the law.

So you do your best, you know. You notify all of the people that you traditionally notify and have public meetings and give notice of those meetings and send out your material, but knowing, while you're doing that, that there is no doubt a slice of employers who just won't learn about it. And there isn't a very effective way of giving the public notice of the details of that kind of a law.

And so it is with a lot of the things that we do in this Assembly no matter who the government is. We pass a law, and then the question is how to communicate the contents of that law. And over the years we've developed various and different ways of doing it.

We have press releases, we have press coverage, we have newspaper advertisements, we have consultation meetings, and a whole variety of different things depending upon what law you're talking about. But in the end you and I . . . we all know that there will be a slice of the public who just won't know that this law has been passed and that it applies to them.

And it is too bad. I mean it really is a difficult situation for them, and we know that. But it is very difficult for us to conceive of a way of ensuring that every person like the employers of domestic workers, or babysitters as we've been using the term, are aware that this law has in fact been passed.

In retrospect, you know, we can look at what we did and say, well that wasn't enough, we should have done more. And we learned from these incidents. We learned from our shortcomings and hope to get it right next time by trying to be perhaps more creative in the way in which the news gets out.

I have received the same letters as the member has though, and I know it has caused hardship and a good deal of irritation among some of the citizens of our province. And I feel badly for that. But it is, to repeat myself, a very difficult proposition for any government to get out the contents of a new law to all the people who may be affected by it.

(1630)

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, I know every time affected parties hear from yourself that you admit to mistakes being made and they hear that you are doing your best to try and come to some resolution, I see that it doesn't really

do anything for those who you speak of that have been so dramatically affected.

And I guess I would be lax at this time if I didn't mention just a couple of them, Mr. Minister, that have wrote to us just to highlight how dramatically affected they have been by this particular regulation and the bungling related to it.

But I see here one individual where they say they . . . we expect, and of course they're wording this towards demanding compensation from you:

So we expect you to compensate us in full for the back pay of \$4,246.71 plus expenses that we've incurred regarding the issue (Mr. Minister).

And I see these expenses that they relate to here amount to some substantial amounts of expenses as well, where in fact they have a \$241.98 bill with an accountant in regards to the matter, an additional \$433.88 in legal expenses related to the matter. And I believe this is one that has been put in front of you before, so I won't go through the process of passing this over to you.

But I see another affected party here writing that . . . at the time of writing they were saying:

We currently have an unsettled claim against us at the labour standards branch in Saskatoon. If we are forced to pay out any amount for this claim, it will be very detrimental to our family. We certainly do not have the funds to pay this claim. Our family life has been in turmoil since we found out about the legislative changes through an article in the Star-Phoenix on October 22, 1996. We want our family life back to normal. Our children have suffered enough.

And, Mr. Minister, I believe that the current status of these individuals is that they still haven't paid this particular claim however; it is still hanging over their heads.

Now given that this is causing these tremendous hardships and emotional stresses, I find it interesting to take a look at some of the paradoxes within government. I looked recently at the most recent set of *Public Accounts* for the province. And in them I notice that there was a considerable increase in the monies that were paid out by the Department of Energy and Mines in '95-96. The total increase, Mr. Chair, was over \$7 million. And that was all paid out in trust to a Calgary law firm called McCarthy Tétrault.

The minister might be, I guess, wondering what my point is in all of this, so I'd just satisfy your curiosity in that I was wondering about the payment. So I'd asked the Department of Energy and Mines and I learned that it was for the purpose of settling a court case out of court, and it was in fact with a number of large oil companies.

So I do find this ironic that here we have a minister who's unable to compensate maybe, perhaps — and I might get into this a little later — but perhaps a few dozen families perhaps, at most, for a mistake made by his department. But when it comes

to big oil companies the story is different with this government. The government's willing to fork out \$7 million to settle claims before they go to courts.

I'd like the minister to comment on what is an obvious double standard in this regard and explain, if he would, what's more important to this government. Do you believe that families are just as important as oil companies? And if you do, what do you intend to do to compensate the families for these liabilities that they've incurred?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well I suspected that the member would raise that matter because we've discussed it before on the floor of this House. And I have met with some of the people who have been affected by the situation and discussed their plight with them. I have consistently taken the same position, consistently said that we will monitor this situation and any decisions that are . . . that may be appropriate will be decided after we are in possession of more facts than we now have.

Let me share with the member some of the complexities. And if this were simply a matter of looking at the claims that had been filed with the labour standards branch and the settlements of those claims and then deciding what to do, if it were that simple, it would be simple. Because your facts would be relatively clear, simple, and the government could make a decision about whether or not to have a compensation program.

The problem is complicated by such factors as the following. We are aware in a general way that there are a number of people out there who have been paying the minimum wage for child care in their home for some time. This may result because that's just how much they pay, or it may be that they became aware that the law applied to them in one way or another. Who knows?

But we know that there are a number of people who have been complying with the law. One of the babysitters, for example, who receives a minimum wage, received quite a bit of television coverage. A young woman by the name of Rothery, Ms. Rothery. She's been receiving the minimum wage.

Now what to do about those situations and how to get that information, because it makes no sense to compensate only the people who have not been complying with the law and not compensating people who have been complying with the law. Now that's a real complication. And how do you get at that information? This is one of the complexities that we're trying to make sense of and to understand.

I have great sympathy for some of the people who I met with who you refer to in your question, but we don't leap into these things and don't make these decisions on the basis of what's obvious. You have to be much more thorough about it and try and get complete information before you make such an important decision.

I might say to the member that we regard these situations with a great deal of seriousness. It's always tough to balance competing claims; that made by a lawsuit from an oil company and that made by a family affected by this law. Personally I like the family better; I would be more responsive to them.

There were probably compelling reasons for the settlement of the lawsuit that the member refers to, but I have no knowledge of that at all. But I have no hesitation about where my sympathies lie.

Unfortunately it's not a simple decision, and I've been trying to convey that to the people affected. But it's one that we will monitor very carefully, and try to dig out the information that we need in order to make a decision about whether or not compensation should be paid.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I know I had sent your department, through the freedom of information, a request just asking you how many claims regarding this issue had been filed with the labour standards branch, and at the time the response had been 14, and only one had been paid out, I think, at that point. And I was just wondering if you could provide us with an update on this situation right now, and also with respect to the period of time in which those affected are going to be allowed to file claims.

I know in the corridor, but weeks ago, I heard a hint from yourself that perhaps the period of time in which claims would be received might be something that could be up for a certain amount of discussion. Would you be able to just make some comments on that at this point?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, that was an exchange with a reporter in which he asked why we did not set some deadline or time limit. And I said in response, we'd consider that. And that's part of the mix; we're considering that too. It's an attractive idea for a number of reasons but we haven't yet . . . we're not yet in a position to make a decision about whether or not compensation should be paid.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the minister . . . and I was listening with great interest to some of the dialogue that was taking place between the member from Thunder Creek and the minister in regards to this babysitting fiasco that's happened in the province of Saskatchewan.

I guess what I would have to just mention, Mr. Minister, it would seem to me that some thought should have been given before the regulations were changed to make sure . . . so that people were really informed. You made a comment about individuals paying the minimum wage, and I'm quite well aware of that . . . even in small businesses, small businesses, not everyone pays minimum wage. Some employers pay more than minimum wage. They pay based on how they value their employees in their workplace and how the workplace is doing.

And so I think what we have had, and I'm sure what the members had in their caucus, claims that have come in, we're dealing with individuals with quite a difference in income levels. And in many cases, individuals who . . . where the spouse was out working for barely minimum wage or little better and then all of a sudden it just wasn't something that was really . . . would be a positive for them to turn around and have to hire somebody.

So I think, Mr. Chairman, I guess what I would address to the

minister in this case is that I think your department has to be a little more . . . I guess think ahead a little more when changes are made in The Labour Standards Act so that people aren't put in a situation such as we find with the individuals and this babysitting question.

But I'm going to go from this to one other topic, a topic that we were discussing in question period this afternoon. There's, I think, a couple points, I think, need to be brought forward in regard to this situation. And I think what we have here, Mr. Minister, in question period this afternoon you basically were saying to the questions I had placed, Mr. Minister, that you were washing your hands, that it really wasn't your responsibility.

I think it comes from the fact that, and I'll look at a letter that was sent . . . I'm sure SGEU sent this to all of their . . . all of their claimants. And one of the lines that I want to read into the record says:

Under the SGEU Long Term Disability Plan Text membership in SGEU is a condition to continue to receive disability benefits.

And then the letter goes on and says to the claimant, well we're doing whatever we can. We're negotiating with the government and we're encouraging all affected claimants to contact government members to have this problem dealt with.

Now from our debate earlier on this afternoon, Mr. Minister, you'd indicated it really isn't your problem. I guess, Mr. Minister, the problem arose as a result of the Dorsey report. Who implemented the Dorsey report and why was the Dorsey report implemented?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well the Dorsey report didn't just appear out of nowhere as some idea of a cabinet minister or a government department. The idea of having this kind of a commission arose from the trade unions involved in the health industry, who had been grappling themselves with the question of jurisdiction — that is to say, which unions would represent which employees — for some two years, I think.

And they came to the minister at the time, the minister of Labour at the time, and the Minister of Health and said in effect, we're not able to resolve this problem; we need some kind of mechanism in order to help us deal with these questions. So that led to the government being persuaded by the unions, with the full concurrence of SAHO, that a commission should be set up.

And the member will recall that we brought legislation to this House in order to establish the commission and the mandate of the commission. It was part of that legislation that the government could either accept or not accept the regulations that were presented by the person who would be appointed as the commissioner.

(1645)

In due course Dorsey, who was an outstanding Canadian expert on questions like this, presented the government with his

regulations, with his report. And we could either accept it or reject it. We could not amend it. It was an either you take it or leave it proposition.

And we took it because we saw no basis on which we could do otherwise. Here is a situation where a person who had been agreed upon by all of the organizations involved, who was one of Canada's outstanding experts in the field, who's had specific experience in the health care industry in his home province of British Columbia, who presented us with these recommendations. And we felt obliged to accept them and we did.

Now that was controversial certainly, a very public issue. The SGEU were extremely unhappy with the result. And you can appreciate the fact that they would be upset because they were no longer representing anybody, subject to the results of the two votes that are yet to be taken. So I can understand the level of upset.

It wasn't until that debate had gone on for some time and after the regulations had been passed that the status of people who were on the SGEU disability plan became public. And that was presented to us as though it ought to be a reason for rejecting or reversing the decision with respect to the Dorsey report. We didn't see it that way. We sympathize with these people and we would like to see some resolution of the matter. But it certainly was no ground for rejecting the approach taken by Dorsey.

I don't know whether Dorsey knew about the disability plan or not at the time he was writing his report. And as I stand here I don't recall whether there was any reference to it in his report. But certainly it would be no ground for a government to reject the whole parcel.

I said to the member earlier today, Mr. Chair, that this was a plan that had been established by the trade union for trade union members. The government had nothing to do with it, nor did the employer of any of the people involved in the health industry. And when the problem of their continuing coverage came up, the first thought that occurred to me, and to others, was that that's a problem for the plan, and that perhaps the plan covers it, or should cover it. It is a union plan and they might be able to find within themselves some way to deal with this problem.

Then we learned that there were discussions going on between SGEU and SAHO, and I believe involving other unions, as to how this thing could be handled within the continuing bargaining relationships in the health industry. Now I don't know what is the state of those discussions, but I said earlier that if there is some way in which we can facilitate that process, we're quite prepared to do it.

I can't foresee that the government . . . that anyone could seriously argue that the government should somehow step in here and establish a disability plan to pick up those people who were covered by the SGEU plan. The logic of that just hasn't been made clear to me. If the member has an argument for it, I'd like to hear it. But I haven't heard one to this point, so . . .

At the same time, however, these people were injured in the

health industry, and if there's an answer to be found to the problem it must lie within the relationship between SAHO and the various organizations representing workers in the health industry.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I think if you reflect back, when the legislation was brought forward to implement the Dorsey Commission, as members, as opposition members, we had certainly indicated that we could see where there was a plan that was needed to address the fact that so many health districts were dealing with such an incredible number of independent unions.

And the problem that that can create as you deal with different unions, and the fact that each union has their own bargaining unit, and you just nicely settle with one and then you have to deal with the next one and so on. And I think, Mr. Minister, you'd be aware of the fact that we raised that fact. We certainly have agreed with the government that something had to be done. And I guess we're all working on the premiss that when everything was said and done we wouldn't run into a circumstance such as we have today.

I'm not particularly standing here, Mr. Minister, and suggesting that the government needs to pick up the tab, nor am I standing here defending SGEU and their policies. I think as we look at the Dorsey Commission and as we look at the report as it was recommended, and based on the number of calls I've had to my office, certainly SGEU members were the more forthright in their letter-writing campaign and calling the office. The two health districts that happen to comprise my constituency, unfortunately for SGEU members, they were very minor players in the health districts.

And there was another concern was raised in the fact that some . . . The different unions, and I just forget offhand the two unions that were directly involved that are becoming the major stakeholders in the province, one of them was represented by . . . Most of the member . . . or most of the health professionals in my area were represented by the one union. And for awhile they were afraid they were going to be put into CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees), I believe, is where they thought they might be put into.

And I had written your office. I had written the Minister of Health, talked to the ministers. And I guess I can say, Mr. Minister, I appreciate the fact that when the final report came down it left the two health districts with the union that most of the members were involved with rather than changing them and putting them in the CUPE union, which that was one concern that was raised, and people certainly didn't want to be transferred out of a union that they had voted to be a part of. And in that regard, I think a lot of people appreciate what was done.

But when it comes to the question that we have before us today, Mr. Minister, it would seem to me that SGEU, as a union, was more than happy to accept this individual, or these individuals into their union. These individuals worked as members, worked as employees in the public health field, and were employees of different sectors of the health field, and became members of a union that they put their trust in, they put their confidence in,

they paid their membership dues to. They paid into an insurance plan that gave them, or insured them, in case of a disability as a result of a job-related matter.

And whether or not SGEU has any more employees in the health field, I don't think — my personal view anyway — it doesn't take them, or it doesn't eliminate the responsibility that they have to members, or who were members prior to any changes that came about.

Whether it's in the health field or whether it's someone has been a member of SGEU for a number of years receives an injury on the workplace, whether it's in a labour-related area or whether it's in the government service, doesn't take away the obligation of the union to look after its members if members have paid into that disability plan that they carry.

And in this case, this individual is not severing her membership with the union. While the union may lose a position in the health field, this member . . . or this individual and a number of other individuals still are, and as far as I know, will retain membership in the SGEU union.

It would seem to me, Mr. Minister, I guess what we're coming to you with is the fact that when the report was released and when this came to light, you had indicated that there certainly you didn't see where anyone would lose any benefits; that the benefits would continue. I believe that's how you related that matter.

And I guess, as the Minister of Labour, the minister responsible to the labour force in the province of Saskatchewan, I think what people are looking to you today at for, Mr. Minister, is some guidance, if you will, as to how some of these disputes can be settled. And well I would suggest we just don't totally wash our hands of it.

I think if someone came to your office, you would certainly want to take a look at the circumstances that surround it. And I think the Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union would certainly be coming to you if they felt they were going to be left carrying the load for somebody else. And they'd say, well we have our own plan in place that looks after our members; we look after our members.

So I guess what we have here is we need an assurance that the Minister of Labour is certainly going to stand up for working people in this province and indicate that we will give you all the support we can to make sure that you are looked after, whether it's by your union or, as you've indicated, the discussion that is taking place now; whether health districts or other unions that are now left with the membership pick up the disability program that these members are being faced with. And so that's the thing, Mr. Minister, I think that people are looking for.

They're . . . I don't know . . . I don't believe they're coming and asking us to come to you and demand of you, or demand of the Minister of Finance, that now you pick up this disability. I guess I would suggest that the membership was paid, the insurance was paid, the disability fund was carried.

This fund is going to be ongoing and this individual or these

individuals are actually members of this union will continue to be so. They're disability members but they're still members who are drawing and there is no reason for me to believe that the SGEU could not honour its commitment to the membership for that membership that was taken out when that individual began working and paid into that membership.

And I'm wondering if you could respond or what your views may be on this matter.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chair, it certainly is a very complex matter. And the member's question indicates that it is, and indicates some of the complexities that are involved.

I think that probably our best approach here is to take it on a step-by-step basis, not try and solve the problem with one swift decision or one swift action. The present course, as I've indicated today, involves SAHO discussing with SGEU how this matter might be handled, and I have considerable faith in that process. I think that the solution to this problem lies there. And if that doesn't work, then I think options have to be considered, and I have not considered them. I have never, for example, read the terms of the SGEU plan or purported to suggest to anybody what their rights might be under that plan.

That's for another day, and only in the event that other solutions don't arise in the meantime. So I think that we just approach this matter on that basis, step by step, and only if one step fails do we have to consider what the next step might be or should be.

I share with the member his concern about the plight of the people who are on that disability plan for the very reasons that he mentioned. He mentioned the fact that they had become members of the union and had signed into the plan and paid premiums with respect to the plan and become injured and entitled pursuant to the plan. And I have a great deal of sympathy for them, so we'll be following this matter very, very closely. For now though we're still on the step involving SAHO and we're prepared to do our part to try and make that process work.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Progress from the Department of Labour, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: — The Government Whip has moved that the committee report progress from the Department of Labour. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion? It now being close to 5 o'clock this committee will report progress and stand recessed until 7 p.m. later this same day.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

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