

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens of Balcarres, Lipton, and Ituna, to present a petition. The prayer reads:

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.

I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens of the city of Regina:

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, crimes of violence, 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.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to present a petition signed by individuals from Lac Vert, Naicam, and Watson:

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 crimes of violence, including the charge of attempted murders of a police officer; such a task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach programs, and other

organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

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 petitioning the Assembly to reverse the municipal revenue-sharing reduction;

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to establish a task force to aid the fight against youth crime; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to change the big game damage compensation program.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly, a group of visitors in your gallery, from my constituency. This is a group of young people from the Junior Adventist Academy in Saskatoon.

I'd like to welcome the students, Jonathon Wood, Brennan Marcoux, Adrian Wood, Trevor Parmelle, Jason Lisk, Michael Raney, Matthew Cascagnete, Christa Dobroskay, David Kartik, and Jonathon Sparks. These students, Mr. Speaker, are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Wood, and by parents, Karen Dobroskay, Melodie Wood, and Phillip Raney.

I would ask all members to join me in welcoming these young people to question period.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to colleagues in the legislature, a valued family friend and adviser, my uncle, Ward Dixon, who's sitting in the gallery opposite.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Congratulations to Sandra Schmirler Rink

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, with apologies to Ogden Nash:

Saskatchewan has many fine curlers.
The greatest, of course, Sandra Schmirler.
She went off to Bern, a medal to earn
And did so, did Schmirler the curler.

I burst into rhyme, Mr. Speaker, because as the world knows by now, the rink of Sandra Schmirler won the ladies gold medal of curling Saturday in Bern, Switzerland. The curling displayed by

the Schmirler rink was, frankly, remarkable. It went through the week with only one loss, and neither the semi-final nor final match could be termed nail-biters. They were that superior to the field.

So the first thing to say is simply congratulations to Sandra; Jan Betker; Joan McCusker; Marcia Gudereit; fifth, Atina Ford; and coach Anita Ford. Congratulations for curling as we knew they would.

I think however, that the chief point to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, is not their exceptional curling, but their laudable poise and dignity with which they represented their city, their province, and their country. The diplomacy they displayed is rare, even among diplomats.

I congratulate them, and I know we all wish Sandra Schmirler well as she now turns her attention to another upcoming event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passover Week

Ms. Lorje: — Sunset tonight is the beginning of Passover Week during which Jewish people the world over observe and remember the preparation for and the flight from oppression in the land of Egypt. This is the basis of the “Book of Exodus” in the *Bible*.

As Jews prepare for this most solemn ritual, it is instructive for the secular world to remember with them, the historical and moral significance of this event.

The migration which began thousands of years ago still shapes, to a great extent, our religious and civil institutions as well as our attitudes. The escape from slavery by the children of Israel led to the creation of laws which are the basis for our codes.

The Ten Commandments, which were delivered to Moses during the flight, are, one can argue, all the law we need. Once we learn to follow these, we don't really need much more.

This story of a people who refused to be enslaved still uplifts us. It reminds us that the human spirit is indomitable. What unites us is stronger than that which divides us.

Passover reminds us that today, wherever slavery remains, we all taste its bitterness. In every generation each of us should feel as though we ourselves had gone forth from Egypt if we are ever to rid the world of the scourge of slavery and oppression.

During this week, Mr. Speaker, I join all members in saying: peace for us; peace for everyone. For all people this is our hope. Next year in Jerusalem; next year may we all be free.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Upgraders Making Profits

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had many

occasions to stand before members of this Assembly and point out the increased activity in our oil and gas industry, and the unquestionable economic benefits that have been . . . are being produced throughout Saskatchewan.

I was in Lloydminster on the weekend and the optimism is overwhelming. I'll have something to say about that later this week. But our communities are benefiting from this renewed enthusiasm. I see it firsthand throughout my constituency, and I'm sure other members do as well, but some will not admit it.

Mr. Speaker, an important part of our oil and gas industry are the two provincial upgraders: the Bi-Provincial in Lloydminster, and the NewGrade Energy in Regina. Together the upgraders employ approximately 500 people directly, and hundreds more indirectly. The Bi-Provincial upgrader plays a significant economic role for the people and businesses in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

That is why I am happy to congratulate the Bi-Provincial and the NewGrade Energy for their 1996 recorded profits. This is good news for our oil and gas sector as well as our provincial economy, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to congratulate Bi-Provincial and NewGrade Energy for their successful year and wish them all the best in the future. And I want to commend our government for having the business sense not to follow the Liberals in Ottawa and the Tories from Alberta in bailing out . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member's time has expired. Next statements by members.

Tisdale Business Marks 75 Years of Service

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to have the members recognize a very special business in the town of Tisdale. Groat's Supply is celebrating 75 years of service to the Tisdale district.

As an automotive and parts store beginning in 1922, Groat's has become a thriving business. Ed Groat's legacy has left a lasting impression on the business community as well as the town itself.

The late Mr. Ed Groat spent two terms as mayor and six years as councillor. Congratulations on three generations with 75 years of community service, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Z99 Fund-raiser

Mr. Trew: — More good news from the Z, Mr. Speaker. C.C. and Lori Lindsay completed their most successful radiothon at 5 p.m. on Friday raising \$35,479 for the Regina General Hospital neonatal unit. Donors, Z99, and C.C. and Lori Lindsay deserve nothing but praise.

The \$35,479 will be used in the neonatal unit to purchase two Isolette units. These infant incubators cost \$15,000 each. The radiothon goal was to raise \$30,000. I am told the additional \$5,479 will all be spent in the neonatal unit buying extras that

that unit would need.

Other people I spoke to reacted with things like: "It's just great." Well what a way of understating the fabulous dedication to Regina people that Z99, C.C., and Lori Lindsay have demonstrated again. Whatever the Z is paying C.C. and Lori Lindsay, it should be more.

Congratulations to everyone involved, especially C.C. and Lori Lindsay and the donors for a job very well done. There are 35,479 ways of saying thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

50th Anniversary of Western Sales Ltd.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have many times stood here and acknowledged the important role small business has in their constituencies, and I've had my share of chances.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise today to take this opportunity to point out the success and longevity of a particular business from my constituency that is celebrating its 50th anniversary later this week.

Western Sales Ltd. of Rosetown has been a successful and competitive farm implement business since 1947 when Glen Thrasher built a small shop and was awarded a John Deere farm machinery contract. In the early years of that business, one of the Herschel dealers joined in a partnership to strengthen it in Rosetown.

Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago Glen Thrasher committed his business to serving the needs of the community and providing quality service to area farmers. Today Western Sales Ltd. is continuing the tradition established by Mr. Thrasher. They remain community focused and they are committed to their customers.

Their dedication to their customers has not gone unnoticed, Mr. Speaker. They are ranked fifth in sales for John Deere equipment in Canada, and for the past three years have placed in the top 100 businesses in Saskatchewan. Employing 47 people in four locations that include Rosetown, Elrose, Biggar, and Outlook, this energetic, forward-looking company believes in giving back to the community.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, Western Sales purchased a 47-passenger bus for the Rosetown community that serves a multitude of community events and organizations.

I would like to congratulate current owners Grant Henderson, Grant McGrath, Doug Slimmon, and Tim Drake for continuing the tradition of excellence that was begun by Glen Thrasher . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member's time is expired. Statements by members continue.

Organ Donor Week

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the

generosity of Saskatchewan people is legendary. Against all odds we have forged a society here in this province based on sharing and cooperation. This week is Organ Donor Week. This week attempts to build on that tradition by asking Saskatchewan people to give a very precious gift of themselves — the gift of life.

The Saskatchewan Coalition for Organ Donor Awareness launched a campaign this morning to draw the attention of the public to this very important issue. Unfortunately, Canada has one of the lowest rates of organ donation in the world. One of the main reasons for this is that families deny consent when asked about organ donation.

Clearly, action needs to be taken before a tragedy occurs within a family. Families need to have that discussion when the atmosphere is less emotionally charged. The key is for people to make their wishes regarding organ donation known beforehand.

Everybody in Saskatchewan who carries a health care card will have received an organ or tissue donor consent card. I urge all Saskatchewan people to take a moment to fill out this important piece of information and to make sure that it is displayed prominently in your wallets. The gift of life is a precious one — please give the gift of life.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in applauding the work of the Saskatchewan Coalition for Organ Donor Awareness in drawing the attention of the public to this very important issue. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Auditor Report on SaskPower

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, the Premier used one of his minor ministers to launch a vicious attack on the Provincial Auditor for daring to question the government's accounting practices. This attack illustrates just how far the Premier and his ministers have sunk, Mr. Speaker. They have become nothing more than bullies — smug, arrogant, and manipulative.

Now the Premier has said this is just a dispute over accounting practices. And on Friday the Premier stood in this House and said, I quote:

. . . nobody is attacking the Provincial Auditor and nobody is undermining the Provincial Auditor.

Yet in the Crown Corporations Committee, the minister responsible for SaskPower said, and I quote,

. . . you might support the Provincial Auditor; I don't.

If the government doesn't see this as an attack, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier please explain to the people of this province exactly what his minister was saying.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I was not in the Public

Accounts or Crown Corporations Committee where the statements that the member refers to were made, and so therefore I don't have that advantage in being able to answer. But I can repeat again on behalf of the government, our position.

Our position is that the Provincial Auditor, as an officer of this Legislative Assembly, is a very important officer. The office is very important and integral to the democratic process. That does not mean that on some occasions the government of the day may take a position in disagreement with the position taken by the Provincial Auditor. If it does so, it must have a valid reason for doing so.

In this case, there is a valid reason as articulated by Ernst & Young and the other auditors used by SaskEnergy and employed by the minister in charge of SaskEnergy. In all regards where there are differences, they should be handled with civility and respect. And the Provincial Auditor, I conclude, himself notes that this is an area that is not free from some doubt since he has asked that it be referred to the CICA (Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants) for further consideration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, we and the people of Saskatchewan know that this is an attack on an individual. What is behind this assault on the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker?

When it was in opposition, the NDP (New Democratic Party) was quite vocal in defending the Provincial Auditor, calling the then Tories, and I quote, "a downright attack on the individual and the institution of the Provincial Auditor." Yet now the NDP is attacking the auditor simply because he had the audacity, Mr. Speaker, to raise questions.

This is what is truly scandalous, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government should be ashamed — ashamed of the hypocritical stance of supporting and then not supporting the Provincial Auditor whenever it feels like doing it.

Will the Premier do the honourable thing, Mr. Speaker, and apologize to the auditor for this uncalled-for and unprovoked attack?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the present incumbent in the Provincial Auditor's office is mature enough to understand the nature of a dispute respecting the accounting procedures of SaskPower because he has himself acknowledged in paragraph .32, quote: I have asked the CICA to examine the practices respecting this very particular matter.

There is an honest difference of opinion. We have accounting firms who have advised SaskEnergy that the charge should be recorded in the way that it was. The Provincial Auditor takes another point of view. There's a legitimate difference. Even the Provincial Auditor says, I'm asking this standard to go toward the CICA.

There's nothing wrong with that. We will have those differences. We've had those kinds of differences. What I disputed at the time in opposition and always will, even under our administration, is any kind of a baseless attack on any officer of this Legislative Assembly without valid reasons and grounds, or any baseless attack at all.

This is a defence of an accounting procedure which was set forward by chartered accountants, reasonable people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I'd hoped that the Premier would stand up and do the right thing and that is to apologize. Obviously I was wrong. What is so sad, Mr. Speaker, is that the Provincial Auditor was hired by this government to do a job and because of this, he has been discredited for voicing his concerns which obviously fly in the face of what the government wants the public to know.

I'm again asking this government to issue a much-needed apology to the Provincial Auditor, who in questioning SaskPower's bottom line was looking out for the best interests of this province and the people who live here.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I can only again repeat the answer I have given the member for the last two previous questions. There is obviously an argument amongst the accountants as to how this reconstruction charge should be recorded. We have professional firms in this business of advising companies like SaskPower to do it in a certain fashion. It was done in that fashion.

The Provincial Auditor has another view, which I would argue he is not absolutely certain about because he himself says he's going to refer it to the governing body of chartered accountants to see which of these two approaches should be adopted. What is wrong with that? That happens; it has happened from time to time; it'll happen again.

The Provincial Auditor is very, very much capable of handling these kinds of differences and we will not in all circumstances — I don't mean this government — no government in all circumstances will always accept the Provincial Auditor's statement. It's not possible, and where it does not accept the Provincial Auditor's statement, it should have good and valid grounds for not doing so.

The minister has advanced good and valid grounds. The Auditor himself is uncertain about it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well he did. The Auditor himself says, the Provincial Auditor himself says that he's referring it to the chartered accountants' board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is also to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, this government has added fuel to the cynicism fire by attacking the credibility of a neutral officer of the legislature, one of the few people residents of this province felt they could turn to for

government accountability.

But how accountable can the Provincial Auditor be, Mr. Speaker, or the Ombudsman, or the child's advocate if this government undermines their efforts and discredits this information? The people of Saskatchewan look to the government for guidance to represent their best interests, but with this attack on the Provincial Auditor, the government has just created more public distrust.

And a recent government poll reflects this, showing 69 per cent of respondents said they didn't have enough information about how the Crowns operate. Yet when the Provincial Auditor raises concerns about the operation and accountability of SaskPower, he gets a verbal slap in the face.

Will this government explain to the people of this province why it has taken such great steps to discredit the auditor just because his professional opinion's different from the government's.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this line of questioning, in my judgement, is patently false if not childish. I have said for three answers in a row, and I repeat again — in a row.

We have a dispute amongst auditors. Ernst & Young — using that firm as an example — is no slouch when it comes to auditing. I think they know something about auditing. They have professional standards. SaskPower relied on Ernst & Young's advice. The member from Melfort is in business. He hires chartered accountants, no doubt, to do his auditing and he relies on their advice.

And there will be disputes, and there is a dispute in this area, and there's a dispute that the Provincial Auditor himself recognizes is not free from doubt. That's all the minister was doing, was explaining . . . he was explaining the questions that were put to him by the opposition and by the Provincial Auditor on this issue. I think it's a legitimate matter for contention. We'll see what the CICA board says in due course and take the appropriate action at that time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, if it was such a trivial issue that the auditor was totally unprepared for, then I simply have to ask: is why did he issue a special report about this very issue? He knew what he was talking about; he knew what his position was, and he was raising a very legitimate concern.

And, Mr. Premier, by you allowing the minister of SaskPower to politicize this issue and to allow the minister to take this as a personal attack on the Provincial Auditor, you have discredited the whole Crown Corporations Committee and the process that that committee should be following.

Will the Premier explain why his ministers are being allowed to use the Crown Corporations Committee to attack legislative officials rather than using it to ask legitimate questions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, our ministers do not use legislative committees or this legislature to attack officers of this Assembly. It has not happened; it's not going to happen under my administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I suspect that the Premier should attend some of these meetings then because obviously anyone that was attended at that meeting knew what this was last Thursday — it was an attack on the credibility of the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Premier, if that's the way you're going to operate it, will you at least commit that this auditor's report should go to the Public Accounts Committee for review? Because that is a financial review committee, and because your ministers aren't at those committee meetings, at least we can have this done in a non-partisan, serious way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again I stand to be corrected by the procedures of the House, but I think the Public Accounts Committee gets all Provincial Auditor's reports. So I don't know what the big applause and the big purpose of the question is. The report is out and it's obvious what the words of the report say. And it's obvious that the Provincial Auditor says that there is a dispute amongst accountants as to how you list this matter. And it's going to be resolved by the CICA. And when the CICA resolves it we'll know what the CICA says, and we'll take the appropriate action thereafter.

So if the member said should it go to Public Accounts, I think I'm correct in saying it does go to Public Accounts in any event. So no problem there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister of SaskPower. Mr. Minister, exactly how much did you spend on getting a bunch of accounting firms to second-guess the Provincial Auditor? If it's bad enough that consumers are paying a record high power rates and \$14 million in reconstruction fees, now they have to pay extra for your political reconstruction fee. So you can reconstruct history and say that this \$14 million isn't really revenue.

In fact I heard you and your accountants refer to the reconstruction fee as a loan. Mr. Minister, if I'm loaning Jack Messer money, I'd like to call that loan today. And I'm sure that everyone else in the province would also.

Mr. Minister, how much did your little failed public relations exercise cost SaskPower and Saskatchewan taxpayers? How much did you pay a bunch of accountants to come to the legislature and join your attack on the Provincial Auditor?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the member opposite that Ernst & Young was representing the corporation as their external auditor. I would also want to remind that member that Ernst & Young has acted on behalf of SaskPower for many years. As a matter of fact I can take you back to 1989-90 when Ernst & Young was the accountant on behalf of your party under a tender process, the same as it happened under this one.

Ernst & Young has consulted with a couple of major accounting firms in Canada, and has received the same opinion to concur with what their recommendation was to SaskPower. I want to remind the member that this is a dispute between two auditors. We pay and do pay through our Crowns, through a tendering process, professional, widely renowned across this country firms. And for this member to indicate that they are other than professional, I would only say to him, he might want to go out and repeat those comments outside.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not questioning the credibility. We're asking you: how much did you, SaskPower and Jack Messer, spend to get a gang of accountants to come in here and attack the Provincial Auditor?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you what the accountant fees were but I can tell you that the officials certainly will have those numbers, and that number will be offered through the Crown Corporations Committee which is the appropriate place for those kinds of detailed questions to be asked.

And as the member will know, SaskPower will be sitting before the Crown Corporations Committee shortly and that's certainly one of the questions that I would urge him to ask.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Auditor Spring Report

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, I want to know if you've learned anything from the SaskPower minister's little public relations disaster of last week. Later today the Provincial Auditor releases his spring report. So I guess what we're wondering, and I think the people of Saskatchewan are wondering, if we're going to see a repeat of the SaskPower minister's disgusting display last week.

If there are areas in the report that he releases today that are critical of your government, are we going to see you hauling in accountants from all over Canada to launch another full-scale attack on the auditor's credibility? Or can you assure us and other members of this Assembly and all members of Saskatchewan that you will treat the auditor's recommendations with the respect they deserve instead of resorting to the tactics displayed by the minister last week?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I repeat again to the

Leader of the Third Party the same answer which I gave to the Liberal Party. This side of the House treats every officer of the Legislative Assembly with respect.

That is not to say that in every instance where there is an opinion offered by an officer of the Assembly that we cannot take issue with it if we have legitimate grounds and rationale for doing the same. In the case of SaskPower we think we do have legitimate grounds, as evidenced by Ernst & Young and the other chartered accountants and their advice to SaskPower as to what should take place.

With respect to the Provincial Auditor's report to be tabled later this day, we'll see what he has to say. In some areas undoubtedly . . . in some areas we'll undoubtedly try our best to comply with his recommendations — in most of the areas. If there's an area where we disagree with him for legitimate accounting or other reasons, we'll express that. We've done it in the past. Nobody is under any personal attack here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Reconstruction Charges

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much. I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier.

What are the chances of other Crowns introducing reconstruction fees that will take millions of dollars out of the pockets of taxpayers without recording this money as revenue?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, there are no plans to introduce any new fees, as the member opposite, I believe, knows. This fee was introduced as a part of a public review process where it was suggested that there would be a rate increase and a reconstruction charge which would be handled in this fashion in order to replace an ageing infrastructure in the power sector; and each Crown will look after its own interests in terms of providing for its future capital investment and we will make sure that it fits with the generally accepted practices.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Reform

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Minister, once again NDP government polling shows two things very clearly. One, health care is the most important issue in the province of Saskatchewan. And number two, health care is the area where the NDP is doing the poorest job.

In January, approval of your government's handling of health care sank to an all-time low of 23 per cent. As bad as that is, most people expect it to get worse — 62 per cent expect the health system in Saskatchewan to deteriorate over the next 10 years.

Mr. Minister, it is clear that Saskatchewan people regard NDP health reform as a dismal failure. What are you going to do to address this crisis of confidence in your government's handling

of health care?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to tell the member and the House that the latest polling showed that of the people that use health services in Saskatchewan, 86 per cent of those who used health services in the past year, Mr. Speaker, found them to be good or excellent. Because the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan has one of the best health care systems in the world — a medicare system opposed by the Conservatives, opposed by the Liberals, still opposed by those parties if you listen to the two-tier rhetoric that they come up with, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to issue a challenge to that member as I did to the Liberal members — which challenge has gone unanswered so far, Mr. Speaker. And that is this: since they like to get up day after day and say we don't have a good health care system in the province of Saskatchewan, I challenge them to rise in their place, Mr. Speaker, and tell us where in the world there's a better, more caring, and compassionate health care system than there is right here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, you really have to wonder why the government even does this polling. And it's quite obvious that they have extensive polling so that they hope they can pull one good comment out of the polling at the end of the day, especially when their poll shows that more than 62 per cent of the public of this province disapprove of the way they are handling health care.

Mr. Speaker, it seems that the government, every time it puts a poll on and every time it listens to the people, then the minister puts on the blinders and says, everything is fine, as he just told us. Mr. Minister, when a person gets diagnosed with a terminal illness, they usually go through five phases. I see that you're going through denial, but everyone else in Saskatchewan has already moved on to anger and fear.

Mr. Minister, why do you do these polls if you refuse to listen to them? When are you going to start addressing the crisis in confidence in your health care system?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to point out is that that member, like the Liberal members, refuses to tell the people where they have a better health care system than the province of Saskatchewan. Because we have a very good health care system, Mr. Speaker, and the record of this party and this government — which was to found the medicare system in our country, Mr. Speaker — has been a good record and it's going to continue to be a good record.

And we're going to continue to build our health care system, Mr. Speaker, which is a far cry from what Conservatives do in office or what Liberals do in office, Mr. Speaker. Because when the Conservatives were in office federally, do you know what they did? They started cutting back on the transfer payments to the provinces for health care, and that's been continued by the Liberals.

There's no difference between the Liberals and Conservatives, Mr. Speaker. And that's why the latest edition of the Canadian Medical Association *News* has this headline. It says: "Ottawa fails to protect medicare." They failed to protect medicare, Mr. Speaker, but we're going to protect it on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farming Taxation Rules

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few days, Mr. Speaker, a number of farmers have contacted my office with a very legitimate question. Because a certain percentage of their grain sales are used for capital purchases each year, they wish to know if they can designate part of these sales as expenditures, and not as income.

Will the Minister of Agriculture indicate whether his government feels this is a reasonable request?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the accounting practices and the rules of taxation are set out very clearly. This government will always consider farmers' requests as serious requests. We're willing to look at this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this House knows, the auditor suggested that \$14 million this government collected from SaskPower as new reconstruction charge should be reported as revenue. This government maintains of course, as we've heard earlier today, that because these funds will help pay for infrastructure upgrades and reconstruction, it should not be listed as revenue.

Mr. Speaker, farmers, or for that matter any business person, uses part of his or her income to improve their business in one way or another. Will the minister in charge of Crown Investments Corporation explain, if this government can decide that part of its revenue should not be included as income, why can't individuals then?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I see how the member is trying to twist around the issues here and see where he's going. I'll tell you, the bigger concern — and we always will, like I say, consider what farmers are requesting as far as income tax purposes are concerned — but what the member opposite should be, should be asking is how fast can we make sure that the federal government gets our grain to market. Why aren't they working on that?

We're going to have, we're going to have, with dropping grain prices, some problems for the Crow benefit gone. I'd like to know what the member's going to do about that, talking to his federal partners, Mr. Speaker.

I think, Mr. Speaker, in the last year there's been several

hundreds of millions of dollars cut out of the farmers' pockets by the Liberals in Ottawa, the cousins of these Liberals.

I find it very amusing that they will stand up in this House and try to convolute the issues, convolute the issues and make cheap politics out of what could be a serious issue in Saskatchewan and that is our net farm income.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage these members to go and talk to Mr. Goodale, who has done very little for Saskatchewan in terms of the federal government and tell him to start working for the farmers of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Evidently what's good for the goose is not good for the gander in terms of this government's eyes. Mr. Speaker, maybe the Premier could answer: if the government can hide revenues, then why will he not allow the people of the province to do the same thing? And that's exactly what's he doing. Why, Mr. Premier, what's good for the goose is not good for the gander in your eyes?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, the federal government in this country, in this country, has taken hundreds of millions of dollars out of the pockets of prairie farmers. We have a transportation system, we have a transportation system that has cost the farmers of this province hundreds of millions of dollars. We have demurrage payments.

We see the federal minister a couple of weeks ago saying that he was going to do something about transportation of grain. A couple of hours later, his office said he was just kidding. Yet now he's saying they're going to try to do something again to ensure the movement of grain.

I think what the member opposite should be doing is standing in his place and telling us . . . tabling his correspondence to make sure that the Wheat Board legislation gets through and that the federal government is serious about moving our grain to port.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 50 — The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 50, The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 51 — The Arts Board Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 51, The Arts Board Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be

read a second time at the next sitting.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day and pursuant to section 14 of The Provincial Auditor Act, I now table the *Report of the Provincial Auditor*, the 1997 spring report.

Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly to make a statement.

Leave granted.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, as the member from Swift Current said a few weeks ago, in Saskatchewan we have learned to respond to challenges from nature in a number of ways. Blizzards, drought, hail, wind — we've experienced them all and accept them as part of the challenge of living here on the Prairies.

Mr. Speaker, what we are not so used to are floods. Last spring, and this one as well, we've had high water, some property damage, some roads washed out, and a great deal of inconvenience for Saskatchewan residents.

But I think it's fair to say that considering the amount of snowfall both winters, we've been substantially flood proof, and we've been very lucky here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in the past few days, as we and the people across North America and really around the world have watched the news, we know by comparison just how lucky we have been. Our neighbours to the south in North Dakota are experiencing floods that are called "once in a century" if not more, and the Red River has created havoc in Grand Forks, a city of 50,000 people. The people are now without water and electricity, and to compound their suffering, fire has destroyed part of the downtown area.

The sights on our TV screens of fire burning in the middle of floods is truly astonishing and it serves to remind us of how powerful nature can be and, by contrast, how little we can do when the forces of nature turn against us. It's being said that it will be a full two years before life returns to normal in Grand Forks, if then.

And as we know, the Red River flows out of North Dakota into Manitoba through Winnipeg, and in that province people are bracing and preparing themselves for a record crest of the river. It's some comfort to them that they can watch the progress of the flood and prepare themselves accordingly, and I know huge efforts are being made to protect life and property in Winnipeg and in Manitoba.

And, Mr. Speaker, to the west, both in Alberta and British Columbia, there is also flooding or the threat of flooding in some of the communities — not to the same extent, but serious

none the less. Particularly, the town of Peace River has had its downtown core flooded, although fortunately most residential areas were spared.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all members will join me in expressing our empathy and moral support for the states and provinces that are under siege from flooding. We also join, I am sure, in stating our admiration for the heroic struggles taking place to fight back the waters — a losing one in some cases but a noble one none the less.

We know that the human spirit and the determination have already displayed . . . have been displayed, will enable them to rebuild once the waters recede. And I know we all wish them the best and express our support for them.

And, Mr. Speaker, when the remarks are concluded, I intend to move a motion, seconded by the Government House Leader:

That the proceedings by all parties be forwarded to the mayors, governors, and premiers of the affected locales.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Is leave granted by the House to allow the Leader of the Opposition and others to comment?

Leave granted.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The official opposition also extends its condolences and heartfelt thoughts to the thousands of people ravaged by the floods and fires in North Dakota. During such widespread disaster, humankind's lack of clout against mother nature becomes painfully evident.

We would like to extend our prayers and best wishes for all those trying to piece their lives back together in the Dakotas. We also wish all Canadians in Manitoba who will be affected by the flow of water along the Red River, a very safe next couple of weeks and wish them all the best. Thank you very much.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Conservative opposition wants to join all members of the House this afternoon to send our thoughts and our prayers to our friends in North Dakota.

Last week we all watched the news and listened to the reports of the city of Fargo and how these Midwesterners were fighting to protect their homes and businesses from the ravages of the Red River. I'm sorry to say that the dyke broke in Fargo late last week and about a third of the city's south end was flooded.

Our hearts and support go out to all of those in Fargo, Alida, and several other small towns along the Red River, and we haven't heard much about the suffering as well from those folks. Newscasts say it'll be about another week before they are safe from further flooding.

More recently, Mr. Speaker, the thousands of families in Grand Forks, North Dakota have been the focus of the news coverage. Seventy-five per cent of over 60,000 citizens in Grand Forks

had to evacuate their homes and businesses and spent their days in air force base hangars with other victims. This has been truly devastating, Mr. Speaker, and the damages can't even really begin to be estimated at this point.

We understand President Clinton has declared a state of national disaster and thousands of National Guard, Red Cross, and other volunteers are doing their best to help out the very difficult situation.

Mr. Speaker, these people are prairie people, much like ourselves. While they are in the midst of turmoil, volunteers to help have actually had to be turned away because so many individuals have turned up to help out in this situation.

That says a lot, Mr. Speaker, about the types of people North Dakotans and prairie people are in general. They are hardy and hard-working, and I know with our help and the help of many concerned, they'll be able to rebuild their homes, their businesses, and their lives.

They are also a giving people, Mr. Speaker. When the Red was rising in Fargo, North Dakota State University cancelled classes so thousands of university students could help sandbag. And they all turned out and helped out. People from all across North Dakota and Minnesota helped out those in need.

I'm thankful, Mr. Speaker, that the Rafferty-Alameda dams are preventing this same fate for areas like Estevan or Minot. If not for these important structures, we could be watching the same news reports for those areas as well. Rather than just providing moral support, these structures are tangible support, and we've had numerous phone calls from the people that say the same.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that all parties here join today to convey our heartfelt wishes to the people of North Dakota. Hopefully the flood waters will recede very quickly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to take a moment as well to join in with other members in support of this motion being brought forward by the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the flood damage that we're seeing and the flooding that we're seeing taking place in North Dakota, and certainly that's now headed up into the Manitoba area, has even brought a little closer to home . . . as neighbours of ours who were just a mile and a half down the road moved to the area of Portage La Prairie. We called on Saturday evening just to see how they were doing. Unfortunately we just got to talk to the young daughter because they were out sandbagging, helping their neighbours to try and protect their property as the flooding on the Red progresses north.

Mr. Speaker, it's just another reminder of how human we are. And despite all our abilities, there are times when nature certainly just shows that it still has the upper hand. And I guess as human beings, we can . . . we show how thoughtful . . . and our loving and compassionate ways by reaching out to people in

need.

While we're addressing the flood situation, I think as well we should just be mindful of the problems that were created by the severe winter. And I think of North Dakota and Montana ranchers who are right now, Mr. Speaker, just going out and counting up the loss in livestock as a result of this severe winter.

While the snow has created a problem, flooding is even expanding that problem. It's certainly important that we take a moment to reflect and I guess, if you will, Mr. Speaker, to say thank you, thank the good Lord for the country we live in — be thankful for the fact that we aren't being affected by these floods.

And I guess if there's one other thing to just be mindful of, Mr. Speaker, is — and the thing that I think brings it even closer to home — is we see the problems that people in Saskatchewan were affected with last year, and when you hear of flood or a major disaster to find out that you've carried insurance for so many years but insurance finds a way . . . or has basically through the years shown, well we don't really cover that.

And I think that's where it is important that we as individuals then pick up the slack. And I know that over the next few months, people — even though we've got an invisible boundary line between us and our neighbours to the south — people on both sides of the border are going to be showing how much they care not only by the way they're willing to work together right now to prevent damage, but even in the way they reach out to help as people recover from the damages as a result of the flooding.

So I certainly extend my heartfelt wishes that each one who is affected will certainly see the brighter side as the floods recede and as they get on with their lives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my remarks that I'd be moving a motion, I hereby move:

That the remarks made by all parties be forwarded to governors, mayors, and premiers of the affected areas.

I so move, seconded by the member from Watrous.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 38 — The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, the municipal employees'

pension plan provides benefits to municipal employees, school board employees, and designated police officers and fire-fighters. Over 700 employers and over 9,000 active and inactive employees participate in the plan. The plan currently pays benefits to about 2,400 members.

An amendment proposed in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, explicitly defines the term "salary" for the purpose of members' contributions to the plan, and benefits payable from the plan. This redefinition of the term salary will result in fairer treatment of part-time and seasonal employees participating in the pension plan.

The Bill facilitates the appointment of a representative from the Urban Municipal Administrators' Association to the nine-member commission that oversees the plan's operations. The commission represents major employers and interest groups participating in the plan, such as the Association of School Business Officials of Saskatchewan, the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association of Saskatchewan, and the urban employees.

Other amendments to the plan result in fairer benefits for plan members. Members who served a one-year waiting period prior to joining the plan will have the opportunity to purchase the one-year waiting period, giving them parity with employees now joining the plan. Members who leave their excess contributions in the pension plan upon their termination of employment will have the opportunity to convert those contributions to a defined benefit based on the option they choose at retirement.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, members transferring their pensionable service and money from their previous employer's pension plan to this pension plan will have the opportunity to purchase any service for which insufficient money is transferred under the terms of a reciprocal agreement. While enhancing the portability of pension assets, the amendment will allow the member to protect a pension asset for which he or she has received credit under a pension plan.

Other proposed amendments facilitate the pension plan's compliance with the Income Tax Act (Canada) and clarifies the rules for members contributing to the pension plan while in the receipt of disability benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 1997.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to The Municipal Employees' Pension Act and, Mr. Speaker, as the minister indicated, the plan provides benefits to municipal employees, school board employees, and designated police officers and fire-fighters.

Although some sections of this Bill are fairly non-controversial, there are others which will increase cost for the aforementioned employers. Mr. Speaker, this in and of itself may not be problematic. Individuals who contribute a significant number of years in public service without a doubt deserve a fair pension. With that aside, Mr. Speaker, despite what the government likes to say, they simply have not provided adequate funds to either

municipal government or to school boards to cover these increasing costs.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities and school boards are in a no-win situation. They do not have ultimate authority over wage determination for their employees nor do they have any control over the amount of funding that they receive in a year. Not only is the provincial government the ultimate arbitrator of funds, they also dictate to a large extent how these funds must be spent.

Given this centralized control, the only win situation for municipalities and school boards is if the government were to provide adequate funding to cover all these additional costs. Mr. Speaker, it is evident that this is not the case. Neither the municipal governments, school boards, taxpayers, or children of this province are winners because of the 1997-98 budget.

Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite do not believe my assessment of the situation, allow me to share with you the view of Mr. Al Klassen, the president of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association.

(1430)

According to Mr. Klassen, and I quote:

Last year the government agreed to salary increases for teachers which will cost school boards \$8 million in 1997. The \$8 million the government has put into school board operating grants will cover teacher salary increases and that's all. No additional money for anything else.

Mr. Klassen has also stated that, and I quote:

This budget represents a zero sum gain for boards, or worse. While the dollars to cover teacher salary increases have been provided, school boards face a wide range of other costs that are not covered. To suggest that Saskatchewan school divisions, and by extension students and their families, are better off as a result of this budget is truly a stretch.

It became very clear this last week, Mr. Speaker, that not only is this government underfunding education, it is also seriously underfunding municipal governments.

Mr. Speaker, last week my colleague from Saltcoats informed the members opposite that at least 106 municipalities, municipal governments, were concerned about the downloading of this government. The funding cut-backs handed down to municipal governments averaged 38 per cent. And this was only an average, Mr. Speaker. In some cases the cut-backs were as high as 95 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, because this government continues to offload its constitutional responsibilities, both of these systems are in a state of severe, severe underfunding.

Mr. Speaker, I find it very ironic that the members opposite rise in this Assembly on a daily basis and criticize the federal government for its cuts to transfer payments which, Mr.

Speaker, only represents one and one-half per cent of the total government funds.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan want to know how the members opposite can criticize the federal government for cut-backs which amounts to one and one-half per cent of their total budget when it has cut municipal governments to the tune of 38 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this situation draws out yet another inconsistency with this government. When the members opposite were in opposition, they were highly critical of the PCs (Progressive Conservative) because that administration cut government's traditional portion of education funding from 60 to 40 per cent, leaving the property owner with 60 rather than 40 per cent of the burden. The members opposite were very critical, Mr. Speaker, yet they have done nothing, not one single thing, to reverse this trend.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for this government to take responsibility for such areas as municipal government and education, which are their constitutional responsibility. Mr. Speaker, I would go so far as suggesting that the members opposite revisit section 92 of the constitution and refresh their memories on what areas they are in fact responsible for.

Mr. Speaker, this government must take a serious look at the results of its offloading. One result of government cuts has been fighting between and within communities and school boards over appropriate solutions to the grave dilemma they are in. The local taxpayers and officials are left to deal with the situation and, Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to wash its hands of the whole thing.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite cannot have it both ways. In this legislation, we see the government increasing costs for municipal governments and school boards with respect to pension plans. I would like to emphasize that on the surface this may not seem to be a problem, but we must consider the context in which this Act will be implemented. This government's intolerable offloading, and the increased financial burden shouldered by local taxpayers, will make these additional costs all the more painful to bear.

With these concerns, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate. We believe that further consultation with the affected groups is necessary before we can support this Bill. I therefore move adjournment of this motion. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 14

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lautermilch that **Bill No. 14 — The Water Corporation Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak again on this Bill. Two weeks ago I spoke to this Bill and raised several concerns, and I would like to take a few minutes today to discuss them even further.

A discussion of Sask Water seems especially timely considering the recent flooding in so much of our province, and this government's lack of commitment to help people affected by the flooding damages. When we called on the government for disaster relief the member from Prince Albert Northcote said the government could not yet act because the damage had not been assessed. Well, Mr. Speaker, municipalities are assessing the damage as we speak, and are busy putting together their requests for relief. Unfortunately until the applications find their way through the bureaucracy, municipalities will have to shoulder the costs of reconstruction.

This burden is especially onerous given that municipalities are faced with Draconian revenue-sharing cost-cutting. The member also said the government would work with local governments to minimize the impact on their areas. I certainly hope they stick to this commitment.

There have been hundreds of thousands of dollars damage done to homes, machinery, and personal belongings. Roads have been wiped out and bridges swept away, worsening the already dangerous road conditions in this province.

Not only has the government shown a lack of commitment to rebuilding Saskatchewan roads, it has not acted on its promise to aid communities affected by flooding. How can municipalities be expected to cope when revenue-sharing grants have been drastically cut by up to 90 per cent? People are frustrated and angry and it is incumbent upon the government to alleviate their concerns.

Lately people have been paying a lot of attention to the Crown corporations, like Sask Water's new advance into business called SPUDCO. The NDP has been crowing about the Crown dividends paid to the government this year and they brag about how well they are doing with people's investments.

What they are not bragging about is the rate of return; that is only .625 per cent. They are not bragging about losing \$16 million in a bad SaskTel deal. And they are certainly ashamed — or they should be — about their attack on the Provincial Auditor when he rightly pointed out that Sask Water was under-reporting profits. I'm waiting most impatiently to see how our Water Corporation makes out in the potato business, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this provides interesting grist for the mill but my purpose here today is to discuss Sask Water and the Bill before us. Mr. Speaker, let me turn to the clause dealing with expropriation. This amendment will take the power of expropriation from the government and give it to Sask Water.

As people in the Condie area well know, having your land expropriated is a painful and frustrating experience. Taking someone's land affects the very livelihood and dignity of an individual. We all know in Saskatchewan how important land is and what it means to our farmers. It's often more than just an

income; it's a way of life.

Because of the seriousness of expropriation, because of the seriousness of meddling with individuals' rights, the decision to expropriate should be made by duly elected representatives of the people. Somehow it seems inappropriate to me to have Crown corporations with no obvious ties to anything but the bottom line of a balance sheet make these kinds of decisions.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill talks about reducing the regulatory process for urban municipalities which are undertaking sewage or waterworks projects. This is all supposed to be for the benefit of reducing regulations.

Reducing government regulation is of course a very good idea. Everyone knows how frustrating red tape is. And regulatory overlap like there was between Sask Water and Sask Environment and Resource Management is definitely a waste of time and of money.

It is especially frustrating to the people of Saskatchewan and the Liberal opposition that this government has a habit of ruling by regulation rather than legislation. So any time we can reduce the opportunity for government to rule by regulation, the better off we all are.

Speaking of regulations and red tape, I have concerns about the changes to the rules requiring registration of approvals at the Land Titles Office. The government is proposing to suspend all licences and replace them with approvals. It would seem that this is simply a housekeeping measure. But where's the guarantee that a new approval will be issued, and who is responsible for making these decisions?

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that this government make clear what the responsibilities are in this regard. And it is vital that we avoid the possibility of arbitrary decision making where, in certain situations, approvals may not be issued.

I am concerned that this Bill does not clear up all of the administrative tape. There are still questions to be answered. New approvals will have to be registered with the Land Titles Office. Will they be registered as a caveat or an easement? And the answer to these questions could impact land transactions.

In their effort to fulfil treaty obligations to Indian bands, the federal government must have jurisdiction over certain bodies of water which normally fall within provincial jurisdiction. The Bill before us will allow for this.

The issue of treaty rights is a contentious one. And this is why the government must be absolutely clear with the people of Saskatchewan about what is happening when land is handed over for the settlement of treaty obligations. This must be not only a fulfilment of our obligations, but an exercise in public education.

People have come to us with concerns that the government is not consulting enough with local residents and has not explained the process of land grants. Because this is a potentially volatile issue, the government must do all it can to alleviate people's fears.

We need to raise questions about the problems of access, the usage of the water, environmental regulations, and so on, when we give up jurisdiction over the bodies of water. I am concerned about how adequately these issues will be addressed.

All of these concerns and more will come up in greater detail in the Committee of the Whole, and I move the Bill be passed on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the whole, this is a positive Bill and our caucus supports it, with one very important exception, Mr. Speaker.

In general, this Bill strives to eliminate red tape and over-regulation. Once again, it is pleasing to see the government adopt a page out of the Conservative campaign platform. The NDP took our 2 per cent cut on the PST (provincial sales tax), Mr. Speaker, that plank, out of our campaign. And now they're taking another plank, which is the reduction of red tape, bureaucracy, and over-regulation, Mr. Speaker. So to Dr. Melenchuk, though, I should inform him that we only meet with the government occasionally to discuss our platform and for them to take our ideas.

Now in light of this, Mr. Speaker, we would like to renew our invitation to the members of the government caucus to come across the floor and join our caucus where their new-found conservative ideals will no longer be subject to the needless and unfounded criticisms of the NDP Party membership.

The first major change made by this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is the elimination of the need for municipalities to submit detailed plans for pipeline systems. They need to maintain those plans themselves, Mr. Speaker, but there's really no need to keep transferring them into a central body all the time. Whenever companies are going to do work in the area, they have to go to the municipality for agreements anyway, Mr. Speaker, and they can check at that point as to what is in the ground.

Our caucus has no longer . . . has long tried to stress to this government that municipalities run the most efficient and responsible governments in the province. Allowing them this greater autonomy recognizes the excellent work and high skill that municipal leaders have shown over the years.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill also eliminates paperwork for landowners who operate dams on their own land. As the minister pointed out in his speech, if land containing a dam is sold, the new owner had to submit a new application to Sask Water for an operation that had long since been approved — simply a replication of the previous application, Mr. Speaker, and previous approvals.

The change frees up time that farmers had been wasting filling out forms instead of running their farms, Mr. Speaker. It also saves the government money in terms of staff resources to process these needless applications. So again we support this change.

However, the one area of this Bill that we do not support is the

increased power of Sask Water to expropriate easements on land without orders in council, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, this is very dangerous whenever you give a government agency more power to run roughshod over the rights of property owners.

(1445)

And as you know, Mr. Speaker, I have a particular interest in property rights and have brought forward many times in this House Bills which would actually give the people of Saskatchewan the right to hold property.

The minister gave the excuse that Sask Water is the only Crown required to receive an order in council to make expropriations. To me, this is quite simply a case of two wrongs not making a right. The rights of property owners have already been deteriorated by allowing expropriations without orders in councils by the other Crowns. This negative situation will only be worsened by extending this unjustified right to Sask Water.

The decision by a government to expropriate land, Mr. Speaker, should always be as a last resort and the Crown should always have to jump through as many hoops as possible to be able to implement this regrettable policy.

The previous government, Mr. Speaker, certainly learned about the need to jump through hoops while the NDP members opposite did all they could to make sure that those hoops, Mr. Speaker, were rings of fire when it came to the expropriation of any lands dealing with the Alameda and Rafferty projects. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the lands there are still not expropriated. Now however, the NDP believe that government has no need to provide notification or, indeed no political accountability, by authorizing the expropriation, as in the case of the Condie power line and SaskPower, Mr. Speaker.

When the government must provide an OC (order in council) it's available for people to see; it's available for people to see who signed that order in council allowing for that expropriation, Mr. Speaker. This change to this particular Act will no longer make that available. Now the minister of the Crown will no longer be responsible for that expropriation.

It will simply be the Crown corporation that is doing it and it takes the political heat off of the minister responsible. We believe that the minister should bear that burden; that they are elected to represent the people and they should accept their responsibility as well as the benefits of being a minister of the Crown.

Mr. Speaker, while our caucus supports most parts of this Bill, we have serious reservations about these expropriation powers and we would like to examine it in more detail in Committee of the Whole, where we will be considering bringing forward appropriate amendments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill No. 47

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed

motion by the Hon. Mr. Upshall that **Bill No. 47 — The Psychologists Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to comment on The Psychologists Act today. There's one thing upon which all psychologists in the province of Saskatchewan can agree, and that is that all psychologists should be registered. It's important that a profession is empowered to first of all police itself, and secondly and equally importantly, protect the public.

And to do this, changes most certainly had to be made to the outdated and ineffective Act of 30-odd years ago. And I would say that the majority of them, Mr. Speaker, are welcomed, but there are some proposed changes that are not eagerly embraced. There are some that I truly hope will be amended because they can be improved, and without modification I think that they're going to lead to ongoing division in psychology in this province.

Of equal significance, without amendments, are going to be the implications as far as the standards of psychology for the province of Saskatchewan.

I'd like to be more specific if I may, Mr. Speaker. First of all I have spoken not only with the minister but one of his employees as well as a member of a committee for this House that was examining this Bill. And I spoke with them in exactly the way that I will be addressing this Assembly this afternoon.

I felt that of primary importance was, first of all, the need for all members of this profession to agree. It was extraordinarily important that these people — psychology professionals who are both doctoral trained, master's-level trained and so forth in the province of Saskatchewan — reach a compromise.

And I must say that I was extremely disappointed that this did not take place. Not totally surprised, but very disappointed. Especially when I read from different members of the profession of psychology that they felt that they were reaching a compromise and were stunned, to say the least, when they found out that this in fact was being brought forward to the House.

It's not surprising, Mr. Speaker, that members of this Assembly would receive many letters of endorsement on this particular Bill. And the reason for that is because the majority of people in Saskatchewan who are in the profession of psychology are not Ph.D.-level trained. It's unfortunate, but it happens to be the case in our province. So it is not surprising that there are greater numbers that would come to us that in fact state that they are in favour of it.

I want to speak to some specific issues. These specific issues include title distinction, they include the transitional council, and they will include supervision and a few other points as well, in particular the grandparenting provisions and the conflict of interest bylaw and so forth.

Let me begin with title distinction. It's interesting Mr. Speaker. When I met with people about this, one of the things that was raised was the difficulty that people in Saskatchewan would

have in understanding exactly the differences between psychologists if they didn't all have the same title. And I find that rather an absurd argument, Mr. Speaker.

For example, we do have ophthalmologists in the province of Saskatchewan and our citizens have little difficulty differentiating between an ophthalmologist and an optometrist. We have orthodontists in the province of Saskatchewan and our citizens are bright enough to be able to differentiate between an orthodontist and a dentist. We have lawyers in the province of Saskatchewan and no one seems to have any difficulty knowing the difference between a lawyer and a paralegal. And yet when it came to this particular professional field, Mr. Speaker, it appears as though the Government of Saskatchewan doesn't think that our citizenry are bright enough to be able to distinguish between this profession on the basis of its training. I found that insulting at the very least, as far as the people of our province are concerned.

We have extraordinary psychologists in our province, some of whom are trained at the master's level. These are highly competent people, people with a great deal of experience, people who have been well trained. There is no question that they have these kinds of characteristics.

We also have highly trained, highly competent and very experienced people at the Ph.D. level.

So there is no question about that, Mr. Speaker, and there is no question at all that all of them should be registered in order to protect the people of Saskatchewan as well as to ensure policing of this particular profession.

What is very interesting, however, Mr. Speaker, is that somehow we think that if we differentiate between the members of this particular professional group that it somehow will undermine people who are not trained at the Ph.D. level, and I find that utterly absurd.

Similarly, when we're talking about the transitional council, there must be fairness. If there's not fairness, the whole purpose of the transitional council will collapse. For example, it is very, very unwise for the inequality that is now being suggested in this proposed Act and it's very unfortunate that what has happened is, in essence, to coalesce the two groups that have the least training, the least education, and to make them outnumber the group that has the most.

Now I'm going to give the analogy that I made earlier about the field of law. Mr. Speaker, I really do pose this question to the Minister of Health, in essence, whose profession is law, and I ask him how he would feel if in fact paralegals were to join in a transitional council with lawyers; and that in the province of Saskatchewan, if it were the similar situation as there is with the profession of psychology, that that group of paralegals actually outnumbered the lawyers in that transitional council, would that be considered to be equal, would it be considered to be fair, and would it be considered to be wise?

Well I don't think any of the above, Mr. Speaker. And what concerns me, we are not making comment on the competency of the paralegal, were not making comment on their experience or their ability to carry out their work and do so in an

extraordinary way, but why is it that one would want to create a transitional council where in fact members of the group for educational psychologists and the one for master's-level trained psychologists in Saskatchewan, would actually outnumber that group, which is Ph.D.-level psychologists. It doesn't stand to reason. And I most certainly hope that the minister will bring forward House amendments and, if not, will at least consider those that will be brought forward by me or others.

To further comment, Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that is also important is looking at supervision, and there have been suggestions as far as what we consider to be minimal supervision. I know of people who, in this province, were trained at the doctoral level and in the past were never even able to consider themselves or call themselves psychologists, with a doctorate in clinical psychology, unless they had gone through registration. And registration not only included exams and oral exams but also a certain level of supervision.

Surely in order to protect the members of the public who will be going to people considering themselves . . . putting themselves in front of individuals who are well-trained and so forth and professional people, that at the very least we can ensure that all people, before they are grandfathered into this . . . grandparented into this new Act, will be considered to have to go through certain minimum requirements for supervision.

I think it is a sad commentary perhaps, in our province that we have so few doctoral-level psychologists here; it's not a problem faced in other provinces. But if what we do is actually minimize the importance of the highest training available for people, what we also do is minimize the importance of one of the most important departments at one of our universities in this province. And that is a department which has received recognition not only from the Canadian Psychological Association but the American Psychological Association.

If I may reiterate, Mr. Speaker, I want to state the following: I have worked with people with a broad range of training; I have been proud to work with all of them. I believe that all of us should in fact be required to be registered in our province. It is a good thing. It's good for the profession and it most certainly is going to be better for the public.

At the same time, it's extremely important for us to understand that, when we're dealing with a profession in this House, that we consider it as equally important to any other profession, to be thoughtful about the implications that this will have on its membership; to ensure that when there is a minority, that those minority interests are well represented and protected because they too are going to contribute in an extraordinary way and have to this overall profession and treatment for people in the province of Saskatchewan.

I hope that the minister will entertain the kinds of changes that I think are warranted in this new psychologist Act. And at this point, Mr. Speaker, without going into any further detail about the conflict of interest bylaw regarding public appointees or protection of terms and so forth, which I will continue to raise with the minister, I will adjourn debate in hope that the government will consider House amendments. Move to adjourn. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

(1500)

Bill No. 28

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No 28 — The Family Maintenance Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this chance to address some of the amendments proposed within Bill No. 28, The Family Maintenance Act.

As my colleague from North Battleford so eloquently pointed out, we are hopeful that Bill No. 28 will make some long-overdue changes to Saskatchewan's systems of establishing child support payments.

Right across Canada provinces are trying to bring their own legislation in line in order to complement the changes that are also being introduced at the federal level. However it is my hope that this Bill will consider both the financial and emotional health of the children of divorced couples.

In this day and age divorce is becoming increasingly frequent. Some studies predict that one in two marriages will end in divorce by the year 2000, and so millions of Canadian children are faced with that reality. Many children of divorced parents find themselves in the middle of bitter custody and maintenance battles. In addition to facing the challenges of overcoming the breakup of their traditional family unit, these children are often victimized again by prolonged legal battles and bitter feuds over other divorce arrangements.

Introducing some standardized guidelines on establishing child support payments is a welcome change if it succeeds in reducing the amount of time and money and emotional turmoil that often result from divorce litigation.

This legislation will still allow judges to have the overriding power to draft child support payments for special circumstances that are brought before the courts. But I'm hopeful that standard guidelines across Saskatchewan will make the process of arriving at child support payments much less complicated, less expensive, and less damaging to the children involved.

As my colleague from North Battleford stated, lawyers are often fond of saying that clients should not mix up the issue of child support with the issue of child access. But reality is quite different. If child support is a bitter and emotional and divisive issue, it is almost inevitable that visits by the non-custodial parent will be a time of turmoil and fighting.

Some recent studies have shown that child support and child access are often linked in reality. Many people I have spoken to about this Bill are concerned that governments at all levels have failed to consider these two issues jointly. They are concerned that the payer in the custody agreement, who is also the non-custodial parent, should also be granted more equitable access to their children.

And I believe that governments at all levels have also found this to be a difficult issue with which to grapple. The crux of the problem is that governments, the courts, and the parents have spent decades and millions of dollars trying to assess what is fair and equitable income support for children of divorce, because we all agree that children must be provided with enough income in order to be provided with the necessities to live.

And it's only very recently that research has started to delve into the deeper emotional matters surrounding the access issues of divorce. Canadian divorce statistics are on the rise and thousands more Saskatchewan children will certainly be exposed to the trauma of their parents' breakup. As parents and as elected members of this Assembly, we should all be more aware of the potential social impact that child support arrangements and child access arrangements are having on our youth. Above all, children must not be a bargaining chip.

I hope that governments at all levels can now begin focusing more attention and research to these very important issues that are shaping the emotional well-being of children across Canada. Many children of a divorce already bear the scars of an unsuccessful union of their parents; they should not be made to suffer any further because of a lack of social conscience in Canadian society.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few more concerns about Bill No. 28 that I'm still gathering input on. And so at this time I move to adjourn debate on this motion.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 23 — The Enforcement of Canadian Judgments Act Loi sur l'exécution des jugements canadiens

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to have with me today, Darcy McGovern from legislative services.

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to know if the minister could tell me, is this also the fruit of the uniform law commission? Is this an Act which you anticipate will be introduced in other legislatures and jurisdictions of Canada, and if so, what stage we're at in terms of other provinces of the country.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to confirm that this is legislation that comes from the uniform law conference. To date British Columbia and Prince Edward Island have already passed this particular Bill, and we anticipate that the others will come along in the next legislative sessions. So we would be the third one to pass this Bill.

Mr. Hillson: — Could the minister indicate if there are any

areas he sees that will result in any profoundly different practice in the province. It seems to me that while there are some details which may change, that in fact there is little substantial difference to present civil practice in the province and registration of foreign judgements.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the member is correct, that it will not cause a great deal of consternation in the legal profession or in the courts in Saskatchewan. The one thing that it will do, which will be of assistance, is that it will set out clearly the full faith and credit clause so that when all jurisdictions in Canada have this legislation passed, there will not be the necessary concern in the courts in Saskatchewan as to whether the other court that made the order had the jurisdiction to do that.

Mr. Hillson: — I note, Mr. Chairman, that there is reference in clause 4 to registration fees being charged. I would ask the minister if he could tell us what is contemplated there. Would this be a relatively nominal charge in order to cover the operations of our local registrar's office in the Court of Queen's Bench, or is it anticipated that significant charges would be levied for registration of a foreign judgement?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The current fee for registration is \$10, and that's under the regulations under The Queen's Bench Act. And we don't anticipate that that fee would change.

Mr. Hillson: — I note that under clause 6, judgements from other provinces cannot be enforced after the time limit for enforcing them has passed. Are any complications anticipated where limitation periods may be different in other provinces than they are here in terms of then giving rise to different legal rights for people registering a foreign judgement here from people who might be commencing a legal action here?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the clear rule set out here is that it would be the limitation period where the judgement was granted that would apply, but with the further proviso that if that in some way was longer than 10 years, it wouldn't be longer than 10 years in Saskatchewan since that's our rules here.

Mr. Hillson: — So in other words then, Mr. Minister, there might well be situations in which a legal action would be out of time in this province but because it started in another province, it would therefore be valid and registerable here.

(1515)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I think as you know, the enforceability of a judgement in Saskatchewan is 10 years; so that meshes with this. I think the question you're getting at again is the similar one as we were looking at it . . . the other legislation the other day, which is the project that uniform law conference has to try to set uniform limitation periods across the country.

And at this time we don't anticipate any problems, but there may be some places where there would be a slight question. But after the hopeful review of all the limitation periods, that any small concern would be eliminated as well.

Mr. Hillson: — There is reference in this Bill, Mr. Chairman, to a power to not register a judgement from another province where that judgement would be contrary to public policy. And that is contained in, I think, various places, including clause 7.

I realize, as you say, this came from uniform law conference, but I'm a little bit puzzled that the drafters would apparently think that there could be a judgement in another province that would be contrary to public policy. And I wonder if the minister could give me some example of what would have been on the drafter's mind in making this provision. What's a circumstance or situation it would really be designed to deal with?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Okay, I appreciate that question because it is a very good question. The classic example that common law . . . obviously are, you know, the rules around slavery, which then became against public policy in certain jurisdictions and so orders related to slavery would not be enforced.

In Canada we don't anticipate that there would be a problem; although the example that was discussed, and continues to be discussed, is a situation where there might be exorbitant damage awards made in one jurisdiction in Canada — say there's, you know, a hundred million dollar award that ends up then being enforced in Saskatchewan. And we wanted to leave some room there for the courts to review situations that seemed to be just really, really out of whack.

Mr. Hillson: — I believe, Mr. Minister, that even prior to our no-fault legislation, that awards in the province of Ontario arising out of motor vehicle mishaps were significantly higher than those generally awarded in our courts. And I suppose it would probably be fair to say that gap has increased enormously since no-fault.

And so you're saying that where someone has recovered a very high award in, say the province of Ontario, that it might not be automatic that that would be registered in Saskatchewan where a Saskatchewan victim would presumably be paid far less?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — No, that's not the understanding we have at all. I think the more important point is that it allows for that ability to challenge an award if it's against public policy. I think practically, in Canada, we would accept the fact that an Ontario award might be higher than what's here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hillson: — Does the minister have any indication as to when he intends this Act to come into force? Are there regulations in place or the rules of court? And can he indicate if Saskatchewan will proclaim this together with the other provinces or will we be proclaiming it on our own?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The present plan is to proclaim the legislation when we have a sufficient number of the provinces that will have passed the Bill. So when we're finished here that will be three, and we'll see what the results are from the other legislative sessions this spring. I'm not sure what the magic number is — six or seven, probably.

We're already in the process of contacting the chief judge in the Court of Queen's Bench to look at what kinds of discussions they need to change the rules to accommodate this particular

legislation. So that process will be commencing, and it's anticipated that all the rules will be in place before the Bill will be proclaimed.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, Canada does of course have nine common law provinces, twelve if you include the two territories — I mean eleven, if you include the two territories — and of course we have one civil code jurisdiction.

I note that in this case the Bill has been translated into both official languages. Do these principles relate specifically to either common law or civil code? Will they be difficult in translating to the other system, or do the principles contained in this Act really transcend civil code versus common law?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Quebec, the Government of Quebec, participates in the uniform law conference and makes sure that things mesh with their system. So it's our understanding that this would include whatever requirements they need so that judgements obtained in Quebec could be enforced in Saskatchewan and vice versa.

That's as far as we can go at this point. They haven't yet passed the legislation there, but we anticipate and the plan is that they would be included as well.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that that satisfies me that this is legislation which will be enacted by other provinces in the country . . . and that while this is a matter within provincial jurisdiction, obviously there is a strong public policy argument for having these provisions the same throughout all of our provinces.

And so it is good that our provincial Departments of Justice are cooperating so that the same provisions apply in all provinces. And I'm pleased to hear that's the case and I am satisfied that this is a sensible proposal for us to proceed with.

I would also like to thank the minister for his answers today and also for the attendance again of Mr. McGovern.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, welcome to you and your officials. This Act with respect to enforcement of maintenance orders is very important, as you know.

It's something that frankly, when I was elected I guess in 1991, I never thought that I would be sort of involved in the numbers of cases with respect to things of this nature and . . . Maybe I'm a little bit off topic here; I'm not sure. Were we on to the enforcement Act thing?

An Hon. Member: — No.

Mr. Boyd: — Oh, I'm sorry then, Mr. Chairman. I'll reserve my comments for the other later. I think the member from Moosomin has some comments with respect to this.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, regarding the Act — and I was listening to the member from North Battleford with his questions — as you indicated in your opening remarks regarding the reasons for the Act, you were talking about uniformity of law across . . . and I believe you're

looking at uniform legislation enacted across Canada. Right now it's just currently B.C. (British Columbia) and Prince Edward Island have brought forward legislation as such, dealing with the same matter.

I would like to know, Mr. Minister, in what way does this . . . In what areas will this bring our legal system into uniformity, if you will, or what's your view of how this will address judgements across Canada and the types of judgements that it will address? Is it an overall, blanket-type piece of legislation or are we referring to specific legislation?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the answer to your question is that this legislation covers everything except maintenance and fines. And what it does do is, clarifies and consolidates the rules that are presently there at common law. And I think the member from North Battleford asked about this particular question in the same way . . . I mean in another way, asking if there would be any disruption to the legal profession and to the courts.

I think the answer is no, that the law is fairly clear — this confirms it. But what it does do is it sets out common ways of assessing when the judgements can be enforceable right across the country. And so what we're doing here is making sure that every province has the same rules as far as enforcement go, so that we won't have to have our courts here wonder about a judgement in another province, except in extremely rare circumstances.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. If I heard you correctly, you mentioned it doesn't affect enforcement of maintenance Acts. Maybe you could just correct me on that.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — There's a separate legislation called The Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, and that covers that.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, and this is where I need a clarification as well. When you talk about uniformity of legislation and legal practice, I guess, or law under this legislation, a question comes to my mind — and maybe this doesn't fall under the legislation, but you can certainly correct me on that — is a situation that happens to have come into my care personally.

And we've talked about it, but I just want to see if this piece of legislation addresses the type of thing where a custody battle began in this province. It's basically where one of the partners has moved out of province and has now started legal action there, and it's really created a problem. Would this then put . . . When you're talking about uniformity of legislation, if a custody battle starts here, does it address it, that the custody battle . . . would there be . . . I guess if you will, we're taking down the interprovincial trade barriers; so that whether a case is started here and then proceeds in Manitoba or vice versa, that there will be a correlation of legal services, or am I off on a different track? Is this not really addressed under this piece of legislation?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I think you are off on a little bit of a different track, because this legislation applies only to judgements for payment of money other than maintenance

orders or fines. And so it's specifically for money orders, if you can put it that way.

Mr. Toth: — And I thank you, Mr. Minister. I was gathering that's where it was going but I just wanted to raise the matter for clarification so that down the road . . . Because I think that there's other areas that need to be addressed as well in how we deal with some issues when it comes to inter-provincially. And whether they can be addressed or not, I don't know, but it's probably something that need to be looked at at a later date in some of these questions.

And certainly when we get into the department, there'll be an issue that I'll be talking with you about to try and find some way of coming to an understanding of how we can correct some of these inequities, if you will, within the system.

Mr. Minister, does your department have any idea of how many cases or judgements this may affect in any given year? Have you done a study that would kind of indicate, once this legislation is passed, of how many cases may come before the department in regards to this specific piece of legislation?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I don't have the exact numbers. But practically, we do have a system already which will continue to exist until this one comes in place and it's under The Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments Act. So practically we don't anticipate any great increase or decrease, but what we do anticipate is eliminating some of the questions or concerns that arise. And so in many ways this is a housekeeping kind of Bill that will hopefully create a better system over the longer term.

Mr. Toth: — So this piece of legislation then is basically addressing, say another piece of legislation that's already in effect, and it's basically giving a broader interpretation to the reciprocal — what was it? — house agreement Act I think you talked about, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the answer would be that it improves as it relates to Canadian judgements because that Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments Act would also apply to judgements from England or Australia or from one of the states in the United States.

Mr. Toth: — I understand the member from the Battlefords asked how soon you expect this piece of similar legislation to be passed in other provinces, and I think you'd indicated that you weren't sure. You expected in the near future . . . Have you run into any provinces who are somewhat reluctant to bring forward this type of legislation?

(1530)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Not that we know of. As you can understand, when the uniform law conference meets, there are representatives from every jurisdiction in Canada — the federal government and 10 provinces and 2 territories. And normally problems are identified at that level, and a Bill is not sent forward for adoption across the country if there are concerns that are registered by a particular jurisdiction. So I would have to say that given the process, this is one that has cleared everybody's concerns.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, a further question going to section 6, the time limit for registration and enforcement. I understand you've said in the legislation a limit of 10 years. And I'm wondering exactly how that period of time was arrived at. Would it have been possible to look at a shorter time period? Or what were the reasons behind this 10-year limit, and does this 10-year limit just drag out a process that leaves, let's say individuals wondering when they will see maintenance or judgements enforced and certainly followed through on?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think if I understand your question correctly, you're asking about the 10 years and why 10 years. Practically 10 years, if the judgement has not be collected, say you have a judgement for \$50,000 against a neighbour and he can't pay you in those 10 years, it's possible to renew the judgement for another 10 years in the last year, as long as you do it before the judgement expires. So it's possible these judgements could extend for quite a period of time.

But practically, and as many people know, if you don't collect your money from somebody fairly soon after it's due, the chances of collecting it later decrease quite rapidly. And in fact by the time you get a judgement, it's often quite difficult to collect from people.

So if you wait for 10 years after you have a judgement, I think that you're sort of waiting for the person to win a lottery or inherit some money from a rich uncle or something. So you're not basing it on the fact that you can collect from that person based on their own hard work and effort.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Unfortunately, if I understand you correctly then, you may take a case to a particular court to seek a judgement in a certain area. You may receive a judgement awarded by the court. A person, individual, may move out of province, and that's why we're having reciprocal agreements or even this piece of legislation.

The fact is though, if the judgement's awarded and an individual say leaves the jurisdiction, doesn't pay the judgement, you have to within 10 years to renew the judgement, to try and collect those funds. Just based on the comment you just made though, a judgement could be made but you may never, ever collect on that judgement.

And what you're saying then is there's really no teeth in a ruling, and this legislation doesn't address, doesn't appear to address that. Or is there anything that would address it?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — No, I think what I was talking about, that there are sometimes companies that disappear, individuals who don't have any money. And so you end up waiting a long time before you collect.

Practically there are other procedures — the sheriff's office, sometimes abilities to garnishee money that's payable from a third party to the person, the judgement debtor. All of those processes are still available. But I guess what I was basically saying is that there are situations that it is quite difficult to collect funds.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess in . . . You agree with me or you may not, but if a person knew beforehand maybe they would save some money and not go after a judgement if they felt that there was no way of it being able to be collected at the end of the day.

But I would like to just thank you, Mr. Minister, and your official for the time here, and certainly addressing the questions we've raised regarding this specific piece of legislation.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

Clause 4

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I would like to speak to an amendment, a House amendment to this. And basically the explanation is that we need to make a House amendment to make the French and the English versions identical.

The French version was not changed to reflect certain minor amendments that were made in the uniform Bill to reflect Saskatchewan practice.

So section 4, the Bill that is set out in the French version provided that fees would be set in the regulations under this Act. And it also required additional information materials to be set out on a regulations under this Act.

In Saskatchewan, fees have traditionally been set in the Queen's Bench fee regulations under The Queen's Bench Act. So we are amending the standard Bill across Canada to recognize that this will prevent having fees set up in a variety of Acts rather than in the particular regulation.

So we think that we want to change this version. And so I have a motion which I would like to read. I move that we:

Amend Clause 4 of the French version of the printed Bill:

- (a) by striking out "réglementaires" and substituting "requis"; and
- (b) in clause (b) by striking out "règlement" and substituting "les règles de pratique et de procédure de la Cour du Banc de la Reine".

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 4 as amended agreed to.

Clauses 5 to 10 inclusive agreed to.

Clause 11

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — We have another House amendment and the motion would be to:

Strike out Clause 11 of the French version of the printed Bill and substitute the following:

“11 Le lieutenant-gouverneur en conseil peut, par règlement, prendre toute mesure d'application de la présente loi, notamment des mesures concernant les formules, qu'il estime nécessaire pour mettre en oeuvre les buts et l'intention de la présente loi.”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 11 as amended agreed to.

Clauses 12 to 14 inclusive agreed to.

Bill No. 21 — The Condominium Property Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to have with me to review this legislation, Madeleine Robertson who is a Crown solicitor in legislative services; and Kathy Hillman-Weir who is the master of titles.

Clause 1

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, through you to the minister, I'd like to welcome the minister's officials to discuss this particular Bill No. 21. And I just have a few comments to make at the outset with respect to this Bill which I see as being crafted in order to create more accountability among the players in this condominium project. And generally this is very acceptable and I'm certainly agreeable to that. It clarifies more specifically the duties and the obligations and responsibilities of all the players within these projects.

The Act itself also attempts to make information surrounding such projects more accessible. Up to this point in time it's not been very clear in that respect. The board of directors and the condominium bylaw amendments, I understand will now have to be filed in a registry, which is a good move.

There are some concerns about the changes relating to the definition of security that will now affect the various sections of this particular Act. And these changes, these are the changes that need to be taken into consideration, and for the protection of the condominium buyer. So those will be some of the issues in the various clauses that we'll be asking for some comments on.

(1545)

The Act does not appear to address the complaints of condominium owners who feel they are being discriminated against during the reassessment process. That's one area that perhaps we'll need to have some dialogue on as well. The reason being that condominium property is classified probably in a separate category from residential property, and will be given an assessment value of .85 per cent. The other residential property owners are to be assessed at .75 per cent. That slight discrepancy causes some concerns and raises the eyebrows of folks that feel there is some discrimination.

It is of some concern to myself and my colleagues because many of the people living in Saskatchewan condominiums are seniors who are in fact on fixed incomes. They have not

budgeted for any of these major reassessment increases because they did not feel, I guess, at the time of moving into these projects, that the government would assess them any differently than they had been in the past with other residential property owners. The fact is they feel now . . . they may feel now that they're being treated unfairly under the present circumstances.

Again I have some concerns that this portion of the reassessment process, what will cause even more headaches for implementation of this . . . and more headaches for the implementation of this badly bungled reassessment program. Residential groups across the province now are beginning to organize themselves in order to educate the general public on how to file assessment appeals. So it tells you that there is a great deal of uncertainty and the need for people to become better acquainted with what direction we're going.

While it did take the government quite awhile to acknowledge the fact that there needed to be changes made to the agricultural property factor, those changes did in fact eventually happen. And again, I relate that back to the difference in the assessment of residential property versus condominiums. And this is why the condominium owners in large part are wondering if this government will also give them equal consideration with respect to that kind of an assessment.

And while there are bound to be some problems with the massive reassessment process, the government continues to unfortunately mishandle the whole program, and that causes some concern. It's happening right across Saskatchewan in towns, in the country, people are trying to sort out all these changes and the mistakes that the government has passed down with this reassessment process. So I guess this would be the place if there are some inadequacies or inequalities, that perhaps they might be corrected before it is passed along to people that will be affected.

While the changes in the structure are quite complex, the heart of the problem is laid out in this respect quite simply. The government did not adequately anticipate or plan the reassessment program in its entirety, and as a result the people will be the ones that unfortunately will be paying for these mistakes.

Nevertheless I just wanted to make some opening comments with respect to this particular Act and I would like to ask the minister why Bill 21 in fact does not contain any reference to the inequalities faced by condominium owners in the assessment program. And I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you can tell me if they can expect that the government will address this issue in the short term or in the long term or if they will address it at all.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I think I should start off by not accepting a lot of the comments that you've made about the way that assessment has been dealt with. And I should say quite clearly that this particular legislation deals with the condominium property and it doesn't deal with assessment. And many of your comments I think are much more appropriately dealt with by the Minister of Municipal Government when you're raising questions with her.

What we have here is a legislation that sets out how a condominium works. And the only thing that has even a little bit of a connection to what you're talking about is the fact that the condominium owners as a group, if they feel that their total complex has been assessed inappropriately, can then appeal to the Saskatchewan Assessment Management authority which is controlled by the municipalities and raise questions about the total assessment for the whole complex. And what we're doing in here is setting out some of the rules about how decisions are made within condominium corporations.

But it's quite far removed from the whole assessment issue and it really isn't the issue that's being dealt with here today. And so that practically I can make some comments I suppose if you want me to comment, but I don't think it really assists us in dealing with this particular legislation other than dealing with how decisions are made within a condominium corporation.

Mr. Osika: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. The fact is though that it will affect the people in the condominiums. And I appreciate your response that this particular Bill does not deal with that. And I appreciate your suggestions that I really go after the Minister of Municipal Affairs over that issue, and I will.

My next question, Mr. Minister. I was just wondering, there seems to have been a lot left, the meat of this Act, for regulations. And I was wondering why it would not . . . a lot of that meat could not be included in the legislation but is now being left to regulations. And as you know, we have some concern about a lot of the Bills that are being passed where we do not have an opportunity to see what regulations will subsequently affect how various actions take place or what restrictions are put in force.

We don't have an opportunity to debate those regulations. And that's been a bone of contention with members, with my colleagues in the official opposition here, with respect to not being able to challenge some of those regulations that are subsequently put in place. I wonder if you'd just comment on that, please.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I think, as I set out in the speech at second reading, these changes are made to an Act which was passed in 1993. It's only four years ago. And what happened was there was continuing consultation with condominium developers, condominium owners, contractors, people who were dealing with condominium corporations, lawyers, many others. And they all had many suggestions about problems with that 1993 legislation.

What we did in the department —and primarily with, I think, Madeleine riding herd on all these people — was to come up with those ideas which made sense to a broad cross-section of people, and that's what we've brought forward here. And so that the amendments that we have brought here are the ones that have substantial consensus throughout the whole part of the Saskatchewan community that's affected by the condominium Act.

One of the reasons that we've retained some of the things in regulation is that as the consultation continues and as there are

more solutions arrived at, it's much easier to make the changes so that the people affected can have a solution to their problem in a timely fashion as opposed to waiting another five years or four years to amend the legislation. So that's why we've done it in this particular legislation. It allows for the continuing consultation, which I think is something that we do well in this Department of Justice.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. And again since this particular Bill will impact or potentially impact thousands of people throughout the province, I guess, Mr. Minister, I was wondering if in fact you would not agree that perhaps instead of regulations that the structure should be more laid out in the Act so that it can be more properly scrutinized, rather than subsequently add and delete. Would you not agree that it perhaps should be better laid out within the Act so people can really see what's going to be affecting them?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I think that the legislation as it is set out in '93 really provided some better ways of doing things. And what we're doing now is making those amendments that will affect the major parts of the legislation so that it responds to the needs that have been identified in the community. And we have some areas where continual discussion will go on about the regulations.

But I think it's also quite clear we're not changing regulations every week. I mean it might be once every six months or two years or, you know, depending on the situation. And that's all done in a way that people in this particular industry and condominium owners are kept well aware of it because we want to provide stability in this particular way that people have increasingly decided to live.

Mr. Osika: — But, Mr. Minister, how can you believe that the objectives of openness and accountability of government can be achieved by leaving so many of the applications of the legislation to be prescribed in regulations which come after the fact?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I guess we just have a disagreement on the word, "so many." We don't think there are that many that are left to regulation. The basic rules are all set out; the framework of how condominiums work is all set out. The various formats . . . what we're doing here is providing the register and other things which will make it much more consumer friendly, if I can put it that way. The people can have better access to it.

But there are some places where we recognize that as the industry changes as the needs of people change, we will have to make some adjustments rather than trying to, I guess, fix something at a certain point right now with a certain rule in the legislation which we will then be wanting to come back next year to say well, we have to fix it. We're saying let's leave that part in the regulations so we can deal with it as it progresses.

Mr. Osika: — I guess I should apologize for saying so many regulations, not knowing how many will be in place.

But again I go back to our bone of contention that it's often regulations that come subsequent to the Bill being proclaimed that we have no opportunity to debate nor do the people who

are affected by have an opportunity to express their concerns and/or views on certain regulations that now they have to be guided by.

The next question I have for you is what changes in the present day developers' practices prompted the proposed change that the definition of a declaration is no longer approximate area of each unit. Was that part of the developers' practices that prompted that change?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the answer to your question is that this doesn't really relate to the developers so much as it does to the surveyors and the method of actually setting out the plans through the chief surveyor's office.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Minister, can you tell me if the changes . . . the amendment proposed within clause 5 is simply meant to update the terminology of this Act with current day surveying terms.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I think that's exactly what it does. It reflects more accurately the existing survey practice and how the plans are processed at the Land Titles Office. So it's to clarify the practice.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Could you explain to me what exactly is meant in the last part of that clause 5 where it states:

“(d) illustrate common property and indicate in the prescribed manner any prescribed common facilities”.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well, I think the idea there is, once again, to provide more information to the purchasers or to others who are interested in the plan. And so that it may be possible, for example, in common facilities to describe the landscaping or some other facility right on the plan. So if you buy a particular unit, you might get a plan that just describes your unit, but then it may also be able to include a description of some of the other things that you're getting right on that plan.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Will that — again I'll go back to regulations — will this be affected by regulations, that particular part, as far as common property, common facilities or common property?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well, I think the regulation is referred to when it talks about the prescribed manner. Any time you see the word “prescribed” that means there might be a rule that sets out how to do it. For example, if you had a plan that's an eight and a half by eleven sheet of paper, you might want to attach to it four or five pages that describe the common property and the characteristics of that common property. So, therefore, the prescribed way of doing it would be to attach a document that provides a better explanation that shows on the face of the plan.

(1600)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, according to the explanatory notes provided for clause 6, the amendment will allow appropriate municipal officials to approve straightforward condominium plans. Now I understand that this amendment will allow municipal councils to cut back on some of the red

tape for condominium developments.

Now when this particular section is in fact applied, some projects can be fast-tracked while others will be put on hold until the entire municipal council can scrutinize the proposal. I just wondered if the minister foresees any problems arising among competing developers because of this change?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the practical effect of that change will be that if there are no concerns in the neighbourhood, that it will just proceed as a regular administrative act. But if there are concerns related to the particular building or to where it's built, or there are neighbours who object, well then that would go to that full procedure that you talk about.

But it's to provide the ability where there's no controversy to have a matter go fairly quickly, but where there's controversy, it provides for the people in the community to have their say.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. That same clause no. 6 would also allow some developers to proceed with the minister's approval even if the security or bond requirement has been waived for a project. I just wondered if the minister could please explain in what circumstances a bond or some type of security for a project might be waived.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Okay, I think that what this does is that it comes directly out of the condominium contractors' and developers' present practice. Sometimes they would have already finished the building before they come forward to register their plan. So at that point it really doesn't make much sense for them to provide security because the building's already there.

Mr. Osika: — Okay, thank you. Here we go back to regulations again. And again, like I said, it's a bit of a sore spot with us over on this side. And I'm just wondering why, Mr. Minister, you might have left the types of acceptable security left to regulations instead of outlining them in the Act.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think this is set out in this way to make sure that we're able to respond through the land titles system to commercial practice as it changes. And if we had some rule in there that held up the ability of contractors to get funding to build new projects, well that wouldn't make any sense either. So what we're trying to do here is maintain that flexibility in this very narrow area to respond to the needs of developers.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Minister, would you not be concerned then that perhaps the types of security needed for approval of a project may become too broad?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — No, I wouldn't be concerned about that. I think the main person concerned about the security is the lender. And we know that most of the lending institutions have many more rules than whatever rules we're going to create before they lend their money.

Mr. Osika: — I wonder, Mr. Minister, could you just give me some examples of other types of securities, other than the letter or the bond, that might be deemed sufficient security?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Right now, the only security we're accepting is the bond. But we are reviewing the possibility of whether we could accept letters of credit.

Mr. Osika: — So I take it those are the only two at the present time that are acceptable.

In clause no. 7, that appears to tighten up the legislation regarding information the developers must provide to condominium corporations about any future projects. Did this section cause many condominium corporation problems under the old Act? Did you get a lot of complaints from developers, Mr. Minister, who were not providing the corporations with enough information?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I don't think there's been complaints from the developers of the condominium corporations, but where the questions arise is when the new condominium board is set up of the owners of the condominium. They often appreciate having the full history of the corporation available when they're trying to make decisions.

It also relates to the fact that sometimes condominium corporations are phased developments and there may be necessity of having information about what the future plans are as it relates to that particular development. Like you might be part of one area of the development and then there's other areas coming, including a golf course or a swimming pool or something like that and you need to have all of that information in a consistent way.

But the main point in this is providing consistency of information. And practically, I would say most of the time it's done already, but we're just having it set out clearly in the rules.

Mr. Osika: — That particular section in clause 8, because it deals with projects that are being developed in phases, some parts of the complex will not be totally completed when the first clients buy their units. Mr. Minister, do you not believe that proper security should be the utmost attention for these developments, so if the developer does experience set-backs, the people who have already purchased the units are not left high and dry?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — We've always had security for completion of projects and that will continue to be a rule that we will keep. So there's . . . that's one of the most important factors and the reasons why you have security is to make sure that the projects are completed. So that's always been the rule and that's the rule we're going to keep.

Mr. Osika: — The clause no. 10, that amendment refers to rules surrounding the transfer of a condominium project from one developer to another. Mr. Minister, can you tell me if this type of a transfer is quite common? Is that the sort of thing that goes on quite a bit? Is it quite a common practice?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — This is a very uncommon practice but we wanted to make sure we had a rule in there to cover it in case it did arise. But it's very uncommon that this would happen. So it's a protection and a provision that will, you know, deal with any problem that may show up.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Chairman, I move that we report progress on Bill No. 21.

The Chair: — Before putting the question on reporting progress, the Chair requires the minister to move, I invite the minister now to move item no. 3, Bill No. 23 with amendment.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I move that the committee report the Bill No. 23, The Enforcement of Canadian Judgments Act with amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill as amended.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 23 — The Enforcement of Canadian Judgments Act Loi sur l'exécution des jugements canadiens

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the amendments be now read the first and second time.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I move that Bill No. 23 be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Leave granted.

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

The committee reported progress on Bill No. 21.

(1615)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation Vote 53

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Seated to my left is the president of the corporation, John Law. Over on my far right is Mr. Garth Rusconi, who is the vice-president of accommodations; seated next to him is Mr. Al Moffat, who is the vice-president of commercial services; Deb Koshman, seated directly behind Mr. Law, is the vice-president of finance and corporate services; and directly behind me is Mr. Rob Isbister, who is the financial planning, finance and corporate services; and I'm Clay Serby, responsible for Property Management, Mr. Chair.

Item 1

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome the hon. minister and his officials. My name is the member from Melville.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — My colleague from Thunder Creek has allowed me an opportunity to just ask you a couple of questions . . .

An Hon. Member: — Thunder Creek.

Mr. Osika: — Thunder Creek? Sorry I mispronounced it.

A couple of questions this afternoon and questions that have been burning that I've been trying to get answers to for some time since it affects the community of Melville, and that's with respect to the court facilities. And I wonder if you could be kind enough and share with me the amount of money being paid in rent for the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management offices presently at Melville, at 117 3rd Avenue West.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you very much, the member from Melville, for the question. I want to indicate first to the member from Melville that we have been working very closely with your mayor and a number of people in your constituency about the relocation of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) to their new office space, which will be in the court-house of course, as you well know.

It is the policy of course not to disclose the amount of what the lease value of any of the properties are around the province. And the reason for that of course, as you well know, is it's an industry standard; it's an arrangement that we've had with the industry for many, many years. And of course that kind of information is viewed as being protected information. As a result of that, I'm not able to disclose that to you at . . .

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That comes as a surprise. At some point I thought I had seen a list of costs of property and rentals being paid for various government facilities used by government agencies; perhaps it was for something else.

If that information is not available, I wonder if you might be able to share with me the cost or the total amount that's been budgeted for renovations of facilities that SERM will now be occupying in the near future?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The work that would need to be done on that particular location or that piece of property would be, of course, tendered through an RFP (request for proposal). That process yet has not been completed, but when we have that information in terms of what those costs for the renovations of that space will be then we can provide that to the member. We just don't have that information currently because the RFP yet hasn't been issued on the work that needs to be done.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Going back to the leasing and rental payments for various buildings. Again, could you clarify for me, is that not come under SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation), with the amounts of costs for buildings that are leased directly by SPMC? Not necessarily what the rent payments are by any particular agency, but the lease payments?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The value of the cost of a particular

department, being in a property that's owned either by the government or whether or not it's property that's leased by SPMC on behalf of a particular department. And that responsibility of course, as you rightly say, is that of SPMC.

The value of a lease that is currently occupied, that is leased, we would not be able to disclose, as I've indicated earlier to the member, on the basis that of course it is the industry standard. Because we go to the market-place of . . . by an RFP. That in their opinion would be . . . that type of a disclosure of course would be a hindrance to the future in terms of leasing processes.

The issue as it relates to a particular department having space within . . . and a government-owned property, we would in fact I think be able to provide that kind of detail out of the individual department's budget that they would set aside for the use of that particular space.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Is there any time that those numbers and those dollar amounts are in fact released?

I go back to still having a recollection of seeing a list of properties and buildings that were the responsibility of SPMC and the dollar amounts by individual properties and then the bottom line as to the total amount of taxpayers' money that goes for paying for rented properties to house agencies or carry out various provincial department activities.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — To each of the departments of course — the member is correct — we would show what the . . . so the global amounts that each of the departments would in fact be budgeting or the payees that would be paying the Saskatchewan Property Management on each of those properties that they would have access to or occupancy to.

So we are disclosing that. And they would appear of course in the space allocation, or in the accommodation side of each of the departments who are utilizing the space in which we're providing for them.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Mr. Minister, one final question that I have with respect to the operation in Melville, I wondered if you could tell me if you have any idea what the government currently budgets for to hold provincial police court in Melville?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Currently that particular cost would be included in the Department of Justice's space allocation requirements as they currently occupy the Provincial Court. That of course will change once new facilities are located for the Provincial Court in Melville. And would expect that that cost will be significantly less because they'll be using less space on less occasion.

As you well know, I think that court will only be used six days per month, and so that's currently what Saskatchewan Property Management is looking for. We expect that that will be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 50 to \$100 per day for each of those days that Provincial Court would sit in the city of Melville.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. I still go back to having to ask you the question about specific locations and costs. When you answered you indicated that in a global sense there would be a dollar amount for a figure that would tell us how much the government was paying for rented property, and not by specific locations.

Again I seem to recall a document that specified particular buildings within various locations that were leased by the government. And those figures should be public. I don't understand why they would not be, given that it is taxpayers' money that's paying for them.

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well what we have in lease accommodations throughout the province, Mr. Member, is that we have about 39.5 million is what we would pay out in lease payments. I think we've provided in our annual report, in the supplementary annual report, what we do list there is all of the payees across the province on a individual basis, of what those are. So if the member were to look at his annual report, what they would find there is the costs on each of the individual properties across the province.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I think what the member from Melville is referring to . . . and I've seen these documents myself, and in fact it was Crop Insurance offices throughout the province, where in fact we used to get the description, the legal description, what facility, the costs of rent, costs of renovations — it was all broken down.

And perhaps that was with the previous administration. And if you don't do it now, then that tells me there was a policy change. I'd like to know when you changed the policy, why it is we can't have access to that information now when it used to be made readily available?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — On individual projects, the member is right. Where we've in fact tendered a particular project, what we would be showing is what those tender costs would be on an individual project. But the member's not correct when he says that in fact lease space has been disclosed for a . . . that there's been a policy change in terms of our lease policy because that's really not true.

I have here a note that says that the Saskatchewan government has for 20 years now, and better, honoured the real estate industry's request that rental rates for individual leased buildings are kept strictly confidential. So this isn't the change in the policy; this policy's been around for at least the 20 years that we talk about and there hasn't been any change in that particular process at all.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, perhaps what's happened then is that in Crown Corporations meetings this came through, I guess through the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance, but actually those buildings are leased through SPMC. So why then do we have to play that game where you're showing, if we actually know who owns the buildings, we can sort of match things up? I mean really anyone that wants to know that information, I

guess is what you're saying, can find it out. Right? So why won't you just make it a public record? A lot of these are long-term contracts anyways. Are you actually going to be affecting anyone's lease or any sites that may come available? Because these contracts, you're not breaking them, are you?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what's important here is that, I need to advise the member that — and I want to just go back to the position that I'd made earlier — and that is that it really is the process of due diligence that we're wanting to ensure that we protect here with the industry. And it's, as I've said earlier on a couple of occasions to both you and the member from Melville, that it's really the industry that's asked that we protect the old process of the pure RFP.

And in fact what we want to be clear on here is that when we are looking for property, or leasing property across the province, that you want to continue to ensure the competitive process and that the competitive process remains in place. And as a result of that we haven't been in the position, as I've said, for the past 20 years, to disclose what those individual leased rates are.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, the problem that we're going to have . . . Let me give you an example — Crop Insurance offices. Your colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Food and the minister in charge of Crop Insurance, went around the province last year closing Crop Insurance offices. And other ministers are busy closing other things down in rural Saskatchewan and we're trying to get some idea as to what's happening with these leases. Many of them were long-term leases.

Did the Saskatchewan taxpayers have a lot of money invested in renovating some of these buildings which really weren't theirs? We've heard numbers as high as 90,000, \$100,000 for renovations, I mean. So to get some idea where we're at, what the public have invested in some of these facilities, we'd have to know exactly which ones we're talking about — see the list of, you know, who has the long-term leases, where they are, what they're being used for. And maybe it would make perfect sense.

We're not asking that, you know, you have to put it in the local paper, but we would like to know, I think, for the good of the public, what it is you're doing with some of these leases because I don't . . . You know SPMC, as many know, has been often a very political group, I guess, from the minister on down. And we would want to just to have some assurance that, you know, some of this isn't happening today; that there isn't patronage or in fact leases given out, as they were under the Devine years, to friends. And the only way you're going to clear this up is to give us this kind of information.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think it's fair to state to the member opposite . . . and of course he has a fair deal of familiarity with the way in which the process prior to 1991 transpired in the province of Saskatchewan in terms of leasing properties. And it's . . . and ownership of some of the properties.

And as the member well knows, that we have a great many properties around the province today that were leased for long

periods of time, of which currently the Saskatchewan taxpayer still has an investment in and is still working at retiring. And in many of those . . . in some of those instances we have properties that aren't being fully utilized or utilized at all, as the member knows.

The member is also correct in stating that over the last couple of years of course what's happened in Saskatchewan is that through the rightsizing process, Saskatchewan Property Management has been looking at ensuring that we try to match the particular department with the space that we have available across the province, and are moving towards reducing the number of, particularly leased properties that we have some of our departments, organizations and services in. In fact since 1991 we've reduced the number of leased properties in the province by, I believe it's 120, and there's been a saving of somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$4 million.

So what's happening of course, is that the government is starting to use, or beginning to examine in a very broad fashion, all of the properties that we want to make available for the services that we have within government. And we're attempting to achieve that, of course, over the long run.

I think it's fair also for the member to say that over the course of the years, Saskatchewan Property Management has had a bit of a taint which none of us are very happy with and certainly had hoped that we might have been able to change that over the decade of the '80s.

This year, as you well know, we . . . or the last year and a half, we've been going through a very detailed review of Saskatchewan Property Management, and when you take a look at the organization that we have today versus the organization that you had, for example, in 1991, you'll see a reduced administrative structure within the corporation. You're seeing a streamlining of the kinds of departments that are currently involved in providing three really broad major services; and are reduced and have reduced in this corporation significantly not only the manpower, but have examined how we might in fact provide a broader menu of services to the people who are in the province. And clearly, I think when you look at the number of employees that were involved with the department, for example, in 1991 I think were just over 1,100. Today within the corporation, we have just under 900 employees within the corporation.

In the last series of work that the corporation has undergone, we've been able to reduce further through a . . . we have a three-stage process that we're working at achieving over the next three years. In the last process, we've been able to reduce the number of people within the organization by about 60, which were positions that haven't been filled over the years, and through that process have only had to see two people find different kinds of opportunities.

So as the member points out, over the last number of years we have seen, I think, some abuse—if I might use that word a bit loosely—I think within the corporation, particularly through the decade of the '80s. But we've changed that process significantly within the corporation, making it much more responsible, making it much more accountable to the

government, also to the departments in which we serve, and are seeing a much better broad-based delivery out there, we suggest, in terms of supporting the departments and the organizations that we provide service to today.

Mr. McPherson:— Mr. Minister, so I guess what you're saying, you refuse to give us the full list of your contracts and the buildings and such for the province. But you had mentioned that due to your rightsizing—you just got to love that term—due to the rightsizing rural Saskatchewan, there are a number of facilities that I guess were leased under the Devine government; you have to carry on that lease, long-term leases, but you're not utilizing the facilities.

So I can only assume that those contracts will be never be renewed anyways. Could you give us a list of those contracts, facilities, where located, what they were being used for? There's no reason why we can't have that list, Mr. Minister, because it's not going to affect anyone in the future.

Hon. Mr. Serby:— There's certainly no problem providing all of the properties that we have across the province that are currently not being utilized in each of the constituencies that we have those properties in, and we can provide that list for the member as soon as we can, and I would expect in the very immediate future.

I guess the earlier question that the member asks is that we can certainly provide renovation budgets for individual construction projects. They're disclosed. Every time that we do a renovation project around the province, we do an RFP. That information is public, and the member opposite and anyone who wishes that kind of information, we can provide that.

And we can also provide the individual payee list, as is already indicated in the addendum to the annual report. That's there as well for the members, so that you can see the kinds of dollars that we're paying out right now on property leases and rentals.

Mr. McPherson:— All right, Mr. Minister. Also, each and every year there was a set of global questions to which there were global answers, and have you prepared that yet? I mean I don't have a copy, but then I'm not the critic. And I was wondering if you have prepared it and sent it across.

I raise it for this reason: by doing the global answers, you'd cut back on a lot of the questioning as we're doing here this afternoon. And if you had it, it would answer a lot of the things about what SPMC is doing with government vehicles, computers—where you're purchasing them, from whom, for how much, things on tendering, employees. So I mean we'd have to wait for that before we can really go further.

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Serby:— Let's see, I just want to respond to the member by indicating to the member that we're about a week or a week and a half away from completing all of the work that we needed to do on our year end. And I think last year when we were here, we provided the kind of information that the member was asking for. We don't have all of that information in detail yet at this particular point in time.

I think the other issue that's important to mention here is that in other years that detail was requested in advance by the critics that were asking the questions as . . . by the members asking the questions of each . . . of the portfolio. We hadn't had that request this year, however.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, thank you. I guess in a week and a half, then we'll have to finish up on some of those questions.

Mr. Minister, SPMC . . . You deal with a lot of computers. I'm sure you're buying and taking the used or the older ones out of commission all the time. Can you tell us what you do with the old computer equipment?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well see, as the member probably is aware, that what we have is . . . our surplus policy is that we make all our surplus supplies, whether it's computers or whether it's desks or furniture, whatever it is that we have, we make that available through a public auction as you're aware, through a salvage and sales department within the corporation.

I think specific to the question as it relates to computers, I think you're aware that we have the computer for kids program which is operated really in conjunction with the SaskTel Pioneers. And what they do, of course, is they get this equipment and they provide some repair to it and maintenance to it; and as a result of that, then some of that then makes its way into some of the school system. Of course the Department of Education then picks up some of those costs as it relates to those particular computers.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the officials here this afternoon. On the topic of disposal of supplies that SPMC is charged with the responsibility of, would you be able to tell us how many government entities, government agencies, your organization would be responsible for disposing of these supplies on behalf of?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — We don't have exactly the number that we might be looking for but we think it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 70, because we would provide that service to all of the departments of executive government. We would provide it for some of the commercial Crowns. There are some public agencies that would also be using our services. So it would be the same number of groups that we would have under our purchasing policy. It would be the identical number. And we think it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 70, but we can provide that for you in more detail.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Minister, we would appreciate that, if we could get a copy of a listing, *per se*, of these various agencies that you act on behalf of in terms of disposing of supplies.

Also, I understand, as these supplies are returned to SPMC for eventual disposal, there should be a process in place whereby which you, as an organization, should be able to know that they are in fact surplus supplies, that they should be disposed of. I worry, because I saw concerns expressed by the Provincial Auditor in years gone by where, perhaps, there hasn't been the proper approval process followed in terms of . . . from the various agencies to SPMC, giving you authority to dispose of

surplus supplies. I'm wondering if you're anticipating those sorts of problems in this next fiscal year?

I know, given that I saw a figure for the '95-96 fiscal year where your department, I believe, disposed of something like close to \$7 million worth of surplus supplies, it would . . . that's a fair number of dollars worth of supplies to be charged with the responsibility for disposal of. And I'm curious whether there's a good portion of that that might be going up on the block without really any proper approval.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what's important to realize here is of course that Saskatchewan Property Management of course has within its purview some assets. And on those assets we would make the decisions ourselves as to what the productive life of a particular commodity that we might have would be, whether it's a piece of furniture or whether in fact it might be highway vehicles that department employees are using. But more important though is that each of the individual departments of course, would be the ones who would be making the decision as to whether or not a particular piece of equipment still has a value.

I think the member might remember probably one of the largest pieces of work that we've done in the last year and a half has been some of the equipment that is moved from the Department of Highways, and we of course looked after that major sale which was about a year ago or so. And the decision about the life of the equipment that was sold off was really . . . that determination was made by the Department of Highways and then what Saskatchewan Property Management did is accommodated that particular sale.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well if I understand correctly though, Mr. Minister, I think it's a requirement of all of these various agencies that would, let's say, borrow supplies from SPMC, that they designate a person or perhaps persons as being responsible to advise SPMC that in fact these are surplus goods that should be disposed of. So if there's a requirement on their part, isn't there a reciprocal requirement on the part of the SPMC division that they know that these goods should be properly disposed of at that point in time?

I guess what I'm getting at is you're mentioning there's something like 70 agencies here and that you will be providing a list of those. And I should suspect we could get a list of 70-some-odd names as well, of people that would be authorized from these various government agencies as far as being able to be authorized to dispose . . . or give you authorization to dispose of these properties.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think the member is correct. The information that was cited, I think in the last *Report of the Provincial Auditor*, indicates that what was lacking from some of the work that we were providing is that we needed to list an individual. As you've rightly pointed out, that should be included as it provides the authorization to the particular good or supply that in fact we're going to be disposing of on their behalf.

There's also included in that of course now, is the transfer document that would be arriving with the particular commodity

that we would be looking after disposing on their behalf, to ensure that in fact that work then is being done in a fashion that it's accountable for and the proper individuals are really signing that off. So that process has now been accommodated, as the member has asked.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. But I didn't hear in your reply there that there actually exists a list of the individuals that are so designated. And would you just be able to advise us if that list exists and if we could have access to that list as well as the group of agencies that you've described for us this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — What we'll do, Mr. Chair, to the member, is that when we provide you with the list of the agencies that we're doing work for we'll also provide you then with those individuals that are authorized as well to sign off on the supplies in which . . . the goods that we're in fact responsible then to manage.

Mr. Aldridge: — And if I could just have one final clarification. When this list does arrive, it will contain the sum total of government agencies for which you do provide these services, because I know there was a little bit of conjecture here this afternoon as to what were the total numbers of agencies that you do the services for. Will it be in fact the complete list?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — We'll provide you with a complete list as you've requested.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, if you will, I'd like to at least get one question in before the Government House takes over. Mr. Minister, you made a comment earlier regarding a question on . . . a response to global questions. And I believe our caucus has sent a request for . . . with a global set of questions to your office and I just want a clarification.

I think you had indicated that no questions had come to your department. And I know that the area that I'm responsible for, we sent a number of questions off before and I'm sure my fellow colleague would have sent a series of global questions to your office.

I'd like to know if you've received those; if you haven't, we'll certainly double check on it. But if you have received it, when do you expect to have the responses to us?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — If that information was circulated to us it might have been part of the Crown circulation that your caucus had sent over. We'll just review our information to see whether or not yours has been received or not, and if it has, certainly we'll provide all of that detail, as you've asked, at our year end.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Chair, I move we report progress.

The committee recessed until 7 p.m.

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