

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of citizens from the great communities of Neudorf, Saskatoon, Melville, and Yorkton, and Springside, Mr. Speaker, as well as Duff. And 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 throughout 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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to support the creation of regional telephone exchanges; and

Of citizens petitioning for the construction of a new hospital in La Loche.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly, I'd like to introduce in your gallery, the east gallery, my daughter, Jeanette, and my grandson, Terrell, who are leaving our fair province for Manitoba.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce two constituents of mine who are in your gallery — George and Esther Labelle.

I trust they're probably here actually to make sure that their daughter Claire was able to make it to work today now that she is considerably older than she was yesterday. So if you would

join with me in welcoming the Labelles and, obviously, congratulating Claire on another birthday.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I see seated in your gallery a gentleman who will be well known to some members of the Legislative Assembly, at least those who were here seven, eight years ago. And I would direct your attention to Mr. Joe Melia, who was until seven years ago . . . and I believe this is his seventh anniversary upon retirement as director of *Hansard*.

And please join me in making him feel very welcome on his visit here today. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, it's a pleasure as well for me to introduce Mr. Joseph Melia, because I've known him in the past as a principal of my former high school in Moose Jaw — Vanier Collegiate.

I certainly enjoyed my education there, and Mr. Melia was certainly an influence on all of the students who went through the school at that time. So I'd just like to welcome him as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Letter from Bombardier

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently informed members that I wrote Bombardier regarding critical remarks made against them in this House by the former deputy premier, the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Regina Dewdney.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I received a response from Bombardier. The official from Bombardier states, and I quote:

We are always conscious of the danger posed by remarks such as those made by Mr. Tchorzewski in the absence of a full understanding of the project and what it will mean to the local area.

The letter goes on to say that Bombardier would gladly:

. . . give Mr. Tchorzewski a briefing on the NATO Flying Training in Canada project to make him fully aware of the breadth and depth of this project and the impact that it will have on Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, I will send a copy of this letter to the member from Regina Dewdney and to the Premier.

If the member prefers to criticize Bombardier rather than support them in their efforts to bring more jobs to Moose Jaw, I strongly urge the Premier to get the member to take time off from federal campaigning, to not only do his MLA job, but to accept this briefing so everyone in this province supports

Bombardier in its efforts. The Premier may also urge the member to simply apologize for his recent remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Low Income Housing Project

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, I want to take the moment today to comment on Saskatoon's community group and its leaders, a group mentioned Tuesday by the Minister of Municipal Government in her announcement of a Saskatoon low income housing project. Like all members, I was happy to see the announcement of this project. It is also seen as an innovation, pilot attempt to deal with persistent social programs and adequate housing, a program that can be repeated and expanded as success is measured.

It needs to be emphasized that there are three partners in this project: the province, the city, and a community organization. This is not a top-down imposed program, but a program that grows from need and out of lobbying by local community, the community that's mostly keenly aware of its circumstances. Quint Development Corporation, with Gary Wilson, is an integral part of this project.

Quint, named for five inner-city neighbourhoods it represents in Saskatoon, has been active in seeking partnerships with the public and private sector to improve the economy and living conditions of its neighbourhoods. It's a logical partner for this housing project and I want to congratulate Gary Wilson and Quint Development Corporation for its role in bringing it into being. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Winning Students from Englefeld School

Ms. Draude: — Two weeks ago the Humboldt Rural School Division announced that Englefeld School would close. For the past year the parents of this community have maintained that this school offers quality education for their students.

I have also stood in this House and brought to your attention the concerns of businesses such as Schultes and Koenders, who fear that the closure of this school will hurt their business and their town. Today I would like to bring to the attention of the Assembly the quality of the students and the education offered in Englefeld.

Seven students participated in the Canadian Mathematics Competition recently. Scott Eggerman, Nancy Kirzinger, and Richard Pomedlie were three of the students who participated in the grade 9 Pascal exam. Scott achieved top marks in the school and in Zone 5, which includes Nipawin, Humboldt, Watson, Porcupine Plain, Kelvington, Invermay, Weekes, and Carrot River. Provincially he finished fourth out of 1,095 students and nationally he placed 990 out of 32,323. Nancy placed third in the zone and 37th in the province while Richard placed fourth in the zone and 65th in the province.

The combined scores for Scott, Nancy, and Richard earned them the distinction of zone champions, and overall in the province they tied for 6th out of 50. Sherrie Zimmerman competed in the grade 10 contest, finishing first in her school, 12th out of 61 in the zone and 158th out of 262 provincially.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to offer congratulations to these students for their achievements and to the teachers of Englefeld who provide a very high quality of education for our children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Donations to Manitoba Flood Victims

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, there have been many times that Saskatchewan people have rallied together in times of need, demonstrating the true spirit of the prairie people — the cooperative spirit. The Saskatchewan way is a caring way. No one likes to see people fleeing their homes in the wake of nature's fury. Time and again the very worst of situations has brought out the very best in humanity.

We're witnessing this today for the thousands of flood victims in Manitoba. Yesterday the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool donated \$20,000 to the Red Cross in an attempt to help ease the suffering of flood victims. In addition, Pool elevators across the province will be collecting donations that will be directed to Manitoba.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Peter Gzowski, who originally started in Moose Jaw, will be dedicating his entire *Morningside* program tomorrow, 9 to 1 o'clock, to raising money for Manitoba flood victims. Appropriately, Mr. Gzowski is calling the show "The Red River Valley." If anyone would like to make a donation to the rally, there's a toll-free number that they can call.

These two examples of Saskatchewan spirit epitomize the thousands of people who take it upon themselves to help in any way they can. There's nothing more important than coming to the aid of a friend or a neighbour who is in need. Not even the federal election is more important.

The welfare of the people must always be the top priority for society and for governments. And I want to commend the Wheat Pool and Mr. Gzowski for the leading rolls they are taking, and all the Saskatchewan people who are assisting the Manitoba flood victims.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ready for Work Program

Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, today I want to commend a program which is a fine example of cooperation between the Department of Labour, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, and the education system.

The Ready for Work program is directed to grade 11 and 12 students who are preparing to enter the workforce, either for summer jobs or permanently. It begins by posing the question, are you ready for work? And then proceeds to show the

students their rights and their responsibilities once they enter the workplace.

This program is a necessary one because, as we were so sadly reminded on Monday, the workplace can be dangerous and even fatal. Beginning workers need to know that by law they have the right to know the hazards of their work and the right to participate in measures to make that work safe. They need to know both their and their employers' responsibilities to ensure a secure workplace.

The program is effective because it has been developed and is presented by qualified workers recruited by the SFL (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour). The slide presentation is based on stories of young workers who have been killed or injured on the job.

Mr. Speaker, I was made aware of this program when President Barb Byers came to Weyburn to make a presentation to students. It is a good project, and I encourage schools across the province to make it available to their students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

International Working Persons Day of Recognition

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a special day for working people the world over. In many countries this is International Working Persons Day of Recognition, indeed a holiday in a great many countries. Certainly in Britain today, labour has a somewhat dual purpose meaning, today being election day in Britain.

But the fact of Labour Day is that there are many groups in Saskatchewan who do recognize the significance of this day. In Estevan, where many of the original coalminers immigrated from Europe, this day is still observed.

Many of us recognize the struggle that workers have endured over the years in such struggles to gain an eight-hour working day, to gain certain basic, rudimentary health and safety benefits, that sort of thing.

I'm very, very grateful for all of those workers past, for all of their diligence in their struggles to make Saskatchewan, Canada, the world, a great place to live in. Where the recognition of human value in labour and the dignity of labour is appreciated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agricultural Sciences Month

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years Saskatchewan has been a leader in agricultural research and development. Our new innovations, new technologies, and new ideas are influencing agriculture around the globe.

We are a world leader in this area and we have the worldwide reputation as being a leader. Research and development in

agricultural science are the foundation of Saskatchewan's continued success in agriculture. That is why it pleases me and other members as well, that the Minister of Agriculture and Food has proclaimed this month as Agricultural Sciences Month in Saskatchewan.

This year, Mr. Speaker, the designation is in conjunction with the 36th annual Canada-wide Science Fair, sponsored by the Youth Science Foundation of Canada, to be held at the University of Regina from May 11 to 18.

Agricultural sciences increases the opportunity for further economic development and growth for our province, but they also have the ability to provide opportunities for our young people.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of the Assembly and all Saskatchewan citizens to consider the importance of the agricultural sciences to this province and to take the opportunity to promote agricultural research and development to ensure a brighter future for all farmers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of Herbert Sims

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the passing of a very prominent resident of Tisdale. Herbert Charles Sims was laid to rest on April 29 at the age of 86.

Mr. Sims is best known as the administrator of the rural municipality of Connaught, a position he held for 42 years. He was also a life member of the Lions International and the Saskatchewan anti-tuberculosis association, and a Jacobs awardee of the Saskatchewan rural municipality secretary-treasurers' association. He was chairman of the board of Ste. Therese Hospital in Tisdale and a member of the University of Saskatchewan Senate.

Mr. Sims was the secretary-treasurer of the Tisdale Riverside Golf Club and a member of the Tisdale Ramblers Hockey Club executive. He expanded his interests with music, singing in choirs, and by playing the saxophone and the mandolin.

Please join me in recognizing the many contributions Mr. Sims made to the Tisdale community over the years and to share with his family the loss of such an outstanding man.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Local Telephone Service Competition

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) is rendering a decision at this hour which will determine whether local telephone service will be opened up to competition. All indicators point to the fact that the CRTC will rule in favour of allowing local competition.

We also understand that today's decision will also require the long-distance carriers to make financial contributions to the local telephone service providers so that they can serve the rural areas as well as the urban areas.

Will the minister explain what preparations her government has made for a decision requiring SaskTel to share its local telephone market with competitors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, we are aware that May 1 was the date for the CRTC to release some wide-ranging recommendations on a number of competitive issues in the telecommunications industry. We haven't seen the details as yet; they're probably being or have just been announced, and we haven't had an opportunity to study them or see them in writing.

But we will certainly turn our attention to them. And we will act and organize ourselves in — within the context of those regulations — in the very best way to represent the interests of our shareholders, the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I would hope in this case we're not caught off guard like we seemed to be when long-distance competition was brought in.

Mr. Speaker, this government fought tooth and nail to keep long-distance competition out of Saskatchewan. Yet when competition did arrive, SaskTel lowered its long-distance rates, and usage by customers went up, and therefore revenues increased. SaskTel officials expressed amazement, but yet the consumer has been served well by competition.

If today's decision goes as expected, will the minister make a commitment that Saskatchewan consumers will enjoy the full benefit of local telephone service competition, and that you will not block competition by seeking an exemption of the CRTC beyond October of '98?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, as usual, the member opposite has got the chronology entirely wrong. First of all, SaskTel began to lower long-distance rates long before the CRTC's ruling. They started to drop the rates in 1991 and 2, and there was a steady reduction ever since; although the CRTC's ruling, from which SaskTel was exempt, didn't take place until 1994.

Then we invited competition to come in. We invited resellers and rebillers in in February of 1996. And we invited and negotiated interconnecting agreements with AT&T and the other interconnectors in October, two years ahead of when we would have been compelled to by regulation from the CRTC. We're exempt from that. That exemption has served us very well; it's given us time to adjust.

But we have invited the competition to come in — far from resisting competition, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, it is sadly ironic that this government is shying away from local telephone competition at the same time the CRTC confirms a federal order in council was issued April 22, which opens the door for SaskTel to apply for a broadcast licence to operate a cable television network. This order in council was the result of a persistent lobbying by this government.

Mr. Speaker, if SaskTel goes into the cable business, it will have the ability to use revenue from its telephone operations to subsidize its cable operations. This would put Saskatchewan's local cable operators at a disadvantage. The cable companies welcome competition as long as it's fair.

But it's not fair, because as long as your telephone operations are not regulated by the CRTC, there is no watchdog to prevent you from cross-subsidization from the telephone end to the cable end.

Madam Minister, it appears that this government opposes true competition in which all competitors are on the same, equal footing. But you seem to like competition when you have a distinct advantage over . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. The hon. member has been very lengthy in his preamble and I ask him to put his question immediately now.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why are you so scared to compete on an equal footing with the local cable companies?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, how would he have it? How would he have it? Would he have us have a strong, competitive, profitable telephone company in the public sector? Or would he privatize it where you'd have nothing to say at all and no basis for any complaints because the private operator would do it their way.

First of all he says he wants us to be regulated and then he complains when the regulator gives us a licence. Are we in the business or out of the business? Is it public enterprise? Private enterprise? Is it profitable or is it subsidized? Make up your mind. Which side of the fence are you on?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Madam Minister, you want an extension so SaskTel is not regulated, but you want to compete with cable companies that are regulated. That isn't fair.

Mr. Speaker, it becomes abundantly clear that this government wants to compete but only if the playing-field is tilted in their favour.

Saskatchewan presently has about 230 local cable operators which employ hundreds of individuals with total payrolls that exceed 8 million per year. Our research also indicates that these cable companies pay close to \$5 million in provincial sales taxes on an annual basis, to say nothing of the provincial income taxes paid by the companies and their employees.

What is it about competition — and here I mean real

competition — that scares you so much you will not promise to give up the idea of extending the moratorium beyond October '98? You already have had five years to prepare for competition. What is it about the present management of SaskTel that scares you from taking on local, private companies head to head?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, we are not afraid of anything. We are completely in the competitive arena. We are making every effort to harmonize with CRTC. And we are not permitted under the terms of the cable licence to subsidize that service. We don't subsidize our Mobility service.

The only subsidy we have is a cross-subsidization to the rural and remote subscribers of this province, which under a private mode would very likely, following the pattern in the States, pay through the nose for service that's non-existent and declining. That's not the kind of service that Saskatchewan people want, that's not the mode that we're in, and we're not afraid to provide good service at good prices to the people of Saskatchewan. We're not afraid to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Income Tax Surcharges

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in 1992 the people of this province were convinced that they needed to accept a further surcharge to their already horrendous taxes in order to reduce the deficit and the debt that the previous administration of this government had accumulated. Mr. Speaker, that deficit reduction was later changed to a debt reduction surcharge with the specific intention that that amount of money was going to be directly applied to the accumulated debt of this province.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm that this amount of money being collected from the debt reduction surcharge specifically in the 1997-98 fiscal year is estimated to be in excess of \$57 million?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I thank him for the question; and I provided an answer to him on this question yesterday.

If you look at '96-97 and you look at the debt reduction that has occurred there, it is well in excess of a hundred million dollars. If you look at '97-98, it will be in excess of 24 — 124 over two years, which will more than cover the amount in the debt reduction surtax.

But what I want to say to the member opposite is, the Liberals are missing the main point here. In the province of Saskatchewan, the debt is coming down dramatically. Taxes are coming down dramatically. And we are enhancing key services to the people of the province. A balanced approach, an approach that takes into account the priorities of the people of this province — quality of services, lower debt, lower taxes —

that's our approach.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, on page 14 of the *Estimates* the amount forecast from last year's amount of money that went to the debt reduction account was \$18 million, not a hundred million dollars. The amount this year is forecast to be \$24 million, which are the amounts that were specified as having to be put as surpluses that had to be applied to the debt. The only other amount that has gone into this account, Mr. Speaker, has been the proceeds from the sale of the Cameco shares. Will the minister please 'fess up and say what's happened to the \$60 million a year she's been collecting for this specific purpose?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. What the member has to recall is, on top off all that is in excess of \$100 million in crop insurance debt that has been paid off . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, which goes into the books as money into Agriculture.

But what I would say to the members opposite is, on this side of the House we're clear — we are for reducing debt and reducing taxes.

What is not clear is where those members are at. One of them is for the sales tax cut. Another would not do the sales tax cut but put the money into education. The leader would harmonize the sales tax, which means spreading the base. Perhaps the aspiring leader, the member from Kelvington-Wadena, would narrow the sales tax base.

What I say to the member opposite is, we have a balanced approach. Enhancing programs, lowering taxes, lowering debt — that's what we're standing on, on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, the figures are absolutely clear and the figures are not misleading. You have not met your target of putting \$60 million a year against the debt because that's what the people of this province were told and believe that you're doing.

What you have to do is come clean and put the \$60 million in the debt reduction account, which would mean, Madam Minister, that your budget isn't balanced, as opposed to what you're saying and claiming all along, because you're skimming off the money into your General Revenue Fund.

Will you account for it in a transparent way so the people of this province can be assured that the money that they're paying on this surcharge is going directly to the debt?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. He knows how the system works. The money all comes into the government coffers and it is used for three things. It is used to enhance programs; it is used to reduce

taxes; and it is used to reduce debt, and to balance my budget, to balance the budget of the people of this province — the balance is not my balance, it's their balance. But as I say to the member opposite, we have reduced debt and we have reduced it in excess of our targets.

What I ask the member opposite is, to explain headlines like this: "Liberal leader sceptical about PST cut." We are clear. We favour lowering the sales tax from 9 to 7; we favour reducing the debt; and we favour enhancing key programs. Where do they stand?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

School Closures

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister in charge of Education. Madam Minister, last month I asked you to provide school boards with their financial information prior to your budget so they could make informed decisions. At that time, the Regina School Board was deciding on the closure of nine elementary schools to save a total of 1.2 million. It's unfortunate that since your budget the school board finds it has an increase of 3.5 million this year, after they have announced the closure of six schools.

Madam Minister, the Provincial Auditor says your government is forcing groups like school boards to make decisions in a vacuum because you don't give them enough information. This is a case in point. Had the Regina School Board known it would be receiving millions of extra money, I doubt these schools would be closed.

Madam Minister, the Regina School Board is meeting today to set its 1997 mill rate. Considering the fact that it's your fault that the school boards were forced to make premature decisions, will you ask the Regina School Board to reconsider those closures?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, as the member will recall, two days prior to the budget we did not yet have all of the information from all of our municipalities across the province in terms of reassessment. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we did not get the information from the city of Saskatoon until the day prior to the provincial budget. We did know that the Regina School Board was in a position where they had to make some decisions, and they were aware on budget day that there was going to be an increase in our overall operating grant of some \$8 million.

Mr. Speaker, we now have been able to give to the boards their grant information based on reassessment in the province, and school boards are setting their mill rates accordingly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Madam Minister, didn't you think this through? Didn't you think through the tough position the school boards would be in? Didn't you and the minister responsible for reassessment ever speak to each other? Maybe the vacuum is between cabinet ministers. Your reassessment is just being finalized. So school boards are scrambling to estimate their

grants and their budgets and where to set their tax rates and whether to close schools or not.

Madam Minister, you are forcing school boards to make decisions without proper information and without enough time to deliberate. Decisions on school closure had to be made six months in advance before the school year, before school boards had any indication of their levels of government funding. Why did these figures come out so late? Madam Minister, what are you doing to fix the problem you have caused school boards across this province?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear on whose assessment system this is. I recall being a member of this legislature in the '80s when the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan, when they were government members, brought in this organization called SAMA, Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency. As I recall the facts and the history of this agency, this was a creation of the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in the fall of 1995, municipalities and school boards across this province met to determine a new system — 85 per cent of municipalities and school boards in this province voted for the market value reassessment system that is coming into existence in 1997.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is a year of reassessment, a system created by the Conservative Party, and municipalities agreed to it. School boards now have their grant information and school boards are setting their mill rate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Auto Theft Claims

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the minister responsible for SGI. Mr. Minister, some months ago SGI said that an increase in car thefts was a major reason SGI was looking at increasing vehicle insurance rates. And on March 12 in this House, you said no, that wasn't the reason. The increase in car thefts wasn't significant.

This morning in Crown Corporations Committee, we learned that car theft claims have almost doubled in two years, from 2,491 in 1994 to 4,483 in 1996, an increase of 80 per cent in just two years. Mr. Minister, how can you say this is an insignificant increase? Will you admit that your government's failure to control car theft has led to pressure on SGI to increase its rates?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think, as the minister has explained before, Mr. Speaker, and I'll reiterate, there's a whole range of factors that are taken into consideration when looking at auto insurance rates, deductibles, and coverage changes. As you know, that process is taking place right now. When it's announced, there'll be a 45-day review period.

But I'll just mention that it doesn't matter which scenario we

look at or what the study eventually tells us. What we know is that we'll still have amongst the lowest rates in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Metis Hunting Rights

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Environment minister. Mr. Minister, Wendy's hamburgers used to have a slogan, Where's the Beef? The people around Hudson Bay are asking, where's the moose? The male moose population in the area has dropped dramatically. Environment officials attribute the decrease to three things — more roads, more ATVs (all-terrain vehicles), and Metis hunting rights.

Mr. Minister, the number of roads and ATVs in northern Saskatchewan has been steadily increasing for years. But the big change, and the only big change in the past year, has been the extension of Metis hunting rights. Mr. Minister, how much has the extension of Metis hunting rights contributed to the decline of the moose population in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the hon. member for the question.

The hon. member neglected to mention a number of other factors which are impacting the moose population, such as ticks and also predation by predators, and cycles as well.

I can assure the hon. member that we are monitoring the moose population, and we will be adjusting seasons this year to reduce the impact of hunting on moose population, and we will continue to manage this resource in a responsible manner in order to ensure that there'll be moose left for future generations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm glad to hear that you're monitoring the situation. Unfortunately those who have to buy licences are now being restricted to one week.

But what are you doing to monitor this situation, Mr. Minister? Do you know how many people have applied for their Metis status since the date of hunting rights were extended to Metis hunters? Do you know how many animals were taken by Metis hunters in the past year? What is the process for applying for Metis status? And what process do people have to go through to verify the fact that they are Metis?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, the issue of Metis hunting rights in Saskatchewan is now before the courts. I will not be commenting on that issue.

But other aspects which we are doing to assist the moose and is . . . one main one is the road closure program, which we are working cooperatively with the forest industry. As an area is harvested, the roads can be closed to reduce the access. And as the member rightly points out, ATVs and other equipment that hunters have today make access much easier for people to get back in off the roads to where the moose may be residing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Minister of Education.

It would be a shame if the federal NDP based their education platform on the Saskatchewan education model. Saskatchewan's education system is showing severe cracks after years of chronic underfunding. Taxpayers are sinking under the growing burden of education costs. Providing quality education to all Saskatchewan students must be a priority, yet under this NDP government, property owners are now footing at least 60 per cent of the education costs. And the government's share is only 40 per cent.

Can the minister explain why Saskatchewan taxpayers are picking up the majority of education costs?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say to the member that on March 20, 1997, in this House we brought in a provincial budget that took a balanced approach to governing in this province. We brought in a provincial budget, Mr. Speaker, that lowered the overall debt, lowered taxes, and increased spending in social program areas such as health, education, and social policy. Mr. Speaker, in this budget we brought in an additional \$8 million in spending for K to 12 education in the province.

And I would just like to add, Mr. Speaker, I have a headline here from the *Melville Advance* that said: "The best ideas in Thursday's provincial budget were the ones stolen from the Liberal Party, says Melville MLA." So all I can say, Mr. Speaker, is I don't know why the acting leader is complaining, because the former leader supports our budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the facts are that Saskatchewan's education system is being underfunded. Since it was first elected in 1991, this NDP government has chopped over \$328 million from Saskatchewan's K to 12 system — \$328 million, that's fact.

Who pays the price? Saskatchewan students and Saskatchewan property owners pay the price, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister tell us when her government plans to accept its responsibility to properly fund K to 12 education, and as a result give Saskatchewan property owners the tax relief that they deserve?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, the member obviously wasn't here on March 20. We increased spending for K to 12 education by some \$8 million. Mr. Speaker, that is a significant turnaround in spending in this province.

Now what does the member want? Does he want us to increase the provincial debt, not decrease taxes, but increase spending in social programs?

Mr. Speaker, I think that we took a balanced approach on budget day. We increased spending in our social program area, we cut taxes, we cut the debt. This province is turning the corner; we're well on the way to economic recovery, and all we can hear from that member is snivel snivel, whine whine.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker. The figures don't lie, Madam Minister. Since 1991 this government has cut \$328 million. The opposition didn't cut it, you did, Madam Minister and your Finance minister.

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), all agree that education is underfunded, and that the property taxpayer is picking up too much of the cost. That is fact, Mr. Speaker.

Is the minister saying that these groups and thousands of people across Saskatchewan are wrong and that you're right?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well you know, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we have begun to turn the corner. We've cut taxes for people in this province and that's been well received by the public. We're cutting the provincial debt — that's well received by the provincial taxpayers because we can take the savings from interest on the public debt and put it into increased spending when it comes to health, social services, and education, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't really know where the Libs are at these days. I really don't know. The member from Melville says, "NDP 'stole' budget, ideas, from Liberals," and he says the budget's okay. Then we have the . . . not the acting leader or the former leader, but the present leader, the research person. He's up at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) "Commerce students mock budget," and what does he agree to? He says we need to reduce the number of school divisions in the province from 119 to 60. He says that he applauds fiscal conservatism.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that the NDP government takes a balanced approach — we cut taxes, we cut the debt, and we're increasing spending.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

JobStart/Future Skills Expansion

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand in the House today and announce that JobStart/Future Skills will be expanded this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Not only is this very successful

provincial training program continuing, but it's also changing with the changing times. We are making the changes because we listened to what workers, employers, and industry associations told us they needed. We added two new features to our already successful program.

These two new features, Mr. Speaker, are retraining in the workplace for currently employed workers, and a new sectoral partnerships program.

As a key component of the Saskatchewan training strategy, JobStart/Future Skills is now an \$11.9 million program. This is \$3.4 million more than last year, Mr. Speaker. JobStart/Future Skills will provide about 2,700 training opportunities annually, and that is training, Mr. Speaker, that leads to real jobs. Since the program began in 1995, we have approved over 4,300 training positions and now we are building even more on that success.

The first new feature, Mr. Speaker, is to open the program to the retraining and up-skilling of persons who are already employed. This has been requested by both workers and employers. This is a \$1.1 million program and will now help retrain current employees in businesses faced with technological change and workplace change, or critical skills shortage. This will help businesses maintain their competitive edge while helping workers adjust through retraining or up-skilling. This program will assist approximately 400 employers, Mr. Speaker.

We're also adding \$500,000 for a new sector partnerships program to help industry sectors work with communities and with training organizations to identify and address their specific training and employment needs for the 21st century. We've already seen how successful sector partnerships can be with the multi-party training plan in the North. Northern people are being trained for good, well-paying jobs in the mining sector.

Mr. Speaker, the other two components, work-based training for the unemployed, and institutional quick response training, will continue as before. They too have proven to be tremendously successful, linking to real jobs where and as they are created. Some notable examples are the Temple Gardens Mineral Spa in Moose Jaw, Michel's Industries in St. Gregor, and the Quadra group in Outlook.

Two JobStart/Future Skills program features will continue. Our \$3 million work-based training program for the unemployed will assist in training approximately 700 to 800 unemployed workers in new jobs. A \$6.3 million institutional quick response training helps our training institutions respond quickly to address emerging skill shortages. This has worked very well in areas such as custom harvesting, home care, and web page design.

The JobStart/Future Skills is a made-in-Saskatchewan success and I know there are going to be many more as we begin working with our partners to define the Saskatchewan training strategy over the next three years. Together we are all investing in Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first begin by thanking the minister for the advance copy of the statement and indeed for sharing with the people of Saskatchewan your ideas and your government's commitment to post-secondary education.

I'm very pleased to see that indeed you're recognizing that not only do we have a problem with people who are unemployed and who require training and/or retraining to indeed find employment for them, but that through the lobby of employers and the concerns of people in the Labour Force Board and indeed some of the discussions that we've had with the minister, that there is indeed now a plan in place to actually provide training for people who are employed currently, who may be looking at the potential that their job — due to technology, due to the fact that businesses will change — that their job may disappear. And indeed they can now join into the training program and indeed receive a training for an additional career. We're very pleased to see that.

Right now of course in Saskatchewan our force, our labour force, is very mobile and there are changes that occur from one corner of the province to the next. And I think that this training strategy — that involves employers, it involves businesses, it involves additional funding from the government — will be able to meet the needs of people.

I want to ensure and I guess as an opposition I will be very closely monitoring to see that indeed the people that should be receiving this assistance and can access this new training strategy plan, that indeed they do so.

I know that the training strategy plan, as the minister announced a couple of weeks ago, has a time line of about three years. And my concern is that we don't indeed delay it and three becomes four or five. I'd sooner see the training strategy move forward and indeed we can implement some of the things. But very clearly Saskatchewan will grow if we have jobs and the retraining, and retraining is necessary to provide those jobs. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Somewheres I missed getting a copy of that report, but that's fine. I still have comment on it and I understand where you're going with that.

I think the retraining program is a good idea, I think, to the effect that it goes ahead and takes people that are in jobs that, because of technology, may be outdated and those people are retrained. It keeps them from getting onto the unemployment lines and ending up with the despondency that may often be there.

I think it also bodes well for those particular industries that are having those jobs that look like they might be phased out due to change in technology, and as a result that will keep Saskatchewan very much in a competitive edge. And I think that's good.

To the extent that we're saying this is going to be a great

provider of jobs, I think probably not. It may be a larger part in keeping people from becoming unemployed. But as far as saying it's going to go ahead and take other individuals and put them to work necessarily, I think it may be not quite as strong as it appears to be at first glimpse on that one.

But I think the program is good. The more effort we put into people that are underemployed or whose jobs are of a marginal situation, we support that. And to the extent that this one goes ahead and makes companies more competitive is good as well. But I think we need not get too excited about the fact that it will necessarily employ that many people. It will just make sure people don't get unemployed. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the Government Deputy House Leader on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — With leave, Mr. Speaker, to make a motion about the position of Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — It's requested . . . the hon. members request to be advised of the nature of the motion.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — The nature of the motion is that Mr. Speaker be granted absence to attend the legislative Commonwealth parliamentary session in Ghana.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Leave of Absence for The Speaker to attend Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Seminar

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Melfort-Tisdale:

That leave of absence be granted for Mr. Speaker from May 12 to 21, 1997 to represent the Legislative Assembly at the ninth Commonwealth parliamentary seminar in Ghana and to assist with Commonwealth Parliamentary Association post-election seminar for newly elected members of the Ghanaian parliament; and further, that adoption of this motion shall constitute notification of the absence of the Speaker as provided for under section 15(1) of The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act.

I so move.

The Speaker: — The motion is not in order because it must be seconded by a member who is present in the Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I would move, seconded by the member for Canora-Pelly.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 53 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, our government has reduced the provincial sales tax from 9 to 7 per cent. This Bill essentially ensures that the overall cost of tobacco products does not drop as a result. Smoking and tobacco products continue to pose a real threat to thousands of Saskatchewan families and young people. Lowering the costs of these products would send the wrong message about the health risks associated with tobacco use.

To offset the sales tax decrease, this Bill increases the tax on a package of 25 cigarettes from \$2 to \$2.10, effective March 21, 1997. The tax on 1 gram of fine cut or pipe tobacco goes from 5.3 cents to 5.5 cents. And the tax on cigars changes to 95 per cent of the retail selling price to a maximum of \$2.50 per cigar.

The tax structure on cigars, Mr. Speaker, is being changed to make it more consistent with other provinces. Nine provinces now apply the tobacco tax to cigars as a percentage of the selling price, rather than as a fixed tax rate per cigar for various price categories. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the maximum tax of \$2.50 per cigar is the same as the maximum tax in Alberta and British Columbia.

The changes contained within this Bill are effectively revenue neutral. The tobacco tax revenue is expected to yield an additional \$5.1 million in 1997-98 while there will be a corresponding reduction in the education and health tax revenue collected from tobacco products.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Tobacco Tax Act.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments on this Bill. As we received a copy of the Bill and the explanatory notes, I found it very interesting that at the bottom of the explanation it talked about the reasons for the tobacco tax rates being increased, and that's to offset the revenue, and I quote: "to offset the revenue loss from a reduction in the E&H tax" that the government reduced . . . will be coming up next in a Bill reducing from 9 to 7.

I just want the taxpayers of Saskatchewan to understand the ramifications of Bills such as this, and of course of the one that's coming up next in the reduction of the PST (provincial sales tax) by 2 points; in that a government that's very, very quick and can very easily bring in back-door taxes of all descriptions, whether it's utilities, Mr. Speaker, or tax like this. I do want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, that I am not a smoker and I do not condone smoking. And I think that we as elected people don't do enough to convince people of the hazards of smoking, and I want that to be on the record.

However, it's typical of this government, however, Mr. Speaker, in light of what they've done with health reform and downloading onto the sick and elderly of the province, Mr. Speaker, once again, once again, Mr. Speaker, here's another

back-door tax onto some less fortunate people in the province as our ourselves — ones with smoking habits that are very addicting, Mr. Speaker.

So the government members should be aware, as should the taxpayers, that we're going to be watching to see where this government brings in another back-door tax to recoup the rest of the reduction of the PST from 9 to 7, Mr. Speaker. And I'll have more to say on that in the Bill coming up next.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, this Bill, as I understand it, proposes to increase taxes on cigarettes so as that to ensure that there is no reduction on the price of cigarettes which is occasioned by a drop in the sales tax. That's as I understand it.

Now there's a very clear course of action which is indicated for members of the Legislative Assembly. Members of the Legislative Assembly can vote against a Bill and in this way propose to reduce the price of cigarettes, or they can vote for the Bill so as to maintain the price of cigarettes.

Now it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that there has been considerable public debate over these last number of years about the impact of lowering the price of cigarettes. It seems to me that there has been a considerable body of knowledge which has been developed, especially in Ontario and other parts of Canada, which suggest that if you lower the price of cigarettes, you make cigarettes more easily available for people, especially young people, who seem to be very susceptible to the come-on by tobacco companies and to get into smoking in the first place.

So there's a very clear option here for members of the Legislative Assembly. They can vote for the Bill to maintain the price we have on cigarettes and in this way, not encourage more of our young people to start smoking. They can do that.

On the other hand, they can vote against a Bill, and in this way take the approach they want, which is to encourage young people to start smoking. Let's see your votes. Let's see where you stand on this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

**Bill No. 54 — The Education and Health Tax
Amendment Act, 1997 (No. 2)**

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to move second reading of The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1997. This Bill continues our promise to bring sustainable tax reductions to Saskatchewan people.

They have worked hard to restore the finances of our province and we said that we would deliver back the benefits of sound financial management in a balanced way: debt reduction, enhanced social programs, tax reductions. Not just one alone, Mr. Speaker, but all three together with fairness and with balance.

We have reduced taxes in every year since 1992 to stimulate

jobs and growth. We strengthened small business and created jobs by reducing their income taxes by 20 per cent. We attracted call centres to Saskatchewan by removing the sales tax on 1 800 and 1 888 numbers. And we also introduced a number of tax incentives for manufacturing and processing. This growing sector continues to create thousands of new jobs.

But we've also worked to lower taxes for families. In 1995, we reduced personal income taxes by up to \$300 a family. Mr. Speaker, this tax cut was both compassionate and fair. It removed some 6,000 low income earners from the income tax rolls. Fairness is already a major feature of the Saskatchewan tax system.

For example, many provinces tax family essentials like children's clothing, home heating fuel, and electricity. This now includes the Atlantic provinces, which have chosen to become part of the federal government's harmonized tax scheme. We do not tax these family essentials and, Mr. Speaker, that is the right approach to take.

This Bill further expands the list of family expenses not taxed by adding many medical devices. Items such as blood glucose monitors and meters, blood pressure monitors, cholesterol testers and monitors, medical alert bracelets, and monitoring systems have now been added to the list of exemptions.

We promised we would reduce taxes further when it was affordable and sustainable. Saskatchewan people were clear on which tax they would like to see reduced — the provincial sales tax.

Business people told us it would do more to create jobs than any other measure. Border communities told us it was important for the competitiveness and well-being of their communities.

And families told us a sales tax cut would benefit everyone; that it would make family purchases more affordable.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill reduces the education and health tax rate from 9 per cent to 7 per cent, effective March 21, 1997. As a result, the people of Saskatchewan will pay less sales tax than the people of any other province with such a tax.

It will provide about \$180 million of annual tax savings to Saskatchewan families and businesses. That's \$180 million that will be put back into Saskatchewan pocketbooks and cash registers each and every year. And it is the largest single cut to the sales tax in this province's history.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill delivers back the benefits of sound financial management to communities, to business, and to families. And it confirms why people everywhere are feeling a growing confidence and optimism in their future.

Mr. Speaker, I now move that An Act to amend The Education and Health Tax Act (No. 2) be read a second time.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while we certainly support the fact that the sales tax should go from 9 per cent to 7 per cent, I'm really not sure how the government can take so much credit for it because they

certainly, in 1992, didn't accept the responsibility for the fact that the 2 per cent that we now are reversing is the 2 per cent that this government put on.

So only in Saskatchewan, where you go back to where you were in 1992, does anyone think that that's progress. And, Mr. Speaker, while it's a step in the right direction, it can hardly be considered progress.

Mr. Speaker, aside from the fact and even including the fact that this tax has gone down, there still is \$791 million more in taxes coming out of the people of Saskatchewan's pockets now than what happened . . . than was happening in 1992 when this government assumed a responsibility for the tax system in this province. And certainly even after the 2 per cent, which is welcome, is off, we're still paying almost a billion dollars more a year on the backs of taxpayers in Saskatchewan; and on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we at least understand what that means to the real people of this province who are fed up with the level of taxes that we're paying in this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments as well regarding this piece of legislation, Bill No. 54. I think, Mr. Speaker, you may be aware, when we had a vote, there were a number of members in this Assembly who were seen as not really working on behalf of Saskatchewan people when they decided to stand in opposition to the Minister of Finance's financial piece of legislation that she had brought in, or her budget speech.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think if you could talk to each and every one of the members, this is the only piece of that budget that really had any meaning to the Saskatchewan people, that really met them right where they're at. And the reduction in the sales tax is certainly something that everyone appreciated.

And I was pleased to be able to pass that on to my constituents. And I know in my area, talking about a reduction in the sales tax is something that people were really looking forward to. In fact it was one thing that everyone deals with on a daily basis.

When I look at the piece of . . . or this legislation that we have before us today though, Mr. Speaker, it's certainly gratifying to see that the government was willing to recognize that a platform policy that we had campaigned on in 1995 was certainly an appropriate piece of information that should be looked into seriously — because obviously the taxpayers of Saskatchewan really liked that part of our policy — and adopted it.

But I would think that maybe Bill No. 54 . . . if the minister would have been more than willing to accept the private members' Bill, Bill No. 204, The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, basically said the same thing.

So I'm pleased to see that the Minister of Finance has recognized that it's appropriate to address this concern, has brought forward this piece of legislation, and that the legislation, as the '95 debate regarding taxation was addressed in the budget, this piece of legislation is just addressing something that was brought forward in a private members' Bill, and that all members of the House can have some impact on

some of the decision making.

And so we certainly thank the minister for recognizing this. It would have been nice if she could have allowed our Bill to proceed, but we'll accept the fact that her Bill does the same thing. Thank you very much.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I enter this debate for just a brief moment or two to draw to the attention of the House a couple of matters which need to be spoken to respecting the member from Melfort's comments on the tax and the position of the government, and particularly the position of his party.

First of all, the member alleges in his remarks to this Assembly that because revenues are up, somehow this is a reflection of the fact that taxes are up, generally speaking. He either fails to acknowledge or is unwilling to acknowledge that in fact revenues of the province at this particular time are up because the economic activity in the province of Saskatchewan is up. When more businesses are prospering and more people are working, more people are paying taxes and the revenues are up. It has nothing to do in this instance with the obvious fact that there is a tax reduction.

There's a tax reduction not only of the amount from 9 to 7 per cent that this Bill advocates, but parenthetically on the — and I say parenthetically — tax reductions in manufacturing and processing, previous tax reductions with respect to the lowest income level earners in the province of Saskatchewan on income tax, and other changes as well. Now that is the first point that I want to make.

It is false logic, it is highly political, and in my judgement it leads to the next comment that I make about where the Liberal Party really stands on the tax situation. It is also a very political comment because it attempts to obfuscate exactly where the Liberals are on this important issue.

So the first point I want to make is tax revenue is up; taxes in the province of Saskatchewan are going down.

The second point I want to make is the fact that the provincial Liberal Party is against this tax decrease and is for maintaining 9 per cent on the sales tax. Lest there be no doubt about it, I quote from the Langenburg *Four-Town Journal* of April 16, 1997, where under a headline "Liberal leader sceptical about PST cut", the following quotation marks are said around these words directed by the Leader of the Liberal Party, Dr. Melenchuk, as context as follows, quote:

Why didn't they use that \$150 million (referring to the tax cut) to support the infrastructure of rural Saskatchewan to allow that transition to occur?

That's an interesting quotation because he's acknowledging a transition, which here they either refuse to acknowledge a transition or in fact outright accuse the government of trying to do harm to rural Saskatchewan.

That's an interesting quote, but that's not the main point of it. What he is obviously saying at Langenburg is he does not want that tax cut. He's saying he does not want the 9 to 7 tax cut. And that's what the Leader of the Official Opposition in this

House says — does not want this tax cut. On budget day, every one of those Liberals voted against this budget because they do not want this tax cut. They want the tax to remain at 9 per cent.

And not only that, Mr. Speaker, not only that, Mr. Speaker, but there is another aspect of the Liberal Party position. The Liberal Party position also is due to the fact that they want to harmonize. Now this, Mr. Speaker, is very clear. The new Leader of the Liberal Party, Dr. Melenchuk, very shortly after election, gave an interview. In the interview he said — I don't have the clipping handy but I can locate it very quickly to give you the authority of this — widely reported, he says, what the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan will do if elected is not only expand now the PST, from 7 to 9 per cent, but they're going to harmonize it with the GST (goods and services tax). That is their position.

Members opposite challenge me on that last statement about harmonization. I thank the hon. member for giving me a copy of an article in the Regina *Leader-Post* dated November 26, 1996 — my memory is correct, right after the Liberal leadership selection process in Saskatoon — and the headline says this: "Grit wants tax harmonization." Those are the words. There it is, there it is: "Grit wants tax harmonization."

Saskatchewan should follow the Atlantic provinces and harmonize its sales tax with the federal GST, says Liberal leader Jim Melenchuk.

That is the position.

(1445)

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

Mr. Belanger: — To ask for leave to introduce guests. Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to, through you and to you, I'd like to introduce a couple of very special guests that travelled a great deal of distance today to be with us, and they'll be here for the day and tomorrow. I'd like to ask all of you to welcome Mr. Felix Merasty and Mr. James Corrigan, who are from Ile-a-la Crosse.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 54 (continued)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too want to welcome the two guests from northern Saskatchewan to the legislative gallery.

I was making the point, the third point — my first point being revenues as a result of the economy going up, the revenues go up for the province of Saskatchewan; my second point being that the provincial Liberal Party wants to increase the sales tax

back up to 9 per cent — my third point that I was making at the time of the quite appropriate intervention by the member from Cumberland was this proposition that the Liberal leader says, quote again:

Saskatchewan should follow the Atlantic provinces and harmonize its sales tax with the federal GST, says Liberal leader Jim Melenchuk.

Now I want to take just a moment, a moment, Mr. Speaker, to explain to the members of the Liberal Party opposite, what that position of theirs means. Harmonization means this, Mr. Speaker, that a provincial government, in applying its provincial sales tax in a harmonized way with the federal GST, must do so in such a way that the PST — if you can imagine it in my right hand here — is exactly in conformity of the GST, including the items specially under the GST which are taxable by the GST.

Now right now, Mr. Speaker, in the province of Saskatchewan, the provincial sales tax, we do not tax a whole wide range of articles and commodities. We do not tax, for example, services. We do not tax school books. We do not tax children's clothing. The list goes on. In fact not only was that list of exemptions very extensive prior to this budget and this particular Bill, we even went further by even narrowing the tax base of the PST here in the province of Saskatchewan. So by my imagination, if you can imagine this, if this is the GST, we're approximately two-thirds or half of the GST, maybe even below half.

Harmonization would force us, by law, Mr. Speaker, to expand the provincial sales tax to exactly overlap the four corners of the GST and would expand the tax rate, as it has in Atlantic Canada, to the point where, the Minister of Finance has pointed out, where it would be double what it is in Saskatchewan even now without the lowering of the sales tax from 9 to 7 per cent.

That is what the Liberal leader, Dr. Jim Melenchuk, wants to do. He wants to harmonize. And the current official Leader of the Opposition in the House here is agreeing with his leader, as obviously he must do.

So make no mistake about it. Nobody in Saskatchewan should be confused about this. The provincial Liberal Party and the federal Liberal Party are at one mind. They want to increase the provincial sales tax and they want to harmonize it, and by harmonizing it, they want to expand the areas of taxation, doubling the individual taxes on people.

Nobody should be mistaken about the provincial Liberal position in that regard. That is clear. I've not heard a retraction, I've not heard an explanation, I've not heard a denial. Nothing. In fact I hear a repetition of it, even as I speak, by the members opposite from their seats.

An Hon. Member: — But we don't even hear you say you might even look at something that would improve our situation, position.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, now the former official leader of the opposition says, they don't even hear us talking about something that would improve the situation. I'm not sure what he's talking about in terms of improving.

But I tell you we have examined harmonization from every aspect that is possible to be examined. And you know what happens? Apart from changing the taxes, from taxing those who can basically pay it onto the consumers generally, that philosophic shift, apart from that — I'll leave that aside for the moment — what it does, it would leave the province of Saskatchewan's coffers approximately \$200 million short in revenue each and every year.

Why? Because in addition to the overlap that I've described about harmonization, there is another mechanism about harmonization which requires rebates to be paid back to businesses — certain businesses. And in the win/lose mathematics of it, the province of Saskatchewan loses \$200 million a year. And more people pay more taxes. That's why no provincial government has accepted harmonization except the Liberal Atlantic provinces.

And even then they accepted it because they basically were bought off. How were they bought off? They were bought off because they have the shortfall in the different numbers, but in the same proportion as we do. And what the federal government said to them was, buy into harmonization and we will — we the taxpayers of Saskatchewan through the Ottawa coffers — what we'll do is we will make up that shortfall for the first year so the people won't see it.

But for the second year we're going to back down to 50 per cent, and all of a sudden they got \$100 million shortfall. And the third year the federal government says, we're out of subsidizing you and you're back into the shortfall. That is exactly the deal and that is what the Liberal Party wants us to do. That is exactly what the Liberal Party wants us to do.

Mr. Speaker, this is a party, this Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, in league with its federal Liberal cousins, which is a party of tax, tax, tax, and spend, spend, spend — and I mean foolishly, spend on everything going. This budget is well accepted by the people of Saskatchewan because it's a balanced budget and this particular Bill reflects this.

If we wanted to save all of the surplus into tax reduction we could've done that. Or we could've have said all of it should have gone to debt reduction; we could have said that. Or all of it should have gone to . . . by the way, when you say no money for infrastructure — \$2.5 billion over 15 years for highways; how about that for infrastructure?

How about \$57 million a year added on to the base for health care; how about that for infrastructure? Not good enough for the official leader of the opposition. Eight million dollars for the K to 12 system and \$13 million approximately for the universities; not good enough for him.

We took the balanced approach of reducing the taxes, putting more money in for people services, and reducing the debt by over \$2 billion on the way to a reduction that totals \$4 billion by the year 2000. And this is not good enough for the Liberal Party.

You know why it's not good enough? Because they will

increase the provincial PST, if elected; and they will harmonize it with the federal government, thereby doubling the PST. And in the consequence, will leave the provincial purse \$200 million short each and every year right after that.

That is the position of the party. And the member from Canora is disputing me. I read to the member from Canora again, lest he did not hear. *Leader-Post*, November 26, 1996, quote:

Saskatchewan should follow the Atlantic provinces and harmonize its sales tax with the federal GST, says Liberal leader Jim Melenchuk.

There's the headline. Did he say it or did he not say it?

An Hon. Member: — He must have said it.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — He must have said it. A least I got the member from Canora . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, let you challenge the *Leader-Post*. Have you challenged the *Leader-Post*? Have you said anything about this since November 26? Not a word. And you can't say anything about it now. It's too late now.

You not only want to increase the PST; you want to have, Mr. Speaker . . . just one comment on taxation. You want to have the oil companies — and the people in the south-west should know this — you want the oil companies to pay on developmental leases up front, in cash, for 15 years. That's what you want to do. Now that's a great idea.

You know how great it is, Mr. Leader of the Official Opposition? If it's so great, we should start right now by you paying your taxes up front for the next 15 years in cash. How'd you like to do that? If it's a fair point for the oil companies and for some businesses, why isn't it a good point for you?

Maybe we should extend that principle to the farmers of Saskatchewan, too. Have them pay their taxes for 15 years in cash, up front, thanks to the Liberal leader of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a Bill which represents, together with the other additional funds for health and for education and for roads and the child poverty initiatives of the action plan of Saskatchewan, that whole plethora of exciting attempts to alleviate those in need, this Bill represents a turnaround for the province of Saskatchewan. It represents a dawning of a new day. It represents, as somebody says, springtime in Saskatchewan in 1997.

After six years of fighting a massive deficit, after six years of fighting a massive debt, we're now able to say, no more deficit. The first government, provincial or federal, anywhere in this jurisdiction to balance its budget. We did that.

And we're able to say to the people of Saskatchewan, you can share with us because it was you who did this for the people of Saskatchewan. You got us out of the deficit position. You got us to the point where we're paying down on debt. We're giving you a reward. We're sharing with you on a 2 per cent reduction of the sales tax. We're sharing with you and protecting our vital health care, education, road system, and concern and

compassion for kids in poverty and in need. What's wrong with that?

What is possibly a source of complaint by the Liberal Party in that regard? Except that what the Liberal Party stands for in the province of Saskatchewan and, I might say in a closing word, what it stands for federally . . . remember that "red book," the famous "red book" of the last federal election, 1993, the one that was waved around? And remember what they said? What did they say about the GST? They said they would what? Do away with it. It's gone. That was the promise made in 1993.

What do we have in 1997? We not only have the GST, Mr. Speaker, but we're going to have it for ever. And not only that, if we ever elect any Liberals to government in Saskatchewan — I don't think I'll see it — but if we ever should, we're not only going to have the GST, we're going to have a harmonized GST-PST, doubling the taxes on the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

I say to everybody in Saskatchewan: a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal. They stand for high taxes. Don't give them your confidence or your trust. This is the Bill which represents the hope and the optimism and the opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 11

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Mitchell the **Bill No. 11 — The Constituency Boundaries Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had numerous opportunities already to talk about Bill No. 11 in terms of its implication for the province of Saskatchewan and the various constituencies.

A couple of final points, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to make about Bill No. 11. I believe that there are two components here that need to be addressed and need to be looked at and see whether or not they are of an advantage to the province of Saskatchewan or a disadvantage.

The first point I think, is around the area of when shall there be a review that takes place. And there's been discussion between the government and the opposition parties in terms of looking at whether or not we should be doing this on a cycle that includes every 5 years or whether the cycle should be expanded to be 10 years.

And I think in previous debates on Bill No. 11 we've made the point that of course we see it as an advantage to move to a

10-year cycle. I think it will be an advantage to the voters that will be in the constituencies will have more . . . a greater understanding of what constituency they actually represent. And this process, I think can take place. So we have no problem in terms of supporting the amendment that changes the period of time from 5 years to 10 years.

The second point that we have looked at in this Bill, in terms of amendments, is the amendment that changes a particular section from the wording, voter population, to total population.

While we agree with the fact that this looks like an error indeed in terms of the 1993 legislation, because when you take a look at sections . . . I believe sections 11, sections 12, 13, 14, all of the sections or the clauses that relate to population have referred to total population. And indeed the one section is the one that relates to voter population. And that must have been an error indeed in 1993 and had slipped by the people at that time and has to be corrected in terms of housekeeping.

(1500)

Now that's the point: that if it is a housekeeping change, as an opposition we have no problem.

However, when we take a look at that concept of choosing constituencies, areas of constituencies, by total population, as I've indicated before in speaking on Bill No. 11, we find this not to be a practice that is acceptable, especially in rural Saskatchewan.

And I think I've indicated before that as we move to a more elderly population outside of city areas, and the fact that within the city we have populations that have a greater density of younger people, who are non-voters, we indeed produce a result that has areas of rural constituencies becoming much, much larger.

When you look at the concept of one voter, one vote, that should be the principle I think, that determines the size of a constituency. If we are elected as MLAs by voters on the basis of one voter, one vote, I think that practice can be followed in terms of determining the constituency size as well.

We have an enumeration process in place that identifies all the people in Canada, it identifies all the people in Saskatchewan. We're going to be setting up a database I believe, that will make the manual type of enumeration unnecessary.

And I think it's incumbent upon this government to take a serious look at whether or not we can change the sections — and I've indicated sections 11, 12, 13, and 14 inclusive — those four sections where it refers to total population. Can we indeed explore the possibility of saying no, that could be amended to say voter population. And therefore you bring a very consistent basis across the entire province of deciding what size a constituency is.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest is that the Bill . . . We need a little time to look at the four sections that I've identified, to see whether or not it is possible to make some changes through amendments to the Bill. And we would like to have the possibility of proposing those amendments during the

Committee of the Whole and have the government take a look at those amendments and see whether or not indeed that would be a much more fairer system to develop an electoral system for the province of Saskatchewan.

We have no problem, as I've indicated, with the fact that we're moving to a 10-year plan. That's acceptable. We know, of course, that this was a housekeeping error, and indeed that has to be changed as well, if indeed we were staying with that system.

But what I'm suggesting is that we take a look at the second half of this Bill to say, instead of developing constituencies on a basis of total population, let's take a look at that now when we have the Bill before us. The year 2001 is a long ways away. Let's take a look at the possibility of making those amendments now when we have the Bill before us and changing it to what we believe is a much fairer and more equitable system in the province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments as well regarding this piece of legislation that we have before us.

Certainly we appreciate the fact that the minister responsible has consulted with us and brought to our attention some of the changes that were coming in. And we thank him for that.

We certainly concur with the fact that we're moving . . . this Bill is moving from a 5-year revision to 10 years. I certainly think, as the member from Canora-Pelly has indicated, that is certainly a positive move.

To be continually changing constituency boundaries not only makes it difficult for the electorate, it makes it difficult for elected members, to know that you've just been elected but by the time the next election rolls around, you may have to be looking at a different set of boundaries and a different area to cover. So you're left with the problem of how do you represent your constituents and yet plan for the future.

And so this change is certainly something that is positive. And I think it as well shows some responsibility in regards to legislation and responsible government. It reflects responsible government, responsible representations.

Mr. Speaker, the area we do have a problem with though as well goes back to the fact that the current Bill before us just goes back to what we had on the last Bill regarding voter population. And we have mentioned this to the member and to the government members, that in our discussions leading up to this piece of legislation coming to the Assembly . . . and in subsection 14(1) . . . or section 14 as amended by reading in subsection 14(1):

. . . by striking out "the voter population of each proposed constituency" and substituting "the population of each proposed constituency".

The reason we have a problem with this, Mr. Speaker, is . . . And going back to the debate that took place prior to the last revision, and even before that, back in the late '80s, there was a revision when two more seats were added in the province of Saskatchewan — one to Regina, one to Saskatoon.

One of the big debates at that time was the different differential, or the variances in constituencies of some 15 to 25 per cent. And I remember government members, when they were on this side of the Assembly, said that that was too large. It didn't really reflect the proper voter population of the province of Saskatchewan. And 25 per cent was just too large and it should be reduced. And I believe at that time the suggestion was even a 5 per cent variance, taking into consideration large urban sectors and then the rural setting where you do have the population base certainly farther dispersed.

Therefore if you get to trying to draw up boundaries where you have totally equal population, in a large urban sector you're covering a very small area, land area, and you can cover your constituency quite easily; whereas in a rural area, as you get a smaller variance and number of seats . . . fewer seats, you end up with larger areas that you have to cover which makes it more difficult for rural members.

While we do not have a problem with the variance, we do have a problem with the fact that . . . when you bring it down to population. Because as we've seen in the last revision where the complaint before was that urban ridings had such a large . . . in some cases more voters per constituency than some of the rural ridings, the changes, Mr. Speaker, in the last piece of legislation actually did one thing: it put, in many cases, the number of rural ridings with many more voters, actual voters, than urban ridings.

And I note the constituency that I represent. In 1995, there were 11,407 voters; Cannington had 11,491; Cypress Hills, 11,014. But on the other hand we see some of the large urban ridings . . . I shouldn't say large urban ridings. As far as land base, fairly small. But for example, Regina Dewdney, 10,158. That's almost 1,400 voters . . . or 1,300 voters less than I had to try and converse with in a larger area.

Regina Elphinstone, 10,764. I can see why the member from Regina Elphinstone decided to get out of Shaunavon — be a lot easier to cover his constituency. Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, 10,417. But of real interest, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that Saskatoon Fairview only has 9,376 electoral voters in the 1995 election. And Saskatoon Riversdale, 9,820.

This, Mr. Speaker, when you start talking about variances, adds up to a variance of about 17 per cent. And it's basically gone opposite to what the variance of . . . the discussion, the debate in and prior to 1990 was about a 5 per cent variance.

I would think, Mr. Speaker, that this isn't a coincidence. And it certainly is not a coincidence when you look at where the strengths of political parties tend to lie in the province of Saskatchewan. The large urban sectors get more seats. Guess who has the strength, especially in the cities of Saskatoon and Regina at this current time? Although I think Saskatoon and

Regina certainly have some areas that other parties are finding that there are strengths starting to come back.

But over the years, Mr. Speaker, the two large urban centres tend to have a stronger NDP base. And based on the way we're going and the change in constituency boundaries, I can see where this government could move in the next year or maybe even the next time there's a change, a variance change, this government could move to the point where they are forcing people to really look on the rural side and say, well we don't stand a chance any more. The two large urban centres have all the votes, they have all the seats, and it makes it very difficult for people to vote against the NDP as it currently . . . certainly as the current riding structure sits.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a very deep concern to us. It's a concern to rural residents. The Premier just a moment ago was talking about how they have made significant changes in taxation. While there are a number of areas I certainly could stand up here and debate the Premier on, I think the Bill that's before us, while it has some good components and we agree with them and we certainly appreciated the debate we've had with regards to the government members on this issue, it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that government members were not willing to take a look at this other piece of legislation and recognize the difference between population and voter population.

The fact that in areas where you tend to have younger families moving into, you're going to have a larger population but you may have a very small voter population. And that can have a significant impact.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that that could be addressed very simply, very easily. And I think, Mr. Speaker, if we got back to voter population, which in our technological times that we now live in could be addressed very easily, if we got back to voter population, it would certainly take away from the discrepancies and the disparities that now arise and are now created as a result of the current legislation and the current make-up of constituencies within the province of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, while we possibly haven't heard the minister indicate that he's willing to address this concern, I can't really say that the minister isn't because I haven't heard the minister respond to some of the concerns we've raised here. And I know we will be giving the minister, we will be giving the minister the opportunity in a moment, we will be giving the minister the opportunity in a moment to respond to some of these concerns.

But I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that when we get into Committee of the Whole if we don't hear anything positive, we will certainly continue to raise this issue. And we will look forward to as well bringing forward some amendments that would address this concern.

But we trust, Mr. Speaker, that the minister himself is recognizing, based on the open, honest, and effective government they talk about, the open, democratic process, that the minister will give some serious concerns in his government to some of the issues that we have raised.

And so I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for having me had the

opportunity to raise some of these concerns. We look forward to the response from the minister and further debate in committee. Thank you.

The Speaker: — Does the minister wish to exercise his right to close debate?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — It is my obligation then to advise all hon. members that the minister wishes to exercise his right to close debate. And once he's recognized, all other members will be prohibited from entering into debate. If any other member wishes to speak, then he or she must do so now.

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very interested in the debate that took place today with the representatives of the two opposition parties stating their views with respect to a very important question. I also had read . . . heard and read previous debates about this matter in connection with this Bill, and indeed in connection with the 1993 Bill.

At issue here, as members have noticed, is the question of whether we in this House represent voters or whether we in this House represent the population of this province. That was the debate that took place in 1993, and that indeed is the debate that has taken place in a lot of other Assemblies a number of times in this country. It's a fundamental question for democracy and not one that is easily answered.

We wrestled our way through this in 1993 on this side of the House and came to the conclusion that we represent, having been elected by our constituents, we then represent all of the people who reside in our constituencies, whether they're of voting age or eligible to vote or not.

And so it is that we would represent people who are under the age of 18; we would represent newly arrived Canadians who live in our constituency and who have not yet become entitled to vote because they are not yet Canadian citizens — to mention two classes of citizens who are not voters but yet who we have an obligation to represent as elected members of this Assembly.

I confess though, Mr. Speaker, that there is a force to the opposite argument. Obviously there is for the debate to have continued over so many years in so many different jurisdictions.

Until now it has simply not been practical to draw constituency boundaries on the basis of eligible voters. The reason for that is that we have never been certain we know how many eligible voters there are in the province, or in each of our constituencies. We've had an enumeration process in this province that has begun on the day on which . . . or the day after the election is called. And enumerators then go around enumerating the population during the next couple of weeks or so and then we candidates get the voter's list about two weeks into the campaign.

(1515)

And I don't know if I can speak for all members on this, Mr. Speaker, but certainly in my constituency the voter's list has not

accurately reflected the eligible voters in our constituency. So we hustle around and try to revise it, try to ensure that all the people are on it, but come election day, sure enough, there are all sorts of people who present themselves at the voting station whose names are not on the voter's list. So we have not had an accurate way of determining in this province who are the eligible voters.

Now the constituency boundaries of course can't be drawn during the election campaign. They have to be drawn before the election campaign. The commission that draws the boundaries — and I think everyone agrees we should have a commission like the one we have — they have no basis on which to do that except the voter's list from the last provincial election.

Now we're making some progress there, Mr. Speaker, as members have noted. We're moving in this country towards a permanent voter's list. And we have indicated, for our part, in the province of Saskatchewan that we will cooperate with the establishment of that permanent voter's list and with its upkeep. We're prepared to cooperate.

Now that process is off the ground with respect to the federal election that is here now. We will have to watch that very carefully, and if the result of that is a voter's list in which we all have confidence, then I think we can raise this question of what is the appropriate way to draw constituency boundaries. I think it will be a workable plan. I think the voter's list that emerges will be an accurate list. And then we could, I think, properly consider the alternative.

But for now, for now, we have not changed the position we arrived at in 1993. And we're sort of from Missouri on this question. If the permanent voter's list works, fine. But we want to see that it works, we want to test it, and know that it works before we change our mind.

And on that basis, Mr. Speaker, I have to reply to the members of the opposition that while the idea certainly has merit and the arguments certainly have force, for the reasons that I've indicated, the government wishes to maintain the same approach that was taken in the '93 Bill.

And I'll close on this note, Mr. Speaker, by observing that if you're reading the 1993 legislation, as the member from Canora-Pelly indicated, it is clear that the intention was that the division be made on the basis of population and that the section that we're referring to was, in that context, inaccurately expressed and it was a mistake that ought to be cleaned up. In that sense, it's a housekeeping measure.

But as I take my place let me note once again, the issue is a good issue, it's a live issue, and no doubt will be raised again in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Mitchell that **Bill No. 9 — The Wanuskewin Heritage Park Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

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

Bill No. 10

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Mitchell that **Bill No. 10 — The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

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

Bill No. 32

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 32 — The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal (Regulatory Reform) Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

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

Bill No. 33

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 33 — The Miscellaneous Statutes Consequential Amendments Act, 1997/Loi de 1997 apportant des modifications corrélatives à certaines lois** be now read a second time.

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

Bill No. 50

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 50 — The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to add a few more comments to some of the debate I entered into yesterday regarding this specific piece of legislation, Bill No. 60, The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, our caucus is certainly opposed to this Bill. Off the top, when we first saw the Bill and understood that the government was bringing this Bill forward — and what we understood about this Bill, it was going to address a number of concerns — we felt there weren't . . . that it was the type of Bill that really didn't have a lot of issues that related to it, or areas that . . . We would certainly take a stand against it.

Mr. Speaker, we found that after meeting with representatives

from the Canadian Society for Industrial Security, it has become clear to us that the government did not do adequate consultation with the industry before drafting this Bill. And we've had the privilege of sitting down with representatives about two weeks ago, just after the presentation — or just before the presentation of the Bill — and they raised a number of concerns with us.

Mr. Speaker, the members of our caucus like all members appreciate the public concern about issues that this Bill is trying to address, certainly when you unfortunately hear of the circumstances leading to the death of one Mr. Nikolichuk in Saskatoon. And that is a concern.

And as we heard from the representatives of the Canadian Society for Industrial Security, this is a concern to them as well because it affects the industry that they are involved in. And they are certainly, as they indicated and as I suggested, were more than pleased to have been asked by the government to work towards drafting some type of legislation or bringing forward some ideas that would be able to be put into legislation that would make that industry operate much better; and that it would certainly bring better protection to its members and to the individuals who they hire and who are out there working as security guards on many different projects throughout the province of Saskatchewan from time to time.

Even the commissioners, I believe, who tend to go up and down the streets and see whether we're parked illegally or not are involved. So there are a lot of people who are concerned and they want to make sure they're well represented and well protected.

The representative of the private investigators and security guards appreciate this concern as well, and they feel that it is in the best interests of themselves, as a profession, to be held to very high public standards of competence and safety.

Their criticisms of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, arise from . . . on the whole are not at reducing the Bill, but rather they want to see the Bill, or this piece of legislation strengthened. They feel that the legislation as it currently sits before us really does not address a number of the concerns that were raised as a result of this tragic incident.

They would like to see the Bill take a stronger approach to licensing that would hold their profession to the highest public standards possible. And I understand from our discussions with them that they are in discussion with other provinces across Canada regarding similar legislation so that there is a uniformity across Canada when it comes to legislation such as this, dealing with an industry of this type.

However by the same token, they expect the government to extend to their profession some degree of respect. It is their feeling that this Bill does little to prevent the kind of situation that led to the Nikolichuk case. What it does do is subject their profession to constant suspicion and arbitrary interference from government and the feeling that it would make it difficult for them to continue to operate very efficiently based on how they understand this piece of legislation coming forward.

They are concerned about clauses such as no. 14 which gives

the registrar the ability to withdraw an investigator or a security guard's licence if they deem that he or she is not a fit or proper person to hold a licence.

Mr. Speaker, this is a major concern because what it does is if a person loses a licence . . . A contractor has bid on a job place to provide security, and all of a sudden they find that the individuals that they have hired have lost their licence. They really don't have a lot of time to react. And in many cases, they feel that they are then going to lose that job as some other security operation is going to then be called in because they do have the personnel that have been licensed and, certainly, recognized.

So they have some concerns in that area. Obviously this definition is far too vague and opens the door to bureaucratic confusion and abuse. They have many further concerns which the House should take time to consider, both in second reading and in committee.

In general, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the government keep this Bill off the order paper in this session so that they can go back and listen to the very worthwhile suggestions that this profession has to offer. In particular, the CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) would like the government to consider a much more thorough Bill that was recently passed in Nova Scotia. Mr. Speaker, it would seem that it would be appropriate to do that. And as the representative certainly indicated to us, their feeling is, rather than just jumping in and addressing an issue that relates to a tragic incident and bringing forward legislation that really may not meet the needs of this particular sector of our society, it might be appropriate for the government to take some more time.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, the concerns that our caucus has raised, and other members of this House have raised, it would certainly be appropriate for the government and for the minister to give some serious consideration to maybe just leaving this legislation sit and not bother worrying or even worry about passing it through this current session, to review the legislation much more carefully, and to come in with a legislation that will address the concerns and that will have some real benefit to this sector.

Certainly the professionals that we've talked to feel that it's appropriate that this legislation that protects their industry . . . but they want to make sure that legislation doesn't impede their ability to provide a service, but it certainly addresses the concerns as far as safety and proper availability of the proper equipment to perform a duty in the workplace.

And then the other concern that was raised and needs to be addressed — and I don't believe the government is even close to having any form of the . . . or any outline of the regulations that will be brought forward to address how this Bill is implemented. And that is of a major concern.

(1530)

Because, Mr. Speaker, once the Bill is passed, once the legislation is passed, and then this Assembly gets the opportunity to address and to speak to legislation . . . but when

the legislation is passed and regulations are then worked on or put in motion and brought into place, they may not generally reflect what the industry feels and in some cases may not even reflect their version of how they interpreted the Bill.

And their feeling is that it would be appropriate for the government to give them an idea of the regulations that would be coming down to implement the intent of this Bill. And I think that certainly is a valid point and it's something that we should give serious consideration to.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I basically raised the points of major concerns. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I adjourned debate the other day and I don't have that privilege today. So therefore I'm going to have to allow other members of the Assembly to get into this debate because I think this is certainly one of the Bills that we need to take some time to address a little more closely to make sure that it addresses the concerns and that it certainly meets the intended need and intent of the Bill. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place and allow any other member in the Assembly the opportunity to speak to this Bill. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has pointed out, that the representatives of the security industry do have some concerns with Bill No. 50 in that it doesn't fulfil the needs as they see it as to what the solutions were to the problems that have come forward in the past within the security industry. They believe that while the minister has brought forward a Bill that is supposed to address those concerns, it has failed to do so.

And we have seen this type of legislation before, Mr. Minister, where a problem has been identified, the government reacts to that problem, brings forward some legislation, but misses the point of what the whole piece of legislation was for. Mr. Speaker, they have done exactly that in this particular piece of legislation.

My colleague has suggested that perhaps what the minister should do is pull the legislation, go back, start over, redraft it, get the points that need to be dealt with, work with the industry to ensure that their needs are met, that the security staff people who work with them are met, and those that are interested in the industry, any needs that they might have are met.

Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to go one step even further than that. If the minister wants to go back, redraft this Bill, and bring it forward to the House still in this session, having done it properly, we're prepared to move quickly on that particular piece of legislation because the security people, both the companies and the staff, need a new piece of legislation there to define and to protect and to serve their needs, which is not being done at the present time, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps for the security staff, what needs to be done is something along the line of certification, as happens with school teachers within a division, that they can prepare the exams for their students without supervision from the department. For the security staff within a corporation, perhaps they could be certified to provide the services without constant supervision, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, we support a move to make this Bill responsive to the security industry, for the security staff, but clearly this Bill has not done so. We would ask that the minister withdraw the Bill, go and do it right, and bring it back into this legislature. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on this Bill at the present time.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker: — Why is the hon. member for Saskatoon Eastview on his feet?

Mr. Pringle: — Mr. Speaker, with leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to hon. members for giving me leave to introduce some special guests from Saskatoon.

I'd like to introduce the grade 4 and 5 class from Hugh Cairns School, and welcome you here to Regina. Also with the class of 57 students, the teachers, Ms. Miller; principal, Mr. Abraham; Ms. Braitenbade and Ms. Stephenson; and chaperons, Mrs. Krysa, Mrs. Reekie, and Mr. Udchic.

They're down in Regina for the day. We're going to be meeting for a few minutes after to take a picture and have a chat. I think I'm coming into the classroom next week and some more tough questions will be there.

I know that the students have probably had a great day in Regina and I look forward to meeting you in a few minutes and would ask all hon. members to join me in giving you a warm welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Now why is the hon. member for Saskatoon Northwest on his feet?

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Speaker, with leave, to introduce guests also.

Leave granted.

Mr. Whitmore: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I too would like to welcome the students from Hugh Cairns here today. I've had the opportunity to be at their school on two occasions for a citizenship court, where the students have played a very important role in that activity. And I have enjoyed both occasions that I've been at their school and I certainly welcome them here today to Regina. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 27 — The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Amendment Act, 1997

The Chair: — Order. The committee will come to order. I would ask the minister to introduce her officials first, please.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On my right is John Edwards, the director of the policy and legislative branch of the Saskatchewan Municipal Government department. Behind John is Doug Morcom, vice-chairman of the Municipal Potash Tax Sharing Administration Board. And behind me is Perry Erhardt, legislative officer for Saskatchewan Municipal Government.

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you. First of all, Madam Minister, welcome to you and to your officials this afternoon. I understand that the basic purpose of this Act is to prevent major tax shifts to potash mines as a result of reassessment. And I wonder if you could confirm that that is in fact what the Bill is attempting to address here?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, yes, I can clarify that and confirm what the member says. This Bill is a consequence of reassessment, where the legislation refers to factors on the mill rate. The mill rate will obviously be changed or altered considerably when the assessment rises. And so this will be activated only every third year when there is a reassessment because the reference is to the assessment of the year before the current year's mill rate, and that won't work in a year of reassessment. So it's designed to be applicable every third year.

Mr. Hillson: — Can the minister tell me, Mr. Chair, if this will prevent all tax shifts regarding potash mines as a result of reassessment or if it will merely cap an attempt to limit potential tax shifts from reassessment?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, it will not have that effect because the property taxes levied on an individual potash mine in a tax-sharing area may increase or decrease depending on the change in a mine's assessment relative to the change in assessment of other mines. So it won't necessarily mean the status quo for all mines but it will mean that the changes will be relative to the assessment of each mine.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, what I'm trying to understand here and I think there'll be many property owners who are trying to grasp, what are the special issues and challenges regarding potash mines in the sense that of course reassessment is resulting in significant shifts all over the province? We're having shifts in some cases . . . the education costs going from villages to farm land. We're having shifts in our cities from downtown businesses to peripheral businesses. We're having shifts from the commercial to the residential. We're obviously having shifts from older to newer. Shifts are going on all over the province, and indeed the whole purpose of reassessment was so we would have shifts.

And so what I'm trying to understand now is what are the particular challenges that mean that we have to legislate some breaks on shifts regarding the potash industry when I say you could argue the whole purpose of reassessment to begin with is to have shifts.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, with respect, I think that the member is not interpreting the purpose of this Act entirely accurately. This is an Act, this is The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Act that we're amending. And the basis for this legislation or what it's intended to achieve is the sharing of potash tax revenues that occurs between and among municipalities.

And there's a formula in place in this legislation that affects that sharing so that the revenue enjoyed by the presence of a potash mine and its assets is not confined to the municipality in which it's located, but that benefit is shared throughout a defined area by a defined formula. And the formula uses, say in this year, it would use 1997 mill rates on 1996 assessment.

Now in a year of reassessment, that doesn't work because you're having a mill rate that reflects this year's assessment; so that using the formula would skew . . . and tend to increase the burden on potash mines, which is not intended.

So it's simply that the reference to assessment is . . . this amendment will alter that relationship for the years of reassessment only. In other words, next year the relationship that's spelled out in the formula between 1998 mill rates and 1997 assessment will produce the same relationship that it always has. But again, in the year 2000 the relationship will again be skewed. So this amendment is meant to make that alteration in the calculations every third year.

Mr. Hillson: — I realize then, Mr. Chairman, that there's a sharing, tax-sharing agreements here for the payment of potash mine taxes, but you're saying that the tax shifts resulting from reassessment will still take place and this may involve individual tax increases?

(1545)

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, first I should correct something that I said — I knew better but I mis-spoke myself — and it's . . . it would be the 1996 mill rate against the 1997 assessment. You know, not the other way around, which I said.

But yes, the reassessment will still capture different values for mines relative to their individual situations. But what this Bill is intended to do is not to reduce tax shifts, but to maintain the intent of the tax-sharing formula.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. The effects of property reassessment are having fairly acute effects on members of businesses, property owners, and I think we're finding out fairly recently, especially farmers. As well the changes in tax structure has a big effect on school divisions. And I'm wondering in general, why are special exceptions being made for potash mines?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, as a result of reassessment, there are a number of consequential changes that are administratively needed as references to mill rates are made. And this is not an attempt to alter the effect of reassessment; it's simply administrative.

Another example for this is — that has arisen recently — is the reference to mill rates in the regulations affecting the provincial disaster assistance program, where there was a, say a 3 mill deductible. Well any place where as a consequence of reassessment, the costs or charges would be changed, then our intent is to make administrative changes with respect to the mill rate reference. So that no . . . the financial effect will not be changed. So in other words, we'll change the reference in those regulations so that the equivalent deductible would be effective.

And it's the same thing here, is that we're just changing the references so that this scheme, the municipal tax sharing, potash sharing arrangement, will not . . . the principles of it will not be altered as a consequence of reassessment.

Mr. Heppner: — In the second reading that we had, you stated that some mines would see their taxes increased four or five times under reassessment. How will these amendments modify those changes?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Yes, this is what we outlined as being a result if we did not make these changes. And that kind of increases was certainly not an intent, and that's what the amendments to this Bill are intended to correct — so that that does not occur.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay. So then the question that I had is still there. How will these amendments modify those changes? Will they put them down to zero or just be twice the increase instead of four or five times?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, as I said before, what this Bill currently does or what the scheme currently does is, it uses as . . . this year, for example, it would use the 1996 mill rate applied to the 1997 assessment. So if the assessment in terms of real dollars goes up, applying last year's mill rate would really skew the result.

So it's meant to mitigate or reduce the mill rate factor that's used, so that it would produce the same amount of tax revenue as previously. And when I say the same amount, I mean, just say there was a potash mine whose assessment was not altered one bit; I mean the value was the very same. Then the amount of money that would be raised would be exactly the same. But if there was an increase, I mean there was an expansion to the mine or some other increase, that would be captured, as it would in the normal course.

Mr. Heppner: — Were the municipalities that were involved in . . . or that had potash mines in the area, or municipalities in general, were they consulted on this Bill? And if they were, was any sort of agreement reached between your department and the municipalities?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the municipalities are represented on the board that makes the distributions or approves the distributions. And indeed, SARM and the rural municipalities, at a meeting specific . . . or consultation session specific to this issue, were consulted and they do concur.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Those are basically the questions that I had, and I'd like to thank you and

your officials for giving us the opportunity to ask those questions.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 4 — The Municipal Board Amendment Act, 1997

The Chair: — I see the minister has one new official. I would ask her to introduce her, please.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Marilyn Turanich from the Saskatchewan Municipal Board has joined us.

Clause 1

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, I note that the quorum is being reduced to one board member. Is that because of the pressure of appeals that you're expecting as a result of reassessment this year? What is the thinking behind reducing the quorum, and in what circumstances would you go with a board of only one member?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, of course we are anticipating more appeals and have appointed additional board members and so forth. But we brought forward amendments last year which made some of these changes and which reduced the quorum to one for the purpose of hearing appeals.

This amendment simply amends the committee structure to a quorum of one. It seems reasonable if the whole board can operate with a quorum of one, that a committee should be able to operate with a quorum of one. And the quorum of one would never be used in a complex appeal. It's just meant to be more efficient and more responsive in terms of the availability to appeal, members to local decisions. And if in a rural or remote location, for instance, where one member acting as a quorum would be sufficient, then it's a matter of cost-saving and flexibility.

Mr. Hillson: — Could the minister discuss for me what mechanism will be used to decide what appeals are simple enough to warrant only one member and when a larger board would be required.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the chairman of the Saskatchewan Municipal Board would make those determinations in the course of his administration of the process.

Mr. Hillson: — I would like to hear, Mr. Chairman, from the minister the average number of appeals we have been experiencing in the last two years, and if she can give us any indication as to what pressure she is anticipating this year.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, if I understood the member's question clearly, he's asking what is the average appeal workload now, and what do we anticipate it to be? That

was the question? Sorry, I didn't quite understand it.

At the current time the average runs between 7 and 900 appeals per year. And we're anticipating, it can only be I guess, an educated guess, but from 3 to 5,000 appeals in the year of reassessment. But at the moment, I mean we're in a very good situation without a backlog. So we're, you know, well positioned to deal with the workload as it comes this year.

Mr. Hillson: — So you're anticipating that there may well be as much as a 500 to 750 per cent increase in the number of appeals you're hearing this year. That's what you're saying?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, as I said, it can only be an educated guess, and of course we've held workshops throughout the province. I'm sure that municipalities will be holding open houses and doing the best that they can to provide an educational process for ratepayers to avoid any unnecessary appeals. But as an educated guess, we are anticipating between 3 and 5,000.

Mr. Hillson: — Can the minister tell me then, in view of the fact that the system has only handled, I believe you said something in the order of 700 appeals up until now — you say you have appointed new members, you've reduced the quorum — is the minister satisfied that we have the mechanisms in place to deal with this dramatic increase in the number of anticipated appeals?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, we did have in anticipation a budget increase. We did appoint eight additional part-time members to the board, who will be available to hear appeals, and we did add two additional clerical staff. And the assessment appeal database has also been updated. So we're expecting that in spite of the increase in numbers, that appeals will be heard expeditiously and decisions rendered in a timely fashion.

Mr. Hillson: — I note that there is a 30-day time period within which to file an appeal. And, Madam Minister, that strikes me as rather short, particularly if a property owner wishes to seek some professional advice, as say from a property assessor, somebody working in the field, or possibly legal advice.

Because it seems to me that in most cases a property owner really wouldn't . . . All he or she knows is that taxes have gone up a lot. They don't really know if they might have proper grounds for an appeal. And 30 days strikes me as a rather short time to allow a property owner to seek professional advice and get in their notice of appeal.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I think the member opposite is referring to the 30-day period that's allowed for the court of revision at the local level. That's not applicable to hearings or appeals to the Municipal Board. But this time is increased from 20 days to 30 days; so we have actually increased the time frame for appeals.

(1600)

Mr. Hillson: — But would the minister though comment on the difficulty though, of say trying to obtain the services of a

commercial property appraiser and seek the services of a commercial appraiser to see whether or not your appeal might have some validity. I understand that in most cases you wouldn't be able to seek this sort of professional advice within that 30-day time frame.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I can only say that the time period has been increased by 10 days from what it was before. And from my experience in local government and as a ratepayer and occasionally an appellant, I've never found that that time frame was not adequate. But in anticipation and to make it as fair and open as possible, we have increased it by . . . the time from 10 days more than what it's been for many years.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, I understand that the existing section of the Act concerning the assessment material, the decision on which the initial assessment was made, was to be made available to the ratepayer or his representative, and that that section, although it's in the Act, has never been proclaimed. And that's my information, that it was not proclaimed, and I would like to ask, Madam Minister, if that is correct and what is the status of that at present?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure, and my officials here are not familiar with the reference that the member is making. As far as we are aware, there is no section of the amendments from 1996, I assume the member is referring to, that has not been proclaimed.

Mr. Hillson: — I believe Madam Minister is aware of the situation that the assessment roll *in toto* is open for a brief period in municipalities in the spring, and otherwise it is closed except for specific inquiries that may come through as a result of land transfers and specific transactions.

I wonder if Madam Minister could comment on that, as to what is the thinking behind the roll only being available for public inspection for a brief period of the year.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, none of this procedure is changed by these amendments except that . . . Well in the previous legislation we have changed the time, but none of the provisions of these amendments address the issues that the member is raising.

There are some differences in interpretation in municipalities. Usually a person, a ratepayer, can get information on their own assessment at any time. It's just that the time period when the roll is open and a ratepayer can make comparisons with other assessments, that's the limitation. But it's always been that way. And it seems reasonable, because each appeal is only relative to that year. So in order to have appeals heard in a timely fashion, there are statutory times for the notices to be mailed, for the roll to be open, the deadline for appeals, the deadline for appeals to the court of revision, decisions to be appealed to the Municipal Board, so that the system can work within the year that's applicable. And so the time lines are necessary in order to deal with that year. If it's longer, then it spills over into the next year. And you can't be dealing with concurrent appeals; it's just not the way the system works.

Mr. Hillson: — I wish to ask Madam Minister if she has any

statistics or percentages as to the history and experience of appeals to this point in time. That is, how many appeals have traditionally — or at least in percentage terms — how many appeals have traditionally been allowed by the Municipal Board from local municipalities?

And again, when they take the next step into the courts, how many of those appeals have been allowed? Is it a significant percentage, or have most appeals been dismissed? Is our history that the bulk of appeals have been dismissed? And again, is Madam Minister anticipating any change as a result of going into the reassessment here?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, we don't really have the figures that the member is asking for. We've got . . . if you look in the . . . I'd refer you to the annual report of the Municipal Board, which outlines in table form the disposition of appeals that come to that level.

But we obviously wouldn't have any information on how appeals are disposed of in the local courts of revision. Because most of them, the majority of appeals, would be dealt with at that level. The only other information I might be able to offer is I'm told that less than 1 per cent of appeals that go to the Municipal Board actually made reference to the courts.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, what I was asking though, does the Municipal Board, the appeals it hears, how many appeals does it allow as opposed to how many appeals does it deny?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I'm told that about 25 per cent of the appeals that come before the Saskatchewan Municipal Board are allowed. As I mentioned, about approximately 1 per cent might make a reference to the courts and the balance would be denied or dismissed or withdrawn.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and thank you to your officials for attendance today. I'm satisfied with the information you've been able to supply.

Mr. Heppner: — Good afternoon, Madam Minister, and to your officials and the news ones that have shown up as well. Dealing with the SMB, (Saskatchewan Municipal Board) to what committees of that particular board would this particular Bill apply?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, this would apply. . . this provision would apply to the Assessment Appeals Committee.

Mr. Heppner: — Having a reduced quorum should obviously lead to reduced costs for the boards in terms of board member expenses. Given current workloads, how would expenses compare for a one-member quorum versus a two-member quorum?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, we've budgeted this year \$1.193 million compared with a total of \$772,000 in 1995-96. There were also some changes in the year just past. And because we had a backlog — there was a backlog of appeals to deal with that we wanted to have obviously out of the way before the year of reassessment. And I don't have the

figures for an individual appeal. It would depend on how far it had to travel, how long it had to stay and so on.

But I think that gives you an idea that based on an increase of three or four times the current load that this is actually a modest increase. So I think it reflects the reduction in the quorum and the more efficient approach to deal with appeals.

Mr. Heppner: — A minute or two ago there was a bit of discussion on members' appeals that were passed and the ones that were not accepted. Have there been examples in the past year where split decisions have been made? Where on a particular issue where board members have been split on things?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, there is no record of split decisions by members of the Municipal Board Appeals Committee. There are no minority reports on file.

Mr. Heppner: — I would imagine, though, that in numerous cases there would have been quite a discussion on the committees between the members as to what the decision should be. And that, I think, raises a concern with a one-person committee. And my question is: isn't there a chance of a certain amount of arbitrariness on committees if only one member is considering the appeal and there isn't the opportunity for discussion, interaction, and a differing point of view?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, as we said earlier, that the committee would only sit at the discretion of the chairman of the Municipal Board if it is seen that the appeal is not contentious, that the issue under appeal is straight-forward, and that the location of the hearing is remote. So in all other cases there would be more than one committee member so that that kind of exchange that the member opposite refers to could take place.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and to your officials. That is the list of questions that I had and I thank you for your time.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I thank my officials for their assistance and thank the members opposite for their questions and their diligence, and I move to report Bill No. 4 of 1997, An Act to amend The Municipal Board Act be reported without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(1615)

Bill No. 19 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Chair, with me today is Michael Jackson, chief protocol officer for Intergovernmental Affairs.

Clause 1

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And just a few brief comments this afternoon. We might as well say right at the outset that we're supportive of the government's attempts here to add some clarity to the definitions of honours of the Crown and making them consistent with national and international usage, and also in being able to facilitate the establishment of medals provincially.

I spoke in second readings rather extensively on the value of potash to the province. And certainly we're supportive of recognition of potash as our official emblem mineral in the province.

Also just before taking my place, just a brief comment concerning the volunteer medal. We're very appreciative that the government is attempting to enhance the status of this particular medal by adding the post-nominal letters of the designation of SVM (Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal) and allowing the usage of that by the volunteer recipients.

We certainly acknowledge the value of volunteerism in the province and wholeheartedly recognize those individuals who give of their time and efforts. So having said that, I'll just take my place and allow this Bill to proceed.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 9 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 27 — The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 4 — The Municipal Board Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

Bill No. 19 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Public Service Commission
Vote 33**

Item 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of committees. I would like to welcome the minister and his officials here today, and we might as well carry on where we left off yesterday on pay equity.

Mr. Minister, you said you had a committee in place or a group that was reviewing pay equity to determine job values. I wonder if you could tell us who is on that committee or group, how they were chosen.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, just to share this with the member that we have . . . what's happening, as I was saying yesterday, is that we're developing an entirely new classification plan in government across the public service, an entirely new job classification plan where we're going to be addressing many of the equities issues that we've talked about.

This process is happily being spearheaded by a joint union and management committee. So there will be representatives from the management side, the Public Service Commission side, and representatives from the union side, for the most part, SGEU (Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union). That committee is working through all of the job classifications.

Now we also have of course some . . . a unit within the Public Service Commission, some staff people, who are tasked with some of the equity issues and so on. We talked a little bit about that yesterday.

But in terms of your question today, how is this being steered through? Who's doing the planning, who's doing the deciding? It is a joint union management committee.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, thank you. Who do you have on there from the management side on that particular committee?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Madam Chair, we don't have with us the names of all the management reps on the committee — it's quite a large committee — but for instance, Mr. Will Loewen, who's with us here today from the PSC (Public Service Commission) is on that committee; Mr. Jim Graham from the Department of Finance; Mr. Dick Hutchinson from SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management).

What we can do for the member's interest is we can get the entire list of the management reps on that committee and send it over to the member. It won't take but a day.

Mr. D'Autremont: — If you would, please, Mr. Minister. And could you please outline why those particular people were chosen to be on the committee.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — These will represent, Madam Chair, senior management people in the various departments of government involved. And they will be chosen for two reasons: one, their expertise, which will have come from many years of

service in the public service; one, their expertise; and two, their interest in achieving the same goals that we all share.

(1630)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, once this committee has made its deliberations and has come to a decision, will they be making a recommendation to someone else on how to implement it? Or will their decision be the final arbiter on pay equity?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Just to explain to the House this afternoon, Madam Chair, the process, the committee of . . . the joint management-union committee will be looking at all of the job descriptions and describing the new class plan. They would then bring that to the Public Sector Bargaining Committee of cabinet, who would then recommend it to cabinet for a final decision. That would be the process of deciding the job class plan.

And then when we begin to look at the financial implications and the mandates to meet some of the equity issues within that new plan, that same process would follow through again — recommendations to the Public Sector Bargaining Committee, then to cabinet for ultimate decision, and then ultimately into this legislature for debate and to be accountable.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The Human Rights Commission has brought forward a series of controversial recommendations calling for your government to pass legislation requiring all companies with more than a hundred employees to adopt hiring quotas for women, aboriginals, visible minorities, and people with disabilities. Have you studied this type of affirmative action in other jurisdictions?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Madam Chair, we had some discussion yesterday between the member from Thunder Creek and myself around the issue of setting targets within government for equity representation of the broad, general Saskatchewan public in the workforce it serves and through their government.

We have worked with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and the commission has set out for us some goals, some benchmarks that we would try to achieve. Just for the member's information, I can repeat those benchmarks as they have been established for us by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.

So our goal in terms of employment in the public service in Saskatchewan: persons of aboriginal ancestry, 12.2 per cent — that's our benchmark goal there; persons with disabilities, 9.7 per cent; members of visible minority groups, 5.1 per cent; women in management, 45 per cent; and women in non-traditional occupations, 45 per cent.

And so this is the approach that we've adopted as a government with goals set for and with us by the Human Rights Commission. And through the various processes of hiring, career planning, and so on, we're endeavouring to meet those goals. And over the last number of years, we've shown progress. We've not reached the goals yet.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. These goals — will they apply just to government structure or will they apply to government-funded organizations also? Just to whom will this apply?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair . . . or Madam Chair, in terms of these numbers that I've just identified, these are numbers established for us by the Human Rights Commission for the government, for government proper.

Now many other employers in the province, in our community, will also have set some — in reference to the Human Rights Commission, their own goals.

So it's not just happening in government; it's happening beyond government. But the numbers that I've given you are those goals set for government, the goals we're trying to achieve, and they will be more or less representative of the demographics in the province. So that if our goal, for instance, in equity of people of aboriginal ancestry is 12.2 per cent, that more or less represents the population of aboriginal ancestry in the province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well what I was asking though, Mr. Minister, was whether or not other government-funded organizations would be asked to meet these quotas, such as education and health, where the vast majority of their monies comes from government.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I think, Madam Chair, maybe the issue that the member would like to address is the question of, are we imposing these on funded agencies and so on, and the answer is no. We do not impose those kind of same benchmarks on funded agencies of government, or third parties and so on.

But many of these agencies . . . Because these figures do reflect the demographics of our province, we know that many of these agencies are working with these same kind of benchmark targets as we are in government proper.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well the reason I ask, Mr. Minister, because in discussions last year, I believe it was, and perhaps the year before, with the Minister of Education, she was moving in this direction within the high school system of trying to bring more women into the classroom. And I'm not sure that she had a quota in mind, but just to raise those levels. And I'm just wondering if this is part of this type of a recommendation.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes. And I think what we see happening in our province these days is that many employers — in fact what I would say is I think most responsible employers, whether they're publicly funded or private sector — have set for themselves, maybe not as clearly stated as this, but some goals to improve the equity representation in their workplace. That's the appropriate thing to do in terms of the delivery of public services, and I think I would argue that's the appropriate and right thing to do in the private sector. So we've seen that kind of thing at school boards. School divisions are looking at these issues to be sure that their teaching staff, for instance, is representative of their student body.

So we're seeing it happen. But again, to repeat, it's not something that government has or is contemplating imposing on our third-party, our funded agencies.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So, Mr. Minister, you believe then that government agencies and the government-funded agencies, either voluntarily or through mandate within government, should move towards gender equity based on population levels? The same with aboriginal content; same with disabilities? Across the board, that there should be equity based basically on your percentages within society and population?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes. Essentially, yes. Essentially my answer to the member's question would be yes. I as an individual citizen of the province would encourage that within our province without a doubt.

The member will know that the motto of the province of Saskatchewan is "From Many Peoples Strength." That's always been the strength of our province — recognizing, I think, the diversity of our people. And as that diversity is reflected in our public institutions and our private businesses in our communities, that's to our strength.

And in some ways . . . I believe it fair to say that in some ways the private sector, or some elements of the private sector, have moved ahead of the public sector in achieving some of these . . . achieving that kind of diversity in their workplace. I'm not one who often stands up and gives kudos to the chartered banks, but I think this is one area where the chartered banks have shown some real leadership, not only in our province but in our country.

So to go back to the member's question, absolutely yes.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Then I'm surprised that you agree with the Human Rights Commission's report because no place in there does it state anything about the male quotas. No place does it say that you should have approximately 45 per cent — which is the government's number — of men in a position.

And I'll give you an example. Within the elementary school system in this province, there is a very high percentage of women and a very low percentage of men in those positions. Now are you suggesting that within the elementary school system in this province, that we should be having more men to bring them up to a 45 per cent quota?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Madam Chair, I think the member knows before asking the question that the reason that we have these kind of programs, the equity programs, is to attend to the imbalance which has existed. And the imbalance in our public employment sector, in the private sector, the imbalance has been overall that women, people with disabilities, people of aboriginal ancestry, have been under-represented in those sectors overall.

When the member takes out a portion of the K to 12 system and recognizes that there in fact may be the imbalance on the other side, where there have been traditionally more women involved in elementary education, I know my own school district is sensitive to that and there is good reason to have some balance

in the classroom at the elementary level. But this is not what we're here discussing when we talk about equity generally in the public service or in the private sector.

Equity intends to deal with that recognized imbalance that everyone in the world recognizes: the imbalance that has left women out of management positions; that has left aboriginal peoples out of employment and out of management positions; that has left people with disabilities out of employment and management positions — that's what these equity programs are trying to deal with.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, I mentioned previously discussing this with the Minister of Education. At that particular point in time, she suggested there was an imbalance in the high school system, that there were too many males and not enough females, and that there needed to be some affirmative action to change that.

If that applies to the high school system, then surely it should also apply to the elementary school system where the imbalance is the other way around. If one is out of balance, then the other is out of balance also, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Madam Chair, this is the . . . This I thought was the estimates for the Public Service Commission. If the member has a particular concern about the balance or imbalance of male and female teachers either in his own home school or in his own home school district, or he has that observation generally in education, I think that's a fair discussion he might want to have with, either with the Minister of Education or with the education officials in his own community.

We're not here — when we're talking about equity — we're not here talking about that kind of specific issue. We're talking about generally in the public service of Saskatchewan, we have known and observed that women have been under-represented, particularly in management; that people of aboriginal ancestry have been under-represented in our workforce and in its management; and that people with disabilities have been under-represented. And this is indeed what we're attending to through this equity initiative.

If the member's got some complaint about what's happening in his school district or in the schools of Saskatchewan, well he can raise the complaint, fair enough. But it's an interesting place to do it when we're debating the estimates for the Public Service Commission.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, your department is the one that's trying to push pay equity, that's trying to push quotas on the government in general, and recommending to the other government structures that they move in that direction. And yet you seem to be extremely defensive when I point out an area where it's in reverse to what you are promoting. You seem to want to deny that it even exists, Mr. Minister. You say, well maybe it's just in my school.

Well, Mr. Minister, you know very well that it goes across the whole province that the elementary school system has a high preponderance of female teachers, just as the high school

system has a high preponderance of male teachers. I don't deny either one of them

And yet if you're going to base quotas on each of those areas, if you're going to base quotas on every government structure, then you have to be prepared to look at all of them and not just a few picked . . . selected few that prove your point. Because, Mr. Minister, there are others that prove the other argument — that if you're going to have equality based on gender in government, you have to do it equally across the board.

Another area is nursing where there is a high preponderance of females in nursing with a few males. Are you prepared to put quotas in that one, Mr. Minister, to say that you have to have 45 per cent men in that area?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well let's be clear, Madam Chair. I want to repeat again that we have not established quotas — we've not established quotas. Now it's an interesting thing that I . . . that the member today comes into the House and I get the feeling he is pushing us to establish just such quotas and impose them.

An Hon. Member: — It came from me.

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I see it. It came from the member who seated behind him this afternoon.

Now I detect he is pushing. Now I happen to, I think, share some of his view here that yes, I believe it is appropriate that we should encourage more male teachers in our elementary school system, just as we should be encouraging more female administrators in government. Fair enough.

It would be, I think, great if more men studied the nursing profession and offered their skills and their talents in the nursing profession. I think that would be great.

We've taken the point of the view in the Public Service Commission that within government we would again, working with the Human Rights Commission, establish some benchmarks that we believe are appropriate for government.

Now if the member . . . I just need to ask him this. Is he today suggesting, as I think he is, that we should now establish, in his word, quotas, and impose them on the school districts and the schools of Saskatchewan and impose them on the hospitals and health districts of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Chair, I'd like to know. Is the member now suggesting that this is what we should ought to do?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, that's what you yourself were suggesting yesterday; that you had a 45 per cent quota for women in these areas. When I wanted to talk about equal pay for work of equal value, you kept saying, well we know that we need 45 per cent women in management. It was you, Mr. Minister, who kept shifting . . . trying to shift the arguments at that particular point in time away from work of equal value to the quota system. And today you're trying to shift it some place else again.

So, Mr. Minister, you're the one who doesn't want to answer the questions because you want to pick certain areas that suit your political purpose, rather than being fair and equal to everyone across the board. Recommendations, Mr. Minister, are a big difference from quotas and you were the one yesterday talking about quotas — a 45 per cent quota.

So, Mr. Minister, I think you need to go back to the drawing board on this particular issue and take a very serious look at where you're going, and that it be fair and equal for everyone not just a select few.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to move to a different area of the PSC. I believe it's the PSC's responsibility to hire people to work within the government structure and to do so, again, in a fair and equitable manner; that they be hired based on qualifications to suit the particular job that you have advertised for. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'm not going to abandon our earlier discussion just for a moment. I would invite the member to either get the *Hansard* from yesterday that I believe is in his book, or turn on his Internet, and he will understand that neither yesterday nor today nor ever have we in these discussions talked about quotas. That's the idea of the member that's doing the questioning here. That's the idea of the third party here that we should ought to have quotas. We never talked about quotas. We've talked about setting goals.

And the member unfortunately seems to want to mix up the discussion between employment equity and pay equity, or equal pay for work of equal value. Now if he wants to have another long discussion about that, we can do that. But he should not mix them in this such a fashion and then suggest that we're talking about quotas when it's he who is talking about quotas.

Now in answer to the next question. He is, in fact, correct that it is the role of the Public Service Commission to assist departments in hiring. The departments themselves will actually do the hiring for the vast majority of positions.

It is the role of the Public Service Commission to ensure that standards are met in the hiring procedures, to do the kind of career ads that we see and advertising those positions and so on. But the departments themselves will actually do the hiring — the Public Service Commission serves as the vehicle to assist.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I clearly remember when I was asking you the questions yesterday about equal work of equal value. You kept shifting over to the number of women that you wanted in management positions. It was you, Mr. Minister, who kept trying to shift the discussion.

Now, Mr. Minister, yesterday you informed the member from Thunder Creek that you had income of approximately \$357,000, I believe, that came from advertisements you had done for other departments, and they paid for those ads — is that correct? Okay, the minister nods yes. Mr. Minister, who did you do those advertisements with?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if I could ask the member to clarify the question. Is he interested to know

where the ads are placed, in which media vehicles? Or in the process by which . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Process by which it's done, which would be our advertising agency.

The agency who does this on behalf of the Public Service Commission is Turner-Warwick. Those ads will be placed in the *Leader-Post*; you'll see them in the *Star-Phoenix*, *Times-Herald*, some of the dailies, a few of the weeklies and so on.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Was this advertising tendered out? How did they become your agency of record? I'm not sure that's the proper word for them, but how did you acquire Turner-Warwick as your advertising agency?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, Mr. Chair, it's always tendered.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you very much. I'd like to ask about a particular position that was filled and that is the local government elections office. Was that particular position advertised?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we think the position that the member's talking about is not a position that's in the regular classified service and therefore is not the responsibility of the PSC.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. That position does report to Executive Council so perhaps it's not a PSC position.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — If, Mr. Chair, if the position is in the unclassified service, then it is not the responsibility of the Public Service Commission.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you very much. Do you deal with ministerial assistants with the Public Service Commission?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The answer is no, Mr. Chair.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well if you keep giving me answers like that, we'll be through this quickly.

How about positions such as STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Company) presidents or deputy ministers — are those positions through PSC?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 33 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1996-97
General Revenue Fund
Public Service Commission
Vote 33**

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 33 agreed to.

The Chair: — The next item of business before the committee is Intergovernmental Affairs. Before we move to that, I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes. I apologize. I wanted to take just an opportunity to both thank the members of the opposition and third party, whose questions I think informed the debate — I appreciate their questions — and to say a special word of thanks to the officials from the Public Service Commission who've joined us in these estimates, but not only for the time they've spent in the estimates but indeed in the days and weeks and months that they serve us all year-round. And the people of Saskatchewan, in my view, are very well served by our Public Service Commission. So thanks to them and thanks to the opposition members.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I would also like to thank the minister and his officials for coming in today and yesterday and answering our questions.

Mr. Aldridge: — And also thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And a thanks to the minister and to his officials for having been so diligent in answering our questions yesterday and today.

**General Revenue Fund
Intergovernmental Affairs
Vote 30**

The Chair: — I'll invite the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Yes, if I could, Mr. Chairman. With us today we have the deputy minister, Mr. Paul Osborne, who's seated to my right; and directly behind me Bob Hersche, the senior policy adviser, telecommunications and broadcasting; and seated to my right and behind me is Melinda Gorrill, the director of administration.

What I might add too, Mr. Chair, if the committee would allow, I have a short message from the minister in charge of Intergovernmental Affairs, who you know has had some surgery recently in eastern Canada. And I just report, having just talked to him a short time ago, that he has started his physiotherapy, doing well, and he passes on, as you might know, his best wishes to all members of the committee and public who may be watching. So I just wanted to relay that message from him.

The Chair: — I thank the minister for that message, and it's inappropriate for the Chair to comment, but I do appreciate his best wishes. And certainly our prayers are with the minister as he recovers.

Item 1

Mr. Aldridge: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. And we do also send out our best wishes to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and certainly hope for a speedy recovery.

I would like to just welcome the Deputy Premier here this

afternoon with the officials from Intergovernmental Affairs. I just believe we don't have too much time here this afternoon that we can really get into too much.

But when I'm looking over the summary here of expenses, I see a number of increases here, I think something in the total of \$350,000 overall. And the branches, or the subvotes of the department here that are getting increases are accommodation and central services, protocol office, the federal-provincial relations, constitutional relations, trade and policy, telecommunications and broadcasting policy.

I certainly, on another occasion I want to get into the matter of the constitutional relations. I see a substantial increase there; well something in the order of 60 or maybe 70 per cent, to \$327,000 for '97-98.

(1700)

But before I get into that, I'd like to just ask, with respect to accommodation and central services, I see that there is, as I say, an increase in spending there. And I'd just like to know if the department has acquired some additional office space or what new initiatives have you undertaken that would justify some increase in spending?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Well the member is correct. I think overall the department budget has increased by 353,000 or about 8.4 per cent overall which, in comparison to other departments, is a bit higher.

But on the other hand, I think if you look at the areas where we've increased . . . The Office of the Lieutenant Governor, for example, had an increase of 10 per cent. But when you look back, it hasn't had an increase since 1992. So you're really talking about 2 or less than a 2 per cent increase per annum over that period of time. And of course the Lieutenant Governor, who you know is a very busy individual and a very proactive Lieutenant Governor, I think it's important that we maintain his travel and sustenance and those things that go with the office.

The other area that there is a considerable increase is in the constitutional branch, as you've identified. And I might say that in large part that's as a result of the filling of two vacant positions that have been vacant for some time. As we approach the next Quebec election — we think probably less than a year from now or about a year from now — we think that whole issue of constitutional . . . the constitutional issue will rise on the agenda. And we want to be sure we have staffed up for the likely debate and responses that we will have to give on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. And that alone, filling those two positions, increases the spending in the constitutional branch quite considerably.

The other area, of course, is in the trade policy branch where there was a transfer to this department. And because of the importance of trade and trade policy, we're putting some extra money into there.

There's other areas as well. But I say to the member these are very, very important areas as it relates to the whole debate of

how provincial governments relate to their federal counterpart, and so some areas needed to be beefed up. With the extra money that we're getting as a result of some of the oil and gas and resource revenue that we'll be able to generate and some of the turnaround in the economy that have given us a bit . . . extra revenue, this is one of the areas that we thought it important to place some emphasis. Because we . . . well we went through the squeeze when we were balancing the budget in the province. This is one of the areas we had held back.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Minister, if we could just turn to the protocol office for a moment. I noted there was some increase there and I was wondering if you could give us an overview . . . or perhaps preferably a list of perhaps foreign dignitaries, representative of the royal family who might be visiting our province within this next fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — The way it works — and I'm learning this as I go as well, so you have to be patient with me — but the fact of the matter is that we don't go out and seek individuals, or those kind of dignitaries, to come. Once they indicate that they're interested in coming here, then we work very closely with them. But at this point in time we don't have any such list.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:09 p.m.

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