

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present petitions today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

These petitions come from the Fairlight, Redvers, Manor, Antler, Fertile areas, Storthoaks, Mr. Speaker, of my constituency. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

And these petitions I'm presenting are signed by individuals from the Storthoaks, Redvers, Wakaw areas of the province of Saskatchewan. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Carnduff, Carievale, Oxbow. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I too rise to present a petition, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

And these are signed by the good people of Glen Ewen. I so present.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are primarily from the community of Carragana in the north-east.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today regarding Channel Lake.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

Everyone that has signed this petition is from Naicam.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition this afternoon as well to the legislature from the people of Saskatchewan. This petition surrounds the whole Jack Messer, Channel Lake fiasco, and I'm pleased to present on behalf of the people from the Spalding area of Saskatchewan that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition on behalf of people in Saskatchewan concerned about the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

And the signatures on this petition are from Yorkton. Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present petitions from people of Saskatchewan who are very disturbed about the impending closure of the Plains Health Centre, and praying that this Hon. Assembly will provide adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the Plains hospital may remain open. Your petitioners this afternoon come from Limerick and Flintoft.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues in presenting petitions to stop the closure of the Plains hospital. Prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and provide adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed the petition are all from the Limerick area of my constituency. I so present.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present a petition:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

And the people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are primarily from Limerick, and I so present.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the folks from the city of Weyburn.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll read the prayer from the following people begging relief:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so that work can begin in 1998, and to set out a time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These are from the communities of Consul, Craven, Climax, Shaunavon, Bracken, Frontier, Maple Creek, Piapot, and Fox Valley. I'm happy to present them on their behalf today, 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 on the following matters: the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; saving the Plains Health Centre; and calling an independent inquiry into the Channel Lake issue.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 31 ask the government the following:

To the Minister of Health: what was the incidence of reported cancers in the area of Saskatchewan covered by the two northern health districts for the fiscal period April 1, 1996 to March 31, 1997, and is the total rate divided into various types of cancers?

And the second question, a much similar question:

What was the incidence of reported cancers in the area of Saskatchewan covered by the two northern health districts from the fiscal period April 1, 1995 to March 31, 1996, and is the total rate divided into various types of cancers?

And I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 31 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Crown Investments Corporation: how much did SaskPower pay in legal fees to the Milner Fenerty law firm of Calgary for the sale transaction of Channel Lake Petroleum from Saskatchewan Power Corporation to Direct Energy Marketing Limited; what was the cost of legal fees paid to Milner Fenerty law firm of Calgary for the subsequent legal opinion surrounding the sale of Channel Lake Petroleum dated June 10 and June 12, 1997?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Belanger: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I'd like to bring to the attention of members in the House, four very special visitors we have today. As I call their name I'll ask them to stand. And I have my middle daughter, Kellie, with us today in your Assembly. And then I also have my youngest daughter, Taylor, and my oldest daughter, Michelle, and my god-daughter, Cheryl, who are all visiting here today to watch the proceedings of the Assembly.

And I must say, Mr. Speaker, in the future as part of my effort of being a parent, I decided to bring them along for a few days to give their mother a rest. But I urge you to make me promise never to do that again. And so I'd ask the Assembly members to invite them here today. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, to the rest of the Assembly, I would like to introduce my constituency assistant, Jeannie Ball, her husband Garnet, and their son, Garrett, who are in your gallery today visiting. And I'd like to ask all members to welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, in the west gallery, a young man who is fairly important in my life. My son, Jordan, who has come down to spend the week in Regina. And when I told him he could come and watch today, he wanted to make a speech on the Canadian Wheat Board, and I said the member for Kindersley could certainly learn something from that. But unfortunately we can't have participation from the gallery. I'd like all members to join with me in welcoming Jordan to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, up in your gallery we have a person wearing yellow. That is a person by the name of Mr. Corey Ecarnot. This young man, who has just turned 15, has been curling for a couple of years, and he made it to the provincial A finals this year. And Corey is the son of my chief of staff, Adelle, and her husband Joe. Please welcome him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Toon Town Animation Studio

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Saskatoon firm, Toon Town Animation Production Studio, has begun work on a number of animated projects involving both aboriginal and non-aboriginal themes.

Gilbert Baldhead from the One Arrow First Nations and Kim Warden from the Poundmaker First Nations are two of many aboriginal artists working on the projects. Animation director, Steve Rabatich, said that the animators are hired strictly on the basis of talent. It just happened that many aboriginals are very talented artists.

Long-term plans for Toon Town involves animated Christmas stories for locally created characters, creating children's cartoons for TV and movies, and was once the only domain of the big American studios. With the talent pool available in Saskatchewan, that will soon change.

Rabatich says, "Talented artists like Gilbert Baldhead, Terrence Sutherland, Carrie Saganace, Kim Warden, and Kelly Sutherland are just a few of the many artists we hire but these particular aboriginal artists are in a class of their own."

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the people of Toon Town Animated Productions for breaking into new areas in animation production in Saskatchewan and congratulate the many aboriginal artists who are helping making it possible.

Thank you.

Saskatchewan's First Astronaut

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to note a very important event that was scheduled for today.

Saskatchewan's first ever astronaut, Dr. David Williams, was scheduled to be blasted into outer space aboard the space shuttle *Columbia*.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the last report I got was the mission has been delayed today due to weather. But regardless of when Mr. Williams slips the surly bonds of earth, I'm sure all Saskatchewan residents will be proud.

I think each and every one of us has a certain fascination with the space program. The training it takes to become an astronaut is something not many of us could handle. Dr. Williams, who now lives in Ontario, is an emergency physician and will use his time in space to do experiments involving brain research as well as studying the effects of space travel on human sleep habits.

Well, Mr. Speaker, while we prefer if more doctors remained on call here in our province, Dr. Williams is another sign of how much Saskatchewan has to offer the rest of Canada and indeed the rest of the world. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

A Guide to Historic Sites

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on April 8 *A Guide to Historic Sites*, a new Saskatchewan publication, was launched. This new book will be the first in the "Discover Saskatchewan" series.

A Guide to Historic Sites, Mr. Speaker, features 232 pages, 32 colour photographs, and 11 maps, and was edited by Dr. Ralph Nilson of the University of Regina. And the book was published by the Canadian Plains Research Center at the university. It is now available through bookstores, Saskatchewan visitor reception centres, and through Tourism Saskatchewan.

This new "Discover Saskatchewan" series, Mr. Speaker, is the result of a partnership among Saskatchewan municipal governments, the University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, Tourism Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation. Plans are under way for at least a dozen more titles under this series.

The *Guide to Historic Sites* includes all provincial historic parks, provincial heritage property, federal heritage sites, and provincial historic markers.

A number of Saskatchewan's museums, non-governmental heritage plaques, and municipal heritage properties are also included, Mr. Speaker.

We all know that Saskatchewan is one of the best places in the world to live, Mr. Speaker. It also happens to be a pretty good place to take a holiday. With this new series, not only will Saskatchewan residents be more able to enjoy our sites, but out-of-province visitors as well.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hospital Bed Shortages

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, according to the Health minister there is no bed crisis. Liberals are fearmongering he says . . . he tells the people of Saskatchewan. Well our office has received a number of calls from emergency room nurses this morning telling us that the General Hospital went on bypass last evening.

And why is that? Because there were 12 patients who couldn't be admitted. There were no critical care beds; no emergency beds; no observation beds available.

Most people would believe this to be one more example of a health care system which is in a state of crisis. Most people would believe this is one more example of a serious bed shortage in Regina, which serves the entire population of southern Saskatchewan.

But why should this government be concerned? After all there is no health care crisis. There is no bed crisis in this city. The Health minister tells us so. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Task Force on Balancing Work and Family

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, last October the government announced a one-year initiative aimed at making the workplace more family friendly. A task force was established to address this growing issue. Public input into the task force is vital to finding solutions to the problem of balancing work and family.

I could read off a number of very real statistics to illustrate the need to make the work place more family friendly, but we already know from personal experience that this problem exists.

Nobody in crisis should have to choose between unemployment and family duty. It's pretty hard to give a 110 per cent to your job when you're worried about your eight-year-old getting home from school before you get home from work. And it's equally difficult to concentrate on a tedious task when your kid's running a fever and grandma can't help out.

The task force is our government's response to this important issue. We want to hear from the people of Saskatchewan. We encourage those who attend to discuss their experiences in balancing work and family. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions to this problem. The only way we can address this issue is by working in partnership with business, labour, and community to develop ways to help people find a balance between their jobs and their families.

The task force meetings resume April 22 in North Battleford, and then move on to Prince Albert, Humboldt, Moose Jaw, Regina, La Ronge, and Swift Current, and Saskatoon. All MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) have the agenda for the task force meetings and I'm sure would welcome their constituents to drop into their offices to get the information.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Former MLA Voices Concern on Health Care

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Day after day the Premier and this government try to duck responsibility for a health care system that is in a state of crisis. The most popular target of course, is the federal government, and that's why we found the letter written by former New Democratic MLA Lewis Draper so interesting. Mr. Draper writes, and I quote:

The provincial government cannot blame the Liberal federal government for health care cuts. The provincial government announced the closure of 52 small rural hospitals to save money well before the federal election. If the provincial government saved this money, can they fault the federal government for claiming their share?

After witnessing the disasters of health care reform in rural Saskatchewan, I shudder to think what's going to happen to us now. We have lost our small hospitals, our rural doctors have been driven out of the province, and nurses fired wholesale.

The former NDP (New Democratic Party) member closes by quoting Charles Dickens, by suggesting, "God help us, every one."

Mr. Speaker, it's time the Premier and this government took note. This is not Liberal opposition fearmongering. It's the thoughts of a New Democratic who knows the government has crossed the line.

Tourism Industry Grows

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to Statistics Canada, the number of jobs in the tourism industry in Saskatchewan is growing. In fact tourism-specific jobs grew by 10 per cent in 1997.

Tourism Saskatchewan is an industry-led partnership with the government. Its mandate is to develop and promote tourism in the province. This partnership is clearly succeeding. Tourism and tourism-related sectors of the economy account for nearly one-quarter of over 10,000 new jobs in service industries in Saskatchewan.

Randy Williams, Tourism Saskatchewan president, says, "new trends in what people are looking for worldwide, like natural experiences and cultural experiences, has positioned Saskatchewan well. Saskatchewan is being seen as a destination now more than it has ever been before."

In our great city you need only to look to the Wascana Centre, the Science Centre, the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, the Globe, the MacKenzie Gallery, and others; the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) Depot and Museum, and the Casino Regina and so much more.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we will continue our prosperous partnership with industry to further promote and expand tourism in this wonderful province of ours. And as I earlier said, Mr. Speaker, that means jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Educational Success of Northern School

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to report to the Assembly today about the educational successes of the Minahik Waskahigan School in Pinehouse Lake. Minahik Waskahigan School is a progressive, kindergarten to grade 12 school serving approximately 380 students. During Education Week in March this year, the staff and students at Minahik Waskahigan School demonstrated the dedication they have to their education. They celebrated the week by filling it with special educational events and concluded with an annual winter carnival.

One event of note was a northern reading challenge. The school competed against other northern communities and had great success. They read over 29,000 books in 10 weeks. Students and staff at Minahik Waskahigan are now busy preparing for the Northern Junior Summer Games held from June 8 to 12 in their community. Students from across the North will be in Pinehouse Lake to participate, compete, and meet new people.

Without the hard work and dedication of students and teachers at Minahik Waskahigan, none of this would be possible. The staff and students have made a commitment to make their school and their community the best it can be. I am proud of their accomplishments and I would ask that other members of the Assembly join with me in congratulating them on their successes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Prosecutions Branch Decision

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, yesterday I met with a young man who feels that the justice system has failed him. Peter Stevenson of Regina alleges that he was sexually assaulted on a number of occasions between 1986 and 1989 by former FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) vice-chief, Dan Bellegarde. Mr. Stevenson has spoken to the Regina city police, the RCMP, and the Crown prosecutor's office about these events. All three have provided him with assurances that charges would be laid.

Then senior officials in your department took it upon themselves to review the files and they suddenly decided not to lay charges. Mr. Stevenson had been given no real explanation for this decision. In the end he is left with unmistakable impressions that the decision by your senior Justice officials not to proceed was driven by politics rather than justice.

Mr. Minister, why did your department decide not to lay charges in this case?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that question. As she knows, the issues relating to decisions around prosecutions are not made by my office or anybody in my office. These matters are handled by the director of public prosecutions in consultation with the people in that office. I have a great deal of respect for the ability of these people to do their job well, and if there are concerns I suggest that this

person contact the people at the prosecutions department and I'm sure they'd be happy to sit down and talk with him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, this morning the Saskatchewan Coalition Against Racism issued a news release condemning the actions of your department. SCAR pointed out that even though the Criminal Code does not require corroboration in these cases, Mr. Stevenson has people who will corroborate his allegations and other victims who are willing to testify.

SCAR also notes that Mr. Stevenson has volunteered to take a polygraph test and Mr. Bellegarde has refused to be interviewed or even give a statement to the police. SCAR says, and I quote:

One is left to question on what basis the Department of Justice is willing to sacrifice Mr. Stevenson in this case.

And that's a good question. On what basis did your department decide to sacrifice Mr. Stevenson after he received numerous assurances the charges would be pursued?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — As I previously stated, we have very capable people who work as prosecutors in our department of public prosecutions. They have a very specific role to complete, which is to carefully evaluate and examine all of the evidence that's presented to him after investigation. And I'm supportive of the kinds of decisions that they make and I'm supportive in this case of them having done a full job of reviewing the matter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, there are many aboriginal people just like Mr. Stevenson who believe the justice system does not work for them.

The Saskatchewan Coalition Against Racism says that the justice system has failed Mr. Stevenson. Your senior officials have said it is not in the public interest to proceed with the charges. Why? What message is this sending to other victims of sexual assault and of exploitation?

Mr. Minister, Mr. Stevenson and his lawyer have made a very reasonable request. They've asked for a meeting with Mr. Daryl Rayner of the public prosecutions branch, Department of Justice, to review the decision not to lay charges. And you've received a copy of that letter.

Mr. Minister, will you give them the commitment that Mr. Rayner will meet with Mr. Stevenson and his lawyer?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the department of public prosecutions deals with these matters directly and I'm certain that if the letter has gone to the department of public prosecutions they will respond appropriately.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Inquiry Into Channel Lake

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation). Mr. Minister, yesterday you said that the problems with the Channel Lake deal were never raised at the November 6 board meeting which you chaired. The evidence shows that that simply isn't the case.

Document no. 900 is an information item that went to the November 6 board meeting outlining the Channel Lake sale, the trading losses, and the prospects for legal action against Lawrie Portigal. Mr. Minister, you chaired that meeting and you were aware of the information that was presented. You were in on the discussion that occurred according to Jack Messer's sworn testimony, and yet you said the issue was never raised.

Mr. Minister, why did you make that statement when it simply isn't the case, simply isn't true? Will you now admit that you knew about the Channel . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the hon. member is coming very, very close to being directly in contradiction of the rules of parliamentary procedure and I will ask him to withdraw that remark and rephrase it and go directly to his question.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would withdraw that remark. Mr. Minister, why did you make that statement when it now appears that that is not the case? Will you now admit that you knew about the Channel Lake fiasco all along and that you participated in its cover-up?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say again, being the minister who tabled on the second day of the Assembly, a 110-page document outlining in great detail all of the issues about Channel Lake, it's very difficult for the member from Kindersley with a straight face to stand in the House and say that somehow we covered this issue up.

The fact of the matter is that the document they referred to, the information item, I reviewed the agenda for that particular board meeting. I don't find it on the agenda. There's nothing in the minutes, nothing in the minutes that relate to it.

I say to the member opposite, if there was a discussion under the president's report, it didn't happen with this document in front of us. I've checked my records; I didn't have the document at the time. If there was a discussion under the president's report, it didn't raise any flags with me.

But I want to come back to the member opposite and say that we prepared for the Assembly two important documents. One called the Deloitte Touche report, which interviewed many of the same people that your inquiry will now re-interview. And I would expect Mr. Messer, in dealing with the Deloitte Touche people, gave them the same statements he's giving now. And so for you to come here and say there's a whole bunch of new information isn't accurate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jack Messer also said that the details of the Channel Lake fiasco were a matter of

record with CIC. A memo from Mike Shaw of CIC supports what Mr. Messer is saying. He has listed a number of SaskPower documents that were provided to CIC. This includes all SaskPower board documents dealing with the sale of Channel Lake, including the June 20 meeting where the botched sale was discussed.

Mr. Minister, all of this information was provided to CIC. You were on the board of CIC prior to June 27 and you were the Minister of CIC after June 27, yet you say none of this information was ever brought to your attention. Well why not? Why didn't your CIC officials raise Channel Lake with you? Or did they simply raise it and then you covered it up?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I say to the member opposite that this is the most amazing cover-up that's ever occurred in the province of Saskatchewan, where the government brings to the Assembly two documents that outline in great detail — in great detail — what happened with Channel Lake. And then tables in the committee a thousand documents, including the one you bring here today, that we tabled, and say somehow we're covering up.

I say again to the member opposite, what I have said clearly is that I was not briefed by my officials on Channel Lake. And to that end Mr. Messer indicated today that he did not brief me. If you were being truthful here you would say that. You would say that Mr. Messer . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Now on the same matter that I previously brought to the attention to the hon. member from Kindersley, I ask the hon. minister to withdraw his last remark and wrap up his response. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite that . . .

The Speaker: — I ask the minister to withdraw the remark and then wrap up his response. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I withdraw the remarks that the member opposite was being untruthful. And I say to him this, that if you read, read the document, you will read on page no. 22, the documentation presented to the board of SaskPower was, at a critical juncture, incomplete to the point where the board was not being effectively informed by written material.

I say to you also, Mr. Messer said today he didn't brief me. That's where we're at; that's where the document comes in. If you would have read this five weeks ago you could have saved yourself a great deal of difficulty.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, you're right about one thing. This is indeed an amazing cover-up. Let's get this all, let's get this all straight. You're saying that in six months nobody every briefed you on this entire mess. Your SaskPower officials never briefed you; your CIC officials never briefed you; your own cabinet colleague never briefed you on this. Why not? Why do you think they didn't brief you? This is now the biggest scandal

your government is ever faced with, and now you're saying that your own cabinet colleague sitting right over there didn't brief you on this entire matter. Mr. Messer even believed that the former minister did brief you on this entire situation.

Mr. Minister, were you — let's just try and get this down unequivocally — were you ever briefed on the botched Channel Lake sale by the former minister? And if not, was this not a huge breach of his responsibility as the minister responsible at that time?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — To the member opposite, I'm not sure that he was in the committee today, but if he was he would have heard Mr. Messer say that he did not brief me — that's what he said, that's what he said. And I want to say to you, as it relates to the document that says that proper material and incomplete material was given to the board by officials in SaskPower, it's my understanding that all of those officials will appear before the committee and your questions should be put to them as it relates to materials given to the board, because that's why we're having the inquiry.

But I would urge you, as I did yesterday, after hearing from half of one witness, don't jump to a whole bunch of conclusions. Let's do the interviews, let's do the process, and at the end is when we should come to conclusions in that committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hospital Bed Reductions in Swift Current

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the latest health care fire is heating up in Swift Current where the district board's CEO (chief executive officer) has announced that the number of hospital beds at the city's regional hospital may be slashed from 134 down to 80.

Mr. Premier, the doctors weren't even consulted about this possible elimination of 54 beds. This sparked an emergency meeting of Swift Current physicians Tuesday night and they're preparing to do whatever they must to oppose this move.

I want to know, Mr. Premier, what are you going to do to oppose this move?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I think that the member opposite needs to give consideration . . . He recognizes how the system works today and that is that the district health boards, that the district health boards in the province are responsible for making decisions based on the needs that they have in their community. I'm not informed or advised, Mr. Speaker, currently as to the kinds of decisions that the district health board is making in respect to meeting the needs of the Swift Current area.

And so I say to the member opposite that if in fact he knows some information about what the district health board is doing, then he recognizes that the process is working, because the responsibilities of the district health board are the decisions around health care, are with the district health board. And if he has some information that relates to decisions that are being

made in the district, I'd be happy that he shares those with me because those are decisions the district health board would be making.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, either the Minister of Health and the Premier don't understand the extent of the problem, or they simply don't care.

Mr. Premier, if the number of beds in Swift Current drops below the 100 mark, the Swift Current Regional Hospital will lose its status as a regional centre. That means it will be almost impossible to retain or attract specialists and the services they provide.

Mr. Premier, you have gutted our health care system in our smaller towns and regional centres and cities. You're the one to blame for the fact that there's "no vacancy" signs hanging above our hospitals here in Regina.

Mr. Premier, what immediate action will you take to prevent these bed closures at the Swift Current Regional Hospital and what are you going to do today to ensure its status as a regional facility is not in jeopardy?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to just take a moment here to talk about the direction that the member opposite continues to take when he talks about health care. Because I've now witnessed him, Mr. Speaker, on a couple of occasions standing up in the House and recently at a meeting — a public meeting in Assiniboia — where the member opposite continues to make statements which are absolutely and totally false and inaccurate.

The member opposite makes comments like: about the Regina Health District, that we're going to lose beds in the Regina Health District; at the Plains Health Centre, that we're going to reduce and there's going to be staff losses. We're not going to see any bed reductions in Regina. We're not going to see any staff reductions in Regina. We're not going to see further financial cuts to the district of Regina.

And I say to the member opposite he needs to stop fearmongering around the province of Saskatchewan, using his Liberal politics to try to convince people in this province that we have a crisis. There's only one crisis in this province, Mr. Speaker, and it's over there in the Liberal caucus.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, what's amazing about that comment is that the Health minister is saying we're fearmongering.

Well I would ask that he apologize for saying that. *The Southwest Booster*, the papers around this province, the three or four families that have come to this legislature each and every day for health care, they're not here to fearmonger, Mr. Health Minister, and Mr. Premier. They're here because you have let them down.

Mr. Speaker, just last week the Premier told an NDP

fund-raising crowd in Swift Current that concerns about the health care system are unfounded. He told the people that health care remains a top priority. These are all quotes, Mr. Minister: "but that the renewal process is built on a good, solid basis." Mr. Premier, you told your New Democrat crowd, and I quote, that, "Swift Current is a very, very important centre of medical care for the south-west."

Mr. Premier, here is your chance to put your foot down and ensure that the quality of health care in the south-west doesn't deteriorate any further. You sell yourself as the saviour of medicare . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member has been extremely lengthy in his preamble and I'll ask him to go now directly — order — I'll ask him now to go directly to his question. Order. I'll ask the hon. member to go directly to his question.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Premier, will you stand up today and show some leadership and be a Premier and step in and make sure that these 54 beds aren't pulled out of Swift Current? Do what's right.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, when he talks about showing leadership in this country around health care, he needs to recognize what's happened in this province, Mr. Speaker. He needs to look at what's happened in this province.

Today we spend \$1.72 billion in health care, the largest financial contribution to health care in the history of this province, Mr. Speaker — the largest. Every penny of that health care funding, Mr. Speaker, is made up by and large by the provincial government. Fifty-five . . . or 70 per cent of that funding today, Mr. Speaker, is made up by the people of Saskatchewan. We fund health care.

Now if the member would have been listening last June, had he been listening last June when the federal Minister of Health stood up in Vancouver, speaking to the doctors across Canada, he said this, Mr. Speaker. He said to the doctors there that provinces are coping with less money today than they ever have because of the federal cut-backs.

And I say to the member opposite today, we spend \$1.72 billion in health care in this province. We have better services, we've got stronger physician services, we have the best health care service to the province in the country today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, last week I asked the Premier if it was true that he had intervened because he was unhappy that Lawrence Portigal, the man Saskatchewan taxpayers had already paid a \$327,000 severance package to, was back on the payroll of SaskPower.

The Premier said he couldn't remember for sure. He said he

hadn't told Mr. Messer to get rid of Portigal in 1996, to the best of his recollection. Today Mr. Messer testified that he believes he saw a memo, authored by the Premier, expressing his displeasure at Portigal being on the payroll.

Will the Premier concede that it is important for him to come to the inquiry to explain this matter to us. Will the Premier instruct his members to now vote to add his name to the list of witnesses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, what I have learned, listening to this hon. member and his questions, is that I will not rely on his statements and I'll rely on what the written transcript of what the evidence was this morning. Because the member gets up and says that there is a memorandum, according to Mr. Messer as he testified, from the Premier's office. And I'll check the transcript to see whether that's true or not. Because it is not true by my information, but I haven't checked the transcript.

Mr. Messer said twice, as I am informed, that I did not speak to him about Lawrie Portigal. And said on the third occasion there may have been a document, not a Premier's document, but a document. I don't know what he was referring to. You ask Mr. Messer what he was referring to. But I repeat to you again what I said to you again last week, and please stick to the truth and the facts. I do not micromanage. This is a decision made by Mr. Messer, and what I said last week is still my position today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, documents filed with the inquiry show that as early as March 1997, even before the last-minute switch that cost us \$5 million, the board had suspicions about Portigal.

Portigal was asked point blank by the board if there was anything in the Channel Lake sale deal, in it for him personally. That was back in March. The fact that so many people had reservations about Mr. Portigal, apparently including the Premier, is something that has to be looked into.

Did the Premier know that the plan to sell Channel Lake was in order to cover up the trading losses? Why was the Premier worried about Mr. Portigal? What did he say in this regard? Will the Premier undertake to locate the document referred to by Mr. Messer today, and will he file it with the inquiry? Will the Premier come to the inquiry and bring the documents with him and submit to questions to try and clear up this matter?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again I will note with care the question that this member has put, who I think now has established a reputation in the House of being somewhat loose with the facts in his questioning and the interpretation as against the sworn testimony.

And I repeat to the hon. member opposite what I've said before with respect to the situation. What I told him a week ago, I repeat again today, with respect to Mr. Lawrie Portigal. That is the situation. There is no documentation. The documentation that comes from our office, you have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Local Telephone Service Subsidization

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address a question to the minister in charge of SaskTel. Mr. Minister, I'll quote for you very briefly from a letter I got from a constituent which goes as follows:

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications, CRTC, is reviewing whether or to what extent rural and remote telephone services should continue to be subsidized in the province. The loss of this subsidy would mean local telephone, local rates in rural Saskatchewan could increase five times or more at some point in the future.

Mr. Minister, is it your intention to represent the province at these hearings? Is it your intention to go along with this type of increase in the future?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I think the question raised by the member from Maple Creek . . . or from Cypress is a very important question because it speaks to the issue of rural telecommunications not only in Saskatchewan, but right across Canada.

And as the member has clearly indicated, if we were to go to a fully competitive market for telephones, what would happen without a continuation of cross-subsidization of the system, as you say, you would see rates increase by a hundred, two hundred or three hundred per cent. That's not only in Saskatchewan but that's in rural Canada.

What we have going on at the present time are hearings by the CRTC. I think the hearings will be held in Saskatchewan in Prince Albert. I'm not sure of the date, but my colleague from Rosetown, the member of Intergovernmental Affairs, is working on this file.

But I would urge all members, all members, to take the same interest, especially rural members, in this item as the member from Cypress Hills. Because these hearings will be crucially important, and I would urge the caucus — the Conservative caucus, the Liberal caucus — to prepare briefs, to defend rural Saskatchewan, so that we avoid the increases that will occur if we don't fight this proposal by the CRTC.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister. Minister, it does state in this memo that I received from my constituent, that your government is not compelled by the CRTC rulings, but however it does say that key issues to be considered include determining whether telephone services to rural and remote areas should be subsidized and to determining the appropriate level of subsidy that should be examined and the mechanisms that the subsidy should be done under.

So, Mr. Minister, if you don't go there and fight against it, you are sort of dragged into it, is what it's saying. And my constituent is saying that her bill will go up from \$16 plus the \$4, which is \$20 now, by 500 per cent, which would be a

hundred dollars, without ever making one phone call. Are you prepared to say no, we are not going to do this. Are you prepared to give that commitment today?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite that we will be there and will be presenting to say that the ability for rural Saskatchewan, rural Canada, to survive is very dependent on the ability to have some cross-subsidization whereby the most remote areas of our province and those with the smaller communities are not put at the vagary of the huge increases that would occur.

And I've just been handed a note that says the hearings will be held at the Marlboro Hotel conference centre in Prince Albert. And the fact of the matter is, I think that it probably would be a good occasion that, in advance to these hearings held on Tuesday, June 2, that there would be a resolution put by the Assembly.

And I would urge you, having raised it, you have an opportunity to second the motion. I would have our minister raise it in the very near future so we could go as a unified voice to those hearings and speak clearly on behalf of rural members, rural people in Saskatchewan, but I think continue the leadership role of rural Canada where our Premier and our legislature could play that role.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 6

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 6 — The Cattle Marketing Deductions Act, 1998**, be now read a second time.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be relatively brief in my remarks regarding this particular item.

The Minister of Agriculture was certainly brief in his remarks surrounding the whole situation with cattle marketing in Saskatchewan deductions Act. The minister's remarks, I don't think dealt with the main aspects of the Bill. We fully do expect that the minister would want to take the opportunity to speak to the Bill, as it is relative to his department; at least I think at this point it still is.

I'm a little surprised that you didn't make yourself available to enter into this debate. At any rate, I think we are well aware of the importance that livestock plays in Saskatchewan. It's an industry that is changing, no doubt.

New types of livestock unheard of just a few years ago, such as bison and elk, are becoming more common in Saskatchewan, in addition to all the exotic brands of cattle that are now in Saskatchewan. We are encouraged by this type of

diversification for the province of Saskatchewan.

Innovation of course, is the key to continued growth within the livestock industry. Of course part of this innovation is the ability to fund research and development projects. That's the reason why there is a check-off. The industry supports a check-off and I, along with the Saskatchewan Party members, also respect their opinion in this area. It is important that we continue to advance the livestock industry through better scientific methods. That's what this money, I understand, is to be used for, and we support it for that reason.

While the government may be slow to see the value of changes in this and other areas of the agricultural industry, we certainly see the benefits. The government gives groups such as the elk breeders the bureaucratic run-around as far as which department governs them. This is one of the fastest growing sectors of our livestock economy, but so far the government has refused to classify elk as livestock. I think when we get to Ag estimates we'll certainly have more to say about that subject. Meanwhile the government gets itself in bureaucratic knots; the livestock industry goes about business efficiently and effectively. And they do it in spite of I think, Mr. Speaker, the government opposite.

Now let me be clear that we understand that the industry itself asked for these changes to the legislation, and had input into these changes. Because of that we will support the Bill that is before us and will not hold it up for too long. But as the official opposition, I think it's incumbent upon us to raise some of the concerns that any legislation that is presented for consideration . . . Many of the concerns I have are not necessarily specific to this Bill. As I've said, we support this Bill, but it is something that we see as a bit of a pattern with this government and its legislation.

The livestock industry supports the automatic check-off, as has been stated, and therefore we will bow to their wisdom and support the Bill without hesitation. However we will support the continuance of the check-off for research, development, and promotion of livestock industry.

There are a few governance issues that I think we should speak about, and these really don't apply specifically to Bill 6, but rather to many Bills that we have seen come down from this government since 1991. Once again we see some very specific wording that is contained in the old Act removed in this new Bill, and removed completely out of regulation . . . or to regulations.

This is a clever way for this government . . . that this government has hit upon to change laws of this province without ever having to come before the scrutiny of the legislature. And quite frankly, I guess who could really blame them, Mr. Speaker.

If you'll allow a slight but pertinent digression, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that we believe that this is an area that should be of great concern to all legislatures — all legislators — when we see a government that wants to continue to move debate away from the legislature into either committees, where it can be hidden, or into regulations, where the government only, through order in council, can make changes. And I think we should be

. . . all legislators should have reason to be concerned about that persistent trend that this government has embarked upon over the last number of years.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that the livestock industry is supportive of this piece of legislation. Many of my friends and associates that I know in the livestock industry have put a lot of effort and work into promotion of the livestock sector in Saskatchewan. And you can only . . . you only have to think about the number of trade missions that have involved cattle producers and other livestock industry people all over North America, and indeed all over the world, with respect to promotion of agricultural products and livestock products out of Saskatchewan to the rest of the world.

And we certainly support, when it comes to those efforts, the efforts of the cattle producers of Saskatchewan in embarking upon those types of promotional activities and educational activities for people all over the world. They've had an industry develop in terms of promotion. They've had an industry develop in terms of all kinds of things related to the livestock industry, whether it is exports of, direct exports of the product of cattle, or direct exports of semen; other related activities in the agriculture and livestock industries are extremely important.

We realize certainly in opposition that the industry has a great deal of work ahead of it — yes. But it has also embarked upon this with the full knowledge and understanding that they are willing to take it on. They are prepared to take it on and they've done a very good job in the past.

Research dollars, as we all know in this legislature, return many, many times in investment back to the province of Saskatchewan. And we can see that in the advances that we've seen in the livestock sector — the cattle sector particularly with relevance to this Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, we see no reason to hold this piece of legislation. The cattle industry, as we know — we've spoken to them — is supportive of this piece of legislation. For that reason, we think that if cattle people across Saskatchewan are supportive of it we see absolutely no reason to object to the legislation.

We object to this government, in some respects though, moving too much of what we consider debatable legislation into regulations. We'd preferred to have opportunity, as I think is right, to have opportunity to speak to the issues rather than just watching this government pass orders in council on an almost daily basis.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we see no reason to hold this piece of legislation and would be prepared, if we have any more questions, to answer them in committee when we get to that stage.

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

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 5 — The Animal**

Products Amendment Act, 1998 be now read a second time.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This piece of legislation is yet another in a long series of very minor in nature, technical of type Bills that are before us in this session. In our province we're facing all kinds of challenges, and it seems a little bit ironic that this is about all that we've seen in terms of legislation from this government at this point in this session.

This particular piece of legislation deals with The Animal Products Amendment Act, of which there's very little in it that we see of concern. The minister again hasn't spoken in any great length about this piece of legislation. But we see, as I said, very little concern about the piece of legislation and would ask any further questions that we might have in committee.

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

(1430)

Bill No. 7

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 7 — The Pastures Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the whole our caucus finds nothing objectionable about this piece of legislation. Again it's another more or less housekeeping type of change to legislation that comes before us today. Its main intent, as we understand it, as the minister has stated at least, is to simplify the legislation, the regulation of community pastures in the province.

As has been pointed out, pastures are currently under the jurisdiction of the agriculture development group and the adjustment Act and The Department of Agriculture Act. It should also be noted that many aspects and definitions pertaining to pastures are contained in The Provincial Lands Act as well. Plus the definitions in this Act make reference to the Indian bands as defined in the Indian Act.

And let's not forget about the way in which this program has been bumped around to different departments, Mr. Speaker. From various branches in Ag and Food over to Rural Development and then to the pastures branch, back again to Ag and Food. This kind of bureaucratic shell game underscores the public's frustration, I think, with big government.

Farmers, like businessmen throughout the province, so often find they're caught in an endless web of red tape whenever they want to deal with government. And what, and what good in the end does all of this do? What does this all serve? As far as I can see, the only people who benefit are the officials in the government who are pursuing some sort of empire-building exercise.

Mr. Speaker, we seem to be spending an inordinate amount of time in the Assembly dealing with Bills that do nothing but shift commas in old legislation or that reshuffle responsibilities from one part of the bureaucracy to another. And this is a pretty classic example of that, Mr. Speaker. We think that this should

stop. We as members have got to start looking at some legislation and asking the question, what would happen if we didn't pass this legislation.

In this case, the answer would be, absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker. Nothing would happen if this legislation passes and nothing would happen if it doesn't pass. So we don't see a whole lot of reason to hold it up but we also don't see a whole lot of reason to pass it. And I think that's the concern that people all over Saskatchewan are expressing with members, I would hope with members of the government. They're certainly expressing it with members of the official opposition.

We think that there needs to be a bringing of more discipline to the public service when it comes to these types of legislation. We have to start emphasizing the servant part of civil servants a little more. Then maybe we wouldn't be buried under the burden of all of these meaningless Bills that continually are put before us.

And I think that one of these areas of government, the NDP has a very particular weakness in this area. Well let's face it, the NDP has pretty much become a bureaucracy type of political party.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this piece of legislation, in spite of the fact that it won't make one iota of difference whether we pass it or don't pass it, we see little reason to hold it up. But if there is any further questions we will be asking them in committee.

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

Bill No. 8

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 8 — The Stray Animals Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to speak to Bill No. 8, just another in a long line of vitally important, earth-shattering pieces of legislation that have been brought before this House so far this session.

On the surface, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't appear that there's very much in this legislation that we would have a major concern with, Mr. Speaker. Again the government tells us that an update to The Stray Animals Act was requested by such groups as SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and the Saskatchewan Stock Growers' Association.

It appears the Minister of Agriculture is having a little bit of difficulty following this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. We're dealing with Bill No. 8, The Stray Animals Act, which you presented to the legislature for consideration of this House.

The first thing that I noticed in this Bill, it has been changed to reflect the changing nature of the livestock industry in Saskatchewan. As we all know and as we've discussed in Bill No. 6 previously, the livestock industry in Saskatchewan has changed a great deal in a relatively short period of time.

No longer are we simply discussing cattle and horses when we

are talking about livestock in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. There is a much . . . a very large specialized livestock industry in Saskatchewan now that includes bison, wild boar, elk, and numerous other kinds of animals that weren't at one time considered sort of domesticated livestock. But we've seen producers in a lot of cases looking for diversification opportunities to enhance their bottom line on their farming or ranching operations.

The discussions that we have had with the Saskatchewan Elk Breeder's Association, we are told that the government doesn't want to put elk under the Department of Agriculture. And we'll have some questions to be asking the minister, and certainly the minister responsible for Environment when we get to their estimates, with respect to that.

We think that if you're going to include other types of what might have been considered at one time exotic livestock in the Department of Ag, certainly elk would appear to be one that should be included in that department as well.

It's confusing, I think, to producers across Saskatchewan, they domesticate formerly exotic animals and that they are not included in the Department of Agriculture as other ones in the past have been.

Much to the chagrin of those involved, this fast growing industry, SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) seems to have a lot of control in this situation. The elk breeders' association believes it's a fight between the bureaucrats in the two different departments, and it appears that SERM has a better group of fighters, Mr. Speaker, because they seem to be winning the day. At any rate, we'll get into those questions in estimates of those departments.

The current Stray Animals Act, as I've said, we have no fundamental problems with it. However, I want to make some general comments on the potential areas of concern that are addressed in the legislation that can be more closely scrutinized in the Committee of the Whole.

First and foremost, we want the assurances that provisions of this Bill do not put an undue burden on local government. As we're well aware, over the last few years this government has hammered municipalities over and over again with constant downloading. Revenue-sharing grants have literally disappeared. Municipalities have been left without adequate funding to maintain services.

The rural municipalities do not have adequate funds to build or maintain roads, even though these roads are under a great deal of stress due to the province's inattention and disinterest in maintaining safe highways in Saskatchewan.

And you only have to think back of this government's intentions a few years ago to cultivate up the highways. The minister responsible for Highways at that time was going to, was going to turn a large part of the highway network in Saskatchewan back to gravel. You can't help but think that that was a major step backwards in direct . . . directly opposite to what most other provinces are doing — Alberta particularly. Mr. Speaker, coming from Alberta, you would know that the highways in that province are in a great deal of better condition

than we see here.

The Speaker: — I suspect the hon. member for Kindersley will welcome interruption, first of all, drawing to his attention that he's not to include the Chair in debate, and secondly, reminding him that the Bill before us is The Stray Animals Amendment Act and I'm sure that he'll want to direct his remarks to the Bill that's before the House.

Mr. Boyd: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assumed you would be aware of that. These assurance . . . we need assurances with respect to this piece of legislation, Mr. Minister of Agriculture, that it will not result in higher costs at the local government, municipal government area.

We recognize however, the importance of having an efficient method of dealing with stray animals in the country. They do pose a safety hazard for those in the immediate area. People have enough trouble coping with the number of deer; they shouldn't have to worry about loose cattle, horses, and elk or wild boar wandering around or getting in their path as you drive over the rough country roads or pothole-infested highways of this province. However, the intent of this Bill is to improve the handling of stray animals that may be roaming the countryside at any given point in time.

So we would have no objection to seeing this piece of legislation moving to committee and we'd be prepared to ask all of the very important questions at that point.

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. Ms. MacKinnon that **Bill No. 10 — The Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us, An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation Act, seems at first glance to be innocent enough. The minister, in presenting the Bill, even says some of the right things. She talks about job creation, investment in the future, and modernization of the economy, and so on. The minister has obviously been listening to the opposition because she wouldn't understand what's really being said.

But my first question, Mr. Speaker, is why, why are we being asked to give *carte blanche* agreement to SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation) to borrow \$150 million? Is it exclusively to build a recreation park in Regina? And if so, why doesn't the proposed amendment, or for that matter the 1997 amendment giving SOCO the first \$100 million, say exactly that?

The proposed amendment limits the use of these borrowed funds to capital construction projects only. I find this interesting because in May 1994 the then minister in charge of SOCO said, the other thing that will change with this property division within SEDCO (Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation), which had been built up over the years to have a

whole array of property, some buildings in Regina, Saskatoon, industrial parks in many of our small communities, Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation will not have a properties division and this will be a significant, a very significant change from where we were in the past.

Now all of a sudden we're being asked to spend \$150 million on capital construction projects. I'm not sure, Mr. Minister, if the people in Saskatchewan realize that SOCO, in the last few years, from the General Revenue Fund, have put in \$21.5 million. This is from SOCO, from this department that was set up by the government to replace what they obviously hated, SEDCO, and now we've spent \$21 million of taxpayers' dollars to actually set up another brother of SEDCO.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, this leaves the legislation open to all sorts of potential misuse by this or other successive governments; this sort of misuse, Mr. Speaker, on which the government has expounded endlessly; this sort of misuse that the very creation of SOCO was supposed to prevent from happening — but here it is happening, Mr. Speaker. The door is wide open, wide open for governments to build edifices to their own lack of planning and foresight.

But never mind. The minister says, trust me. The \$50 million will only be used as I say, despite what the legislation says. Last year the previous minister in effect said the same thing — trust me. I only need a hundred million dollars and it'll only be used to do as I say it will; \$100 million here, another \$50 million some place else, \$5 million everywhere. It's no big deal, right? That's what the previous minister said.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it might not be a big deal to the members opposite and to the government members, but it is a big deal to us. To the people of Kelvington-Wadena, \$5 million is a lot of money; \$5 million lost in Channel Lake is a very big deal to the people of Rose Valley, who lost their hospital last year.

It's a very big deal to the people of Englefeld, who lost their school last year. And it's a very big deal to the RMs (rural municipality), who can see no daylight at all on how they're going to maintain their road system. It's a very big deal to the small businesses who have either already folded and moved away to less oppressive tax systems or being forced to seriously consider that. And, Mr. Speaker, if \$5 million is a big deal, then \$150 million is 30 times a bigger deal.

Okay, I agree R&D (research and development) parks could be a good idea. The minister points to the success of Innovation Place in Saskatoon. Good and well. Indeed some good things have come from it and the foresight of the people who put it there. It does not necessarily follow, as the minister suggests, that this guarantees the success of more of them, more R&D parks, especially when we don't know how many of them the minister is contemplating.

Using this kind of logic, if one R&D park is good, 27 of them should be 27 times as good. But I don't think so, not necessarily anyway.

What we have to ask this government is, where's the plan.

Where's the list of pre-committed tenants? Where's the money going to be spent? Are we going to be asked to borrow another no-big-deal \$50 million next year? The people of Kelvington-Wadena need answers to these kind of questions before they'll support this Bill.

And then, Mr. Speaker, there's the question of the debt itself. The people of this province have been told for the past seven years, the debt is a very bad thing. They've been told that borrowing is evil and paying down this existing debt is the only priorities at the expense of all other priorities. Now today we are being asked to support a Bill to authorize the borrowing of a hundred and fifty million dollars with nothing but just vague justifications and with no real, supportable plans.

I don't happen to believe that borrowing money is intrinsically evil. Yes of course the people of the province have a right to expect their government to invest in their future. What is wrong however, is the sort of trust me, I know what's good for you approach. How or why should the people of Saskatchewan trust a government with \$150 million when the ministers of that government openly and blatantly categorize \$5 million as no big deal?

Show us the plan, Madam Minister. Show us the business plan that justifies the investment. Show us the controls that eliminate the misuse of money by either this or future governments. Show us that some thought has been given to whether this is truly the proper priority in use of limited resources. And show us that the projects contemplated fit into some kind of long-term strategy, any kind of a plan for the future that this government may have. That's what the people are asking for.

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the minister show us that she has an understanding that the interest charges on \$150 million will accumulate whether or not this government has a plan. There will be interest.

Until the people of Kelvington-Wadena have answers to all of these questions, I suggest that we adjourn debate on this Bill. I move that this debate be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 18 — The Pharmacy Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Pharmacy Amendment Act, 1998.

In 1996 a new Pharmacy Act was passed to better regulate pharmacists and retail pharmacies in Saskatchewan. The Act was proclaimed on January 1 following development of the necessary drug schedule regulations and bylaws.

In the course of developing the regulations, it became apparent to the Saskatchewan Pharmaceutical Association and Saskatchewan Health that there was a deficiency in the original Act. While the Pharmacy Act allowed for drug schedules to be established and regulations, it did not allow for change to those schedules to be made automatically.

The drug schedules in the regulations set out the conditions of sale for various drugs. For instance, there are some drugs, such as prescription drugs, which should only be sold by a pharmacist. Some non-prescription drugs also pose a health risk and need to be kept behind the counters so the pharmacist can advise the customer about the risks.

Mr. Speaker, The Pharmacy Amendment Act, 1998 will ensure that changes to federal drug regulations will be automatically reflected by the drug schedules pursuant to The Pharmacy Act. In this way it will not be necessary for the Saskatchewan Pharmaceutical Association to file numerous bylaw amendments reflecting changes to the narcotic control regulations of Canada and the food and drug regulations of Canada.

It will also ensure that when a drug changes status, such as deletion from the narcotic control regulations, it is then placed on an appropriate alternative schedule. In this way the public is better protected from drugs that may cause potential harm. The Saskatchewan Pharmaceutical Association is supportive of that amendment.

With this, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of The Pharmacy Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in light of the comments made by the Government House Leader in regards to The Act to amend the Pharmacy Act, Bill No. 18, as we've reviewed this piece of legislation, there really doesn't appear to be a lot in the legislation other than conforming to federal regulations and bringing the drug Act in this province, The Pharmacy Act in this province, into guidelines with the federal Act and certainly making sure it's compatible and meets all the requirements of the federal Act.

And this seems to be a straightforward, appears to be a straightforward piece of legislation. And with that in mind, I don't see any reason why we should even hold it up, but allow it to go to committee. If there are other questions to be raised, we'll certainly raise them in committee.

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

Bill No. 19 — The Physical Therapists Act, 1998

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Physical Therapists Act, 1998.

For the past two years we've been consulting with the Saskatchewan College of Physical Therapists to develop this new Act. The current Act is outdated and does not contain the necessary and standard provisions required in newer professional legislation.

I'm pleased to say this new Act contains some very positive changes for both the profession and the people it serves.

In 1997, Mr. Speaker, this government made similar changes to the legislation governing occupational therapists. The legislation will set out a clear and more effective process for

responding to and resolving public concerns about physical therapists. The Act will also ensure flexibility in setting registration requirements and issuing licences.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, these are some very positive changes, developed in close consultation with the profession. I believe this Act will serve physical therapists, their clients, and the province well into the future.

I beg to inform the Assembly that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the subject matter of the Bill, recommends it to the consideration of the Assembly, and I move that Bill No. 19, The Physical Therapists Act, 1998, be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while I was quite agreeable to move the previous Bill, The Pharmacy Act, into committee, and had given some consideration to possibly moving The Physical Therapists Act into committee as well, Bill No. 19, I have given second thought, listening to the comments made by the Government House Leader. Some of the thoughts that I have in regarding the Bill, while I believe the profession and the intent of the legislation deals with the number of concerns the physical therapists have had over the number of years and are attempting to address these concerns and certainly raise the profile of the profession, there's some areas I think we need to take a little closer look at and just consult a bit more with the association to indeed understand how much they have had involvement in the establishment of this piece of legislation.

One of the areas of concern I do have, and we just want to do some follow-up on, is the fact that the legislation removes the discretion of the minister to overturn disciplinary judgements. And while I don't have a problem with that, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to look at the legislation a little more carefully.

While we talk about appeals, I think one of the concerns I would have is we need to be assured that there is an avenue that people have to go to that may be somewhat removed from the profession itself; so that if disciplinary action is taken, people . . . or therapists themselves can feel quite confident that when disciplinary action is taken, that they're being dealt with fairly. And from the minister's comments, I'm not exactly sure if the appeal process will allow for that fairness.

As I understand it, the college itself will have their appeal committee in place and a person may find themselves dealing with their own colleagues and may feel somewhat intimidated in appealing a decision made by the association. So I think that's where the original Act, in having the ministerial involvement, was trying to address that. But at the same time, why I think it's important that ministers of the Crown not be involved, as certainly that becomes a political situation.

But I think it's important that there be an open and fair appeal process that at least allows for other involvement by other individuals on the appeal panel. And that's one of the questions and areas that we'll certainly want to look at and get some input and feedback from the therapists, the physical therapists themselves, as to how they would see this make-up of the appeal panel in order that everyone, anyone involved in the profession, can feel that they're quite comfortable in raising appeals regarding decisions made by the therapists or by the college.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's appropriate that we take a moment to address this Bill a little more at length before we move it to committee. And with that in mind, I would move adjournment of debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 15 — The Gas Inspection Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to move second reading of The Gas Inspection Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, safety of the public is the major focus of this government. The gas inspection department has one of the most important mandates in that respect. These amendments are intended to strengthen that mandate.

The first amendment is intended to facilitate the undertaking of routine maintenance on gas equipment. Mr. Speaker, there are important and very safe maintenance activities that individuals can perform on furnaces or other gas equipment. The gas inspection department wants to encourage this work to be done. The Act as now written requires that a gas permit be obtained before undertaking any maintenance work. This is not the intention. Therefore to make this clear and to encourage such work, we are proposing the amendment to subsection 2(o)(ii).

(1500)

The second amendment is intended to clarify the responsibilities relating to the activation of gas equipment. The Act now obligates the gas utility to activate newly installed equipment. With gas equipment becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex, the installing contractor, as a result of factory and other specialized training, is in a better position than the gas utility to undertake proper and safe activation.

The amendment to subsection 13(3) will result in the installing contractor now being clearly more accountable for the total installation of gas equipment, including its proper activation.

The final amendment, to subsection 23(3), is intended to give

gas inspectors clear and broader authority to take appropriate action to correct and deal with hazards regardless of their cause. This is very important if hazardous situations are to be addressed in a timely and appropriate manner. Without the amendment there may be situations where action is delayed or not taken because of some uncertainty as to whether it was caused by one of the circumstances now listed in the section.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will add to the safe and efficient operation of the gas industry in the province. Accordingly, I move second reading of The Gas Inspection Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in responding to the comments made by the Government House Leader, it's certainly important that we have . . . deal with gas inspection services because of the potential hazards that may arise if gas connections aren't fitted or hooked up properly, or the installation of a new building, and someone does it very carelessly, and certainly the results could be quite catasta — well forget that word.

An Hon. Member: — Catastrophic.

Mr. Toth: — Catastrophic, Mr. Speaker.

But certainly, Mr. Speaker, when you think about gas installation, it's important that we have specific guidelines in place to address the seriousness of gas installation and hook-up. And as well, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that the public is protected but also to just do away with some of the extra red tape that certainly takes up the time of indeed getting the approval needed for a permit to do a gas installation.

And I know in my area of the . . . or in my constituency, on a number of occasions I have been contacted by individuals who are in the process of a building project but have found themselves on a waiting-list for a gas inspector to come and approve the installation hook-up so that they can indeed move ahead with their building project.

And that I found, Mr. Speaker, to be very frustrating for individuals as they . . . Whether it's a housing project, whether it's a business, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we certainly do have regulations in place, and guidelines and Acts that address any concern that may be of significance to the general public so that the safety of the public is maintained; and as well, that the public can feel quite satisfied that indeed they are being represented well and that we as legislators in this Assembly are mindful of the concerns of the public.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are certainly a few other questions we need to look at. We need to take a little more time to indeed take more careful review of the piece of legislation before us, the Bill No. 15, The Gas Inspection Amendment Act, 1998, to indeed determine whether or not it meets all the criteria that the government is hoping to accomplish, or that the public and indeed individuals who work in the gas field as well are looking for, and whether or not it is . . . While we are attempting to move some of the roadblocks, maybe putting some other roadblocks in place.

And I think those are some issues that we need to look at before

I would suggest we move into committee and get into further debate and specific questions regarding the Act.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Agriculture and Food Vote 1

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

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my left is Terry Scott, the deputy minister of the Department of Agriculture and Food. Behind Terry is Jack Zepp, director of administrative services branch. And behind me is Ross Johnson, budget officer, admin services branch.

And on the road, en route from Melville and Swift Current respectively, are Carol Eaton, executive director of administration and finance for Crop Insurance in Melville, and Lorne Warnes, executive director, admin, from ACS (Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan) in Swift Current.

Subvote (AG01)

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, welcome to yourself and to your officials. Throughout Ag estimates we'll have questions on a number of subjects. You could have just asked. We would have told you that there was no need for the Crop Insurance folks to come in just yet. Over the next number of days, weeks, and months we'll have lots of opportunity to discuss various things within the Department of Agriculture, but crop insurance wasn't one of the ones I had in mind today.

But anyway a number of things that we want to discuss with you over the next period of time, including things like rail-line abandonment, what that will do in terms of highways; certainly crop insurance will be an issue we'll want to discuss with you; grain marketing.

The Estey report is another area that we'll want to discuss. The Canadian Wheat Board's complaint against the railways, we'll want to discuss. Hog marketing, we'll want to discuss in Saskatchewan and the environmental concerns surrounding that issue. Grain marketing will be an area that will be of interest I think to people in Saskatchewan. And certainly safety nets are another topic that we will want to discuss over the next period of time.

Mr. Minister of Agriculture, I wanted to touch on one subject that's come to my attention in recent weeks that we had discussed with the elk breeders' association here in Saskatchewan, that we wanted to address a number of questions to you with regard to this new, evolving . . . relatively new, evolving industry that's turned into quite a boon for agriculture

producers, livestock producers in Saskatchewan, with large numbers of elk farmers starting up, and have started up all over the province of Saskatchewan.

I understand it's one of the fastest growing agricultural livestock opportunities in the province of Saskatchewan currently. And we would like your views on this industry relative to its growth and its potential, what your department sees as its potential. And we will want to discuss with you a number of things about that growth potential and where we see that industry going in the future here in Saskatchewan.

I understand that there's a great deal of bureaucratic struggle going on between your department and the department of . . . SERM. We feel that certainly there's concerns from an environmental standpoint and an environmental resource management standpoint, but you have to also look at the situation relative to an expanding livestock industry, livestock opportunity here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could give me a few thoughts on elk breeding here in Saskatchewan and game farming in general. I understand that the cabinet is studying this issue and is about to approve a new policy paper regarding game farming. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I just want to start off by saying that I'm actually very pleased. Last year my estimates came up fairly late in the session and now we're probably about halfway through the session and I'm pleased to be able to stand up and talk about Agriculture estimates, because I'm not sure of the priority of agriculture on the opposition benches. But day 26 into the session, I haven't had one Ag question in question period, so I really am pleased. I'm not sure if that's because I don't put the emphasis on . . .

But I'm pleased to be able to stand up today and talk about Agriculture in the estimates, Mr. Chairperson, and particularly about the elk industry, as it is one of the very, very important industries in Saskatchewan.

I was at the annual meeting of the elk producers about a week . . . just over a week ago and spoke to them there. There were over 500 people — breeders, producers — at that session. That is the largest meeting in Canada of Canadian elk breeders. The only larger one was in Edmonton where the international meeting was last year.

Elk has been around . . . some of the producers go back almost 20 years but it's in the last 10 years really that there's been tremendous growth in the industry. We have seen a large demand in the Asia market for antler velvet. And we've seen breeding stock, very high quality breeding stock, being developed here, which resulted in large horns and a good return.

We see the breeding stock selling for . . . bred heifers about 20, \$25,000; bred cows up to 30, 35, \$40,000 is not unusual. So this industry is very strong and growing and obviously the return is there.

Now there are a number of things that have to take place for industry to prosper. And one of the things is that government create the climate in which those elk producers can produce

their product and get it to market in a fashion that will give them the best return.

I think we're doing that. I've worked very closely with the president and directors of the elk breeders' association and I think that there are a number of issues that are coming forward that are being resolved.

(1515)

You're right; we're out right now consulting. There was a consultation paper put forward after discussions took place with the industry and we are now in the process of trying to finalize those discussions. And there are a number of issues that we've worked with the breeders, with the producers on. While I don't know that every one of them is finalized to everyone's satisfaction, I think it is a big step forward.

What we're trying to do, because these animals are under the round table discussions of about three years ago . . . These animals are not considered wild, but the only . . . the difference between elk and let's say cattle or . . .

An Hon. Member: — Wild boar.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Wild boar, exactly, is that the elk are indigenous to Saskatchewan. So they are treated a little bit different than something that's not indigenous to the province.

An Hon. Member: — Why?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — In terms of . . . Why, the member from Rosthern asks. Well specifically because of disease. We have to be very certain. And that's where SERM comes in.

SERM has a responsibility for the control of the health of animals in the wild. And while there may be some differing opinions on exactly how this should play out, I think for the most part that, through the discussions with the industry, we've been able to satisfy, satisfy a lot of those things.

So I think the industry is growing very rapidly. It's a strong industry. We're supportive of the industry. We are trying to move . . . there are a number of things being moved out of SERM into Agriculture. How many, we've got to make those decisions. Because as the industry grows and they become more domesticated, we can do that. Never forgetting though that they are indigenous and that any movement of elk into this province could affect the wild. And so SERM does have a responsibility there as well.

Mr. Boyd: — So what you are saying is that the Department of Ag is not prepared to do the testing and the disease control on elk that you do in other areas in the livestock industry. Is that how I would interpret your statement?

Because your department certainly regulates in other areas of livestock here in Saskatchewan — in the cattle industry certainly, hog industry. You have volumes of regulation about the movement, transport, all kinds of things surrounding disease control and that sort of thing which are obviously very necessary.

Is your department not prepared to enter into those same types of disease testing type programs that are prevalent in other areas in the livestock industry?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Quite the contrary, Mr. Chairperson. Last year we put in \$50,000 for research of disease — E. coli and Cervi, meningeal worm. And this year we put in another \$50,000 into research for disease, the purpose of which is to be able to develop a foolproof system of testing for disease, which we don't have right now. We think there probably isn't a problem, but at the end of the day if there is a problem somebody has to take responsibility, and that is the government if they don't have the proper rules in place.

So what we're doing is putting money into the testing. There's two researchers, one in New Brunswick and one in Saskatoon. They've been working on this. We hope to, within a relatively short period of time, a year or two — these things are always hard to predict — but develop a protocol agreement. Because that way we'll be able to import elk to our province and have reciprocating agreements with other jurisdictions.

But the key is to ensure that those protocol agreements don't breach the standards that we have as far as disease in the wild species and in the elk producers' stock themselves. Because as I said earlier, these things are very, very expensive animals and we have to make sure that when they come in they're clean.

So we're putting money actively into that. Our department's working very closely with them, because as you identified, I think you understand that it's a very, very important area.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, over the last number of days we've had all kinds of concern coming forward from the elk farmers of Saskatchewan. You must be aware of some of the concerns that they have brought to your attention with respect to their industry. They have put out a policy development type of information and statements over the last number of weeks and months with regard to where they would like to see the industry grow and go in the future.

Certainly the antler velvet market is important and the breeding stock market is important. But they are also looking to open up meat processing facilities here in Saskatchewan so that the industry doesn't collapse once we've seen a state where the antler velvet market is not buoyant enough to handle the increased numbers of elk that are being produced in Saskatchewan as well as certainly the breeding stock.

As we all know, and I think there's a great deal of concern within their industry that what we may see happen is similar to what we've seen happen in a number of other what might be considered sort of exotic type of livestock areas, where at one point we see huge dollars being put into breeding stock, and then almost overnight a collapsing market because there just simply isn't a continued growth in the number of people that want to move into a market that has no return on their very substantial investment.

So, Mr. Minister, are you aware of the concerns that the industry has? Have they been brought to your attention? And maybe you could tell us a little bit about some of those concerns and what you're doing to address them.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Yes, I'd be happy to do that. But before I do that I want to correct something that I said earlier. My deputy just corrected me on it and it's E. Cervi and P. Tenuis. I think I said E. coli, which is not the right term, and I was thinking P. Tenuis and didn't say it. I do know a little bit about these things.

What we're doing is . . . what we've done is put out a discussion paper. That discussion paper has stimulated a lot of discussion. And we understand the industry has some concerns. They have gone through the paper thoroughly I think for the most part. We are dealing with the board of directors, who we deal with as representatives, as democratically elected representatives of the industry.

And we get phone calls from time, you know, to time from producers directly and we listen to those very carefully. Because the important thing here is to make sure that we find the solutions to some of the problems that they have in developing the industry.

I think there was a lot of concern over some of the wording in the paper, but I want to make it very clear that that paper, that discussion paper that was put out, was just that — a discussion paper. As I said, it's generated a lot of discussion for a few reasons. One of them was wording and understanding exactly what was meant in that discussion paper.

There's some concerns about protocol agreement. There's concerns about, I think some of the people in the industry would like to see the Environment and Resource Management completely out of the business of elk production in Saskatchewan.

But I said . . . I think you were asking me what the people were calling in about. And I said one of the things that they call in about is there are some producers who would like to see the Department of the Environment completely out of the picture and have Agriculture just doing everything.

Well I think we're moving closer to having Agriculture administer most of the industry. But as far as having . . . the reality is, as far as having SERM completely out of the picture, that is not a reality. But I think they can be removed to cover the areas that they should concern themselves about, and that is disease control in the wild. And that means having a say in protocol agreements where the movement of elk go back and forth from the border. Because they have responsibility to the people of this province to ensure that there are healthy elk indigenous species in the province.

So yes there have been some calls. We've had many consultations. I met with the elk breeders a week or so ago, some of them. We've been meeting for over two years off and on, on this — I have. And I think we've made great strides.

While there is some frustration, I think from some of those people who have been a long time in the industry and just have a little frustration that they think not enough is happening, I hope that this round of consultations . . . and we're going right now through our process of cabinet and committees to make sure that we have the best possible policy.

We're meeting, I believe next week with the ag caucus and the elk breeders, and I think environment caucus as well. I know that you've probably met with them, which is your responsibility. And I think that's a good thing, because we have to be able to determine exactly what is needed for the industry.

So I guess I would invite you, with any people you know in the industry, to bring those concerns forward. But we have to look at the results of the consultation. That's what we're putting together now. We've got the survey. We mailed out surveys, questionnaires to all the producers — not just elk producers, but white-tail and red deer producers, and the number of people who are involved in the raising of deer and elk.

I think there was about 500 questionnaires sent out. We got those back. We made all . . . We had consultations after that. And now we're putting together a package. Some of it will be similar to what was in the paper; some of it won't be.

But I think the key is, and I've told this to the elk producers, that after we go through this process — and we're meeting with them as a caucus to hear them out — after we go through this process and before the regulations are put forward, they will again have a chance to sit down and talk and lobby with us to put their concerns forward. At the end of the day, I would hope that we resolve as many issues as possible. Am I optimistic that every one of their concerns will be addressed? Probably not, because in the real world that doesn't . . . But I think we'll address all the . . . most of the concerns that they have.

Now the one corollary there is that if some producers think that SERM are going to be completely removed, unfortunately that's not going to be the case, but their role will be reduced, and more of it is coming, the intent is for more of it to come into Agriculture.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, just for the record, could you tell us who are the members of the NDP ag caucus and what possible reasons would they have or what is the point that they would have in meeting with the elk breeders of Saskatchewan rather than just simply your department or SERM?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — It's a government . . . We have a very thorough system of government caucus committees in this government because we don't . . . where decision making — I know they don't like to hear this but he asked the question — where decision making is very thorough and very broad based, so that the member for Shellbrook-Spiritwood is, Saskatchewan Rivers rather, is the Chair of the agriculture caucus of the government caucus. And we have member for Last Mountain is on the committee; we have the member for Carrot River on the committee; we have the member for Redberry on the committee. And we also are going to be having, inviting the environment committee; we have different committees, but because the environment's involved, they're going to be invited as well.

As to why we're going to be meeting with them? Because the elk producers asked for it.

Mr. Boyd: — The fact of the matter is — this is pretty much unrelated — but the fact of the matter is you got nothing else for some of these back-benchers to do and you might as well

put them to work meeting with some people around Saskatchewan. Frankly, I'm a little bit surprised you would want some of them to meet with them, but anyway the fact of the matter is, is you do meet with them and that's certainly your prerogative and we wouldn't want to suggest that you shouldn't be.

(1530)

Why do you think . . . is it only surrounding the issue of the fact that elk are native to Saskatchewan that you would not want to see it moved entirely into the Department of Agriculture or are there other reasons? You've really only outlined the fact that they are native to Saskatchewan and that . . . is that the only reason? And would that follow then that we won't see things like a fallow deer or all kinds of things that are native to Saskatchewan — antelope farming if we ever get to that stage, or a white-tailed deer, or things of that nature — would it also fall that we wouldn't see those moving only under the sole responsibility of the Department of Agriculture?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well that is the main reason, and it's the fact that any species that is not indigenous and is produced here, SERM does not have a concern about. They don't have a concern about wild boar; it's not indigenous. They don't have a concern about bison. Although bison was indigenous, there are no bison around in the wild.

And the key . . . this is the main . . . that's the main reason, for disease reasons — it's separation. And really the producers are concerned about separation as well because they don't want to be mixing the genetics. I mean the genetics of the domestic elk, if I can call it that, are much superior to those of the elk in the wild.

So it flows both ways. And we are talking about ways to monitor escapes or monitor intrusions, and I think that that's one of the discussion areas. So that's the main thing.

And it's like anything else. The Department of Environment and Resource Management has a responsibility to the population and the people of this province to maintain those populations of indigenous wild animals. And if they weren't concerned about the elk in the wild, then what's the purpose of SERM, I mean in this instance. They have a responsibility so they're going to be involved in it.

But that involvement, we've worked together with SERM for many years in many areas to transfer some of the administration to Sask Ag and Food; for example, the environmental regulations on intensive livestock operations. We've been working about, something like 15 years with them and it's worked very well.

So while they're not out of the picture, their capacity has been changed over time to one of monitoring. But it's just right that they live up to their responsibility and monitor the indigenous and protect the wild species.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, if you'd give us an assessment of where you and the elk breeders are in disagreement at this particular time.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — The discussions that are going on have been wide-ranging as put forward in the consultation document. There is not an answer to where there's going to be disagreements because there is no final document. I explained the process earlier.

We've gone through the consultation; we're going to be meeting with them as . . . I've met with them as minister and I'm going to be meeting with the caucuses. I would assume that your caucus or your ag caucus will meet with them if you haven't already. I encourage you to do so because it's an important industry.

We won't know exactly what they agree or disagree with until the final decisions are made. But we're going to get the consultation process done. We're going to write a draft set of . . . a draft agreement. That will be taken back to the industry before the regulations are finalized.

And so like I say, at the end of the day I'll give you one specific area where I can see that some people — I don't think all, but some people — may not agree and that is, as I said earlier, if there is going to be some people saying I want SERM to have nothing to do with the elk industry in this province, they're not going to be satisfied because SERM is going to have, as we talked about, the responsibility to the wild population, to secure them from any disease, and that means some involvement in protocol agreements for the movement back and forth.

So that's an example of one area. But I think for the most part we're going to see agreement on a large number of issues.

Mr. Boyd: — So as I understand the process then, you'll be meeting with the elk farmers, with your ag committee, and then the ag committee will be making recommendations from there to cabinet. Is that the process? And then from cabinet we'll either see . . . we'll see regulation or we'll see actual legislation.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Yes, the process that we go through includes cabinet committees, the caucus members, and others. You know, for example, the member for Lloydminster has a lot of elk producers in her area and she's very concerned about it; so we have an open-door policy in our caucus meetings. If you have an interest you can certainly come and participate.

But we go through a series of cabinet committee, caucus committee, cabinet, and then to finalize the regulations, and that will vary as far as the actual process from time to time but it's fairly set.

But before the final regs for the further changes are put in place, I stood up at the elk annual meeting, the elk producers' annual meeting just over a week ago, and told them that they would have a chance to review those regulations again. So I did that because I think it's the right thing to do, but also because of the concerns over some of the wording in the consultation document that was misinterpreted, I guess, by some of the people reading it.

And rightly so. I mean some of the wording, I think governments, as you know, don't always do everything right, and you might say we never do anything right, but that's been I think, handled pretty well by the department. We've got a very

good group of people working on the elk industry in the department. They understand the industry well and they truly believe that this is an industry that can grow and they're working to that end.

Mr. Boyd: — Is it not correct, Mr. Minister, that part of the concern that they have surrounds the whole area of regulation? I believe that they would feel more comfortable with legislation than regulation. The concerns are obvious with regulation — that you and your department and the minister responsible for Resource Management and his department can change regulation just simply by order in council without having to do much in terms of any kind of debate, certainly not in this Assembly.

And that's part of their concern. They see a situation where you may not be telling them the whole story here; that you're going to say we'll do all of these kinds of things and then when it gets to the regulation stage you embark upon another direction. Is that not part of their concern?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I have not personally heard that they don't trust this department.

An Hon. Member: — Take it from us.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Take it from you? No, thank you very much. I won't take it from you.

I can give you an assurance — that's not how I operate. And we'll be working with them on the regulations. If there is a change, if there is any proposed, if, after the regulations are put forward, I could see us continuing to work on them to achieve more of the objectives that they may want if they're not satisfied.

This is not going to be sort of a cast in stone. Nothing is in government and legislation nor regulation.

But I can guarantee you that if there are changes in regulations after we've gone through this process, they will be thoroughly — and mark my words — thoroughly consulted. Because as your former party would know, if you don't go around consulting and telling people and explaining and working with them, that you don't last in government very long.

And it is my intent, because I believe that we can help grow this industry, to be very open and honest and forthright with these people. They have been with us, in terms of coming to us and saying, you know, we want some changes. We've dealt with them . . . Well not totally. We're in the process of dealing with that. And I can assure you that there is no intent to do any trickery about the regulations. Because I know who that hurts, and it's not you. So there's no intent to do that.

And in terms of this government, we strive to be open and honest and forthright with the folks out there. Because if you don't, you don't last long.

Mr. Boyd: — So then, Mr. Minister, you would be prepared to give us the assurance, absolute assurance, that the elk breeders that are affected by this policy paper will have a chance — a reasonable chance — of having their concerns addressed prior

to the cabinet deciding on this and implementing the policy paper?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — That is correct. We are working directly with the elk breeders' association, their representatives. We receive calls from individual members, which is very . . . which is right; if they want to call, to call. Or their member or you, if you are their member, or anybody. But we will be consulting before these new regs are put in place.

We're consulting with the industry again. With the industry being the board of directors of the . . . As you can appreciate, we have already sent out 500-or-so questionnaires and allowed . . . have people send back in those questionnaires with their opinions on them. I don't think we're going to do that again.

But through their democratically elected organizations they, as the member for Wood River knows because he was at the elk breeders' meeting last week, as well as myself, and knows a lot of the players very well, we will be allowing . . . or not allowing; we're giving the opportunity for the board of directors to see the final versions and tell us what they like and don't like.

And if there's any more changes we can possibly make to reach their objective, we will do that. So that's the commitment I can give you.

Mr. Boyd: — So we can reasonably, Mr. Minister, we can reasonably assume from here then that before implementation the elk farmers of Saskatchewan will have full opportunity to view the proposed regulations, to discuss the proposed regulations, to point out, and point out where they see there are problems with the regulation and reasonably expect to have input into the implementation, and also input into whether the regulation makes sense or not for their industry.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I'm trying to be as open and polite with you as possible. I don't want you to try to put words in my mouth, so I'm going to repeat what I said.

We have dealt with the entire industry in the form of questionnaires to, I believe, every member, the intent was to go to every member, 500-and-some I think we sent out. They had the opportunity to respond. We've gone through the consultation.

We are now going to be making government decisions on regulation. Those regulations before taken . . . before finalized will be taken back to the board of directors of the elk association, elk breeders' association. That board of directors, on behalf of their membership, will have an opportunity to have final input into the regulations.

I would not guarantee, as I said earlier, that we'll be talking to every elk producer again. Because in the sake of time — and I think the industry wants this too — in the sake of time we want to get this to a conclusion.

So that's the commitment that I give to the association and to you.

I just want to give you a little statistic here, while I'm on my

feet, about the growth of this industry and the importance of this industry to the province. In 1991 we had, under the census data on specialized livestock — and this is the Sask Ag and Food annual report, '96-97 — there were 2,744 elk. By 1996 there were 8,598 and it's grown substantially since '96.

So there's a tremendous growth, as in bison. With bison we went from 1,600 to 7,000, and deer from over . . . doubled — 2,250 to nearly 6,000. So we're not . . . we take the industry very, very seriously and that's why we've gone through the process that we were going through. And what I wanted to accomplish is the best set of regulations to help this industry grow.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Can you explain the workings of the technical advisory committee and the wildlife diversification task force which were set up to look at this issue. Could you explain exactly what their role is?

(1545)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. This is a very technical question, if I could just get your attention here.

The technical advisory committee was a committee . . .

An Hon. Member: — You have our undivided attention.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you. Was a committee set up by the department, chaired by the deputy minister of Agriculture, to try to bring together interests. We have people from the elk producers' association. We have people from the wildlife federation and others to try to talk about what we could achieve as far as changing regulations that might suit the desires of the industry. So that started, I think in 1996.

Mr. Boyd: — Could you give me a copy of the make-up of that committee, who is involved on those two committees — the technical advisory committee and the wildlife diversification task force. Could you undertake . . . maybe your officials have it with you, I don't know; otherwise would you undertake to provide us with that information?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — The wildlife diversification task force was done through SERM, I believe. We don't have the name of the people on that but they came up with a number of recommendations through that task force. And that would be available through SERM, either through estimates or if you just call the minister's office I'm sure you can get a copy of their recommendations and who was on the committee.

As far as the Saskatchewan technical advisory committee on elk production . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well it would be elk and deer as well. It was chaired by former assistant deputy minister, I believe, Dale Sigurdson. This, by the way, this committee has expired now. This was set up, I said '96. I think it actually started before that but it's no longer in existence.

But Rick Alsager from Maidstone was on it, I think at that time representing the game farmers' association. I think it's now the elk producers' association or the elk breeders' association. Dave Bueckert from Tugaskie; Wally Envik from Shaunavon; Ron Friessen from Warman; Rudy Jurke from Lloydminster; Rob

Naber from Melfort; Curt Schroeder from Regina; Bentley Brown from Turtleford; Ryan Clark from Fairlight; Dwight Forwood from Wood Mountain; Duncan Hockley from Yellow Grass; Philip Murray from Oxbow; Byrnnne Rothwell from Moose Jaw; and Alan Stein from Moosomin — for those are the members on the committee. That's all.

Mr. Boyd: — Would we assume then that all of those people have an involvement, a direct involvement, in elk breeding or game farming, on that committee?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I don't have, I don't have in front of me each organization that they represent, but I recognize a lot of the names on here and there's a lot of them who are producers — elk producers and deer producers. There are also representatives from the wildlife federation and Nature Saskatchewan. And there may be some other representatives but that was the majority of the make-up of the committee.

Mr. Boyd: — Would it not make sense for only people directly involved in the industry to be on the committee? We understand that there's, for example, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool has a representative on either that committee or the one we're speaking of or the wildlife diversification task force, and what possible reason would people from outside of the industry have to be on a technical advisory committee advising on technical matters surrounding the breeding and the game farming industry?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I think, I think that when these committees are put forward, we try to get a broad base, representative base: a number from the producers' association because they are key; a number from wildlife federation because they are key; and Nature Saskatchewan as well; and then there may be some other players in there, wouldn't be as many as the producers, but who represent other interests.

The key here is not, I don't think, who's on the committee, but what the accomplishments are, what we can put forward. And I say that committee now has expired and we are going through the policy routes, through the consultation process, to which I think has worked pretty well. And so I'm not sure it's a concern who is on the committee rather than what the committee can accomplish.

So we have to be sure, we have to be sure that all people who have concerns are represented. Because I know from experience of being government, if you don't cover all the people who are concerned, you're never going to get a policy that somebody isn't going to be sniping at and you don't want that for the benefit of the entire industry.

If you, for example, eliminated wildlife federation on the issue of elk production in Saskatchewan, I think that wouldn't be very smart because they have a great interest in the wild elk and how they interact with tame elk and in terms of disease and numbers and all that stuff. So it's a matter of making sure there's a broad base of representation to get everybody's views aired.

Mr. Boyd: — Well yes, certainly we would agree with that, Mr. Minister, but we also wonder why . . . if you had a committee that was sort of looking at the overall impact on agriculture and

the overall future prospects in agriculture for the industry, we would agree with that type of assessment, but in terms of the technical advisory committee, what possible . . . what could anyone outside of the industry possibly add to the discussion in a technical fashion that someone in the industry couldn't?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — And the fact of the matter is this. We could proceed as government in consultation with the elk producers and the deer producers — in this case you're talking about elk — without consulting anybody else. There's absolutely nothing stopping us from doing that. Let's bring all the elk producers in, the board of directors, or whoever they wanted to bring in; sit down and hammer out a policy on elk production in Saskatchewan, a policy on protocol, disease controls, and go on from there.

But the fact of the matter is that would be a foolish thing to do because Nature Saskatchewan, the wildlife federation, have an interest in the indigenous population that could be affected by the domestic population. So all you'd be doing is causing yourself grief if you didn't go and consult with as many people as possible.

So I'm not sure what your point is considering that this committee is no longer functioning. But it's in a process that we have gone through over period of years, from this committee now to the consultation process and the policy paper that we put forward.

And we want to talk to everybody because you should know you don't steamroller, you don't steamroller issues like this through, because the moment you do, you're going to have so much . . . cause yourself so much grief that nothing will get done.

And you know who would be hurt? The industry would be hurt. Because if you ignore the people who have interests in the indigenous population, they will — and don't talk to them and say here's what we're doing to make sure that population is safe — then they will be fearful the other way, that their population is going to be hurt because the people who are game farming don't care about them. But that's not true.

So in order to reduce suspicions or fears or bogeyman theory, you bring as many people in as possible to talk to them. Let them each have their opinion. And it's a democracy in which we live and in a democracy the minority have their say and the majority have their way. It's ever been thus in a democracy.

And that's why you talk to everybody, hash it out, and then you try to determine by consensus. And if that doesn't work, by the majority who . . . what should happen. So in this case a number of producers are on the committee — wildlife federation, Nature Saskatchewan and others.

So I'm not sure what your point is, but my theory is, talk to as many people as possible, get all the information, because at the end of the day you try to bowl your way through and forget about some folks, you will halt the industry because there will be an outcry.

So let's try to make the industry grow by making sure we take care of each and every . . . all the aspects that will help it grow.

Mr. Boyd: — My understanding, Mr. Minister, is that the elk breeders would like to have the right to import a domestic elk from outside of Saskatchewan. Yet this policy paper deals with the importation of wildlife under The Wildlife Act. Is that correct? Or is this something that is going to be an item that will be up for discussion in the policy development stage?

(1600)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — With regards to the importation, as I said earlier, there's a growing role for Ag and Food in the elk production industry. And that's what we're pursuing. It will evolve. Some things I think can be accomplished very quickly; some things that may take longer.

But I want to repeat what I said earlier. There's no decisions made for sure yet. We're in the process of decision making. But remember too what I said earlier, is that SERM has a duty to oversee the safety and disease control of the indigenous elk population. So as far as protocol agreements are concerned, while we are migrating the authority to Agriculture, I don't see a complete removal of SERM from the picture.

Those decisions aren't made yet. But as far as the Department of Environment and Resource Management goes, I would think that they would want some monitoring of whatever capacity — like I say I don't know the final outcome — but of some capacity. But the objective would be to move as much as possible under the jurisdiction of Ag and Food.

But as I said earlier, if you think there's going to be a complete removal of SERM from that aspect, there won't be. Because as a responsible government we can't do that — not just SERM — you can't do that because there is a group of people out there, like wildlife federation, like natives of Saskatchewan, and I would say like a lot of elk breeders, who want to make sure that the indigenous population remains healthy. Because it's in their best interests that they remain healthy because there are noses touched through fences from time to time in the elk industry, believe it or not, and we want to make sure that both, both the wild and the domestic, are disease free.

SERM has a responsibility for the wild; Agriculture has a responsibility for the domestic. But even at that we're moving a lot of the administration, or trying to, over to Ag and Food.

Mr. Boyd: — Does any of the game farming take place on Crown agricultural lands currently, and will this change under the policy paper?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Now I can't be flying around monitoring everything, but to our knowledge we've never found game animals being raised on Crown land, so unless . . . If you have some knowledge, you might want to share it with us.

Mr. Boyd: — No, I just wondered whether you were aware of any. And is it permissible if a producer were to, that has in their operation Crown land, to produce elk or deer on that property?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — As it stands now, no. But that's one of the areas that's under discussion. And the outcome of those discussions, well as I say, we don't know yet but there may be some movement in that area. We're continuing to talk and that's

what we'll be talking about when we meet with the game . . . with the elk producers' association next week. And this will be ongoing until the final regulations are . . . final decisions are made for the regulations.

Mr. Boyd: — What is your department's position on that? Should they be, should it be permissible or should it not?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — We have been exploring the option of including some Crown land over a period of time. We have talked with the industry about that. You know, it's a possibility. Whenever you go into something like this you have to take into account all, all views. So we don't know exactly what the outcome is going to be, but we have been exploring that and talking to the industry about that. Like I say, as it stands now there is no hunting allowed on, on Crown land.

I think in the future one of the areas, I just might say, in case you ask the question as soon as I sit down, is that the endangered spaces or endangered habitat lands probably will not be used for production. But as far as some of the other Crown lands, I think that's open for discussion and for possible change.

Mr. Boyd: — As you know, Mr. Minister, a lot of the land that the Crown holds is land that would be pretty adaptable to game farming in Saskatchewan and therefore I would think that it won't be long before you'll see — if you haven't already and I suspect you have — see producers coming forward and wanting to produce elk and fallow deer on those properties.

I'm a little bit unclear. You say that's one of the areas that is up for discussion. When you suggest that it is up for discussion it . . . I think what you are implying is that you are not prepared to do that but you might consider it somewhere down the line. Is that a fair assessment of your comment?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — This area . . . I can say this. To our knowledge there has been no restrictions to the growth of the industry because you can't produce on Crown land. However there has been some interest. And because there has been some interest, we are actively in the discussion stages of whether or not we might be able to accommodate some of those people in certain circumstances, under certain conditions, or certain lands, in order that they might be able to produce elk or deer on certain Crown lands.

So I think we're trying to accommodate the need that's out there. But like I said, it hasn't been an impediment to growth; there hasn't been a large demand for it. But if there's some people would like that, we're willing to talk about it and see what we can do about it.

Mr. Boyd: — Game farm elk, I think — well maybe we can't — but can we agree that they are privately owned animals on privately owned land? We can agree on that, I hope.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Is this a trick question? They're privately owned animals to my knowledge. I don't know if there are any publicly owned elk out there except for the indigenous species, and they're on private land. That's what I understand.

Mr. Boyd: — Never a trick question, Mr. Minister, just wanting to gain your thoughts into this area.

Yet the policy paper states that SERM, who is responsible, as you've said for yourself, SERM, the resource management folks, wanting to ensure that native elk are properly handled for all people of Saskatchewan . . . and I think that's probably fairly reasonable. I don't think you'd get too much objection from too many people in that area.

However, we understand that SERM is wanting to have a hand in developing regulation for the harvesting of animals, privately owned animals on privately owned land. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Maybe you could explain to me, I'm sorry, a little bit more what you mean by the harvesting of privately owned animals on private farms.

Mr. Boyd: — Well the breeding, the harvesting of the elk velvet and the eventual . . . if the industry evolves, and I think that's what the goal is — the industry evolves to the point of having meat processing facilities here in Saskatchewan.

We understand that the policy paper states that SERM and the minister sitting right beside you there whispering in your ear wants to have a hand in this, in the discussions, wants to have a hand in this, the discussion surrounding the harvesting of these animals and all of the aspects involved in elk farming. And yet they are not responsible in that area. Their responsibility, as you have said, is for the native population outside of privately owned facilities and privately owned elk.

Why then would SERM have any input whatsoever into this area? Do you think SERM should have any reason to be involved in that aspect of the business?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — So let me get it straight now. You're saying in the breeding of private elk and private farms — you can do that now; SERM has no involvement in that.

The harvesting of the antlers for the velvet. That's going on right now. SERM has no involvement in that.

And as far as the processing, you can take your animals to the processing plant, and SERM has no involvement in that.

So in the three areas that you, the areas that you mentioned there of the industry, there is no involvement by SERM. I'm not sure where you're going but . . .

Mr. Boyd: — We have been told, Mr. Minister, that SERM seems to have some degree of interest. And maybe you could consult with the minister sitting right beside you, to ask you whether or not SERM has any interest in the regulation directly affecting and controlling privately owned animals in privately owned facilities on privately owned land. Do they want to have input into that part of the business or does their only interest lie in the native elk of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I'm not sure how I can answer that any more thoroughly. You're talking about the involvement of SERM. Now I'll repeat, SERM has an interest in disease, which means in the separation of domesticated elk and the indigenous

population. They have a responsibility there and a concern — not a concern, but involvement in that aspect.

But as far as breeding elk or harvesting the antlers or do you want to take your elk to the slaughterhouse or get it slaughtered, SERM has no involvement there. If there's something else that you're alluding to, I just ask you to tell me what really you're talking about.

Mr. Boyd: — Do you anticipate seeing Resource Management people marching onto privately owned land to have a look at privately owned elk, the elk police that the minister sitting beside you there wants to have running around Saskatchewan? Are we going to be into a situation where we're going to see this kind of thing, where the minister jets in and marches down the road, jackboots and all, and walks onto facilities? Is this something that we should be concerned about, where people are in the elk farming industry concerned about these kinds of things?

I think they feel it is reasonable for Agriculture people, the Department of Agriculture people, to be concerned about disease in their privately owned facilities and privately owned elk. What I'm asking you is, is Resource Management people going to be involved in undertakings, going onto privately owned facilities to inspect, or to have a look at facilities, or to be involved in any aspect of their business?

(1615)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I don't anticipate it will be much different than what it is right now, because SERM, through their capacity in enforcing The Wildlife Act, can access property. We have had discussions with the industry about escapes and intrusions, and I said earlier we want to monitor escapes, we want to monitor intrusions, for the safety of both the indigenous population and the domestic population.

So your alliteration is very . . . has a lot of flair to it but not much substance, when you talk about walking on with jackboots, because in the carrying out of their responsibilities, they can access farms right now. And like I said, escapes and intrusions are being talked about so I don't see a whole big change in that area.

Mr. Boyd: — I think that's, Mr. Minister, where a part of the concern is here. The elk industry, as I understand it, the people there feel that it is a privately owned industry. They have full appreciation for the fact that there is wild animals roaming Saskatchewan that are under the management of Resource Management people. They don't have any . . . I don't think they have any dispute with that; they fully understand that.

I think where their concern lies is that very, very over-zealous Resource Management people are going to be intruding, intruding upon their privately owned . . . in their privately owned facilities, looking and inspecting privately owned elk, and making all kinds of recommendations and saying you're not following regulations in this area or whatever. Making all kinds of wild-eyed interpretation of regulations. And in fact, and in fact implementing regulation through orders in council that will directly affect their business.

And I think that's where their concern is. They have some very, very serious problems with Resource Management people being involved in their privately owned facilities.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I think the member, Mr. Chairperson, better understand what he's saying here. He's making some very serious accusations. And I know he has immunity in the House, but we have thousands of government staff in Saskatchewan who work with the people every day. If you have any evidence, sir, of those people not carrying out their job in a professional manner, then it is incumbent upon you to relay that information to the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management.

But don't stand in this House making wild-eyed accusations that you may or may not substantiate. If you can substantiate it, you stand on your feet right now and you relate — the minister's sitting right here — and you relate to him those people who are not . . . who are acting in a manner that you described as not kosher to the situation. Because as government, it is incumbent upon us to treat all people fairly. And we do that.

Well if I want to go back to the Tory years and talk about people fairly we could digress quite dramatically, but I don't want to do that. I just want to tell you, sir, that's a serious accusation you have made. Please stand in your place and substantiate it, or say that you will in a letter or get a hold of the minister to tell him that.

Mr. Boyd: — No one is making any kinds of accusations. What we are saying, what we are saying is, is there is a concern in the industry that this may happen. And we want the assurances from you, as Minister of Agriculture in Saskatchewan, and eventually the minister, when we get to his estimates for Resource Management we'll also want that assurance that we are not going to see some of the concerns that the elk farmers of Saskatchewan come to be.

They have concerns in these areas. And the member over there from Regina says it's making a mountain out of a molehill.

But I'll tell you, sir, when someone puts \$24,000 into one bred heifer in the elk industry, they have a lot of concerns, they have a lot of concerns about the welfare of that animal. Some of these people have more invested than you'll ever see in your entire life, sir, when it comes to investment into an industry. They would make you pale in comparison to the amount of investment you have in Saskatchewan.

So if you want to, if you want to somehow or another suggest to the elk farmers of Saskatchewan that their concerns are making are making a mountain out of a molehill, well then I'll ask them to . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. I wish to remind committee members that questions and answers should be directed through the Chair according to rule 28 — order, order — according to rule 28 of our rule book, questions and responses are to be directed through the Chair; that is backed up by *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules* found on page 49, rule 168.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you. I think the point that we're trying to make to the minister and to the others here today is the fact that some people in Saskatchewan in this industry have made a considerable investment — a very, very considerable investment in some cases — and they feel that their interests are not being very well served at this point. They feel that their interests would be better served with your department than with the Resource Management department.

Now you can dispute that and there's perhaps, there may even be legitimate reasons for disputing that. I am only saying to you what the industry has said to me. They have serious concerns in this area and they want to be . . . they want some assurance from this government that their concerns are not going to be trampled upon. They have concerns that their industry has the ability to grow.

We've seen that substantial growth in Saskatchewan. You yourself have witnessed . . . the minister knows of the significant growth, something in the neighbourhood of 15 per cent on an annual basis — tremendous growth, tremendous opportunity, tremendous investment in Saskatchewan by Saskatchewan people.

They want to ensure that the resource is managed properly also. But they also want to ensure that the substantial investment that they have is not put at risk because of regulations that will not serve any real purpose. That's the concerns that they have. That's the kind of concerns that we are relating to you.

We're not trying to make accusations that Resource Management people are not doing their job. We want to ensure that the job is done properly but we also want to ensure that the interests of these people who have made considerable investment in Saskatchewan are addressed. And the flippant comments of some members of this legislature are not in keeping with their interests, I don't think.

And that's the concerns that these people have. When they address their concerns to this government, Mr. Minister, they get those kind of flippant comments back.

And if you think that people want to invest in Saskatchewan and want to stake their lives and put their capital and their family's capital and seek opportunities and jobs and everything else here in Saskatchewan when they have an attitude of that kind of display, I don't think it's going to happen.

I think the role of this department, Mr. Minister, and SERM should be one of cooperation, should be one of helping, should be one of trying to do what they can to accommodate a growing and expanding industry here in Saskatchewan. They don't believe that their interests are being held in that kind of esteem. They think that they . . . that their interests are not being well served at this point. And that's why they have some serious concerns about where their industry is headed in Saskatchewan.

So I would caution members of this Assembly when they want to make those kind of flippant comments about the industry that they should take the industry a far, great . . . a far degree more seriously than their comments in this legislature lead us to believe that they are taking that industry.

The people of Saskatchewan that made this province what it have, have invested blood, sweat, and tears in this province and do not need those kind of accusations or comments from members of this government, members of this government purporting to on one hand help the industry and, on the other hand, making some sort of flippant comment about is this how you judge the worth of people in Saskatchewan.

Well I tell you, sir, that that is one of the criteria of how you judge people in Saskatchewan — the amount of time, the amount of time, the amount of effort and the amount of investment that they make in Saskatchewan.

And I defy anyone in Saskatchewan to say that the fruits of labour that people make and invest in this province, whether it be the labour of their hands, the labour of their intelligence, or the labour of their capital, is somehow or another wrong, because I do not feel that way. I think the investment that people make in Saskatchewan in terms of their labour, in terms of their intelligence, in terms of their resourcefulness, and yes, in terms of their capital investment, is important to Saskatchewan.

It is important to Saskatchewan and members of this government should not dismiss that. Members of this government should not dismiss that and, Mr. Minister, I would hope . . . I would hope you would want to have some discussion with some of your members and perhaps make them aware of the value of this industry and the sensitive nature that people feel about those kinds of comments about an expanding industry and expanding opportunity for Saskatchewan farmers.

Game farming, I think, represents a tremendous opportunity for Saskatchewan. We want to see that it's regulated properly, yes. But we do not want to see it over-regulated to the point where we are going to see people losing opportunities here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, I'd appreciate your comments.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I hope you feel better. I hope you feel better now because that's about all you've accomplished. Because I'll tell you something — we have had tremendous support of this industry over the years of our government since 1991. Its comments . . . and you can rant and rave all you want about how you're more caring than we are about the elk industry. That's irrelevant because we know it's not true. You know why it's not true? Look at the numbers.

In 1991 we had 65 producers. Today we have 360 producers. In 1991 we had 2,744 — 1991 when we took government — elk. Today we have 13,500 elk. That's a growth of about 20 per cent in the last few years, every year. That's because we are working with the industry. That's because the elk industry has a depth in this province that is second to none.

And I tell you, my friend over there from Kindersley, member from Kindersley, if you can talk about the scare tactics of the Department of Environment marching in with jackboots onto their farms and scare away investment if you like. That is your choice. But I'll tell you that A-on. And we are going to be working with this industry as we are right now to keep it growing at a pace that is almost second to none in North

America.

And I just ask you . . . I know you have to do a job of criticising the government and that's your job and I can take that. But I tell you for the good of the industry, for the good of the industry to maintain this growth, I ask you to consider your words and choose them very carefully when it comes to scaring off, potentially scaring off investment because of something that maybe will happen promoting your bogymen theory.

We have commitment from members in this caucus, in this government from all over this province who have elk breeders and who know them on a first-name basis. I have met with the industry myself on many occasions. These are good people. They're growing the industry. And we're going to continue to work with them.

So please if you support the industry like you say you do, don't talk about the bogymen. Ask legitimate questions about what can help this industry grow.

Mr. Boyd: — I think that's exactly what we've been doing this afternoon, sir. We have been asking the kinds of questions that the elk producers have asked us and have provided us with to bring to your attention.

The elk producers of Saskatchewan obviously have concerns. If they didn't have concerns they wouldn't be talking to people about their problems or their concerns. I think it's incumbent upon us to bring to your attention the concerns of people that have brought their concerns to us . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the fact that people want to get into those kind of discussions is probably a debatable point.

(1630)

The fact of the matter is, is that the industry wants to see it regulated properly, yes. They do not want to see overregulation. They worry that by moving it, by not having it in the Department of Agriculture where they rightfully believe it should be, they think that they're going to be in a position where they're going to be overregulated. They think there're going to be in a position where they're going to see Resource Management people on a constant basis coming and inspecting their facilities, and having a look at their elk.

And if I'm hearing what you're saying, sir, is correct, that this is not going to happen, I think that will go a long ways to alleviating some of their concerns. But their concerns I think are real, and the evidence will be in the regulations that you eventually come forward with. If the regulations that you come forward with are not the types of things that the industry is looking for, then I think their concerns are well-founded.

If their concerns are addressed, then I think they will feel that this is a department, SERM, and Agriculture that are listening to them. At this point they do not hold that belief it would seem. So I would implore both the Minister of Agriculture and Food and the minister responsible for Resource Management here in Saskatchewan to listen to what these people are saying. They are the industry — you are not. They are the industry players that have made that growth. It has had nothing to do with what your government has done. It has everything to do with what

they have done.

So I would ask you that if you want advice on where this industry should be going, they are the people that can give you the advice. They are the people that can provide you with the information on what kind of regulations they feel are appropriate and alternatively, what kind of regulations they feel are not appropriate.

So we'll leave it at that, Mr. Minister, and ask you to once again provide this Assembly with the complete assurance that their interests and their concerns are going to be listened to and addressed.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I can again assure the member that their concerns are going to be listened to and addressed in a manner that will involve consultations and negotiations as to what we might be able to achieve together.

I appreciate the fact that you think we're on the right track. I appreciate the fact that the elk producers in this province have done a wonderful job at growing the industry, but you can't leave government totally out of it because we are concerned about the disease aspect, as are the producers, as are the people in the wildlife federation.

The government's role is to try to maintain the population. We have more elk behind fences than we do outside of fences in this province — outside of fences. I mean, we've got a tremendous industry here and when it comes to import protocols and disease, we have to work together with SERM, with the industry. We're doing that.

And I think that we don't disagree here. We may disagree on the tactics of debate in the House but we don't disagree that this industry is growing and it can grow more and prosper. And our job is to try to provide the right climate for the elk producers in this province, for the people who are concerned, for the people who are looking after the interests of the indigenous population. I think we're doing that very well.

And we have in this province more producers than Alberta or Manitoba. There's about 305 producers in Alberta — we have 360. In Manitoba there's about 70 or 75 compared to our 360.

We want to work with the industry. We are working in this industry. I think that together . . . And I appreciate your interest in this, I appreciate your interest, but I just repeat: please don't run around crying wolf because that doesn't help the industry. And I think the people in the industry know that.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, I want to welcome your officials and thank them for coming today. And I'd like to continue a little bit on this line of the role of government and what they are going to be . . . what role they're going to be playing as far as the elk industry goes in the province.

I think, as the member from Kindersley has mentioned, the main and clear statement that the elk producers want to put across to you is this industry belongs to them. It does not belong to government. They brought the industry to the fore. It's thriving in a very good fashion, and we want to make sure that

this continues.

We don't want regulations that are going to impose on us extra financial burdens such as is stated in the policy statements. I'm referring to policy statement no. 24. SEBA (Saskatchewan Elk Breeders Association) disagrees with this statement because they say that according to it the elk producers would be responsible for the removal of wildlife attempting to enter the farmer's facility.

Now if wildlife, whether it's other elk or whatever it is, are not where they're supposed to be, naturally that's the place that SERM should come into play and SERM should be the ones responsible for making sure that the wildlife are taken out. The responsibility being the financial responsibility as well as the work involved in doing that.

My husband and I happen to be getting into some elk and I really don't feel that I want to have extra financial burden with removing wildlife that might be trying to get into my property.

So, Mr. Minister, when you look at a concern such as that, maybe we need to have you deal with one of these concerns at a time. And if you could just comment on this and understand why SEBA is concerned about it and give us some indication of whether that kind of a regulation will not come into play, we would be most happy.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I congratulate you for getting into the elk industry. I think it's a very exciting industry and growing. And you're right, we don't want to put any onerous financial responsibility onto producers.

That discussion paper that you refer to is just that, as I said to the member for Kindersley. It's a discussion paper. Those final decisions are not made as to who's going to be responsible for the cost of removing that, the intruder.

But I don't think there's going to be any onerous responsibility on the producer to bear all the cost of that. SERM has a responsibility. And see, the key here, and this is what I'm trying to reinforce, it isn't an either/or situation. You said the elk industry should be deciding. As I said earlier, the industry has had tremendous input. But you can't forget about the wild population. You can't forget that SERM has a responsibility for the wild population.

This is a partnership, the way I see it. And that's what I try to facilitate with the Department of Agriculture trying to get more control over the management of the industry, the domesticated industry.

But you can't forget SERM's responsibility. And they won't forget their responsibility because it's incumbent upon them to look after the wild. But if there was a disease problem from an intruder, I mean, what is worse? An intruder coming in with disease or an escape that might disease the wild population. They're equally as bad. We all have responsibility to make sure the regulations are there to cover that. So I'm not arguing with you. I think we shouldn't put onerous financial responsibilities on producers, but that discussion paper has not said that that's what's going to happen. And we will continue to work with the industry.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess being as I am a farmer, I have some issues that I really must bring forward regarding a lot of the legislation and regulations that place financial burdens on the farmers.

What I would like to refer to right now is the Act that has come forward in the legislature respecting deductions made from the marketing of cattle. Now from my understanding of this, the purpose of having these deductions is to encourage research and development. I say that the farmers should have a small part in this but I think that it's also incumbent upon all of society to recognize that they benefit from research and development.

The end result of research and development is good for every person in Saskatchewan and in Canada. And I see that farmers are having more and more to take on the financial burden and responsibility of seeing that these dollars come forward. Is there not another attitude that maybe we could incorporate here by maybe looking at processors, at everyone putting money into research and development. Why does it have to be solely the farmers?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — All I can say to that answer is it's a right question, is we have letters from farm organizations who requested this Act to come forward; who are satisfied, who are satisfied with the changes we're making because they asked for it. And in terms of financial responsibilities to the producer, producers understand. In fact many of them ask for check-offs to fund their own research and development, to fund their own programs.

Government are partners through the extension divisions, through our specialists. So again it's a partnership that we're trying to develop in this province. But with this particular Act, all I can say is that they asked for it, we accommodated their wishes. So I don't know, if you think there's a problem or you know something that I don't, please tell me.

Ms. Julé: — I don't think it's a matter, Mr. Minister, of anybody knowing more or less than the other person. I think it's a matter of clarification of who really did ask for this Act. You say farm organizations. Could you please specify which organizations those were.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Rather than guess exactly . . . We don't have letters with us, but I'll tell you I will get them very quickly. I will get them to you as soon as possible, and for sure before these Agriculture estimates are done so that you can continue your line of questioning.

But we . . . all I can say is that whenever we put forward legislation, I've been around this House for a few years and I know what happens if you don't consult and don't make sure the industry is satisfied. It is my belief, through the consultation and the letters that we have received — and as I say, we'll supply those letters to you — that the industry is very happy and very satisfied with this legislation and we're simply accommodating them.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, I'll be looking forward to receiving a list of those organizations.

I'd like to just switch my line of questioning over to crop

insurance. Could you tell me how many applications there were for crop insurance in the last fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I'm sorry, we had some confusion in numbers, but the confusion was that we didn't, I didn't add the livestock feed in here. But the total contracts . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . What was that?

An Hon. Member: — You took your math education in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I took my math education from the member for Cannington, I guess.

The total contracts were 37,000, 1997 — 37,490. I could break those down if you like. There was 36,098 crop insurance and 1,392 livestock feed.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. I would like to just zero in on the crop, the insurance for crops so forget about the livestock for the moment. I want to know how that number compares with the previous year's numbers.

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Total contract holders, 1993 — 52,029; 1994 — 46,922; '95 — 42,777; '96 — 339,764; '97 — 37,490. Now . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . '96 was 39,764; 1997, as I said earlier, 37,490.

Now I know what your next question is going to be, so I'll answer it. If you look at the acres, which is the important thing to look at and not the number of participants because what's happening as in all of western Canada, the farms are getting larger. The acres actually increased under the program from, let's see here — 18,000 in 1994 to 20,000, just over 20,000, 1997.

An Hon. Member: — That's million.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Or sorry, 20 million . . . 18 million to 20 million.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you were wrong — that wasn't going to be my next question, but anyway that's all right.

Mr. Minister, aside from the facts, the figures, the acres, the acres, etc., what I want to say to you is a commentary that comes directly from many farmers. They say that your government is making crop insurance look very, very attractive because you say the premiums are down. They say that in fact the premiums are down but so is the return. They say that if you want a decent sort of coverage you're going to have to pay a great deal of money as compared to the return they're getting. So they are also saying, please ask them to get a better crop insurance program in place so that it pays for us to get into it.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I appreciate you asking that question because that is a question that's often asked and there's a bit of misunderstanding because we have reduced the premiums of crop insurance by 33 per cent over the last two years. That is . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . yes, I'll get to the returns. That is

a savings of \$35 million approximately annually to producers. That is a long-term sustainable drop in input costs, in input cost for farm management that this government has done. And I'll tell you any other input costs that are out there — fuel, fertilizer, whatever chemical — while they bounce up and down, they don't go down like this 33 per cent and stay down.

Now your point about the returns is a very important one. I want to be very clear with you so that you can tell those people out there who are concerned about the return rather than reiterate their concern is this. The coverage was down slightly this year but the coverage moves up and down every year by a formula that has not changed over the past number of years, that has included in that formula the price of grain.

So when I see people and hear people like you say, well yes you've dropped the premiums but you've also dropped the coverage, well we didn't drop the coverage. The coverage is set by formula. The coverage would have dropped this year but because of the price of grain, no matter what the premium was. And let's be very clear on that.

And the real problem with crop insurance, the perception of crop insurance is that because of the cash/price squeeze out there that 70 per cent coverage for crop insurance, or 80 per cent, where many years ago would have been sufficient to take a year's . . . a hit for a year, and cover that hit, today because the margins are so slim, it is ever more difficult for people who need crop insurance coverage for that to cover the loss because why? The inputs are so much greater — fertilizer is so much greater, chemicals are so much greater than it has been over the past number of years. So you can't relate the crop insurance program.

We've improved that program dramatically, if you look at it, and I really appreciated that question because there's a misconception that we also dropped the coverage. But that's not true; the coverage goes up and down every year by prescribed formula. All I want to reiterate is that this government in the last two years have saved the farmers of this province \$35 million annually by reducing a very important input cost to them.

Ms. Julé: — Just a final comment, Mr. Minister. Certainly it sounds as though you have reduced the cost. The end result is it's no benefit to the farmer. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Chairperson, without getting angry, I'll respond to this. She just said that a reduction of 33 per cent of a cost to the producer is of no benefit. It's that kind of attitude, Mr. Chairperson, that really makes me wonder how she can sit there and be elected in this House. Because \$35 million a year is no benefit? All I ask you to be is honest — be honest with the people out there.

That reduction is a benefit to producers. It's a benefit this year and next year and the year after and the year after. And for you to stand in this House, as a democratically elected representative, and say that's no benefit, I'll tell you is, is . . . Well I don't know what it is but it's not very good, I don't think.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My first

start, I'd like to go from where the member from Humboldt left off, Mr. Minister, and I don't believe you actually really heard or understood what she was trying to say to you. I'm hearing exactly the same thing from my farmers. Yes, you dropped the price 33 per cent, and me, as a farmer, definitely it helps. But it helps about that much.

When you look at the overall price, our inputs have gone up, and you look at where our grain prices have gone and you look at where the final coverage . . . yes, your formula dictates what the prices are. So grain prices have gone down so your coverage goes down — and you can correct me if I'm wrong. But that doesn't help when our fertilizer prices are higher than they've been for I don't know how many years, our chemicals prices just keep rising, fuel costs, taxes on fuel . . . you'll know a lot about that. Machinery — go back to 1970, Mr. Minister, when you could buy say a tractor for \$10,000, a hundred-horse tractor, and that same tractor right now probably cost you anywhere from 100 to \$140,000.

And I'm sure you know. You farm, Mr. Minister, so you know exactly what I'm talking about. And I'm glad the member for Humboldt brought up the issue of inputs and cost of crop insurance, because my farmers are saying exactly what her farmers are saying, is that the final line is how much coverage they have for what they're paying for. And you've heard me say this to you before. And I agree, you've put the premiums down a wee bit.

But this year, above all years, I have never seen the concern in the agriculture industry out there, and with all my farmers and every farmer in every corner of this province that I've talked to since probably January, the concern out there is greater than it's ever been. And I believe the potential for disaster in our agriculture sector is greater this year than we've ever seen.

We had a rash of farmers that went under a number of years ago and kept on for about three or four years, and then it slowed down a bit. Should we, Mr. Minister, have a drought this year, as it looks like we may have in many corners of this province, the crop insurance is not going to bail these farmers out, let me tell you, and I think you know that. And the potential for it to happen is very great. My own farmers at home, you go to coffee row and you check on the Easter weekend, and the concern out there is far greater than I've ever seen it before.

Part of the problem being that a lot of the farmers, as you know, are bigger and bigger and bigger. And their debt loads are getting higher but their input costs, just to put this crop in this spring, are astronomical. Some of them are a quarter of a million to a half a million dollars just to put the crop in the ground.

So I guess my question is, Mr. Minister, are you getting that same feeling out there as I am that the concern is greater in agriculture possibly this spring than we've ever seen it for approximately the last 20, 30 years?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well the short answer is yes. I know there's a concern. I know the cash crisis on the crunch on the grain side. When you say agriculture, let's be specific, because there are very exciting things happening in the hog industry and the beef industry. The poultry people are working, the dairy

people are working, to improve their industry. The specialized livestock people, herbs and spices, all those things are moving along very, very healthily. But unfortunately, as we've seen many years, over the years, the grain side has a problem.

What you explain, I don't disagree with you. The input costs are the problem. And as I explained to the member from Humboldt, the reason the people say without, like you say, without thinking much about, well crop insurance isn't a help . . . Well it is a help. But it can't help you from the, from the rising input costs that you can't control.

Here's what we've done. Here's what we contribute to the agriculture economy. Besides the reduction of 33 per cent in crop insurance and making it more flexible so that you can get 50 per cent coverage if you're short of cash some year, at least covering, you know, some of your, some of your costs for a buck an acre, thereabouts — that's a benefit — but here's what we've put in. We put into this, taxpayers' contribution, because of exemptions and fuel tax, \$120 million roughly a year and it's going to be up this year we predict. About 130 or \$40 million in E&H (education and health) exemptions for fuel, fertilizer, bins, seed, and other inputs. We put in a total of \$149 million from crop insurance and NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account), into our share of the premium on top of reducing the farmers' share. We contribute without add . . . with those four things, \$435 million annually to rural Saskatchewan. Annually.

And you can holler at me all you like about the crisis out there and I'm not doing anything about it. But I'll tell you, numbers talk. We broadened the tax exemption base annually pretty well in this province. Last year we broadened it to ILOs (intensive livestock operation). You don't pay any tax on almost all the inputs for your farm. That's what we're doing.

I've also taken to the federal table two years ago — and this is frustrating and slow — but the fact that inputs are the major problem in this province. And we're having a report from our deputies this year as to help describe some options that we might look at.

We can't control the price of inputs as far as price controls. The federal government won't do that. We can't control the price of grain because it's an international price. And they won't do that. We can't be subsidizing any more because farmers don't want to be subsidized. But what they want is some watchdog for input prices and that's what we're attempting to do. This is a tough job.

We as a province have done our job. It's not ended but we've done our job of \$435 million annually and we're adding to that every year. The problem is the producers out there are having a terrible time to farm within the margin. And what you and I should be discussing in this House is how we help them do that. What are the options? Because the next time that you buy a 200 or \$250,000 combine for your farm — I'm not saying your farm; for a farm — is the time when you may be ending your career as a farmer. And that's the problem out there because the cash flow isn't there to sustain it.

So I'll be willing to talk about this and other things in this House because I think that's the key. How do we farm within the margins that are available? We lobby and fight Ottawa on

transportation to try to keep that cost down. We as a government reduce input costs for crop insurance. We are talking on the federal level to try to monitor all the input costs. We are talking to Ottawa. In fact I've written a letter, or almost written a letter, to make sure that we get a message to the Americans not to get into the subsidization war like the Europeans are starting to get back into again, to hurt. That's what we're doing.

But let's sit up — and I challenge you to sit up and stand in your place — let's talk about how we help farmers farm within that margin that's out there.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

D'Autremont	609
Toth	609
Bjornerud	609
Heppner	609
Gantefoer	609
Draude	609
Boyd	609
Osika	609
Hillson	609
McPherson	609
Belanger	610
McLane	610
Goohsen	610

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk	610
-------------	-----

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Belanger	610
Hillson	610

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Belanger	610
D'Autremont	610
Upshall	611
Goulet	611

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Toon Town Animation Studio	
Whitmore	611
Saskatchewan's First Astronaut	
Heppner	611
<i>A Guide to Historic Sites</i>	
Kasperski	611
Hospital Bed Shortages	
Osika	612
Task Force on Balancing Work and Family	
Lorje	612
Former MLA Voices Concern on Health Care	
McLane	612
Tourism Industry Grows	
Hamilton	612
Educational Success of Northern School	
Belanger	613

ORAL QUESTIONS

Prosecutions Branch Decision	
Draude	613
Nilson	613
Inquiry Into Channel Lake	
Boyd	614
Lingenfelter	614
Hospital Bed Reductions in Swift Current	
McPherson	615
Serby	615
Inquiry into Channel Lake	
Hillson	616
Romanow	616
Local Telephone Service Subsidization	
Goohsen	617
Lingenfelter	617

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 6 — The Cattle Marketing Deductions Act, 1998	
--	--

Boyd	617
Bill No. 5 — The Animal Products Amendment Act, 1998	
Boyd	618
Bill No. 7 — The Pastures Act	
Boyd	619
Bill No. 8 — The Stray Animals Amendment Act, 1998	
Boyd	619
Bill No. 10 — The Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation Amendment Act, 1998	
Draude	620
SECOND READINGS	
Bill No. 18 — The Pharmacy Amendment Act, 1998	
MacKinnon	621
Toth	622
Bill No. 19 — The Physical Therapists Act, 1998	
MacKinnon	622
Toth	622
Bill No. 15 — The Gas Inspection Amendment Act, 1998	
MacKinnon	623
Toth	623
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE	
General Revenue Fund	
Agriculture and Food — Vote 1	
Upshall	624
Boyd	624
Julé	634
Bjornerud	636