

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of residents of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures to this are from the communities of Arcola and some here in Regina. I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

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

These petitions come from the Sedley, Creelman, and Regina areas, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions and reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

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

And this petition is signed by individuals from the Radville, Ceylon, Weyburn areas of the province. I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Radville and Weyburn. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 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 put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And these are signed by the people from Carlyle, Wawota, Manor, Maryfield, and all across the province.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of citizens concerned about the impending closure of the Plains hospital. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Arcola, Creelman, Kisbey, and Carlyle. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

People that have signed this petition are from Spalding.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I as well have a petition to present to the Assembly this afternoon. This one deals with the issue of the Plains Health Centre and the impending closure. I'm pleased to present on behalf of Saskatchewan residents from primarily the Radville area of the province.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise on behalf of people concerned about the closure of the Plains Health Centre:

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 the petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from Yorkton.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present petitions this afternoon from people of Saskatchewan concerned about our crumbling health care system and specifically about the impending closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Your petitioners this afternoon come from the cities of Yorkton and Melville. I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also bring forward petitions from people wanting to stop the closure of the Plains hospital. 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are all from the community of Assiniboia, and I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned about the closure of the Plains hospital. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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.

Those who've signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from the city of Regina. Many of these people we're looking forward to seeing tonight at 7:30 . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The hon. member of course will want to avoid entering into debate while presenting petitions. Continuing with presentation of petitions.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to bring the voice of Saskatchewan people to this legislature through this petition, which 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.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of Yellow Grass and Weyburn. I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the widows and widowers of those killed in work-related accidents.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have The Workers' Compensation Board Act amended for the disenfranchised widows, widowers of Saskatchewan whereby the pensions are reinstated and the revoked pensions reimbursed to them retroactively and with interest, as requested by the statement of entitlement presented to the Workers' Compensation Board on October 27, 1997.

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

These signatories are from the Regina district, 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: to save the Plains Health Centre; to call an independent public inquiry into the Channel Lake issue; to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre; and to have the Workers' Compensation Board reinstate pensions for disenfranchised widows and widowers.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, the hepatitis C compensation commission Act.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Now, hon. members, earlier today at Government House tribute was paid to 18 Saskatchewan recipients of national and provincial honours. And these 18 recipients and their guests are seated at this moment in the Speaker's gallery. We want to recognize them in the Legislative Assembly chambers today. And in just a moment I'll invite the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the Third Party to bring brief remarks. MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) will then have an opportunity to introduce their constituents to the members of the Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislative Assembly, as has been indicated, earlier today I had the pleasure, as did my colleagues from both sides of the House, to help recognize and celebrate the 19 Saskatchewan citizens who have been awarded national and provincial honours in the past year. And, Mr. Speaker, those citizens, as you have noted, have graced this House today to be with us in the Chamber in your gallery.

Colleagues, the poet Longfellow once observed that a good life, quote: "consists not in seeing visions and dreaming dreams, but in acts of charity and in willing service." Now, Mr. Speaker, in a few moments we are going to hear about some truly good lives, of acts of charity and willing service. We're going to hear some truly remarkable stories about some truly remarkable people. And through these stories, these lives, we see much reflection of Saskatchewan and Canada at large.

And though these stories and these lives may seem broadly diverse, they are by themselves a cause of celebration in the diversity. And though they may be diverse, there is a common thread which runs through them; a common theme that unites them. That theme is commitment. Many of our citizens are involved in the community today, but we honour these people here today for going the extra step to commitment. And commitment means giving it your all. And these 19 Saskatchewan people have given it their all over a lifetime of volunteering, of entrepreneurship, of building, or in a dramatic moment, of selfless bravery and heroism.

Mr. Speaker, it strikes me also that there is another theme in addition to commitment — another thread running through this colourful tapestry of excellence. The theme, as I've noted, of service. Whether in teaching or in sports or in business or in broadcasting or in risking their lives to save someone in trouble, all of these honourees have distinguished themselves by serving others. And ultimately these two ideals — commitment and service — combine to define our community, to define a community, to define a nation, and to make our place the finest place in the entire world in which to live.

I close with an observation by the humanitarian, Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer once said the following:

The ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

Who have sought and found how to serve, will be really happy. Well by that standard we have with us, I'm sure today, 19 very happy people, and deservedly so. And I think we should all be so happy, Mr. Speaker, and all so proud that we can count such people among our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends, our nation builders.

And so on behalf of the government and the people of the province of Saskatchewan, I'm privileged to honour, to welcome, and to thank these people for their great contribution. Thank you and God bless.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition I too would like to extend our congratulations to all the men and women who were honoured earlier today at Government House and who now join us in the Assembly.

We are extremely pleased to see 19 recipients out of the total of 30 honourees that were honoured in Saskatchewan throughout the year. These are men and women that have not only made great contributions to our province but, in some cases, also to our country and the entire world.

As I said during the ceremony at Government House, these men and women are a testament to how much Saskatchewan has to offer. I think we should all take pride that we have people in our province, and from our province, who have made such great contributions to their communities in their fields of expertise, and in some special cases, simply through their act of bravery. And I think it is highly appropriate that in this Assembly, where we represent all the people of Saskatchewan, we take time out

of our schedule to simply say thank you to these men and women of distinction.

On behalf of the official opposition once again, thank you to all of you and congratulations on the honours that have been bestowed upon you this year. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm please to be allowed the privilege of adding my voice to that of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I would like to add ... echo those words of congratulations and commendation.

And as I said earlier, it's a privilege to address the hon. citizens of this great province of Saskatchewan on this day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Hon. members, in just a moment I'll be asking you to introduce your constituents to the Assembly. And to the honours recipients, I ask that you stand while being introduced by your Member of the Legislative Assembly and then remain standing for the applause that I know that you are going to receive.

We'll now begin with the introductions.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Claude Petit, Member of the Order of Canada.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly a gentleman, and I know we're not supposed to read biographies, but I do want to just say that this gentleman could be introduced in two ways: he is both a Member of the Order of Canada and a former member of this Legislative Assembly. So I would call now on Mr. Herbert Pinder, Member of the Order of Canada, to please stand and be introduced.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was the case this morning, with the number of introductions you may tire of me before I'm finished. It is a great privilege, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. John Sandison, Member of the Order of Canada.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to introduce to the members, Mr. George Terry, Member of the Order of Canada.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Hon. members, it is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly a constituent in Moose Jaw North,

Master Warrant Officer Daniel Maltais, recipient of the Order of Military Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Frank Larson, recipient of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Amanda Patenaude, recipient of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Clayton Rousseau, recipient of the Medal of Bravery, represented by his brother, Tyson Rousseau.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure indeed to introduce to this Assembly, Mr. Derek Russell, recipient of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It is an equal pleasure for me to introduce to this Assembly, Mr. Thomas Taylor, recipient of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure once again to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Boyd Anderson, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Ms. Carol Gay Bell, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and privilege to introduce to the Assembly, Dr. Stirling McDowell, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again on behalf of the member for Saskatoon Idylwyld, it is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Ross Pinder, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to this Assembly, Mr. Ralph Hjertaas, recipient of the

Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to the Assembly, Dr. James Hunter, recipient of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and to the Assembly, I'd like to introduce Mrs. Violet Pyett, recipient of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you. I take pride and pleasure in introducing to the House this afternoon, Mr. Doug Steele of North Battleford, recipient of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

New Chief of Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government and with your permission, I would like to congratulate the new chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Mr. Perry Bellegarde, who was elected yesterday.

Chief Bellegarde leaves the position of chief of the Touchwood File Hills-Qu'Appelle Tribal Council to assume his new position. He has been involved in a number of Saskatchewan first nation initiatives and projects, including the issues of aboriginal and youth employment as well as issues that affect off-reserve and urban aboriginal people.

Chief Bellegarde captured the support of nearly two-thirds of the voting delegates on the first ballot. This indicates the strong support for Chief Bellegarde in this leadership role.

We are proud of our position and our positive working relationship with the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), and look forward to the same productive association under Chief Bellegarde.

Again, our congratulations to Chief Perry Bellegarde.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I also rise in the Assembly today to recognize Saskatchewan's newest political leader. As you all know, yesterday the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations elected a new chief to lead their people into the next millennium.

I would like to congratulate Perry Bellegarde, who is a former chief of the Touchwood File Hills-Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, and the new chief of FSIN. I'm certain that he will represent his

people well.

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that all of us in this Assembly recognize the importance of the political and democratic process and sometimes the difficulty it brings. I would like to commend Mr. Bellegarde for his commitment to his people and willingness to serve them at the highest level.

As we enter into the year 2000, elected leaders in Saskatchewan and all of Canada must face some very serious challenges. But it is also a time of great opportunity. The same is true in the first nations community.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to wish Mr. Bellegarde the best of luck in his role as leader and invite him to meet with the Saskatchewan Party caucus at any time. As I have said, we face many challenges in the upcoming years, but if we approach them together we can turn these challenges into opportunities — opportunities for all people of Saskatchewan to reach their fullest potential.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Comments on Health Care in Saskatchewan

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One year ago to the day in this Assembly the hon. member from Arm River made the following statement and I quote: "The minister has stated on many occasions that there is no better health system than here in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, we agree with that."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — This rare occasion on which the member spoke with such simple, truthful eloquence, should not go uncelebrated. We agreed with the member from Arm River a year ago and we agree with him now. I want to extend best wishes for a happy anniversary to the hon. member from Arm River on that accurate statement about Saskatchewan health care, outstanding health care that stands the test of time. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miracles at the Plains Health Centre

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously if you torture the facts long enough, they'll tell some truth. Thank you.

Saskatchewan has had many miracles in its history, Mr. Speaker. This week there is a film crew from British Broadcasting Corporation here in Regina. They're here to do a story about a miracle that we have recently witnessed here in Saskatchewan. Kenji Chan was miraculously brought back from the verge of death after a tragic accident.

But, Mr. Speaker, he is not alone. There was another miracle some four years ago when Karlee Kosolofski was brought back to life from severe hypothermia. What do these two miracles have in common, Mr. Speaker? They both happened here at the Plains hospital; the same Plains hospital that this government is determined to close. They just don't care.

Martin O'Collins, the British director of the film crew, said that Regina gained an international reputation following the successful treatment of Kenji Chan and Karlee Kosolofski — and it all happened here at the Plains hospital.

In the face of this international recognition, what do the NDP (New Democratic Party) do? They want to close down one of Saskatchewan's newest, largest, and most accessible hospitals. Mr. Speaker, they just don't care.

We had over 300 people out in Assiniboia, 400 people out in Indian Head, 550 people out in Weyburn, 200 in Redvers; and they were there, Mr. Speaker, to save the Plains. Mr. Premier, there is a rally . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. The hon. member's time has expired. I also remind the hon. member that in bringing remarks in members' statements, they are to be directed through the Chair. Continue members' statements.

Prince Albert Women of Distinction

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night, to mark their 85th anniversary in Prince Albert, the YWCA held its ninth annual Women of Distinction banquet. The event was held, as the program said, and I quote:

In celebration of women who have made significant contributions to our community. In honouring them, we weave their names into the fabric of history that informs our lives and marks our progress together as we work to make our city a better place in which to live.

The proceeds from the Women of Distinction night go to support the Y's residence for women and children, as well as the many other programs delivered to Prince Albert women and children by the YWCA.

Here are the P.A. (Prince Albert) Women of Distinction for 1998: the Young Woman of Distinction in Science and Technology is Alissa Poulin; the Community Enhancement category was won by Donna Christopherson; Shirley Gange won the Business and Professional Award; Health and Sports and Fitness Award went to Mamie E. Bailey. The Arts and Culture winner was Lorna Gibson.

My congratulations to all the Prince Albert women of distinction and then to the YWCA.

Mr. Speaker, last night the guest speaker was Nancy Green Raine, and all of us will remember her from the Olympics of 1968. I want to tell all members, Nancy "Green ski" has not changed one bit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Upgrades for the Battlefords and Area

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the people of the Battlefords are aghast. Last week the hon. member from Lloydminster sent my constituents an open letter telling them to quit bellyaching because there was no help for the Battlefords in this year's provincial budget. Instead, they should be grateful because the

NDP is spending lots of money in Lloydminster. She then proceeded to list all the wonderful projects being sponsored by the NDP in tax-free Lloydminster.

Well, Mr. Speaker, at the risk of sounding like an ingrate, I have to report that as I went around my community, I detected none of the outpouring of rejoicing that the MLA from Lloydminster confidently expects. I heard not so much as a single hallelujah chorus.

I say to our lady of the deck chair, if you really care about the future of the Battlefords, join with your colleague from Redberry in supporting my petition for upgrades to the Yellowhead and the entrance to the city of North Battleford.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Construction of Saw Mill

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have good economic news regarding value added activity in the forest sector.

Three first nation bands have signed a deal with Weyerhaeuser to build a small . . . a saw mill north of P.A. Construction of this Wapa Weeka mill will start in May and is expected to be operational by next March. Forty new, long-term jobs will be created at the mill. This is not including the many spin-off jobs in harvesting and transportation that will be created by the \$22.5 million project. Weyerhaeuser has partnered with the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, the Lac La Ronge Band, and the Montreal Band in what they all agree is a historical venture.

This new partnership between the pulp and paper company and the bands will give the bands a chance to compete in a major industry and to continue contributing to the economy.

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan we are moving to better utilize the forest by first of all sawing it into lumber, and then using the waste to produce fibre for pulp and paper. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskPower Proposed Investment in Guyana

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this afternoon is for the minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation).

Mr. Minister, yesterday Jack Messer testified under oath that the NDP had a legal opinion that says you could be sued for pulling out of Guyana. Given your spectacular failure to manage SaskPower and Channel Lake, maybe I could explain what this means to the minister.

It means that after you've decided investing 30 million of taxpayers' dollars into a third-world power company was such a great idea; and then after spending \$2 million of taxpayers' money to find out investing in Guyana was actually a very bad idea; and after the public outcry surrounding the whole Guyana affair got very, very loud, you pulled out of the Guyana deal.

The only problem with SaskPower is, the SaskPower's lawyers are telling you, the government, that you could be on the hook for millions of dollars. Mr. Minister, will you come clean today and immediately table that legal opinion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, as I've reported to the House on numerous occasions, we withdrew after the analysis on the letter of intent in dealing with Guyana as to whether or not to invest there. And having brought it to the Crown Corporations Committee where your members had a chance to speak to the issue, never raised all of the concerns you're raising now. In fact the member from Melfort I think, believed it was a good arrangement.

But I say to the members opposite, when we withdrew after we found that the research we had done and the due diligence that it was not a good economic deal, we received legal opinions and we were reported to CIC that in fact we were on strong ground in withdrawing from the proposal. And to this point in time that remains the case and no one has started any legal action to this date.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — The last thing we need is more of your NDP rhetoric on your management of the Channel Lake scandal, and we don't need any more NDP doublespeak about your disaster in Guyana. What the people of Saskatchewan are looking for is the truth.

Mr. Minister, you should never have been in Guyana in the first place, and for the price of a cup of coffee, anybody in Saskatchewan could have told you that. But you decided to spend a couple million dollars of taxpayers' money instead, and then conclude that the Guyana deal was a bad one in the first place.

Mr. Minister, Jack Messer testified under oath, you got a legal opinion that says you could get sued by the Government of Guyana for pulling out. You didn't like that legal opinion so you went shopping for another legal opinion that said you could win in court. It sounds a lot familiar doesn't it. Duelling legal opinions, just like the one you dredged up for Channel Lake.

Mr. Minister, it's time to come clean on this whole thing surrounding . . . like you did on Channel Lake to a certain extent — now it's time to come clean on Guyana. Will you table those duelling legal opinions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, what we won't do . . . And if you can imagine the logic — he says we're going to be sued and then table the legal opinions.

Now that is a bright person and you can obviously see that he was part of the Devine administration that ran the debt up to \$15 billion. He says you're going to be sued, table your legal opinions, and show it to the people who are going to sue you. What kind of logic is that from the member opposite?

But I will say to you, the member opposite, that we have had many meetings in the last three weeks in rural Saskatchewan and the issue of consulting and project management and international investment, far from where you are coming from, is well accepted in the public in Saskatchewan.

I want to say that I was in Swift Current . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the answer provided. Order. I ask for the cooperation of all members in the House, all members in the House.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the members opposite that we're fortunate that the public of Saskatchewan are a bit more sophisticated and understand business a little more than the old Tories, the old Tories who ran the debt in this province up to \$15 billion. I'll tell you it's going to be a long time, a long time before you are ever given again the reins of power to do what you did to the economy during the 1980s.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well that's nice to know, Mr. Minister, that you have confirmed that you are anticipating being sued. And we also, the people of Saskatchewan, also understand a little bit about business acumen and they understand that you lost money on Channel Lake, you lost money on Guyana, you lost money on NST. Virtually everything you touch you lose money on, Mr. Minister.

This doesn't have to be a real complicated process, Mr. Minister. We ask questions. You're to provide the answers. You have legal opinions that say the government could be sued for pulling out of Guyana — one opinion says that you'll lose; one opinion says that you'll win.

Will you admit that you did go and get a legal opinion that says if you pull out of Guyana you could be sued by them and there'll be a substantial cost to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan. Will you also admit that you further went shopping to find one that said you would win that kind of suit?

And will you stop the cover-up and immediately table both legal opinions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems to have selective amnesia when it comes to the fact that the books of the province have been balanced now for five budgets. The fact of the matter is that we have the lowest utility rates in Canada, and I might add that that member can run but he can't hide from the fact that he's a Tory.

One other suggestion I might make is that you fire your researcher, Mr. Hermanson, who has his numbers all wrong about privatization and support from the public of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Premier. Mr. Premier, it was extremely disappointing yesterday to watch you whip your members into line and force them to vote down compensation to hepatitis C victims. It was a heartless, spineless act, Mr. Premier.

Still, Mr. Premier, we remain hopeful that one of these days you will come to your senses and allow your MLAs to vote freely and represent their constituents' views. Mr. Premier, your decision to close the Plains hospital has never come to a vote in this legislature. Instead you hide behind the Regina Health Board to do the work for you.

Today the Saskatchewan Party is calling for a free vote on the future of the Plains hospital. We are calling for that vote to be held this Tuesday, May 5. Mr. Premier, we are calling on you to allow your MLAs to represent the people they serve and to vote to keep the Plains hospital open.

Mr. Premier, will you allow that free vote to happen?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health, the Saskatchewan Party, the Conservative Party in this legislature, stands now on an almost daily basis calling for free votes, free votes, Mr. Speaker.

I can name a number of those members who were elected as Liberals to this House who did not go back to their constituents for free votes. I can name a number of members who were elected in this Assembly as Conservatives who now won't go to their people for a free vote. Now they stand unanimously as the new Tories, voting as a block.

Mr. Speaker, there is a vote coming up. There will be a vote in Saskatoon. I would challenge the leader of that party to subject himself to the vote of the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first the Premier and his ministers and his members hide behind the Regina Health District Board; now they want to hide behind a by-election.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that people across this province are concerned about the closure of the Plains Health Centre. And, Mr. Speaker, as I've asked, I've asked the Premier, Mr. Premier, you've heard people; you've read the petitions; you've had . . . I'm sure you've got numerous letters even on your desk from people across this province who are concerned about the closure of the Plains health care centre.

Mr. Premier, it's a simple question. Will you allow a free vote on the closure of the Plains health care centre or are you going to hide behind every other issue and not allow your members to vote freely?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I have to smile at the

question, especially at the answer given by my colleague the Minister of Social Services. I want to come back to the point that the Minister of Social Services made, talking about votes.

I don't think he's a researcher. I think Mr. Elwin Hermanson is a policy consultant at \$24,000 taxpayers' expenses on top of the Official Leader of the Opposition's pay. When it comes to vote, let the Tory Party put their actions and their mouths into coordination. Let Mr. Elwin Pederson get up and test his . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Pederson, Hermanson, Elwin, it doesn't matter. They're all the Tories, all the same — Pederson or Hermanson, they're all Tories. Get up there for a vote.

Now as to the Plains hospital, I want to tell you this. Don't ever forget this. When the Plains is closed in October and we are consolidating into the General and Pasqua, there will be not one bed closed or lost in Regina — not one bed closed or lost in Regina.

We're going to have the best in renal care, the best in cardiac care, the best care that Saskatchewan and the South has ever had.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, it's obvious the Premier and his colleagues are not listening to the people of Saskatchewan. In fact, Mr. Premier, at the meeting in Weyburn, and not just Weyburn, many other meetings, if you were to call an election today you would hear in spades as the people went to the polls to vote. As many individuals have said, they said, call an election. If you don't change your mind, you will find out — you will hear from us as we go to the polls.

Mr. Premier, people of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. Order on both sides of the House. Order. Order, order. The hon. member is quite capable of asking the question without support from his colleagues. And the minister will be able to provide the response without support from his or her colleagues.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, you've been hearing from people; your colleagues have been hearing from people across this province. When are you going to listen.

Mr. Premier, we're asking people, if you're not going to listen to them at public meetings, we're asking people to call your office at 787-9433 and demand a free vote. We're asking people to call their MLAs — which I'm sure they already are — and ask for a free vote. Mr. Premier, when will you begin to listen to the public, such as they've been asking, and allow not only a free vote in this Assembly but allow for that free vote to take place throughout Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly every vote, I like to think, is a free vote because MLAs contribute their vote of conscience and their vote of minds to the issues of the day through a kind of free vote we saw from the Tory Party yesterday on the hepatitis debate, where they unanimously stood up — unanimously — because the whip was put on them,

and the same thing with the Liberals.

There's going to be a vote all right. And I'll tell you when there's going to be a vote. There's going to be a vote sooner than later in Saskatoon, and you challenge me to a vote? I challenge you to put up Elwin Hermanson or Eldon Pederson or any of those sons. Put up your policy research guy at \$24,000 a year of taxpayers' bucks — \$24,000 a year of taxpayers' dollars — for not a penny of work being done. Put them up in Saskatoon. Stop hollering here; put them up and see if you get the approval of the voters.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the Liberals will again be hosting another Save the Plains meeting tonight . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now let's give the hon. member from Thunder Creek a chance to be heard from the very beginning. And I'll ask — order — I'll ask for cooperation of members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the Liberals will again be hosting another Save the Plains meeting tonight in Regina at the Plains hospital auditorium. We expect that people will raise serious concerns, just as they have at forums which we've already held. We have also received more than 5,000 letters of support. Many of those are NDP supporters who know the NDP is making a major mistake. One Morse resident says, and I quote:

Dear Mr. Premier: My father devoted much time and effort in getting the Tommy Douglas government elected. I and countless others spent years supporting the CCF and then the NDP. You jeopardize your and the party's future if you don't listen.

A Moose Jaw couple write and I quote:

We have voted for the NDP all our lives but if you close the Plains that will cease.

Mr. Premier, why do you refuse to listen? Even lifetime supporters of your party know that you've crossed the line.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to first of all thank the hon. member for all the testimonials about the NDP, which testimonials are still true. Also I want to remind the House, Mr. Speaker, that the announcement respecting the Plains was made prior to the 1995 general provincial election. It was made at the time that we're involved in renewal. There were people who didn't like that decision at the time and they exercised their democratic right.

The member calls that . . . he describes this as a meeting hosted by the Liberal Party. Make no mistake about it, lock, stock, and barrel, the meetings are hosted by the Liberal Party for political purposes. They don't tell the people the facts. I totally understand why the people come there and express their concern. I totally understand the attachment to the Plains hospital. I totally understand many of the issues that they raise, but why don't those men and women of that third party start telling the people the truth?

Not one hospital bed will be lost in Regina — the best renal care, the best cardiac care, the best care for all of Regina and southern Saskatchewan, come October 1998. That's the truth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, I'll give this government a taste of what people are expressing in further letters to the Liberals. A Strasbourg resident says and I quote, "The Premier and his government are making the worst mistake of their lives." That doesn't sound like a testimonial. It sounds more like we're starting to eulogize here.

A husband and wife from Estevan put it in this way, and I quote, "Let common sense prevail." A Kisbey couple says, and I quote, "You obviously are a government that won't listen. I think it's time for the government to use common sense and work for the good of everyone." And a resident of Wolseley says, "Please listen to the voters. Swallow your pride and admit you made a mistake."

What about it, Mr. Premier. Will you swallow your pride and admit you've made a mistake?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quoting for me letters which he receives. Well let me quote for him letters which all of the people of southern Saskatchewan received. *Leader-Post* of March 13, 1998, quote, the letter writer says:

I am confident, that when the process is complete we will have the best acute-care services in the province. These services will benefit not only those who live in the Regina Health District but all the residents of southern Saskatchewan.

No services will be lost, closed or downgraded with the closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Who is that letter-writer? A member of the Regina District Health Board and a former Liberal candidate for that party in 1995, Pat Edenoste, who supports the decision, as does the former president of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party, who supports that decision.

And why do they support that decision? They support that decision because they know that there will be no beds lost when this is completed. They will have the best renal, the best cardiac, and the best health care, as Ms. Edenoste said, in all of southern Saskatchewan. That's why they're there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Before the hon. member is recognized, I want to remind him there is protocol for being recognized in the House. If it's not honoured by members, members will not be recognized in the House.

Next question. Recognize . . . Order. Next question.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the people of southern

Saskatchewan know that this government's priorities are totally screwed up. And it's because they've lost their ability to care.

A husband and wife from Weyburn suggests in a message to the Premier, and I quote: "We thought the PCs were bad, but you take the cake for stupid policies."

A gentleman from Zehner states, and I quote:

It's ridiculous that a government loses millions on foreign ventures like Guyana or domestic ventures like Channel Lake or spends \$37 million on a casino and then closes vital hospitals.

A Moosomin man puts in this way, and I quote: "Roy, you already know you and the NDP are out next . . ."

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the hon. member will be aware that in the House, unless quoting from a tabled or public document, not to be using the proper names of members of the Assembly. I'll remind the hon. member of that and I'll ask him to wrap up his question and get on.

Mr. Aldridge: — A Moosomin man put it this way, and I quote: "Roy, you already know you and the NDP are out the next election, but why torch the place on the way out?"

Mr. Premier, surely you don't want to end your political career this way. Will you give the people a say by placing a moratorium on the closure of the Plains until the next provincial election?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the policy of the government, when we announced health care renewal back in 1991-92, is clear. We are renewing health care to save medicare and health care.

We have taken huge steps forward in this regard. We are leading the provinces of Canada in this regard. We announced prior to the 1995 general election, the Plains was going to be closed as part of a consolidation and an enhancement — an enhancement — of the health care services.

What's important in this debate, Mr. Speaker, is what today's letter-writer writes in the Regina *Leader-Post* in the headline: "Facts, not emotion, important in Plains decision." That's what she writes, "Facts, not emotion, important in Plains decision."

And the facts are we'll have the best renal care, the best cardiac care. We'll have no bed loss. We'll have the units modern and up-to-date. We'll have an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). We'll have new technology. We will have the finest in Regina and in southern Saskatchewan that we've ever had.

And what the people of Saskatchewan will decide, they will decide in due course at election time. But I'm sure of one thing: whatever happens to me and to my government, they will never ever, ever, ever elect the Liberals or the Conservatives, those men and women who fought medicare tooth and nail then and who still fight medicare tooth and nail now. Never.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower President's Resignation

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the movie industry in Saskatchewan is taking off. Yesterday we had *The Godfather* part IV. You'll recall the Deputy Premier told us sometime ago that Mr. Messer resigned by mutual consent. Well John Wright, the President of CIC, says that's nonsense. He agrees with Mr. Messer, that the truth is Mr. Messer was given an offer he couldn't refuse — resign in three hours or be fired.

Well if that's what the Deputy Premier calls mutual consent, then if he hasn't massacred the truth, he certainly massacred the English language.

My question for the Deputy Premier: is he sticking to his story that that's mutual consent, or does he now admit he misled this House on at least five occasions on this crucial issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I refer the member to the interview that Mr. Messer gave after he resigned. And he was being asked and he was asked, what about political pressure to resign. He said no. He was then asked: the government didn't ask you to resign? He said, and I quote: "No, I mean I had no conversation with or direct representation from the government."

I say to the member opposite, as Mr. Priel said, and I quote from his document which he tabled in the committee yesterday, April 27 or the day before, and he said and I quote:

Further, it would be inappropriate, in my opinion, if not irresponsible, for the committee or any members to draw conclusions on matters the committee is investigating without first having heard all of the evidence.

And I keep going back to that, to the member from the Battlefords. The issue here is, and you know, that you should not jump to conclusions about this issue before the hearing is completed. And over and over again you're told this by Mr. Priel, and then you jump out of your seats and you run back in here and ask all of the questions, having assumedly come to conclusions about the inquiry results.

Be patient, listen to the questions and the answers, and then, as he says, I would suggest . . .

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

Vehicle Insurance Deductible Increases

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance). Mr. Minister, Ken McQuarrie of Melfort has launched a class action lawsuit against your government for breach of contract. He says, and the Saskatchewan Party agrees, that you had no right to unilaterally jack up deductibles from \$500 to \$700 on January 1 for persons whose registrations had not yet expired.

We believe this is a clear breach of contract, something the

NDP does on a regular basis. Mr. Minister, we've received SGI's statement of defence prepared by — guess who — lawyers at MLT (MacPherson Leslie & Tyerman). It says, and I quote:

SGI specifically denies that a contract was formed between SGI and the plaintiff. SGI's position is that SGI vehicle insurance is not a contract (believe it or not).

Mr. Minister, do you agree with this position? Do you believe that the SGI vehicle insurance is not a contract?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I say to the member opposite, this is an issue that has been raised before and I can tell you that the board of directors have checked this out thoroughly. It's a legal opinion that has come to the board that in fact they are on . . .

An Hon. Member: — Table it.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Oh, table these legal documents you say. I mean you've got to get some new lines when you ask questions.

The fact of the matter is that this is an issue that will be dealt with by the management and the board of directors of SGI and they will come to the conclusions as to what is in the best interests of the shareholders and the user of the service. And I say to the member opposite, if the individual is suing, that is a format that they can use. But the issue will be dealt with in the normal manner.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 35 — The On-farm Quality Assurance Programs Act

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 35, The On-farm Quality Assurance Programs Act be now introduced and read for the very first time.

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

Bill No. 36 — The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 1998/ Loi de 1998 modifiant la Loi sur les services de l'état civil

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 36, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 1998 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

(1430)

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the House to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, a former member of this Chamber who I am told, although I didn't sit with him, brought a lot of colour to the Chamber in the years that he spent here as a member of the legislature.

Subsequent years brought him, Mr. Speaker, to Prince Albert, which created another challenge, and I guess that would be for his new tailor in Prince Albert, who managed to accomplish the needs of the former member I'm about to introduce.

I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, Mayor Don Cody from Prince Albert.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to submit the answers to written question 55 and, by leave of the Assembly . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As further evidence of this being an open and accountable government, by leave of the Assembly, I want to submit the answers to question 56, 57, and 58.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip requests leave to simultaneously respond to all questions. Is leave granted? Leave is granted and the answers to questions 55, 56, 57, and 58 are tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 20

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Mitchell that **Bill No. 20 — The Election Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to add a number of comments today to the comments already that have been made by the member from Melfort-Tisdale a few days ago regarding Bill No. 20. I think he hit the nail right on the head when he spoke of the need for an electoral system that's not only fair but is also perceived to be fair by the residents of this province.

The main purpose of this Bill is long overdue. The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer must be perceived always to be fair and impartial to everyone involved in the electoral system — to all the voters, to all the candidates, and all the parties. So rightly or

wrongly, up to this point there has been a certain taint surrounding the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, not because of the people who have held the post, but because of the circumstances surrounding the position.

To this day the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is under the auspices of the Premier's office. It's not an independent position like the one of the Legislative Counsel or the Clerk of this Assembly. Rather, it is a position that has been appointed solely at the discretion of the government of the day.

While the members opposite have constantly maintained that this has had no bearing on the decisions chief electoral officers have made in the past, obviously there will always be some questions about those decisions as long as the electoral officer is an employee of the Premier's office.

This Bill seeks to remedy this unacceptable situation by making the Chief Electoral Officer a fully independent officer of the legislature. This is the case in most, if not all, of the other provinces in this country. And it's the case at the federal level, where the electoral officer answers to parliament and not to the government. And we are fully in support of this.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is timely now since the position of Chief Electoral Officer is currently vacant. I understand that once this Bill is passed by the legislature, members from the three parties will meet to discuss the qualifications necessary for this post and the search for the next Chief Electoral Officer and the first to be fully independent officer of the Legislative Assembly will begin.

I believe this process, as suggested by the Minister of Labour, should be a good one if the government is truly interested in making this selection a non-partisan affair and I'll be glad to participate in that process.

However, as the member from Melfort-Tisdale suggested in his remarks on this Bill, I too have some concern that the process that we will undertake shortly will not be formalized here in the Legislative Assembly. There is no requirement on the government of the day to commit to such a process. In fact if the government simply wants to put a name in front of the Assembly to vote on under this legislation, they certainly could.

And if this were to happen at some future date, Mr. Speaker, it will serve to thwart the spirit of the Bill. That circumstance would inject politics into the appointment of the Chief Electoral Officer all over again. So while I support this Bill, I think it could be made stronger and fairer on the whole if the process for selecting a new Chief Electoral Officer was put in writing in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has another major concern about this Bill as well, and that is the appointment of returning officers. It makes little sense to me that these men and women will continue to be appointed by the cabinet. There is absolutely no justification for this. The Chief Electoral Officer will have the power to appoint the assistant chief electoral officer and his or her staff. Yet he or she will not have the power to appoint key deputies in each of the ridings, namely returning officers.

What is the sense of this if we are trying to take the politics out

of the electoral system. Frankly it doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. The returning officers should also be completely independent from the government of the day. They should be appointed by the electoral officer after a public search.

No, Mr. Speaker, there aren't lucrative patronage appointments like we see handed to presidents of certain Crown corporations, but as it stands now they are patronage appointments nevertheless. They are appointed by the government and they are not publicly advertised positions. Under the system as it now stands, and as it will continue to stand if the government doesn't decide to do what's right, they are appointed, more often than not, because of their loyalty and hard work for the party in power.

This is obviously wrong, Mr. Speaker, and to be fair this practice also goes on elsewhere, including at the federal level. Before the last federal election, an overwhelming majority of those appointed by the federal Liberal cabinet as returning officers were loyal Liberal activists. But just because patronage in the electoral process goes on elsewhere, it doesn't make it right here. And I think the members opposite know that.

Don't they have enough patronage tools at their disposal to reward their party faithful? Surely to goodness they can keep their hands off the returning officers who are in charge of ensuring elections are run fairly and honestly at the constituency level.

In turn, Mr. Speaker, these returning officers appoint deputy returning officers and the poll clerks. As long as the cabinet has a firm control over who is appointed as a returning officer in each of the 58 constituencies, they have I believe, indirect control over all of the appointments made within those constituencies.

This is wrong and I urge the government, I urge the minister, to change this if they want people to truly believe that they are honest in their attempts to depoliticize the electoral process in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, today I also want to touch on another inequity in the current electoral system. Though it's an area that isn't addressed in the legislation we have before us in this session, it is the subject that we addressed two years ago when this Act was first passed. And that is the whole issue of political tax credits.

As all members of this legislature know, fund-raising is vitally important to all political parties. And in this area, as in all others, all parties should be allowed to operate on a level playing-field.

But that's not the case today, Mr. Speaker. Because while two parties in this province, the NDP and the Liberals, are allowed to offer their contributors tax credits, all other parties that are currently registered or will be registered in the future cannot offer such tax credit. This is because Saskatchewan is only one of two provinces in Canada that does not have a provincial tax credit. Instead the two old parties filter their contributions through their political cousins in Ottawa who then send it back.

Through this practice, contributors are technically giving to the

federal party and therefore receive the federal tax credit. Of course any party which doesn't want to be beholden to a federal party is out of luck. And therefore we see a huge disparity in the system between the old parties and the new parties.

As I said, two years ago we passed legislation that did contain a section that in fact put into place a provincial tax credit. And while every single section of that Act has been proclaimed by the government, this one strangely has not. And I can't think of another reason why this wouldn't have been proclaimed other than the current government likes playing with its current advantage. They see no reason to make the system fair when it's tilted in their favour.

Issue of tax credits aside, Mr. Speaker, there is another worry. In this legislature we pass legislation in its entirety. The opposition might be against the particular Bill but in the end Bills pass this Assembly in their entirety — pass with the support of the majority.

Why then does our system allow the government to then turn around and pick and choose what parts of the Act are proclaimed into law and which aren't? These decisions aren't made here on the floor of the legislature. They are made in the cabinet room behind closed doors away from the glare of scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that Bills passed in this legislature are passed as a whole and do anything . . . and to do anything but proclaim the entire Bill as passed is breaking of faith with the members of this House. It is in fact putting into place an adulterated version of the Bills passed by this legislature.

Once again the voices of the members elected to represent the people of this province are silenced, just as is the case when the government does most of the actual governing of this province through regulation. We are getting to a point when the actual Bills we debate in this legislature are becoming less and less relevant. More power is slowly being handed over to the cabinet. At a time when most of the world has become more democratic, it seems to me Saskatchewan is becoming less so as more decisions are being made away from this House and behind closed doors.

Yesterday in fact we saw the spectacle of back-benchers, obviously in discomfort, voting against compensating victims of hepatitis C. There is no room, according to this government, for MLAs to vote with their conscience at any time. It's shameful, and the sooner we put more power and authority back into the hands of those who are elected to this House, instead of a small clique of cabinet, the better off this province will be. However, as it stands now if the government doesn't want to proclaim a certain part of The Elections Act, that is their prerogative.

However in order to make the federal system fair for all parties, then we should pass legislation to ensure that no party gets to take advantage of tax credits unless they all do. We should disallow the practice of filtering donations through federal parties. By doing this, no party in Saskatchewan would be able to offer tax credits, and then every party — current and future — will be playing by the same rules.

And as a fringe benefit, we could avoid the unseemly practice used by the NDP and the Liberals, including the member from Melville, of hiding the identity of their donors — a clear contravention of the spirit of The Election Act.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, if this government was really interested in taking the politics entirely out of the electoral system in Saskatchewan, they would do all of these things. And I am confident . . . Am I confident they will do this? Unfortunately I'm not confident at all.

However, these are some of the issues we will be questioning the government on in great detail . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. Now it does not serve the purpose of the Assembly to have debate coming from three different caucuses at the same time. And all hon. members will be given opportunity to enter into debate if they wish to put their remarks on the record. I would urge them to do it that way.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In closing I'd like to repeat that I said, as I said, that there are . . . these are some of the issues that I have identified which we will be questioning the government on . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Now I just asked the hon. members to come to order. And within feet of the member who's speaking, one of his own colleagues and a member from another caucus are carrying on their fairly loud debate. And I will ask the order of the House to allow the member who is speaking to be heard.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be questioning the government on a number of the issues as I've raised. Not only here in the House, but with the minister on Bill No. 20, but we will be doing that in Committee of the Whole. And I look forward to the opportunity for the minister to evaluate some of the concerns we have raised, to maybe even suggest some alternatives to the Bill to improve the Bill for all the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill No. 29

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Mitchell that **Bill No. 29, The Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I made a few comments regarding Bill No. 14 . . . or Bill No. 29 pardon me, when it was first in for second readings a few days ago in this Assembly. And a couple comments that . . . and a couple thoughts I'd like to bring into the debate/discussion as well, as we look at The Workers' Compensation Act. I think as I indicated the other day, it appeared from what I was hearing from the minister that there were attempts certainly to make the Act more responsible, make the board, the Workers'

Compensation Board, more responsible to injured workers in the province of Saskatchewan.

However, we've had individuals who have called us, Mr. Speaker . . . and yesterday we gave . . . we took time to recognize the problems of injured workers and recognize the fact there are injured workers, and in some cases, unfortunately, workers have lost their lives at the workplace . . . yesterday in this Assembly on a day commemorating injured workers.

However, Mr. Speaker, as I look at this piece of legislation, there are still a number of injured workers, workers who were injured at a major project in south-eastern Saskatchewan, at Shand, who have some major concerns.

Now, Mr. Speaker, whether or not this piece of legislation would have addressed those concerns, I don't know. I don't know whether or not the workers who were injured and certainly the families who lost loved ones in that disaster, whether or not that would certainly offer opportunities down the road to make sure people don't face the same situations or circumstances. I don't know.

We'll certainly want to look forward to raising those concerns with the minister. Because, Mr. Minister, when you look at — or, Mr. Speaker — when you look at The Workers' Compensation Act and when people look at Workers' Compensation, they come to us, we find on so many occasions, in many cases, Mr. Speaker, situations where there just seems to be a lack of understanding between the board and between the workers. And I believe the minister talked about that the other day and tried to cover that area of discrepancy and the problems that arise.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important . . . and we hope that this piece of legislation, as the minister was talking about the other day, indeed makes the board more responsible and it addresses concerns of injured workers. And as I indicated earlier, whether the Shand workers would have been affected, whether they would have been helped, whether or not this piece of legislation is something they can look at to address some of the ongoing problems, is something that we would certainly look forward to addressing with the minister.

Because I think that's important. It's important for us to recognize the fact that when someone's injured on the job and they've been paying into a compensation program, that that program acts responsibly and certainly meets the needs they're now facing as a result of the injury and ongoing injury, whether it's a worker at Shand or whether it's a worker on an oil rig in this province or working in a manufacturing . . . for a manufacturing firm in the province of Saskatchewan, or even just a worker who's involved on the floor of a store, in many of the stores across the province of Saskatchewan.

This is a very important piece of legislation because there are a number of concerns that are out there, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, in your role as a MLA you've probably had a number of these concerns that have been brought to your attention. So we look forward to addressing this piece of legislation even more as we get into it.

I wholeheartedly agree with the minister in his closing comments. He said:

Preventing accidents before they happen is better than even the most perfect compensation program. Even one death in the Saskatchewan workplace is one too many and even one injury too grievous.

We certainly agree with that, Mr. Speaker. And I'm sure that you would agree with that as well. This is something we need to all recognize. Unfortunately, despite all the efforts that we as legislators would like to see and all the safety precautions that are put in place — we can do everything within our power to make sure the workplace is safe to work in — we do not have control over sometimes the little mishaps that may take place as a result of individuals who maybe were not as careful on the job site.

But I think we need to make every effort to make sure the job site not only is safe but the workers recognize how important it is for them to act and work responsibly and make sure that they are taking precautionary procedures to protect themselves, especially if they're working in an environment where there's loud noises, or an environment where there may be heat-related problems that may arise, of protecting themselves, or whatever the environment. It's certainly important, and I believe the minister talked about that when he talked about funding for prevention units, basically a unit to talk about educating individuals.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those few comments, I would like to allow other members to have an opportunity to speak to this Bill as well and I look forward to further discussion on The Workers' Compensation Act as we get into Committee of the Whole at a later date. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also happy today to take my place and speak for a few minutes about the proposed changes to The Workers' Compensation Act. Our caucus will need more time to study the proposed changes and to consult with some interested parties before moving it ahead.

When we're dealing with Workers' Compensation, I feel it is necessary to take time and care in studying all changes because of the number of people this Act affects. Obviously workers who are injured on the job are affected by the Act. And I can't think of another subject area, besides perhaps Channel Lake, that we deal with as an opposition that elicits as many phone calls on a weekly basis as does Workers' Compensation.

Many of these calls are from people who have been fighting with the Workers' Compensation Board for years, if not decades. Like any compensation program, or any government program for that matter, people do fall through the cracks of the Workers' Compensation system, just as they do with the current health care system and just as they do with the government's no-fault insurance system.

Mr. Speaker, just over a year ago the government unveiled the latest review of the Workers' Compensation Board, which I believe contains some 52 recommendations. Obviously the Bill before us in this session deals with only a very few of these recommendations. Some of the recommendations made in their

report are not subject to changes in the legislation itself, as they are really just changes in policy for the board, but others do indeed require changes to legislation.

While the minister informs us that other recommendations are still subject to consultation with stakeholders, I think he owes the Assembly a better explanation of that. I think at some point in this debate he must tell which of the recommendations he plans to implement and when, and which recommendations he has no intentions of implementing. There are a good many people in this province who want to know this government's future plans with Workers' Compensation. It's not just injured workers who want to know the direction this board plans to go.

Employers in the province are also waiting and watching very carefully for the actions of this government opposite, because it is the employers who pay the full cost of Workers' Compensation. And employers, like some of the people injured on the job, haven't always felt that the government or the Workers' Compensation Board has been willing to listen to their concerns over the past few years.

Business people, many of whom view Workers' Compensation premiums as a payroll tax, cannot be expected to pay more and more into a system. As with any tax, there's a limit to how much a single individual or a single business or a group of businesses can be expected to pay. And with any changes to The Workers' Compensation Act, we have to be concerned about whether it will be an added cost to doing business in this province.

Yes, we have to be concerned that the injured workers are taken care of by Workers' Compensation for the time they're unable to hold down jobs, but we also have to be ever concerned about cost to businesses. Because we all know, or else we should know, with each cost incurred by businesses or any employer, there is less money to hire staff and this hurts every person in Saskatchewan. It hurts people who are able to work but unable to find jobs because businesses are unable to hire.

Late last year employers in Saskatchewan did receive some relief from their Workers' Compensation bill when the rates fell for about three-quarters of those businesses who pay premiums. However this decrease came on the heels of an increase for most employers just two years ago. So while employers welcome this decrease in doing business, as they welcome any decrease, many are asking whether the drop should have been more.

You look at Workers' Compensation Board's projections for a \$60 million surplus and see \$60 million that would otherwise be in the economy and working for people in this province. As well, not all businesses and organizations were fortunate enough to see their Workers' Compensation premiums actually drop. Retail operations, newspapers, print shops, light manufacturing, charities, and non-profit organizations, and financial institutions were hit with further increases.

So, Mr. Speaker, employers are watching all changes made by this government very carefully to make sure they're not going to end up costing them more money. The minister says the cost for the proposed amendment will be just under \$5 million. One would hope that he sticks to his word and that this cost will be

covered by the Workers' Compensation to current rates and that not that we have to expect another increase.

Mr. Speaker, another area that is a concern for those who are paying bills for Workers' Comp are the definitions of injury and occupational disease. Many feel the definitions as proposed are simply too open-ended, and could potentially include many ailments or disabilities that are not currently part of the plan, and could end up covering diseases or other ailments not directly attributable to the workplace.

Let's remember that the Workers' Compensation Board is a place as a provider of no-fault income replacement benefits for people who are clearly injured on the job. It is never intended as income replacement for those who come down with conditions that cannot be directly linked to the workplace or to their job.

Some injuries and illnesses are common to everyday life, not just to the workplace. If more and more conditions are covered that are not directly attributable to the workplace, I think the Workers' Compensation Board is beginning a journey down a very dangerous road, and in the end it'll be the employers who pay directly and the employees who pay indirectly. It'll be the workers who pay indirectly since fewer people will be hired as employers face high costs once again.

Another concern for employers is the certain grey areas that we've seen pop up in Workers' Comp in the last few years — grey areas such as stress. Again there is stress in everyone's lives — at work and at home. I believe it must be very difficult to determine that a person suffering from too much stress in their life can attribute it directly to the work environment.

(1500)

I believe provisions such as stress, as injury or occupational disease, is going to prove very, very costly down the road. Other provinces, such as New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia put specific limitations on costly claims such as stress, chronic pain, and the ordinary diseases of life. Perhaps the same should be done here so everyone, workers and employers both, have a clearer understanding of what is covered and what isn't, and what may be covered down the road.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also concerned that when we're talking about occupational diseases we may travel down the road taken by some other provinces and appoint an occupational disease panel outside the auspices of the Workers' Compensation Board. While I am pleased that there is nothing in this legislation regarding such a panel, I know as well that the government was seriously considering this at one point.

One need only look at the experiences faced in other provinces such as Ontario, which did strike up an occupational disease panel to determine what was and was not covered under Workers' Comp. Eventually it fell prey to many different interest groups, and it ended up costing millions of dollars and was eventually scrapped. I would hate to see the same thing happen here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, in talking to those involved in the Workers' Compensation system, I am of the opinion that much more has to be done in the terms of bureaucracy surrounding the board.

Some people are involved in struggles with the board for years before their cases are finally settled. This goes against the very nature of the no-fault insurance that is supposed to prevent lengthy delays from occurring.

Mr. Speaker, Workers' Compensation is a very emotional issue for many people in this province judging from the phone calls and letters that come into our offices. Some advocates of injured workers see so many problems, in fact, that I understand they're staging a five-day rally in front of the legislature next month. I'm sure all MLAs have been invited to this rally.

And as I said, we as legislators must always remember there are two sides to this coin — employers as well as the employees. And I'll be very interested to hear what the people who show up for this week-long rally will have to say, not only about Workers' Comp but also about SGI no-fault insurance and long-term disability.

Mr. Speaker, in the end, after all the fixing that is to be done on Workers' Compensation Act, our ultimate goal must be fairness — fairness for the injured workers of course. They must be dealt with in a manner that allows them to retain their dignity. It must also be a system that helps them to recuperate from their injuries fully and sufficiently, in order to get back to work. That, I believe, is what most men and women want. And they are entitled to that, just as employers are entitled to be treated fairly by Workers' Compensation in terms of the rates they pay.

Mr. Speaker, we'll have much more to say on this Bill at a later date, but we do need to look at it a little more closely and consult with stakeholders. So at this time I move we adjourn debate on Bill 29.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 30

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 30 — The Tobacco Tax Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there's too many of us in this Assembly that would disagree with the intent of this particular Bill. Whether we're talking about smokers or non-smokers, most people are very well aware of, and very concerned as well, about the effects of smoking on the health of Canadians, and especially young Canadians.

On the whole I would have to agree with the minister, that the federal government's move in 1994 to reduce tobacco taxes and to match provincial tobacco tax cuts was a very backward move. Not only did this make tobacco cheaper and more accessible in the provinces that chose to participate, but it also created an open invitation to smuggling into provinces like ours that have decided to continue the high tobacco taxes.

As much as the members of our caucus ordinarily hate anything to do with taxes, every reasonable person has to hate more what tobacco is doing to the health of our young people. It is therefore quite appropriate that we in Saskatchewan should continue to take a hard line on smoking and on tobacco sales. On this score, I would like to state for the record some of the

facts about smoking that justify legislation like the one that we're discussing today.

By now almost everyone knows that smoking and other tobacco use causes cancer, heart disease, and emphysema. In fact smoking is the main cause of preventable death in Canada. A cocktail of more than 4,000 substances, more than 50 of them cancer causing, hits your lungs. Poisonous compounds like carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, and ammonia gas enter your bloodstream. Meanwhile nicotine begins to feed the cycle of addiction.

If you're allergic to smoke or susceptible to asthma, and if you smoke, the chances of developing asthma rise sharply. Flare-ups and chest spasms can begin quickly. And over the medium term, you become much more susceptible to cold, to flu, and to pneumonia.

Physically fit smokers broke bones and sprained ankles more often than similarly fit non-smokers. And the more the soldiers smoked, the more likely they were to develop blisters on the 160 kilometre marches.

Even adolescent smokers develop more respiratory problems like shortness of breath and wheezing, and suffer more severely from the symptoms. Young tobacco users have, and we'll list a few; abnormally high heart beats, low tolerance for exercise, lower lung capacity, worse asthma, and an increased risk of damaging arteries from fatty build-ups associated with heart disease.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every 13 seconds, someone in the world dies from a tobacco-related illness. And every year tobacco kills 45,000 Canadians, 418,000 Americans, and 2.5 million people worldwide. A member of the World Health Organization says we'll go to 4 million by the year 2000, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Even though more than 90 per cent of youth know that smoking is addictive, most children under 10 believe that if they were to start smoking they could stop at any time. In fact, although only 5 per cent of high school seniors believe they would still be smoking two years after graduation, 75 per cent were still smoking eight years later.

Here is some other smoking assumptions, attitudes, and behaviours of Canada's young people. And the source is the *Ottawa Citizen*, November, 1996. Twenty-nine per cent of 15- to 19-year-olds and 14 per cent of 10- to 14-year-olds are current smokers. Smoking among teens 15 to 19 years of age has increased 25 per cent since 1991. About 85 per cent of smokers began before the age of 16. The most common reason cited for starting is the influence of friends.

Eighty per cent of current smokers have seriously thought of quitting. And 80 per cent of those have made at least one attempt.

Corner stores are the number one source for cigarettes. In 1994 about half of 10- to 14-year-olds who tried to buy cigarettes in a store were never asked their age and were never refused when trying to buy cigarettes. Ninety-one per cent of youth believe tobacco is addictive. Eighty-three per cent who have seen tobacco company sponsorship advertisements feel that this is

really brand advertising.

The earlier people start smoking, the harder it is to quit when they are older. People who start smoking in their teenage years run the risk of becoming lifelong smokers. One-third to one-half of young people who try cigarettes go on to be daily smokers. Every 5 per cent of teenagers who smoke two or more cigarettes completely and overcome the initial discomforts of smoking, overcome the initial discomforts of smoking, will become regular smokers.

It takes an average of five attempts for an adult to successfully quit smoking. Nicotine addiction is a most widespread example of drug dependence in our country. In 1989 about 64 per cent of teenagers who are current smokers had made at least one serious attempt to quit and could not.

Clearly I could go on for a long time citing these sorts of statistics, Mr. Speaker, but underneath all the numbers is one simple truth, and that is something we are very well aware of but needs to be underlined. And that is that smoking kills.

So for these and many other reasons, we believe that this Bill is generally positive. We are therefore satisfied, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time, to see this Bill pass to second reading. Thank you.

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

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've just been joined by a group of students from Wolseley, Dr. Isman School, grade 4 students. They're accompanied by Loretta Kaczmariski, I believe — I hope I've got that right — and Stan Magel. And, Mr. Speaker, they've joined us this afternoon to observe the proceedings in the Assembly.

I'll look forward a little later on to meeting with the group. Unfortunately due to some of the responsibilities in the Assembly, will not be able to be with you for the whole process, but I've invited my colleague, the member from Cannington, to meet as well. But we look forward to meeting with you and talking about what you've observed as you sit here and observe the workings of the Assembly, and even as you tour the Legislative Building shortly.

So I'd like to invite the members to join with me in welcoming the students from Dr. Isman School in Wolseley.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 14 — The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998

The Deputy Chair: — I'll invite the minister to introduce his

officials.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. With us today we have Ms. Bonnie Durnford, seated at my side, who is the assistant deputy minister of Department of Social Services; and directly behind us, Ms. Lynn Allan, who is our director of child welfare.

Clause 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and to the minister and his officials, welcome.

Mr. Minister, a few questions regarding the Bill before us, Bill No. 14, An Act to amend The Adoption Act. And as you recall from your comments about the reasons for The Adoption Act before this Assembly, some of the comments I made in second reading debate regarding the Act.

And certainly, Mr. Speaker, you're aware of the fact that I've suggested some of the . . . a number of the changes that you're making, they're certainly welcome changes. And they're changes that I think will address some of the concerns that are there.

But I'd like to bring some questions forward that maybe you and I have already talked about and in some ways agreed or agreed upon or do tend to agree. But just for the sake of even the viewing public so that they can have a better understanding of what this piece of legislation is going to do, and how it's going to address some of the concerns that they may face or the questions that they have.

And in section 2 I understand the amendment to the Act recognizes the birth father in the adoption process. And as I indicated the other day, I applaud the change, as I've been informed by many people that the adoption process, indeed the custody process, does not recognize the rights of the father. And we've certainly had this and I'm sure that even in your office and your position as an MLA, that's been brought to your attention.

Have there in the past been any inquiries to the Department of Social Services by birth fathers wanting to contact their adoptive children?

(1515)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, certainly there have been requests from birth fathers. And we don't have a tally of exact numbers, but there certainly have been requests. We have the post-adoption program by which birth fathers can make inquiries. Of course we would check with the adoption records and so on to see if in fact the person who's making the inquiry is indeed the birth father.

And that is why we believe that the amendments we're making now will provide even a better opportunity for birth fathers in the future to make that kind of contact by including this information on the adoption order.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As well, conversely it would appear, and we've heard it on many occasions, where

children have looked up and as they've become older and certainly reached adulthood, on many occasions they have desired to certainly look up who the birth mother may have been, and seek that information. I would take it and I ask the question, have you had that same type of inquiry from children regarding who the birth father may have been?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, Mr. Chair, that's true. There would be inquiries from those who have been adopted in regard to their birth mother but equally in terms of their birth father; that's true.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you're saying that this amendment marks a new philosophy or way of looking at the process of including the birth father. Quite clearly this shows the former process was discriminatory towards the birth father and that's the way a lot of fathers that I've chatted with have talked about it.

And will this privilege, Mr. Minister, be extended to fathers and adopted children involved in the adoption process prior to 1998 after this Act comes into force?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chairman, I'm reminded by my officials that changes that were actually made to The Adoption Act in 1990 did open many doors for birth fathers formerly. These changes will not significantly address those who have been birth fathers. We believe that the changes in 1990 made some change that opened the doors for those birth fathers.

What the changes we make today will ensure in future, even more so, that birth fathers have the opportunity to be involved in that open adoption process at time of adoption. That there be clear record keeping and that in future, as those who are now being adopted may grow into adult years and wish to make contact with birth parents, that the process is even better.

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Minister, while you're suggesting what this piece of legislation is doing will make the process, I guess I'll use the words flow more smoothly, work in a more cooperative manner with birth parents and certainly in recognizing birth fathers as well, what you're also saying is it doesn't change it a lot for birth fathers prior to even the changes in 1990. Is that what you're indicating?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the 1990 changes did open the doors for birth fathers. With this piece of legislation we're essentially defining the birth father; to broaden that, to clarify that, to make certain in most circumstances — there will be circumstances that will vary from this — but in most circumstances that the birth father, as defined and identified by the birth mother, and as admitted by the birth father, that they can be part of that adoption process. And then, to some future time where through the open adoption process, the individuals who've been adopted may want to have that contact, that it be available to them.

So it is defining and broadening the ability for birth fathers to be involved right at the beginning. The actual access and so on is defined and available now through the change in 1990.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if I could

use a bit of an example as well — and correct me if I'm maybe wrong in using this example or the way I'm bringing it out — but I understand that in order for a birth mother to contact her adoptive child, if no access agreement has been made, she must submit a request with the department. Further, the adoptive child must submit a request to the department as well. So that indicates to me a willingness on behalf of both parties to seek this adoption. Can a birth father also make the same request?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, yes, the answer is yes. The birth father may make the very same request.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, as we look at the changes that are being brought forward in this Act, was the child advocate involved in the drafting of these amendments, and if so, how much was . . . or how much of the involvement was the child advocate involved in?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the child advocate will be aware of the changes that we're proposing. She was not part of the drafting of this particular piece of legislation, although there was a great deal of consultation done with adoptive parents and their representative organizations, and if I may say, with the legal community, because we are here dealing with legal matters. So there was a wide consultation.

The child advocate was not involved in the actual drafting but she is aware of what's happening.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, in section 5(4)(b) you state that the section is amended to ensure that birth parents are informed of their rights prior to the signing of the agreement. I'm wondering if you can clearly detail the rights of the birth parents and the problems with the system before this amendment, in detailing these rights.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, over the last number of years we have been working on the process of adoption to ensure that it is the very best process that we can provide. And so in terms of the actual adoption process now, there is home study required for all the independent adoptions that works very, very closely with the adoptive parents so that they fully understand the implications of adoption.

An issue that has arisen through this is the matter of access to birth parents. There has been some interpretation or some suggestion that access to birth parents should be guaranteed by law. We do not believe that that in fact represents what we believe is the true principle of adoption — so that the adoptive parents may adopt and with all confidence raise the adoptive child as their own.

Now we encourage the open adoption process where there is involvement of birth parents, but we maintain that that should be a privilege and not a legal right. And so what we are doing here in this section is making it very clear in law that access is not part of the adoption order, to give the adoptive parents the confidence that they may raise the child as their own.

But again, that said, we are very anxious to encourage the open adoption process and to involve both birth mother and birth father, and so the amendments around birth father to more facilitate the birth father . . . as not particularly as a result of

these amendments but through the process that has evolved over the last number of years. We worked very hard with adoptive parents and with birth parents; so that at the very outset everyone understands as clearly as possible all the implications, all the ramifications, and all the rights and privileges of adoption.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And that leads to a further question in section 16(1). And it talks about . . . you talked just a moment ago in response to the last question about access and communication. And as you're aware or will recall, I did make some comments in regards to that and I appreciate the comments you're making as well in response. The fact that for adoptive parents they need to know, and certainly begin to realize, that first of all when they are bringing their names forward for adoption, there are a number of responsibilities. They've got a responsibility to provide a good home atmosphere and raise the child to the best of their ability.

And I'm sure that many parents who do come forward for adoption do have some . . . I guess maybe may draw back a little bit and may reflect a little bit, and some concern as well in the areas where they might be concerned about the fact: will they be allowed the ability to indeed have full control in raising that child without fear of manipulation by the birth parents.

And from your comments, I understand that's where you're heading. And I take it that basically that's where subsection 16 is going as well.

And when you talk about . . . I think under an explanation, it mentions about clarifies the communication access agreements are not part of the adoption order, but it also talks that they're not enforceable. And I'm wondering what you mean by that term "not enforceable" as well, Mr. Minister. While we're thinking of addressing it so that there aren't interferences, is it even if there were communication access agreements; are you basically saying by law they really wouldn't be enforceable? That it would be difficult to enforce them? That they would create a problem so let's just address it and not have them as part of the new Act?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Yes, Mr. Chair, the member from Moosomin has it correct, that what this is saying is that these are not legally binding and that there would not be an option for someone then to sort of go back to the courts and demand more access. And it is to guarantee to those parents who are willing to take a child into their family and into their home under the process of adoption, that they in fact can be assured of the rights that would be enjoyed by any parents in our society.

It is again, I repeat, that we do encourage that open adoption process and encourage the communication agreements, because we think in the long run that is the most healthy relationship. But we do want to provide that solid assurance to adoptive parents that they can raise that child or those children in the competence of any other parent in the province.

Mr. Toth: — I thank you, Mr. Minister, and appreciate the fact that your officials have recognized this and recognized the need and have addressed it. Because it certainly would be unfortunate if we had to come back here next spring because we found that there was an area, especially when it comes to access

and communication, that was creating a problem and hadn't addressed it while we were doing a number of changes, major changes, to the Act.

Section 18(12) talks about . . . amendments to section 18(12) clarify that an adoption is revoked where there is a subsequent amendment. This seems to make sense, but I wonder if the minister can clarify whether this might have a serious impact if, for example, a child was adopted by a loving family who was to suddenly die without making provisions for the custody of their adopted child. If the child was subsequently adopted, my understanding of this clause is that the first adoption would be revoked.

And while it may be a simple house-cleaning matter, I think we need to ensure the integrity of the relationship between the first adoptive family and the child is not damaged. Will it also have an effect on the line of succession of property for that adopted child?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member raises I think, a very good question, a very significant point. And we're discussing it as we speak. So we may want to have some more, yet more dialogue.

In the circumstance where an adopted child's adoptive parents are both tragically killed, that adopted child does not lose any inheritance rights; that's clear. We expect that the circumstance that might be reflected in this, where an adoption would be revoked, our sort of only sense of where that might happen is if in fact — and I don't know if it's ever happened and for sure it would be a very rare occurrence — but if the adoptive parents, for some reason, turned out not to be appropriate parents or in fact abusive in some way.

And we would address that situation as we would in any other family, by in fact removing the child and placing it in foster care. That could be the circumstance where an adoption would be revoked. But in terms of the death of adoptive parents, all legal rights which would belong to a natural born child of those parents would remain with the adopted child.

(1530)

Mr. Toth: — I guess the other question that comes to the forefront, and maybe we missed it and I may have missed how I placed it as well, is if provisions haven't been made by the adoptive parents for custody of the child, who then takes charge? Like I would, I would assume that most adoptive parents just like . . . would treat this in much the same way as birth parents.

Unfortunately, Mr. Minister, I think many parents feel they're going to live for a long time and kind of put off making sure that there's some provisions in case something tragic like this happens. But in this case, what happens if there isn't anything done that really provides for the custody of that adoptive child, should the adoptive parents tragically be removed from the scene?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I do want to reflect to the member — he might agree with me on this — that all parents feel like they're going to live for ever, until they get teenagers

and then they feel they gain some years.

Mr. Chair, we would . . . in the case of adoptive parents, it would be as in natural parents. That the parenting responsibility would be to discuss or put in place in a will or in some other form, intentions for children if in the tragic circumstance, both parents are taken.

If that is not the case, either with adoptive parents or natural parents, if that indication is not provided, likely what would happen is that the family of the adoptive parents, as in natural parents, would group around and maybe make some decisions or take some responsibility.

If ultimately there were no family or other kin that could be available, it would fall to the Department of Social Services to arrange for the care of the child or children, which would be exactly the same in a family where the parents are natural to the children.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I think that's a point well taken. It certainly needs just to bring forward just for clarification, because as a natural parent you're right, most of us I think . . . in fact I'd be surprised if there aren't parents who have not taken the time to discuss with exactly next-of-kin, if certain things should happen, will you see to it that our children are looked after or parented or whatever.

And I think that in the adoptive-parent situation as well it's important, because it's not just the adoptive parents but certainly it's the extended family — it's the grandparents who . . . I think you will all note the fact that whether it's the adoptive parent or the grandparent or aunts and uncles — you all become very attached to a child. So I think it's just a normal process to allow this to happen.

The fact that if the only other option, if there aren't extended family members, then the department certainly feels that, and I understand would feel, would be responsible to take . . . and obligated to make sure that child is provided for. So I think that's an important thing for people to understand.

In section 21(4) I note the section as amended to clarify that if there is a conflict or any conflict between this Act and The Child and Family Services, this Act takes precedence. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you can give me an example of how or where this provision might come into place.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Again this would be in that extremely rare situation and I am not aware of it happening. But in that extremely rare situation where the adoptive parents, it is subsequently determined, are not suitable or fit for parenting of that child and the department would have to intervene to remove that child, who then may become a permanent ward of the department, this amendment then allows the department to share with that child information about their own personal history, i.e., their natural parents and the process of adoption. So it provides the legal right then for the department to act as the parents would, have the same right to provide that information.

This is a very rare circumstance, but we want to protect against every circumstance.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In section 23(1), and I'm not sure if I totally understand the section, the section refers to a situation where a child is living with only one of his or her parents, birth parents, presumably because of divorce, death, or because a parent was not married in the first place. This section discusses the process by which the new spouse of the custodial parent can adopt the child.

I'm interested in the situation where the birth parents are divorced and the non-custodial parent is still living. In the amendment it states that the non-custodial birth parent must be given notice of the application within a 30-day period or a period determined by the judge. The amendment says nothing about the need for agreement by the non-custodial parent.

Can the minister explain this exclusion and the impact this has on the rights of the non-custodial parent?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I want to be as precise as I can about this. There's many definitions here.

Currently the Act allows the non-custodial parent to provide consent for the adoption; that's at the outset of the adoption process. What this amendment wants to do is sort of simplify the process by simply saying then that the consent for the adoption equals the notice. So consent represents the notice.

So when the non-custodial parent consents to the adoption, that will be considered also the notice to the non-custodial parent, the very same person who is giving consent for the adoption.

Mr. Toth: — So would this . . . when you're talking of consent being given, when would consent be sought or be looked into? Would that be before notice is given? I guess that's where the question arises as well, is how does a non-custodial parent become aware of this adoptive procedure or process?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, that is assured by the court process itself. The court must ensure that the non-custodial parent has provided consent.

Now in the circumstance where that consent, at the end of the day, may not be forthcoming for the non-custodial parent, the court can supersede and still proceed with the adoption. But it is the responsibility of the court, through The Adoption Act, to seek the consent of the non-custodial parent.

So consent of course precedes the notice. We're trying to technically smooth this out so the consent becomes the notice. Having consented, one has been notified.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, as well, does this apply equally to common law spouses as it does to . . .

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — It would apply, Mr. Chair, to a common law spouse who is the natural parent or custodial parent. It might not apply if in fact the parents who are placing the child for adoption, the child is the natural child of one of those parents but the common law spouse has no relationship with the child. But in the circumstance where it's common law and they are the natural parents, then yes it would apply.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As well in this

legislation we talk about international adoptions. And I think we're all aware of the fact that adoption is clearly a very complicated process, and it becomes even more complicated when we start talking about not only provincial boundaries, but international boundaries and international adoptions.

While I'm not disputing that some of these complexities are not warranted, because we must make sure that we protect the rights of all parties involved, especially the child, you've provided some explanation regarding the amendments being made regarding international adoptions in reference to the Hague Convention.

Mr. Minister, it appears to me that your intention is consistent with these principles, but I want to note that even in the recent past, there have been incidents where the international adoption process is highly bureaucratic and it results in delays of up to one year, as we've seen just by . . . just after . . . not in this past year, but certainly last year a number of cases that hit the media.

This has a dramatic and I might say negative impact on all parties. And my heart goes out to adoptive parents who take a child into their house without even meeting them, only to be disappointed time and time again because of bureaucratic delays.

Mr. Minister, there's no doubt that for parents who wait for a year or two years, this is the longest period of their lives, and certainly this is not good for the child. First of all they are being adopted because they are not in an optimal situation, to say the least. And secondly, we all know how important it is for a child to be with loving parents in the early parts of their life. Not only does it promote the bonding process, but also it is important for the child's emotional, social, and intellectual development.

Mr. Minister, what do these changes do to ensure that bureaucratic delays are lessened while maintaining the integrity of the process of international adoption?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — This, and I, with the member from Moosomin, I think we would . . . we really do feel for those parents who are adopting internationally and face some of the, as the member describes them, the bureaucratic delays.

I believe the member would admit that most of those delays will be occurring in the country of origin, in the country of birth of the child. And we have little, or very little, mechanisms by which to deal with the bureaucracies at that end. We try to ensure that our own processes are as smooth and as flowing as possible.

Now I recognize the dilemma here, because we do want to protect parents and children from any unscrupulous activities that may be occurring in those international circumstances. We want the protections to be there, and some of those protections will create some processes delay. There's no doubt about that.

Directly to your question, our ability to organize outside of our own boundaries is extremely limited. I think worldwide, I believe we are benefiting by The Hague Convention so that jurisdictions around the world are now beginning to put their, as we are with this, put their processes and their regulations and their law into a harmonized situation; so at least we're all

dealing from the same set of rules.

We know and we hear, particularly from parents who are involved in Romania, that there have been some delays which, as you point out, are not just frustrating but may in fact not be providing to the children and the parents the best circumstance that we desire. But our ability at that end is pretty limited.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I certainly would encourage the department to continue to work and to see how we can facilitate the international adoption process even more. I think and believe, Mr. Minister, that other countries, while I guess we have to recognize the fact that countries in many cases just feel very strongly about themselves as well and don't really want to see children leaving their country . . .

Because I think as you have mentioned, certainly in Romania the problems that were rising out of the civil disobedience — I guess if I can use the term — and the atrocities that were taking place, by having and allowing adoptions, it was a recognition by the government of a problem that they were having difficulty in addressing even themselves, and so they were willing to allow this to happen.

But I think at the same time we're all — if I can use the word — proud, we're all proud people. And we don't want to acknowledge, by allowing adoptions and having people coming in and recognizing that there are a lot of little children that really don't have parents and whom haven't a place to go to . . . It doesn't speak well of your nation.

So I can appreciate the fact that there will be some difficulties in trying to put together the processes that will be needed to certainly allow for a smooth flow.

But I would certainly encourage your department, even working together with federal departments, to address some of these concerns, and to, I guess if you will, help other countries to realize that this isn't a slam on your nation, but certainly there are homes in this province that . . . our province or our country of Canada that are willing to open up their homes, families that are willing to open up their homes.

So I would say, let's continue to work towards building a smoother process that allows for the international adoptions. And I want to say to you and your staff who have joined you today, I commend you for the work that has been done in the area of adoption and addressing the number of the concerns. I thank you for your responses to the questions that I posed this afternoon.

(1545)

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 12 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, just before I make that motion, I too would want to join with the member from Moosomin in thanking the officials who have joined us here this afternoon — Bonnie Durnford and Lynn Allan — not just for the contribution they've made to our discussion today, but as the member pointed out, for the good work that they have

been doing over the last number of years around all of the adoption issues and processes in our province and far beyond it.

And so with that, Mr. Chair, I would like to move the Bill without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 14 — The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998

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

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Social Services Vote 36

The Deputy Chair: — As we begin, I'll invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated at my side is Ms. Glenda Yeates, deputy minister of the Department of Social Services. Just behind Glenda, Ms. Bonnie Durnford, assistant deputy minister. Directly behind me, Mr. Bob Wihlidal, executive director of our financial management division. Beside the deputy of Social Services, Mr. Phil Walsh, who is the executive director of our income security division. And just behind Phil, Mr. Richard Hazel, who is the executive director of family and youth services division. And I welcome our officials to these deliberations.

Subvote (SS01)

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Welcome, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials. My colleague has allowed me to start this afternoon asking questions. And I first of all want to start by saying I think your department is such an important one in our government because there's so many children and people that are counting on you that are . . . probably the people in our province that need some looking after and need some help. So I understand that you're probably very busy and you have tremendous responsibility.

I'm going to talk mostly about one area that I've had questioning on, and maybe you'll have an opportunity to go further with. My colleague hasn't returned. I wanted to ask you about the community development unit. I understand that there are workers in probably each of the regions, but I'm not sure what the purpose or the mission of this program is, and maybe you could outline that for me.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, our community development unit is essentially a small — in terms of the relative size of the Department of Social Services, which is a large department in terms of its personnel and responsibilities and budget — it is relatively a small unit.

We do not have exact numbers here, although we can get them. Well maybe we do now. We have . . . the unit at the provincial level is a unit of three people, three full-time equivalents in any event, so three positions at the provincial level. And then in our regions we may have workers who are doing this more or less on a full-time basis or on a part-time circumstance. So the scope of the department is relatively small.

But that, I hope, is not to minimize some of the importance of the work that the community development unit we know is doing and we hope can do even more in the future, which is to essentially work with local communities and to work with agencies within local communities, recognizing that in this vast province with its geography and its various . . . just the variety of communities in this province, that needs in an individual community and resources in an individual community may vary a great deal.

And we hope that we're tying the kind of programing that we're able to do and that we're able to support, as closely as we can with the real needs and the real resources within that community.

And so what we describe as our community development unit is really our mechanism for trying to relate with communities and with the resources that exist there, to be sure that if there's opportunities for us to partner or team with community-based organizations, that we're doing that as much as we can. If there are small economic development efforts that we might be a part of as a department, working with, again, community-based organizations, this is the sense of the community development unit. It is small, but I'm hoping — and know it is effective — and I'm hoping it can have even greater effect in the future.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I was wondering when this program was actually developed, when you started, when there was actually employees in this area. And I was wondering if the program has actually been evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the unit is two years . . . two years ago was established as a provincial unit. We have not done a formal evaluation of that unit, but what we have been doing are evaluations of each and every of the initiatives that the community development unit has brought forward and is involved with. And so we are evaluating on a project-by-project or an example-by-example basis.

Two of the community development projects or initiatives now that I have been able to see firsthand — I choose two from the city of Saskatoon — one is something called Quint Development, which is a community-based organization that works very closely with the Department of Social Services to provide opportunities for men and women who may today or have been receiving social assistance but can, through some of their own initiative and perhaps with some community development support, in fact become small entrepreneurs.

And so for example, I met a man who's been assisted by the Quint organization in Saskatoon. He was on welfare. Through the Quint organization, he was provided some basic tools, some basic carpentry tools. That individual now is independent of social assistance, has his own small contracting business and is

doing very well.

What he required was the support of some of the business skills that Quint can provide — some initial capital, small, but to provide him some tools — and that has given him the ability. That's one initiative that the community development unit has been involved in.

Another in Saskatoon which I believe has been extremely successful is an organization that I believe the member will be aware of. It's described as the Saskatoon Communities for Children, and working with a wide number of community-based organizations, organizations at the municipal level like the Saskatoon City Police department for instance, the Communities for Children have brought a large group of people together who all have the interests of children at heart and find now that they're working together, they in fact can achieve more by working together than by working independently.

Again, that's been another initiative of our community development unit, one that I think as our evaluations have shown us, is doing some very good work and of which we're quite proud.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, you used the word we a couple of times when it comes to evaluation. Does that mean that the evaluation is done directly in your department or is it done in each region where there is workers taking on a certain initiative?

(1600)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — As we move ahead, Mr. Chair . . . in fact we're evolving and learning as we go. The evaluation process now is a project through the community development initiative is going to be established. It must have built within it an evaluation process. So there is, on a project-by-project level, an evaluation process.

That will generally be done at the regional level but of course all the information is shared with the central office of the department. We have not . . . As we go, we're ensuring as best we can — of course we do with every program and every dollar that we spend — that we're getting the maximum return or benefit for the program and for the dollars expended.

We will, as . . . Now because I say the unit is two years old and we're only now sort of beginning to see some of the, some of the fruits of the labours of the unit, what we have seen thus far, I at least as minister am feeling relatively confident about, that will serve, will serve the people we are destined to serve — that is the citizens of our province.

And first of all this effort . . . these programs and initiatives will serve them well. But I think equally this unit will serve the communities in which we're a part well, and will in fact serve the department well.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, you said that the evaluation process is actually built into the project itself, so as they go along they . . . it's probably like a cash flow projection where you can see if you meet your own. And that's where my background is from, I guess that's what I'll relate it to.

But what I'm wondering is, they've basically evaluating themselves then. Who is looking at it overall to determine if this is . . . if it's a really good use of money? Because just because the criteria says within their own evaluation this is working, what I'm wondering is if the project itself are looked at by your department to determine is this a really good use of Social Services money.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Just to be clear I think with the member, the evaluation process will not be . . . While it is engaged in consultation with the project, it's not the project evaluating itself. But it will be officials and staff of Social Services that will be doing sort of the outside evaluation.

Now we don't contract evaluations from outside of our own department, but we do the evaluation. But it's not being done by the participants although they're certainly involved; you can't do a fair evaluation without involving them. But there will be officials within the department or within the region that will be doing the evaluation. Any project that will be funded through dollars provided through Social Services — any project — is on an annual basis to provide some evaluation because we budget annually for each of our expenditures.

In terms of the community development unit, why we believe this is effective, is now, and can be more effective. What is happening here actually is that this very small unit that has a very, relatively very small budget allocation is able to work with communities and in fact can lever funding in communities into something better. And so we believe this is a wise use of the tax dollar that we begin to work with communities. Not only working with communities, but we're able to lever some other sources of funding often to benefit the very people that we and the community agencies together are desiring to serve.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, does this mean now that Social Services can look at, and each region look at, individuals or individual concerns within a region and make decisions based on a certain area rather than trying to make them across the whole length and breadth of the province? Meaning that the special needs that may be happening in North Battleford compared to Watson, being that it's an entirely different area, they'd be able to have different types of programs in those two areas.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — On the very specific of the community development initiatives and projects — again it's a three-person unit province-wide with assistance by workers in regions — but in that specific, yes. That in fact is the goal, that we look for some unique opportunities community by community.

There are other programs of which the department is involved with under the child action plan. For instance we're involved with the prevention and support grants. Now that would draw in seven other departments. But in terms of the approval for projects under prevention and support grants, again there will be local decision-making committees that will tailor and approve projects on a more local basis.

However in some of our other programing there is a desire for much more consistency in terms of our social assistance rates. For instance we do take into account some local circumstances, housing costs, and so on. But generally there will be a

consistent application of programing across the province so that we have a fairness. It wouldn't matter therefore if you lived in Watson or you lived in North Battleford, you could expect a similar level of income support under social assistance.

But when we're talking about the community development unit, which we are, that unit in fact seeks local uniqueness. So what works in Saskatoon for instance, the Saskatoon Communities for Children, or Quint organization may not work at all in the city of Moose Jaw. Something quite different might work in the city of Moose Jaw.

And so that unit does in fact look for what makes situations unique and what resources may be unique to the community and how can we work together.

Ms. Draude: — I understand that there are three full-time employees and I'm wondering if you can tell me what the budget allocation for this community development unit is including these three full-time employees.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, in this budget the total allocation is \$205,390 — \$205,390 — and that will provide for salary and related office expense and so on.

Ms. Draude: — One of the people that was last year I think working in that department, I understand from a press release, is now working with the Department of Labour under their new balancing work and family program. I'm wondering if this person has been replaced in this unit, or if wages are paid, which department is paying the wages?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the officials advise me that Ms. Martin has been seconded to the Department of Labour up until September of this year to do this important work of balancing work and family. That in fact she is still receiving her salary from the Department of Social Services, but because she is seconded by Labour, when her term there is finished, that we will receive, the Department of Social Services will receive from the Department of Labour a lump-sum payment to make up for the time that she has provided service to the Department of Labour. And in the interim, we have not filled her position knowing that she will return to that work in September.

Ms. Draude: — Can you give me an idea of how many community development staff are spending time assisting or writing grant proposals for these community-based organizations?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the member may have a more specific concern or question; we welcome it. There will be, we're confident, there will be circumstances where the community development folks will assist community-based organizations in preparing grant requests, for instance, under prevention of support grant work or in some other program. I personally would not see that as inappropriate. That's part of their task to work with community-based organizations. And those organizations would look to these professionals to say, could you give us a hand, give us some pointers, and that sort of thing.

We're not aware of any that we could sort of document as having received specific help from the community development

unit, but they may well exist. If the member has a more specific question, we'd be sure happy to try and answer it.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess I'm wondering if in each division where there are . . . somebody isn't hired specifically for this job and they were asked to take time away from doing their job, whether it's a mental health job and they want to write a proposal, is their wages allocated or is it changed at all? Is it given to this program or are they . . . is it understood in your department that they spent some time doing work on the community development program rather than their normal job?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I hope I understand the member's question, and I would respond in the following way. That we have a variety of professionals who provide services through the Department of Social Services and so we will have income workers who will deal primarily with the distribution of social assistance, and intake and so on, with our social assistance clientele.

We will have child and family protection workers who work with children and families. We will have verification workers who work to ensure that benefits and so on are being appropriately provided. We have some small group of people who work in community development. We have some people within the department who work in policy areas, some who work in financial management, and so on.

Now generally, generally, those who are at work in the Department of Social Services will be nine out of ten, or more than that, focused exactly on their work.

This is not to say that our workers are not involved in community as well. I mean obviously that which brings people to devote their life to the work of social work gives them a vent to be involved in their communities.

I know in my own community — social workers that I see employed in the department — I see many times after hours involved in all sorts of community organizations and fund-raising projects and other contemporary political activities. So they may in those community contexts be offering some of their own expertise and experience to assist groups.

It would be rare that anybody on their sort of working hours would be working at grant applications on behalf of a community-based group. It may occur, and with our community development unit that may in fact be a part of what they see as their role within the community, and I would not particularly disagree in that regard.

So again I ask the member if there's a more specific circumstance that she would seek information about, we'd be pleased to try and answer.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to you and your officials again. And dealing with Social Services, an area I want to raise a few questions in regards to the recent release of the, what you call the most significant social program in 30 years, and some of the changes and the actions you are taking — talking about social assistance and trying to make it more responsive, I guess if I can use the word, if I can use that

word, to the needs of Saskatchewan people.

It's one of the things that I've talked about, talked about in the past — we've talked about for a number of years — is recognizing the fact that there are individuals in this province who don't necessarily enjoy being on social assistance, find themselves and have a found themselves in the past where even if they did take some partial employment opportunity that might be available, it was like they were being penalized for having taken that employment opportunity because they would basically lose any assistance if there was any substantial income from the employment opportunity to the point that they would say, well, why bother working.

And I think that's one of the comments you mentioned when you were talking about the changes to the social program, and some of the changes that you're talking about in regards to how we address social assistance and how we look at individuals and how we help them to feel good about themselves and feel that they are contributors to society rather than just taking from society.

And, Mr. Minister, what I would like first of all is just a few comments from you in regards as to how you see this program working. And I understand as well, it's just nicely coming into effect. When do you anticipate that this program will be fully up and running and what has been done to date to indeed implement the intents of the program that you just announced.

(1615)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I appreciate his . . . And we have not simply in public debates within this Chamber but in more private and behind the bar kind of conversations, we've talked about many of the challenges that exist within our current social assistance program and how we might be able to improve that program to, as the member indicates, to make it more responsive to people who find themselves in that circumstance of low income.

And the member, I can repeat, is absolutely correct when he says that a significant number of people who today will be receiving support from social assistance, from welfare, in our province do not wish . . . If they could be off that system tomorrow, they'd be gone.

Unfortunately, and sometimes with the best of intentions, we have in my view over the past 30 years in social assistance created a system — and again I say: with some of the best intentions — we have created a system which has an ability to entrap people within that very system.

Sometimes it's described as the welfare wall, where once in the system it is very, very difficult for some families to ascend that wall and find the security that lets them move beyond that wall. We've built that wall, Mr. Chair, and through these programs and initiatives we're trying to bring that wall down. We're trying to tear that welfare wall down.

Because you see, Mr. Chair, we take the view that you want to be absolutely sure that the families can be better off working than receiving social assistance. We just want to make sure that that's the case. It is not the case today.

In fact under the current system, if you're a family and you are able to secure some working income, we allow that family to keep only a very, very small portion of that income before we then begin to deduct from their welfare benefits. And so as you earn more from your work we in fact lower your benefits.

Now at the end of the month of course you have the same amount of disposable income, even though you've been significantly contributing to your own income through your own work. That's a disincentive, Mr. Chair, it's a real disincentive.

Equally a disincentive for families with children — particularly single mothers and we know that a significant number of those who must have some financial support will be single mothers with children in their care. Once you are receiving social assistance benefits, we — through the department, through the Department of Health — provide the full range of health coverage for those children.

But under the current system the moment that that young, single mother is able to access enough employment income or maintenance income from a former spouse or the parent of the children, the father of the children, as soon as she is able to secure enough of her own income to move beyond the welfare cut-off, at that moment she's also lost all of her health benefits for the children, which for a single parent can be a very significant deterrent to moving beyond social assistance. Those are but two examples and there's many more.

So what we are trying to do is bring down that welfare wall of the programs which we have described as our building independence strategy and investment in families and investing in people; that we have described, as the member says, one of the most significant reforms of the welfare system that we've seen in our province for 30 years. We want to bring that wall down.

And so a key component, two of the key components here of the new initiatives, is something we describe as the Saskatchewan employment supplement, where as opposed to the current circumstance where someone on welfare who is able to access some earned income will see that income deducted from their cheque, what we intend to do, Mr. Chair, is to provide in fact an incentive — an employment supplement. We in fact will supplement those wages. And based on the numbers of children and the amount of wage, we will supplement those wages to encourage people, to encourage that independence that comes from work and that pride of daily activity and so on. That's the employment supplement program.

We are also putting in place under this set of initiatives something we call the family benefits plan. And so those health benefits which are now provided to children on welfare, to the children of families who are receiving social assistance, will be now provided to children of low-income families well, well beyond what is today the welfare cut-off line — well beyond. We expect that these benefits will now be available to some 80,000 children in 40,000 households across the province.

And so that single parent or those dual parents who today are on social assistance, who are beginning to see their way into more employment income and moving beyond social assistance will

be able to leave social assistance without fear of losing the health benefits for their children. We want to erase that as a deterrent; we want to invest in those children and in their health.

Equally, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chair, we have been working with the federal government in the creation of what is now widely described as the child benefit. The federal government has agreed to contribute now \$850 million to this national program, another 850 in upcoming budgets. We are contributing — unlike most other provinces — we are contributing to create a child benefit for the children of Saskatchewan which will lift all children in this province off of welfare; that we will be providing for all children, for their basic needs, not in the traditional welfare system but through the child benefit.

That, Mr. Speaker, is an important, important change of philosophy as well as an injection of new monies. Because the child benefit again will not just go to those on welfare, but it will be available to a broader range, a much broader range of families that are sometimes described as the working poor, whose incomes are very low but not falling into that category which would provide them a welfare benefit. So the child benefit again will be extended to a much broader range of families in our province.

We're very excited about these programs. We firmly believe that while we don't look for immediate turnarounds, that we are setting the stage here for a significant change both in the numbers of people who'd be receiving social assistance but the whole philosophy of social assistance.

I believe the member asked when the programs, when we expect to have them fully up and running. The target start date is officially July 1 of this year. They will then . . . it will take through the month of July to have the programs up and fully functioning, and so in essence it will be August 1 or the end of July when the programs really begin to flow.

I do want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to say that because these programs will be available to a broad range of families who live in low income circumstances not just those who today are receiving social assistance but a broad range of families across our province, we are taking what steps we can in this intervening period leading up to July to try and inform those families of these benefits which will be available.

Some of those benefits will be available simply as a result of having filed an income tax report. Incomes of the appropriate levels filed in income tax will immediately qualify them for the child benefit. We will immediately then qualify those families for their family health benefits. We do want those families to know that those benefits, family health will be there.

The child benefit cheques, of course, they will see appear in their direct deposit bank accounts or in mailings. But the employment supplement program it's going to be a matter of a phone application for that program.

We want families to know about these projects and programs. And so we're taking this period of time between announcement in the spring to the summer months when they will begin in July to try and inform families. And I just encourage anyone

who may be following the legislative debates to know that information about all of these programs is available through a 1-800 or a 1-888 line, a 1-888 line. The number is 1-888-488-6385 — 1-888-488-6385.

We've been doing . . . trying to publicize this number through some print ads. We've had some — a few radio ads — and we've been taking out some ads in the larger urban centres that have the buses and the bus little billboards up in the buses. We're providing these brochures to as many facilities, offices, places, all of our housing units, medical offices, churches to try and get this information into the hands of families because we believe that these programs are an exciting beginning. And we want all the families who are eligible for them to begin to enjoy those benefits.

So I thank the member for his question. I look forward to any . . . the specific questions he may have about the programs.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, you talked about employment supplement, child benefit. I heard you make a comment in regards to the fact that people will just see the cheques automatically appear in the mail. You made some comments in regards to the income tax return.

I guess a couple questions I would have, first of all, Mr. Minister, what criteria when you look at the income tax return? Are you just going to look at income tax returns? And if it falls, if the income, net income, falls below a certain level you're going to automatically spit out child benefits or supplement cheques?

What are the criteria you're setting up? Because I'm afraid, Mr. Minister, you'll be aware of it as well as I will that you may be . . . it's possible that if you just go with income tax returns a person's net income may be very low but they may have had a fair, substantial amount of change has moved through their hands with expenses and everything. It may cut back on it. That doesn't necessarily say that they're in a low-income bracket.

So I guess what I would like to know, number one, as you look at the income tax returns, do they just automatically . . . does the department just automatically take these returns, review them, or is this in consultation with the federal department in addressing this concern? And as well, it almost sounds to me like there is, would be no request for assistance from parents. Is that what I'm hearing, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the child benefit, because we have — we and other provinces but Saskatchewan in the lead actually — have been able to move the federal government and all provinces into support for a national program, which we believe is a better — it's a better program because it can offer the resources of the federal government; it will be a national, a unifying kind of a program and so on.

We have been able to move the federal government into this kind of program. Therefore we are working with the federal government for the delivery of the program.

Now you will know that currently the federal government does provide the CCTB — the Canadian Child Tax Benefit. This program will exactly parallel the current CCTB, so all of the

checks and balances that the federal government now use to provide those benefits to low income Canadian families will be the same.

We're appreciative of this in many ways because it can therefore provide that benefit with absolutely no administrative cost, new administrative cost for us, for the provinces. It will be delivered through Revenue Canada through the existing mechanisms that the federal government now have.

Now I think the member makes a significant and important point that no one desires to see benefits to circumstances where benefits are not desired. Equally, we don't want to see a circumstance where conditions may change for a family since the last time we filed anything. We want to also have the ability to ensure the families that, whose circumstances may change for the worst, we're able to support them as well.

But we have adopted this mechanism of using the income tax filing which I think essentially has served well in providing the current federal benefits to low income families. I think essentially it has worked well. We've opted to do that to avoid the necessity of creating an entire administration new and separate and apart, provincially, to administer that benefit. That would be a large cost to us to do that.

We're making administrative changes obviously for these programs, but if we had to start actually mailing out the cheques and doing all the direct deposits and everything else, that would be a large, another large administrative task, and so we're pleased to work with the federal government on this.

We also believe it simplifies it for families. It simplifies it for families. It essentially requires that the filling out of the income tax form which we are obliged by law to fill out accurately and truthfully, that then will through Revenue Canada be assessed to whether benefits can be triggered or not. We will then have the ability through Revenue Canada to receive that list of names who are receiving benefits, then we can provide the families health benefits that we will provide through the Department of Health to that same group of family.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess the question does come up as well is what if a family does find themselves in a situation whereby their employment opportunities changes dramatically in the fiscal year, and you've used the last taxation year and the information off of the income tax.

Is there a process in place whereby families who may find themselves in a difficult situation just immediately, that they weren't expecting, can certainly apply for? Or what is the process that is involved?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, we've been cognizant of that. And I spoke moments ago about the benefits of working with the federal government, well there are drawbacks. And some of the . . . I mean, they have rules and policies which we may — may or may not adhere to. And on occasion we've run into situations where we don't like what they're doing.

The federal government has made it very clear that through Revenue Canada they will not, mid-year, accept new entrants for . . . that it has to be done on the annual income tax filing. So

cognizant of that, whether we like it or not, that's the rule they set.

So cognizant of that, what we have determined is this. If a family in our province has a significant change in their financial status . . . And you're right. I mean, hardly a family in Saskatchewan in this decade of the 20th century, some of the securities that we knew many years ago are not there. We do see workplaces all of a sudden decide to move or close or something, and there can be a big change in circumstance.

(1630)

So what we will do in that situation where a family finds itself in financial need for their children, we would encourage that family, as we do today, to approach the Department of Social Services. If in fact their income levels have fallen below what the basic needs of their family is, then we will provide to that family, benefits. And we will provide for the children of that family, benefits that will equal the child benefit until such time as that family can qualify for the child benefit.

And so we will, the Department of Social Services, through the process that we use now with families in social assistance, be sure that those children will receive, if they qualify, will receive the benefits and will not be left in any way destitute.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, I'd certainly like to follow up on this a bit more but I have a couple people waiting for me as well. So I'm pleased to allow the member from Kelvington-Wadena to follow up with some more questions. Thank you for your responses today.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I'd like to follow up on some of the questioning from the member from Moosomin. I'm wondering, there are young, usually young mothers who may have been on social services and then started going to university which meant that they actually are then looked after under Department of Education rather than Social Services. And I'm wondering if the child benefit is something that they're going to be able to obtain as well and how it's going work specifically for them.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I regretfully did not bring with me today . . . The Department of Post-Secondary Education has put together some information that will describe precisely the circumstances which will face a whole variety of those who will be students under the new programs. And of course because the programs . . . these programs apply to parents with children, they would not apply to the single individual at university or in post-secondary training. But with that student be it single or . . . be the person single or married with family, these are family programs.

And I will ask . . . I will get from the Minister of Post-Secondary a copy of this and provide it to the member because it was very helpful for me to see in very detailed form exactly how these programs will impact on students with children, particularly single moms who made it . . . desiring to get some further education — post-secondary high school or post-secondary SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) or university or other training opportunities.

What I was pleased to see in the detail that had been laid out was the dramatic improvement in circumstance that this will offer to that young mom with children going back to school. With the combination of the provincial training allowance and supports there, with the change in the student loan provisions which will move some of that loan, traditional loan money which has become debt on students now, to a bursary program which is a great support, with the addition of the child benefit supports and the family health supports, the difference has been detailed by the Department of Post-Secondary Education for students is in fact dramatic.

And my belief is this will encourage, really encourage young single parents or young married parents or parents of any age for that matter, to seek that education that can give them the step up to independence. I will just ensure that we get that information and can provide you the very specific implications. All I know is that it's very, very positive.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I'm sure that there are a lot of young people out there really looking forward to this information because it will be a benefit for them.

I'm wondering if you could address the issue of child care costs as covered under the new program. Just give us an outline of how child care costs will be covered now.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — What we're endeavouring to do, Mr. Chair, through the child benefit and the other benefits that we're trying to bring to low income families, is to provide for that family a stronger base of income, some of which can be available for child care, whatever the arrangement they may have.

Now low income families typically will qualify for the subsidy, the subsidized child care spaces. Not all low income families may desire to utilize a subsidized child care facility; they may have more personal or private arrangements. What we're endeavouring to do is put more financial resources in the hands of those families to better meet their child care needs.

We fully recognize that as we encourage people to seek employment for instance, and in fact will provide that maintenance . . . or the employment supplement, often with employment comes new costs, again particularly for single moms. There will be perhaps some new child care costs; there may be other work-related costs in terms of uniforms or other equipment needs and so on.

So again, as we build the child benefit and as we provide a supplement to that working income, we're hoping that those new income additions will assist that parent or those parents in meeting some of the new costs of work which . . . or for that matter an education, where there may be new child care costs.

So what we're trying to do is maintain our child care network of subsidized spaces. We'd like to be building that, perhaps even building it more than we have been able to, but to maintain of course the subsidized child care operations across the province. But at the same time to provide more benefits to individual families, that they can make their own child care choices.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In rural

Saskatchewan, there is . . . I guess I can't give you . . . I don't know how many subsidized spaces there are in rural Saskatchewan. I know in my area there aren't very many at all. Maybe you could give me an idea of how many there are and if you're looking at the possibility of increasing the number of subsidized spaces. Because even with this new, with the new plan, if there isn't spaces available, it's going to be very tough on, again, low income families or young mothers, and it's one area that I feel we should be addressing.

Rural Saskatchewan has very distinct problems when it comes to issues of child care and I would appreciate your telling me what your government intends to do to address some of these problems.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we do not have, at least with us today, a strict breakdown of what would be described as urban or rural child care spaces. I can tell the member that we have, province-wide in child care centres and in family child care homes, a total of 6,980 subsidized spaces — 6,980. And these will include our infant teen centres in the schools, in some of the schools of our province. So the total number of spaces is 6,980.

But I think the member raises a very important and significant issue in this province. That the needs of child care in rural Saskatchewan can be quite different, quite different than the needs in urban Saskatchewan, particularly in a farming community, where the need for child care may not be a — well it would be in some circumstances but it may not be in all circumstances — a 12-month need, where we have the intensive period of spring seeding, we have harvest in the fall, and in some farming communities, that's when the family may require or need some exceptional child care services.

So in 1995-96 we began in some small ways, but made a beginning and it has grown, to fund some pilot projects in northern and rural communities to look at some different operating models that might better meet the needs of rural communities. And I can illustrate for the member one or two examples of those.

We are developing what's described as a rural extended family child care model. Now this would extend some hours or a weekly service for up to 12 children in a provider's home if there's a second care-giver there. We currently have five such homes operational, and the indication that I have is that they're showing some very positive results in relieving some of those seasonal child care pressures that happen, particularly in farming communities.

We've got now rural . . . child care centre pilot projects going on in Dundurn, in Moosomin, in Shaunavon, and in Redvers. And again these are offering extended hours of operation during the peak farming seasons. And they're also offering some special transportation to and from the farm, not unlike the traditional school bus for public and high school children.

In the Outlook area, what they have done there — I've spoken to people involved in this; it too is proving some success — they're developing a registry of child care opportunities in the community; which registry again will be available to farm families and rural families in some of those peak needs so that

they can know who might be available within the community to provide child care on a more short-term basis. And I'm told by the information here — and I didn't know this — that there's a similar project now being developed in and around Yorkton.

In Zenon Park we've made some particular arrangements around staffing ratios for special ages of children, again to allow a little more flexibility, knowing that the needs will be . . . need to be a little more flexible in the rural community.

So there are a number of initiatives going on. They are, as I say, beginning in 1995-96 so we're still relatively new. But I think we're again working with communities trying to find some unique solutions to some of the unique concerns that will exist in our . . . in rural Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I'm wondering if, for the subsidized day care spaces, if there's actually . . . do you keep track of a waiting-list like you would a waiting-list in a hospital? And if you could tell me what the numbers are on that waiting-list and possibly compare . . . telling me if they're going up or down in the last few years.

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we do not have available to us exact numbers of the families or children who would be on waiting-lists. Because each of our centres, the centres are not operated by the department but they will receive funding from the department. We do know this; I can say this. There is a waiting-list; there's no doubt about that.

We have been working over the last number of years to try and build our number of subsidized bases. We were more than a little disappointed when the federal government announced to all Canadians — both politically, through political election campaigns and then even through more formal announcements — that they were undertaking a major new national child care initiative, and then it just disappeared.

The whole nation was expecting a fair commitment from the federal government to creating new spaces. We were very hopeful that that would happen because we do have need in our province. There is no doubt about that. We've been trying to address it ourselves with increasing support to our child care branch but there's still much work to be done.

I do know this, there are in the province today 26 new groups who have requested funding for the establishment of a child care facility — 26 across the province. And we have 32 of our existing child care organizations either addressing, or requesting more spaces or a greater parent subsidy. I'm sorry I can't give you any sort of exact numbers on the waiting-list. There is a waiting-list, there's no doubt about that, indicative of the fact that we have 26 groups around the province seeking to begin child care, a new child care operation in their community, and another 32 of our existing services. And then we have some other examples too of more unique situations where there's some requests before us for school-based services and so on.

So we've made some steps forward; we have another growth within this budget of support to child care. We've been, over the last two years and again this year, been able to assist our

child care centres in providing a better wage level for the workers. This seemed to me was something very important that we should do, for people who work in our child care are caring for the most precious of our resources — our kids — and the levels of salary were extremely low in comparison to any other sector. And so we have devoted some resources to our child care budget that are very specifically directed to go to the salary and benefits of child care workers, because we do see these as very important players in the care of children.

They're really . . . I mean tragically in some ways, I think we have the vision, or some have the vision, that day care centres and child care centres are babysitting services. They do provide that care, but these are essentially early childhood education programs. These children are receiving early childhood education; they're being shaped for a lifetime while they are there. And so we want to, as best we can, which may not get to be sufficient but as best we can, reflect what we believe are the value of those people who work within those centres.

So we've got lots of work to do. We made . . . we've been able to take some steps forward but again we've got lots of work to do. And I'll just say one more time, we and every province I think in Canada, was real disappointed when the federal government announced the national child care initiative and then it just disappeared and not one thin dime was ever spent.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You're preaching to the converted if you're going to try and tell me the most important thing is our children because I agree with you. But I am wondering, can . . . you talked about building the number of subsidized spaces. Have you actually done that? What has been the increase in number of spaces in the last year?

And is there . . . even though you don't have the actual number on the waiting-list, can you tell me if the number of people that are on the waiting-list is increasing in the last few years? I would think that with the increase in job numbers that we've been talking about, there is probably a relative increase in the number of people looking for help to look after their children as well.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We will provide . . . All we have — all I have — we have is this year's budget stuff. So we'd know the spaces this year; we will get for the member a comparison over the last number of years. I can say to the member that in . . . since '92-93, we've tracked sort of our budgetary expenditures in child care, and those expenditures have grown \$3.7 million in that period of time and she'll see this reflected in the numbers when we provide them.

We've been able to double the number of teen-infant spaces. We've been able to begin two preschool support programs. Again we've increased its centre operating grants to enhance the wages. We've enhanced our infant-toddler subsidy rates. We've undertaken some education and information campaigns. We've increased the special needs grants. We've spent, of that money, 1.5 million on enhanced wages to our workers. And last year we were very pleased to be able to provide a million dollars in capital enhancements to our child care centres to ensure that all of the centres, every centre in Saskatchewan, now meets the standard codes of our child care facilities.

I was able to tour a number of our centres last year under this program. Many of them installed new windows, natural lighting; some fire and safety issues were addressed. We have in this budget, as the member will know — she has studied the budget documents — again a million dollars within this budget for child care facilities and the child care programs. We want to work very, very closely with the Child Care Advisory Board on exactly where those funds will be best utilized.

I as minister and we as a department, count very heavily on the advice and the consultation of the Child Care Advisory. And these are people who are child care operators. Some of them sit on boards, some of them are front-line workers — all of them deeply involved in the provision of child care. They come from every corner of our province. So we'll want to work with them in terms of that million dollar allocation that's in this year's budget.

Last year the bulk of that allocation did go to capital needs to bring the day care centres up to standard. Some of it this year might be appropriately spent there but there may be other areas of need.

We will provide for the member the numbers of spaces over the last . . . tracking them back a number of years.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I am going to implore you to look very . . . to look at rural Saskatchewan, because I think that when it comes to the needs out there, I know that there's needs right across this province. And you've addressed many of the issues in the last few years, but I haven't seen a great change in what's happening either in the day care facilities or the opportunities in rural Saskatchewan.

It's one of my areas of concern, that rural Saskatchewan is being ignored, and I think this is one area where again we haven't seen any progress or any opportunity to keep the infrastructure. And I know people . . . usually when you talk about infrastructure you're talking about roads and schools. But in order to create jobs, you're going to have to have something to encourage families to live there. Young families are going to need some help the same way they need them in the cities, and I again ask that you look for something for the day cares in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, just a couple of more questions on the new programs. I know it's a joint venture with the federal government. Are the cheques or the monies sent out from the federal government or the provincial government?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The Child Benefit is a joint initiative. Our family benefits program and our employment supplement, those are provincial programs solely. But the Child Benefit is a shared program, federal and provincial, and so we describe it as a national program. It's neither federal nor provincial; it is a national program.

The cheques — to your question — the cheques will be delivered by the federal government. Those cheques, when they . . . because Saskatchewan is teaming with our own Child Benefit, and investing significant resources there — other provinces are choosing not to do that — the cheque itself, when

it is delivered to the family in Saskatchewan, will indicate the Saskatchewan wheat sheaf and the Canadian flag. It will be clear on the cheque itself that this is a joint, federal-provincial — a national — program.

But the administration of those cheques, the mailing and so on, will be provided by the federal government, for which we are grateful, believing that it's better not to duplicate bureaucracies and administrations any more than we absolutely have to.

I do want to say this though: the majority now — and I think this majority will grow over the next number of years — the majority of families now see those benefits brought to their home or to their family through a direct deposit in a banking account. This too is savings to the public purse, if we are not required to provide that postage and that envelope and that paper but can do that electronic transfer into a bank account. It increases security for that amount of money. It's a sure deposit. It provides a more timely deposit. It saves administrative costs.

And if there is any concern — if I may say it again — this is I think reflective of some of our more rural circumstances where, I know when I lived in a small community, I had a post office box. In fact I just used General Delivery. There has been I think on occasion, some concern that families are not particularly anxious for everyone in town to know that they may be of a circumstance where they are receiving a benefit.

Again the benefit, direct deposit there, is of course, it is absolutely confidential. There can be no need to worry about any exposure or anything like that; so we encourage, both in terms of social assistance, and I would encourage families with the Child Benefit, that they set up the direct deposit mechanism. And in fact I've met with some individuals in the banking field, encouraging them to explain to their customers how easy it is to have a bank account, to deny no one a bank account, and to make that available for direct deposit.

To your question along with it, yes, it's the federal government who writes the cheques and will do the administration.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

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