

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 on this petition come from the community of Weyburn. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition to the Assembly 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 community of Radville. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today. 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 from Weyburn, Moose Jaw, Radville, and Ceylon. I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to 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.

This is signed by the people of Lake Alma, and Radville, Saskatchewan. I so present.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to present a petition about people concerned about the impending

closure of the Plains Health Centre. 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 all from the community of Radville.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased as well to present a petition to the Assembly this afternoon dealing with the closure of the Plains hospital and the situation concerning a moratorium. The petitioners come from the Radville area of Saskatchewan.

I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition has signatures on it from the community of Ituna.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I 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 from the city of Weyburn. I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens in Saskatchewan over the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The people who have signed this particular petition are from the communities of Ituna, as well as Hubbard, Foam Lake. And I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I present petitions this afternoon from people of Saskatchewan distraught over crumbling health care under the NDP (New Democratic Party) and particularly about the impending closure of the Plains Health Centre. Your petitioners this afternoon come from the communities of Ituna

and Homefield.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues here today in bringing forth petitions, people throughout the province, in their efforts to stop the closure of the Plains hospital:

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 people that have signed the petitions that I have today are from the Assiniboia, Viceroy, and Limerick area of the province. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to present petitions with regards to the twinning of the No. 1 Highway:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

From the communities mostly of Medicine Hat, Alberta. Mr. Speaker, there's a few from Fox Valley, from Hilda, from Drumheller, and from Alsask as well. I'm happy to present them on their behalf today.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are seeking justice for men and women who have lost their spouses in job-related fatalities:

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 their pensions are reinstated and the revoked pensions reimbursed to them retroactively and with interest, as requested by the statement of entitlement presented to the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) on October 27, 1997.

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

Mr. Speaker, people have signed this from not only Regina but North Battleford, Medicine Hat, and other communities.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province of Saskatchewan petitioning the

Assembly on the following matters: the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; to save the Plains Health Centre; to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre; to have Workers' Compensation Board reinstate pensions for disenfranchised widows and widowers; and to relocate Highway No. 40 to alleviate congestion at the entrance to North Battleford.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT, AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and duty to present the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations which is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, your committee, in examining the matters of the acquisition, management, and sale of Channel Lake Petroleum Ltd. by SaskPower and the payments to Mr. John R. Messer when he ceased to serve as president of SaskPower, has concluded that expert assistance is required in order for this committee to fully carry out its terms of reference.

Your committee recommends therefore, that the Assembly do authorize the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations to enter into a contract with an independent oil and gas industry expert who shall be directed to do the following:

(1) Evaluate the terms of the long-term gas supply contract awarded to DEML (Direct Energy Marketing Limited) as part of the sale of Channel Lake Petroleum to determine whether the contract is within industry standards; and

(2) That if the long-term gas supply contract is not within industry standards, to provide information to the committee as to what those industry standards are.

I do now present my report, and with leave, Mr. Speaker, I would move concurrence.

The Speaker: — Leave is not required and the hon. member . . . it is in order to proceed to the motion.

Ms. Lorje: — I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I do now move:

That the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations be now concurred in.

I move that, seconded by the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 45 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Economic and Cooperative Development: what criteria has to be met to establish a new REDA, regional economic development association; when the south-west was split with one REDA existing

within the other, what were the benefits foreseen; what was the division of the south-west, or has the south-west accomplished so far; how has this affected the one-window approach formerly supported by the minister; and has there been any problems with the divisions of money and power?

I so submit.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I gives me great pleasure to introduce three people who are in the east gallery this afternoon. Two are from Thom Collegiate. They're grade 12 students who joined two of their classmates to interview me about the role of MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly).

They are, and I'd ask them to stand, Mike Tomchuk and Tyler Kellett. And they did a superb job and asked very, very thoughtful questions. I invited them to attend and observe us in action. So I'd ask everyone here to give them a warm, warm welcome, please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — And while I'm on my feet I would like to introduce someone who probably doesn't need much of an introduction to many of us here, a familiar face, my former assistant, Jonathan Denis, who has been very, very busy since he graduated with his Bachelor of Administration last June. He's just completed his first year of law school at the University of Saskatchewan, will be resuming work at the bank for the summer, and has been asked to return by the Fraser Institute to participate in some events in June.

So I ask everyone to warmly welcome Jonathan once again. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, in the west gallery I would like to introduce Mr. Dale McAuley, the mayor of Cumberland House. Dale, Mr. McAuley, was here for a CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) hearings in relation to the North. And as well, Mr. Speaker, we reminisced about the famous Cumberland Bridge. And now of course, he was presenting to me this idea of improving the Cumberland Road.

So I guess, Mr. Speaker, things always keep on improving, and I would like everybody to welcome Dale to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a guest seated in the east gallery from the community of Canora, a businessman and the alderman councillor in the town of Canora, Mr. Glenn Leeson. I ask members to join me in welcoming him to the House today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the House, a person that I work with daily and has provided much guidance to our caucus. It's Jim Fodey — he's sitting in the west gallery — our chief of staff in administration. I don't think he's been introduced to the House before, and, Jim, we want to thank you and welcome you to question period.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my caucus I'd like to also welcome our guest, Mr. McAuley, the mayor of Cumberland House. I'm sure glad to see him here today and I understand he's also going to be talking and meeting with the minister on Highways issues, especially in the Cumberland House region. And I with all my heartfelt effort, I want to wish him best of luck because he's certainly going to need it. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Beauval Comes to the Aid of Bereaved Families

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to the resiliency of the people of the northern village of Beauval. In recent weeks there has been funeral after funeral in this community of a thousand people. And time and time again the community has risen to the occasion and helped the families through their terrible losses.

The people of Beauval realize that they're not the only community to go through such hardship, but I know that this community has done tremendous volunteer work that is a good example of people helping out people in their time of need.

As their MLA I'm very proud to represent a community that has compassion and care for each other. My sympathies go out to the Aubichon family on the loss of Pierre; to the Gauthier family on the loss of Armand; to the Roy-Laliberte family on the loss of Janice; and now to the Burnouf family on the loss of Jules and their son-in-law, Gabe Kyplain of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Mr. Speaker, losses of this magnitude are certainly challenging, but many acts of kindness and support, as displayed by the entire community of Beauval, encourages all of us to have faith and continue on with confidence. It is a tremendous display of the values of all northern people as a whole, as all other communities in the North do the same for their families in their time of need. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Sends Fire-fighters to Alberta

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Saskatchewan words like cooperation, working together, and compassion are words we put into practice and not just into fancy phrases.

An example can be found on the front page of today's paper. The headline says, "Sask. sends firefighters to Alberta." And the headline tells the story, Mr. Speaker, unlike some of the

headlines I've seen lately.

As we have seen on the news, some of the worst fires in Alberta's history are sweeping throughout the north-west and Alberta's fire-fighters are under tremendous pressure. More than a hundred fire-fighters from Saskatchewan are helping them. And we are checking our resources to see if we can spare more.

I should add, Mr. Speaker, that our forests are under . . . are very dry too, and under threat. Usually at this time of year there's about 43 fires. Now the number is up to a hundred.

It's one thing to share when you don't need something at the moment; it's something else to extend yourself when you're natural impulse is to hold on to what you've got. But the Saskatchewan way is to offer help.

And I congratulate our fire-fighters and our department for sharing their expertise and their resources and to the people of Saskatchewan because they would want us to do this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberal Party Policy on Medicare

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, recently I let the Premier know where the Liberal caucus stands on medicare. I said the NDP members were losing their ability to care but I still thought they listened. Well after listening to the Premier and others yesterday, I'm again worried they don't listen.

Mr. Speaker, my caucus colleagues and our leader spent last fall consulting with Saskatchewan residents and our supporters to develop policy. On November 23, resolutions which originated from those consultations were passed by the Liberal convention.

One states that we "uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act and support a publicly funded, publicly administered universal medicare system and oppose those who seek to undermine it with a two-tiered health system."

Instead of wrongly implying we don't support it, NDP members should be glad Liberals solidly support medicare. If we didn't, Mr. Speaker, this province would be left with the reconstituted Tory Saskatchewan Party that wants two-tier medicine. Or it would be left with this NDP government that brags about how it protects medicare, then shows how it really doesn't care by closing 53 hospitals, 968 acute care beds, 461 long-term care beds, lays off over 500 nurses, and leaves 6,600 people to languish on waiting-lists in the province.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite should simply be glad that at least one party in this House truly supports medicare.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Boom

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) television aired a piece entitled "Swift Current Boom." I would like to take a few

moments to inform the Assembly of the great things going on in my constituency.

In the last few years Swift Current's population has grown by over 1,000 people. By the year 2000 the city officials project Swift Current's population will swell to 18,000, making it Saskatchewan's fifth largest city.

The sustained boom is fuelled by the oil and gas, agriculture, and manufacturing industries. The restructuring of oil classifications by this government has greatly contributed to the booming oil industry. Oil companies are no longer moving in with trailers but are becoming involved in long-term leasing and construction.

The agriculture industry is doing so well that workers are being recruited from Manitoba, and three new grain terminals have opened in the Swift Current area in the past few years.

At the same time, the manufacturing industry is sky-rocketing and workers are being brought in from the Maritimes to help fill the demands of the growing economy.

The increase in population has meant an increase in construction as the city's vacancy rate is less than 1 per cent. Two new motels are in the works and new homes and apartments are rapidly going up. A 40,000 square foot Real Canadian Wholesale Club is also being planned.

Mr. Speaker, Swift Current is booming. This boom is being sustained by long-term commitments of oil companies, a strong agricultural sector, new small businesses, a growing manufacturing sector, and good government policies. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Beechy School Wins Drama Festival Awards

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, rural Saskatchewan has again risen to the top in the Rosetown-Biggan constituency. I would like to congratulate the Beechy School Drama Club for their outstanding performance over this past weekend as they competed at the Saskatchewan Drama Association's Provincial High School Festival.

The drama club won the top award for best overall play for their performance in *It's Not the End of the World . . . But You Can See It From Here*. The Beechy School Drama Club was one of the 11 schools competing in the provincial festival, including clubs from Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Swift Current, and Prince Albert among others.

The play, which was written by the students themselves, was about what it is like to be a teenager in rural Saskatchewan and portrayed a typical rural lifestyle — long school bus rides, farm accidents, harvests, as well other aspects of rural life.

In addition to the best overall play award, Beechy was the runner-up for best visual presentation, captured three certificates of merit awards, and had two members receive awards — Daniel Flynn for acting and Ashley Meston for the major technical award.

Once again, congratulations to: cast members, Shannon Baxter, Logan Conner, Brandi Danroth, Kristian Danroth, Melissa Danroth, Daniel Flynn, Allissia Hanke, Kate Housek, Jesse Schellenberg, Denise Stroeder; stage manager Ashley Meston; crew members, Kris Braun, Cody Sander, Mike Jansen; and to directors Glenda MacFarlane and Karen Richardson for their hard work, energy and dedication which resulted in outstanding success.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kinistino Dealership Wins Excellence Award

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farm World serves farms in the Kinistino area, including parts of my constituency. The New Holland dealership has been recognized with the Parts Excellence Award.

In winning this award, Farm World has demonstrated the highest level of commitment to serve their customers. The management, knowledgeable staff, and the greater availability of parts were all part of New Holland's decision to give the award to Farm World of Kinistino.

This is not the first time Farm World has been honoured with the Parts Excellence Award and it won't be the last. Congratulations to Dave Cook and the staff of Farm World on being number one in North American parts. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SGI-CAA Child Safety Program

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan residents are among the most safety conscious in Canada when it comes to buckling up. But getting young children to use seat belts safely is a challenge.

An SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) survey showed that 75 per cent of children under the age of one were not properly restrained in a moving vehicle. One-third of all children under five were not belted in properly.

SGI's new traffic safety awareness campaign aimed at increasing the proper use of child restraints will run through May and June. CAA (Canadian Automobile Association) Saskatchewan is participating in the program.

The program, called One Safe Trip Deserves Another, challenges the parents to test their knowledge about the correct use of child restraints.

A grand prize trip for four to Universal Studios, Hollywood and SeaWorld will be drawn from all the entries courtesy of CAA Saskatchewan Travel Agency. People can attend drive-in inspection clinics across the province through May and June to learn how to properly use child restraints.

SGI is proud to be part of a program that will help protect Saskatchewan's children from injury. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskPower's Proposed Investment in Guyana

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SaskPower. Mr. Minister, it looks that we're still not through paying for Guyana. The Attorney General of Guyana has now announced that they intend to sue SaskPower for damages that could reach \$3 million Canadian — \$3 million. That's on top of 1.4 million you already blew in Guyana.

By the time you get through paying the legal fees defending yourself, Saskatchewan taxpayers could be out \$5 million. That's about the same amount that you lost in Channel Lake because you couldn't read the contract. The NDP has no money to keep hospital beds open but you have millions to blow on hare-brained schemes like Guyana and Channel Lake.

Mr. Minister, you're in over your head. You really don't know what you're doing. Will you announce today an immediate halt to all of these foreign gambles like Guyana before taxpayers lose any more money?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite that he should not be so gleeful about the potential of a legal suit. He asked the same question last week and I informed him that there was no legal action from Guyana to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, and there isn't now.

And what he should do if he wants to ever have credibility — which he obviously doesn't have in his own political party, and didn't have as a Liberal, and doesn't have now as a Conservative — if he ever wants to have credibility, is not take your sources for information from the Conrad Black press. You should wait. You should find out the facts before you ask the questions. At this point there is no legal action from the Government of Guyana to the electrical company here in the province.

And I also say to the member opposite, if there were a legal action, it's our legal opinion that we will not be responsible for any payment, any more than the Guyanese government would be responsible for our due diligence of the project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Minister, the Attorney General of the Government of Guyana is the person who said he was intending to sue you for your act of negligence, and now you're calling his credibility into question.

Mr. Minister, there is 19 opinions that you can probably hire on any one day. The copy of the lawsuit is going to be lost on the basis of a memorandum of agreement that you signed to purchase the Guyana power company.

Section 11 states, and I quote: "The law governing this letter of intent shall be the law of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana." Mr. Minister, who did your legal opinion for you. Are they experts on the Guyanese legal system? Do they really think that a court in Guyana is going to be sympathetic to your lame excuses, or is SaskPower going to be taken to the cleaners again

just like you did in Channel Lake?

Mr. Minister, the question is: who gave you the legal opinion and what expertise do they have in Guyana?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, we've come some distance from the member from Kindersley last week saying, release your legal documents so the people from Guyana who are intending to sue you, can have a look at what your defence is going to be. That was his argument.

Today the member from Melfort gets up and in his first question says, there is a legal action that has been started. In his second question he says they're considering it. Now when you talk about credibility, sir, the member from Melfort, when you promised the people of Melfort that you would never leave the Liberal Party, and sign the documents saying that and then jump ship, and I might say . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Now all hon. members will recognize that the Deputy Premier is not located all that far from the Chair, and the Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the answer being provided. I'll ask that the . . . Order. I'll ask all hon. members to provide for the House the opportunity to hear the conclusion of the response.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments. But I say to the member opposite, the member from Melfort, when he speaks to the credibility, I want to say this.

He lost all of his credibility when he left the Liberal Party, having promised that he would never do that, without a by-election — without a by-election — and left to join the Conservative Party.

And I can understand why those in the Conservative Party didn't elect you as leader — because you don't have the credibility. And I say you proved that in your first question by saying legal action had been commenced and then changed your story to say it's being considered. Where's your credibility, I would ask?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Gantefoer: — Every day that there's disclosures about your handling of your ministry, your credibility absolutely is disappearing. Mr. Minister, I would like to let you discuss, if you would, the fraudulent activity that seems to be coming aware in the sale of Channel Lake Petroleum.

We already know pages were switched in the final sales document after they were signed by SaskPower officials. We already know that the final sale price was misrepresented by Lawrence Portigal to SaskPower officials and the SaskPower board. Today we found out that Lawrence Portigal was on DEML's payroll at the same time as he is working for SaskPower to complete the sale of Channel Lake to DEML.

Mr. Minister, given all of this information, what action are you

taking to protect SaskPower shareholders, the people of Saskatchewan? Have you turned over the Channel Lake file to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say in terms of the file of Channel Lake, has now been turned over to a committee that that member sits on and asks questions. But I want to challenge him on one thing and I want to challenge the press on something, that they should ask that member — the Conrad Black paper in particular — he has accused DEML of fraudulent action today here in the House under immunity. He's done that.

I challenge him and I challenge the press to ask them to accuse DEML of fraudulent actions that he has said here in this House, do it outside the door if you have credibility. I challenge you to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Minister, through the testimony that the committee has heard, it is obvious that the people who can best judge if investigation should proceed are the RCMP. Will you make the commitment to turn that file over to the RCMP?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say again, the legislators on that committee have credibility. I believe that fundamentally. You may believe that the elected members don't have credibility and I understand your opinion about democracy in this province — that that's your opinion, and the member who runs Public Accounts. They understand that.

The issue here is your credibility. You said DEML had committed a fraudulent act. You said that here today in the House. I challenge you immediately after question period to step outside of the House and say that about the officials of DEML.

Now they're not unable to defend themselves in that court outside of the Assembly. But if you have character and credibility, I challenge you, and I challenge the Black newspapers to challenge you when you step outside the House, to say that DEML is fraudulent in their activities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure

Mr. Krawetz: — Yesterday in this House the Premier made the unequivocal statement: the Plains will close. It reminded me of Allan Rock's heartless statement about hepatitis C victims — the file is closed. The Premier and Allan Rock, that's quite a pair, Mr. Speaker. Two tin men of Canadian politics — no compassion and no heart.

Mr. Premier, you then ordered your members to block a free vote on the future of the Plains by talking all day on a meaningless NDP motion patting yourselves on the back for health care.

Mr. Premier, the Saskatchewan Party will continue to call for a free vote on the future of the Plains hospital. I've a very specific question: when will you allow that vote to take place?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party can continue to call on anything that you want to call on, just like the member from Melfort called on the RCMP to look at the allegations of fraud surrounding DEML. And whether he will say that outside the Chamber, it's about as credible as that statement.

I say with respect to the Plains situation, the announcement was made by the government on the Plains three, four years ago. We are now months away from having more space in hospitals without bed loss, the best renal care, best heart care, cardiac care. No bed loss. No bed loss. No bed loss as a result of this change whatsoever, and you know that to be the case.

We're going to have the finest health care system in Regina and southern Saskatchewan contrary to the Saskatchewan Party — sorry — the Tory Party's commitment to defeat and destroy health care.

Keep in mind that it's your leader, Mr. Hermanson, who's talking about private, for-profit hospitals. It's your leader that's talking about two-tier health care systems. And it's your leader who is taking \$24,000 a month of taxpayers' dollars.

Talk about credibility in here? Not a chance; you don't have it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, last night at the Plains meeting in Melville, one of the people there made an excellent suggestion. He said we should change the name of the Plains hospital to the Tommy Douglas trauma centre; then the NDP will keep it open. Well we'd even go for that, Mr. Premier, if that's what it takes to keep the Plains open.

Mr. Premier, I understand your members' problem. They can't vote to close the Plains because their constituents would never forgive them. And they can't vote to save the Plains because you would never forgive them.

Mr. Minister, will you take off the gag order today? Will you allow your members to vote freely on the future of the Plains, and will you allow that vote to take place next Tuesday?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the phoniest argument advanced is this argument about free votes — will you let your ministers and members take free votes — while these people get up and vote unanimously without dissent on anything.

They vote for two-tier medicine. They vote for private, for-profit hospitals. They vote for their leader getting \$24,000 a year and not even having, not even having the veracity to run in an election coming up in Saskatoon. No wonder *The Estevan Mercury* and the . . . (inaudible) . . . story says today, "New leader advised to get out of trough," referring to Mr. Hermanson.

And this member talks to us about free votes. This member talks to us about credibility. This member, these Tories, these Saskatchewan Party right-wing extremists who want to make Saskatchewan Alabama North, they would have anybody in this

province believe they're for medicare.

If they believe anybody buys them that, I've got one of seven bridges they can buy in Saskatoon real cheap. I can provide that for them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northern Highways

Mr. Belanger: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of the North want to be part of Saskatchewan. They want their government to come up there and see what the NDP neglect has brought to people of the North. The roads have been called everything from Grant Devine's golf course to a bombing range.

But, Mr. Speaker, we don't want the minister to fly up; we want him or her to drive up, drive up and see the conditions that you have left the roads in. When will the Minister of Northern Affairs or the Minister of Highways drive up to the communities of the North and apologize to the people of the North for 20 years of neglect and tell them when will they get their roads fixed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, in relation to the question, I would like to say that the largest budget increase that the North has ever seen in regards to highways was done this year with \$17 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, his own constituency on Turnor Lake, \$1.2 million improvement on the road in Turnor Lake. In his own constituency, \$5 million going in on the road to Pinehouse, Mr. Speaker. In regards to another 5 million in relation to the area in the forestry development in around Canoe Narrows and those areas, Mr. Speaker, that is what this government is doing.

When we have the mayor from Cumberland House . . . when we put on the Cumberland bridge we've asked for federal support in regards to highways. They have neglected their duty right across Canada and Saskatchewan. In northern Saskatchewan they used to pay 60 per cent. They pay nothing now, Mr. Speaker.

The federal Liberals — that's where he should be looking at and raising this question to, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, this type of politics is very demeaning to the people of northern Saskatchewan. And if the minister wants to play the game, we have a list of all the federal funding in highways in northern Saskatchewan. And I'll have a page take it over to him for records. I think the very important point you want to make is this type of politics is insulting to the northern people's intelligence, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the small hamlet Patuanak send approximately

\$100,000 per year to your government for driver licence fees, licence plates, and vehicle insurance, just for those three categories. They are desperate to get Highway 155 between Green Lake and Beauval and on to Patuanak repaired.

Local industry depends on that road. It is an economic lifeline to the communities that are isolated. And they want the road fixed not just for the economy, Mr. Speaker, but for safety reasons as well. People want these roads fixed.

Mr. Minister, will you fix our roads? Yes or no? The buck stops here.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate. We put \$17 million into northern Saskatchewan — quite a bit in that member's own constituency. He's trying to run away from the fact that the federal Liberals — even the Conservatives put in money in the North — the federal Liberals have not. And they should be putting money . . . They take money and extract money in regards to mining and forestry and they don't put a penny back in there, Mr. Speaker, other than part of the payment in regards to the Athabasca Road.

Mr. Speaker, that's what that member should be doing. He should be going to the federal government and asking for the federal government in joining with us and saying yes, the federal government needs to partner with this province and northern Saskatchewan and make sure we improve the North, the roads in the North. And that's exactly how to deal with the issue, Mr. Speaker.

And I was very pleased that this was the second question in eight weeks that the member raised in regards to the North. That's how much those federal Liberals care and the Liberals from over that side, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care Concerns

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, thank you. Whether it was Conrad Black or whomever, Mr. Speaker, an editorial in today's *Leader-Post* suggests that the time has come for a little sensitivity training for the NDP government. It points to the member from Lloydminster snickering when we raised concerns about a seriously ill Regina man, and suggestions by the member from Regina Centre that the closure of the Plains hospital is no big deal.

The member from Regina South took it one step further yesterday when he said question period is becoming like the *Jerry Springer* show. He says that the Liberal opposition should be raising real concerns. Well, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, are you so out of touch, sir, that you don't understand that people are coming to us with real concerns which we are raising on their behalf?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I have been in this Legislative Assembly for a good number of years. I'm very

proud of that record. I'm very proud to have been of service. And I think it is an important role of all MLAs, on government and opposition side, to raise concerns on behalf of their constituents. There's no problem in that regard whatsoever.

I do however, urge the Liberal leader in the House here to follow one rule when a concern or a complaint by constituents is raised. And that is that all of the relevant facts surrounding the specific issue be brought to the attention of the ministries and of the government so that we can provide, as fully as we can, the proper answer.

Now the member from Lloydminster had a personal conversation with Mrs. Prystupa as a result of the matter which you referred to on Monday — I was not in the House — and explained the situation in this regard. And as it turns out, as I understand it, the question of the operation surrounding this patient, this person, was a matter of elective surgery determined by the doctor of the person involved.

That was not raised by you folks. We didn't make that decision. Nobody in this government did. Elective surgery. So all I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is I urge all of us, and on behalf of all of us on the government side, if we have offended Mr. Prystupa or Mrs. Prystupa, that is not warranted; it is not justified.

The member has apologized and expressed that directly. I do so. I think we need to treat each other with civility and treat the public with civility and make sure that the facts that are put here are put fully and completely.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, each and every one of the members from Executive Council and from the NDP government are more than welcome to attend the meetings that we are holding throughout the province. And they can hear directly. There are far too many to be individually referred to any particular minister.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the member from Regina South should have put it in park. Instead, he put it in lurch and proceeded to insult all rural people who have raised concerns about accessing the General Hospital if the Plains is allowed to close. He told this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and it's in *Hansard*, that I don't believe that people are so dumb that they can't find the hospitals. People are voicing legitimate concerns about finding their way to the General in an emergency. And because they raise these concerns, the member suggests they are dumb.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, how can you sit by as your members call people who raise questions and concerns about being dumb and not knowing what they're talking about?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, members of this Legislative Assembly, I said a few moments ago, owe it to this Assembly, to this institution . . . I've been here 30 years, off and on, and I know in the course of debate words are used which ought not to be used on reflection. That is in the course of the debate. I've done it. Everybody here has done it. I even dare say you have done this.

The central thought of this issue that the member has spoken to during the course of the debate is that concerns surrounding the location of General and Pasqua are being addressed and will be addressed and people will be able to understand that. That is the situation.

Now you may not like the choice of words. Perhaps I don't like the choice of words. Maybe if the member had to do it over again he'd use another choice of words. But please do not splice, please do not splice words and elevate them into a case which is not justifiable.

I repeat again, we must deal with all concerns of Saskatchewan people compassionately and honestly and as carefully as we can. And that has been the motto of my life politically and it continues to be the credo of my caucus and government today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Drought Contingency Plans

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, as you are aware, since July last there have been areas of this province reported to have had less than 2 inches of total precipitation. I hate to be the one to cry wolf, and I know it's early in the season, but I think it's time to cry puppy, and we have to take a look at what you've got for contingency plans for people in areas like the south-west, contingency plans particularly for the cattle producers.

At this stage you know, Minister, that hay supplies are low; that the possibility for a hay crop is very likely not going to happen; that we have grass shortages for cattle to go on pasture. What contingency plans do you have, Minister, for the trucking of cattle, for the movement of hay, and for the listing of hay services?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I thank the member very much for that question. This is day 40, I believe, of this session and it's the first question that I've been asked about agriculture. I guess that tells you where the other parties are, Mr. Speaker. So I thank you very much for that.

What we are doing is what we've always done. We have a feed listing service — they don't want to ask the questions for their seats, so they got to ask them from their seats when somebody else does. That's interesting — we've got a feed listing service; we've got Sask Water has water funding service; we've got like the feed and forage I said; we've got the NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) programs in place; and crop insurance we've reduced, so what we're doing . . . I understand the problem.

The first concern is the feed and we have those services available. We also can trigger the federal program that allows farmers to sell their breeding stock and not be taxed on if they buy them a year later; so those are the things we're doing. It's a potential problem so right now we're monitoring it and trying to stay on top of it very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a supplemental for the same minister or perhaps the minister in charge of Water Corporation. In the past, Ministers, we've had situations where dugouts have been empty and we've engaged pumping programs where we've moved water from rivers and other lakes and that sort of thing into dugouts. Do you still have those kind of contingency plans in place? Do you have pumps available? If you have pumps on paper, do you actually know where they physically exist since 1988, probably the last time they were used.

I'm hopeful that you will take a look and let us know as to whether or not you have lists of where these things are available and could you also provide us with a written list of the services available that you mentioned in your first answer?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Yes, thank you. We can do that. We can provide you with lists and my department, as I said, is monitoring this situation. We have concern, quite a lot of concern, because the pastures aren't starting in some areas and that will be the first problem; so the water situation is the critical one there.

What we have to do in turn is what I'm doing, is on a weekly basis and sometimes more than that, making sure that I get reports from the department on the situation, talking to the people in rural Saskatchewan who I talk to on a very regular basis in different areas, and that way, keeping on top of it.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have to ensure is that we have some cooperation though. We've seen — and we're talking to the federal government about this — we've seen the support for the ice storms in Quebec. We've seen the flood support in Manitoba. We've seen the fishermen's support from the federal government in Ottawa, and we are going to be very, very hard-pressing, considering the fact that they've reduced their support significantly for Saskatchewan. We put a half a billion dollars or more into this agricultural province . . . into agriculture in this province — five times more than the federal government is.

We're watching the situation. We're going to let Ottawa know what's needed from their part and we'll do what's our part.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 48 — The Income Tax Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 48, The Income Tax 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.

Bill No. 49 — The Saskatchewan Assistance Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 49, The Saskatchewan Assistance Amendment Act, 1998 now be 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.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on Bill No. 744

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I would like to make a statement to the House.

On May 1, 1998, Bill No. 744, The Hepatitis C Compensation Commission Act, was introduced by the member for Arm River. The Bill is presently standing on the order paper for second reading under the heading, private members' public Bills and orders.

I want to quote from a ruling from June 4, 1996 in which a Speaker noted that it is a duty of the Speaker:

...to review all Bills in respect of Rule 36 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*. This rule states, in part, that any bill which proposes to impose any new or additional charge upon the public revenue or upon the people, must be first recommended by the Lieutenant Governor before it is considered by the Assembly. The principle underlying this rule is fundamental to our constitution. Because the executive of government is held strictly accountable for all public expenditure, it must also be solely responsible for initiating legislation involving the imposition of new or additional charges upon the public revenue, or upon the people through taxation.

The question to be addressed here is whether Bill No. 744 contravenes the parliamentary principle of the Crown initiative in financial matters. The Bill No. 744 seeks to establish a hepatitis C compensation commission", to be composed of three commissioners tasked with first, identifying those individuals who have contracted hepatitis C as a result of receiving tainted blood products, and secondly, to determine fair and reasonable compensation for those individuals.

Clause 4 of Bill No. 744 provides for the appointment of persons by Executive Council to a hepatitis compensation commission. With respect to this clause, I refer members to a ruling of the Speaker dated December 23, 1975, when it was ruled that the creation of a commission and the appointment of commission employees by the Executive Council constituted an expenditure of public funds. I also refer members to Erskine May, 21st Edition, page 713, where it is stated that charges upon monies to be provided by parliament for salaries and other expenses caused by the imposition of novel duties require a royal recommendation.

Clause 7 of Bill No. 744 provides for payments of compensation to victims identified by the commission. Undoubtedly the source of such payments would be the General Revenue Fund as no other funding mechanism is stipulated. This would constitute a new charge upon the public purse and therefore requires a royal recommendation.

Therefore I find that Bill No. 744 requires a recommendation, and because the member for Arm River is not a member of the

Executive Council, I must rule that the said Bill is out of order and advise the Assembly that it will be removed from the order paper.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 1998. The main purpose of this Bill is to improve the way vital statistics works with its stakeholders.

Specifically this Bill will streamline the way we register births and deaths in Saskatchewan. We are updating obsolete technology and streamlining inefficient processes. Overall, we are modernizing the program that has been unchanged for decades and preparing it to meet the new century.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is a better customer service. For example, we're amending the current birth registration process. Currently vital statistics cannot register a new baby until the mother and/or father completes and delivers the registration of live birth.

The amendments, Mr. Speaker, would allow the physician and other attendants at the birth to notify vital statistics of the birth. Vital stats gets the information sooner and the new parents can concentrate on taking care of their baby, not paperwork, in those first important days.

The mother or father will still be asked to fill out the registration of live birth, but they'll have more time. They'll be able to take the form home with them instead of having to complete it before the mother leaves the hospital. In doing so they can think about important decisions, for example, like the naming of the child.

The amendments will make the birth process more efficient in other ways, Mr. Speaker. First, new parents will be able to send information directly to vital statistics instead of going through district registrars. And second, health districts will have a greater flexibility to help parents complete the live birth registration form. This should improve the quality of data. This is important not only for vital statistics, but for the health districts and the use of data in developing and delivering other programs.

Mr. Speaker, we are also proposing amendments to improve the current death registration process. Currently when someone dies, there is no clear time frame in which the physician or coroner must provide the cause of death. The funeral director can't obtain a burial permit until this is done.

The amendments will provide a definite time frame so that the disposition of the body can occur quickly. The amendment will also allow vital statistics to directly register a death and issue a burial permit. This will be done through the use of an

automated, electronic process and this will eliminate the need for district registrars in registering some 90 per cent of the deaths.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the amendments will more clearly define when a body can be buried, cremated, or otherwise disposed of. This is important in cases where a doctor is awaiting autopsy reports or where a coroner needs further information to determine the cause of death.

Such amendments should help prevent evidence from being lost or destroyed in cases where the cause of death may still be in question.

The third set of amendments, Mr. Speaker, involves the appointment of district registrars. Currently, Mr. Speaker, every clerk or secretary-treasurer of a municipality is a district registrar. To say the least, this is very cumbersome. The amendments will give vital statistics the flexibility to appoint any person as a district registrar when and where they are needed in the system.

(1430)

Mr. Speaker, the amendments will also give vital statistics more flexibility to change its forms as needed. We have to protect the integrity of the documents and the information that vital statistics collects, but at times the requirements for data collection change. Often, to address these needs, the forms have to be amended quickly. This Act will allow vital statistics to respond promptly to clients' needs.

Mr. Speaker, these are the main provisions of the Bill. I am very pleased to propose these measures to take vital statistics into the new century or the next century, and to improve the services to the public and other stakeholders. Accordingly, I hereby move second reading of The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a few comments I'd like to make regarding the Bill before us, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act. As I was listening to the minister and just a quick review of the legislation, what I note, it's quite a lengthy amendment to The Vital Statistics Act.

As the minister indicated, it deals with everything from the registration of newborns to changes in marriage forms, death certificates, and coroner's statements, and burial permits. So it certainly covers a very broad area.

As the minister was indicating, the minister talked about the piece of legislation attempting to streamline these certificates and permits that are needed at so many different areas in our life and for the ability of vital statistics to work so that there is a true picture that we have available to us.

And, Mr. Speaker, if it indeed cuts down on the red tape, if it cuts down on the paperwork, and if it saves money it's something that I'm certain that our caucus is more than willing to support. We're more than willing to take a very careful look at it.

And I think for many people, especially in the area of when it comes to death certificates and grieving families, there are

difficult periods that families have to live with. Especially at a time of bereavement, that paperwork becomes very tedious and difficult and we would certainly want to take a close look at the legislation and determine whether or not it indeed makes that process and makes that time a lot easier for family members when they face that situation in their lives.

As well the minister talked about changes to the registration for children. I think for young parents, or parents regardless of what age, when a newborn comes into the home, you're not always prepared. And I don't think any family member or any parent looks forward to having to all of a sudden have a pile of documents thrown in front of you to fill out when you want to enjoy the birth of that new child or that new member that has entered the family.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I look at the piece of legislation, as I've listened to the minister, it certainly appears that this is an attempt to streamline a process that I think has become far too bureaucratic, far too complicated; and for many people it just interferes in their daily lives. And it would seem that that would be fair, would only be right. And I think even for the vital statistics, for the department, and for the area of government to streamline the process as well, I think is important because it becomes a tedious job for them as well. If you have a lot of paperwork that isn't necessary, it just makes the process of getting your vital statistics in order that much longer.

So we're certainly looking forward to further debate. We'll have some questions, but I think it would be appropriate as well for us to review the legislation, in view of what the minister is telling, indicating, to us the intent is, how we're reading the piece of legislation. Want to take the time to review it, to indeed determine whether or not the legislation meets all those requirements. And if there are any changes, we'll certainly be willing to discuss them in committee of the whole. But to allow for some time to review it, I would now move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 40 — The SaskTel Pension Implementation Act

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of The SaskTel Pension Implementation Act. This Act provides authority for the establishment of a new, non-statutory pension plan for current and former employees of the SaskTel communications company who are members of the existing Saskatchewan Telecommunications superannuation plan.

The SaskTel superannuation plan is a defined benefit plan and includes only those employees and former employees who joined the telecommunication company prior to 1977.

Mr. Speaker, this Act will implement an agreement between SaskTel and its union, the communications energy and paperworkers union, to administer the SaskTel superannuation plan under The Pensions Benefits Act, 1992. In this way, SaskTel pension agreement and arrangements will be more consistent with other pension plans in the telecommunication industry in Canada.

Under this Act, the SaskTel superannuation fund will be disestablished, a new pension plan will be created under The Pension Benefits Act, and all the assets, liabilities, and agreements pertaining to the superannuation fund will be transferred and assigned to this new pension plan.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the board of SaskTel superannuation fund will be reconstituted as the administrator of the new pension plan. The administrator will hold the assets of the plan for the purpose of providing lifetime retirement benefits to both current and former SaskTel employees whose pensions were governed by the SaskTel superannuation fund.

As hon. members know and may know, the issue of pension management became a bargaining issue between SaskTel and the CEP (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada) during the 1996 labour discussions. As part of the settlement, SaskTel and CEP set up a joint management-union committee to determine what legislative amendments could and should be mutually agreed upon and presented to this Assembly for our consideration.

The SaskTel-CEP committee recommended a process to in effect repatriate the SaskTel superannuation plan by establishing a new pension plan administered by SaskTel and its union. The board of the new plan will be appointed by SaskTel management and CEP and will include representatives of the SaskTel retirees.

Mr. Speaker, this Act delivers on that agreement and will allow the SaskTel pension plan to be operated in a new, businesslike fashion and more within the realms of a collective bargaining environment.

This Act also flows from a commitment made by our government in the Crown corporation review last year, in 1996, Mr. Speaker. And on June 25, 1997 my colleague and the former minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) corporation, reported the findings of the most extensive review of our corporation completed in the history of Crown corporations and in the history of our province.

One of the commitments we made at that time was to make changes to the governance of Crown corporations to ensure that they operate more independently in particular market-places. Mr. Speaker, this Act delivers on one of those important commitments.

So to conclude, Mr. Speaker, this Act will implement the agreement between SaskTel and the CEP to administer SaskTel's superannuation plan under The Pension Benefits Act. It is consistent with the goals of SaskTel and CEP to allow pensions at SaskTel to be governed more by the collective bargaining process than by legislative process.

And finally, it is consistent with the policy and direction of the government's Crown corporation review report in allowing Crown corporations to operate in a more businesslike fashion.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing and finally, I move second reading of An Act to Implement Certain Provisions Respecting a Pension Plan of Employees of Saskatchewan

Telecommunications and Others and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. I so move.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to respond to the minister's good speech. At least he tells me he gave us a good speech. And he probably did.

But in regard to the pension plan and the changes that are coming about, the minister talked about the fact that back in 1996 there was SaskTel negotiations or discussions regarding bargaining and the strike that was as a result of breakdown in bargaining.

And part of the bargaining had to deal with pension plans. And I know pension plans have been a major, and continue to be a major concern, and a major issue, especially as individuals look back and are aware of the old defined pension benefit plan. And the number of employees who had the privilege of living under that plan and who are now retiring. In many cases, a number of SaskTel employees will have . . . or will be retiring with that old plan in mind. And then the employees who are just coming on and are living under the agreements involved in the new superannuation plan.

And it seems to me, if I understand the minister correctly, an agreement reached between the employees and between the union tried to draw, I guess if you will, define a plan that everyone would be treated equally. And that's what I'm understanding the legislation before us is doing right now, and that the funds from the old plan transferred to the new plan that everyone is in general agreement with it.

One of the concerns that we would have is the fact that of employees that are retired or have been retired for a few years . . . And I believe SaskPower, there are some employees retired under SaskPower have some concerns with their plan, of the fact that it hasn't kept up to inflation I believe. And there's a few concerns raised in that area. And we'd want to raise those questions.

And for that matter, Mr. Speaker, this new piece of legislation may be dealing with that. And of course we can raise that and ask the minister to see whether or not all the concerns that have been addressed by superannuates to this date, the fact that they feel they have been finding out that agreements have come in place and then they haven't been followed through, whether or not that is a concern here with SaskTel workers as well.

I guess on the other hand, the Saskatchewan taxpayers need to know, and as individuals who use the SaskTel network and patrons of SaskTel, we would like to know as well whether or not this is a cost, will be a cost to patrons down the road. Will it cost the taxpayers. Or is the legislation that is before us today basically putting in place a mechanism that meets the needs of all of its employees while at the same time doesn't create an extra burden for the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan. I think that is an area that we certainly need to be aware of and certainly need to keep in mind.

Because, Mr. Speaker, I think if it becomes a burden to the taxpayers, it becomes a burden to governments down the road and then you run into a major problem where governments have to deal with legislation that was brought forward in the past.

That creates a problem. Especially if it creates a monetary problem, then you're . . . a former government is left trying to correct a situation that should have been corrected in the first place.

So those are, those are some questions that we certainly will want to raise and make sure that this piece of legislation, as it is brought forward, deals with the concerns of the employees. Makes . . . Also addresses the fact that taxpayers are not left on the hook. And that at the end of the day, governments are not left on the hook and having to address something that happened in the past.

So we would certainly want to look into that. We'd want to take a bit more time to address some of those concerns, those issues. And indeed with that in mind, I think it would be appropriate for adjournment of debate. Therefore at this time I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 27

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Calvert that **Bill No. 27 — The Public Service Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From all appearances most of this Bill is pretty routine. Our caucus of course supports the concept of a professional, independent civil service. Most of this Bill serves only to clarify and update several aspects of the old Bill and thereby strengthens these aspects of the civil service.

However, there are a few areas of this Bill that raise some alarm bells. First, the summary that accompanied the Bill makes a rather bold pronouncement. It says:

This new Act is required to facilitate the process of human resource management transformation, a process currently under way which will ultimately redesign a human resource management function with respect to governance, structural design, and changes to systems and processes.

That's a pretty sweeping statement, Mr. Speaker. The official opposition will want considerable more detail on what this involves before we agree with this Bill. Especially considering that the minister was relatively vague about what the transformational process is.

In reading the Bill, one area where the new vision becomes clear is in the new section on the purpose of the Act where it states that one of the purposes is "to strive to develop a public service that represents the diversity of the people of Saskatchewan." Clearly what this indicates is that this Bill is headed in the direction of affirmative action initiatives of some kind or another.

The value of affirmative action to the civil service and to

society in general is always a hot topic. It is one that is raised in the United States for many years with no end in sight. The key question in this debate is, do we try to hire civil servants that are best qualified to do the job or do we use the civil service as the tool to achieve other social ends?

(1445)

If the answer is the latter, that is something that the public has to be aware of. If we are putting efficiency and professionalism second to other goals, no matter how worthy, then we are in danger of not spending public funds as effectively as we can.

What is especially disturbing about this clause is that it is very vague. Exactly what aspects of the diversity of people will we be striving to bring to the civil service? Will it be based on gender, race, ethnic groups, sexual orientation, etc., and what will the criteria be? The Bill doesn't tell us and the minister has not deigned to let us in on this plan.

We do know that this Act will no longer give special treatment to one group in society. In the definitions for this Bill, the definition for war veterans has been mysteriously dropped off. I think that it speaks poorly of this government and its priorities that it would line up a raft of other groups for special hiring privileges while at the same time turning its back on people who have risked their lives for our country.

Of course none of this represents the main thrust of the Bill. The recurrent issue it addresses is its procedures for the commission to delegate its powers and responsibilities basically to anyone it sees fit. It also gives the commission extensive new powers to make grants, enter into agreements, hire advisers, and the like.

Anyone who has ever been in a managerial position knows the importance of delegation, but it's a concern that always has to be tempered. Ultimately someone has to be held responsible for the actions of the commission. We've seen several times this session how poorly the government serves the people when no one is willing to take responsibility.

The entire reason for the Channel Lake inquiry is that everyone involved is pointing fingers and avoiding blame. This is a stark example of how delegating duties can be a danger.

We should therefore approach this issue in this Bill with considerable caution. Whether by regulations or by legislation, it needs to be clearly set out that the commission will be responsible for all actions taken under its name no matter who have been delegated to do the job.

Another aspect of this Bill that is particularly alarming is the section on the commission's regulations. A new clause there gives trade unions the power to review and comment on any regulations before they are passed. As a legislator, I have to say I find this very offensive. I don't understand why an outside organization like a trade union should be given any special veto powers that supersedes this Assembly and the taxpaying public.

Mr. Speaker, I think if you put a clause in The Department of Finance Act stating that no new regulations could be passed until the business community approved them, you'd get quite an

outcry from the members opposite and their followers.

Mr. Speaker, the final authority on regulations must continue to rest with the elected officials. These sorts of special privileges to interest groups run completely contrary to democratic government. Further, I would suggest that they run contrary to the entire intent of this Bill, which is to strengthen a professional and independent civil service. The civil service will not be independent if they have politically motivated union bosses proofreading all their work.

Speaking of political influence, this Bill also contains a revamped version of a traditional public service protection from political influence and restructuring from political activities. The reason for changes to this section compared to the old Bill are not clear. As far as I can see, this Bill simply rearranges the clauses and wording of the old clause. Our caucus will want to explore in depth, more, the reasons for this apparent cosmetic change.

But of course the real issue behind political influence activity is how sincere it is. It is well-known that the NDP have extensive partisan ties and influence throughout the civil service. It's one thing to put it on paper that the public service is free from political influence, but it's quite another for this to be sincerely enforced.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, our caucus has concerns about this Bill and I move that the debate on this Bill be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 33

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 33 — The Provincial Court Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak today to The Provincial Court Act, which among other things establishes an independent commission to determine pay levels for our provincial judges.

I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, that we all know in many respects this retroactive legislation is long overdue. I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that I need to remind the members of the Assembly of the rocky relationship created between the Executive Council and the judiciary branches of the Saskatchewan government. A rocky relationship created by the former minister of Justice when he disestablished the independent commission headed up by the Saskatoon city commissioner, Marty Irwin, to determine a pay increase for judges.

Not only did the former minister not accept the recommendations of the commission that we all believed to be binding at the time, but he passed retroactive legislation to disestablish the commission. And it seems apparent, Mr. Speaker, that this is an ongoing pattern of this government — say one thing, do something exactly the opposite.

Appointed an . . . they appointed an independent commission and then when they didn't like their recommendations, they just simply voted them out of existence. Kind of like shopping

around for the kind of legal opinion that you want and then going forward with it. And for good measure, add to the legislation that the government can't be sued for breaking its own laws.

Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody is above the law in this province or this country. And that is what the members opposite, I think, are starting to find out. So now the government believes that they can fix this relationship through this new piece of legislation and through the creation of a new commission.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say to the members opposite that with their track record of establishing commissions and then getting rid of them, why in the world would the people of Saskatchewan or our provincial judges have any faith that they'll not turn around and do the same thing again?

Mr. Speaker, that is what this government fails to understand. Perception is everything, and so is trust. When the people no longer trust you, when they don't believe that you are doing what you say you are going to do, this is when you as a government begin to be in big trouble. And that is the position that this government finds itself in today.

Besides the issue of trust, there are certainly many other important issues embedded in this legislation which we need to talk about. Whenever we are discussing the appointment of judges, the payment of judges, and the pensions that we give judges, we are talking about the public trust and public funding.

I see that the government has extended the period of membership in the Canadian bar from five to ten years and I'd like to say that I think that that's a positive step. But other than that, I see very few changes in this legislation which will deal with the appointment of judges.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice speaks of the independence of the justice system and he says that while — pardon me — and he says that this is why he has introduced these changes and created this independent commission to determine judges' salaries. But, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the members opposite that in the minds of most of Saskatchewan people, the way we appoint our judges plays a much greater role in creating that view of independence.

So I'm very interested, Mr. Speaker, to hear what the Minister of Justice has to say about this important issue during the Committee of the Whole.

I would like to point out a couple of clauses in the Act that we have concerns about. Clauses that certainly beg answers during the Committee of the Whole. And I would say, Mr. Speaker, that although I realize some of the answers to these questions may not be answered until the commission meets to determine salary issues — and that is a step towards a more independent judiciary — I would say that we would have some problems passing a piece of legislation and leaving the ultimate authority in the hands of the members opposite to regulate these important issues without consulting the people of Saskatchewan.

One of the first questions I think the taxpayers of Saskatchewan want answered is how much this new commission will cost

them. This is important not only because we are spending taxpayers' dollars, and that's always important, but because you spent a great deal of money creating and eliminating the previous commission.

Second, despite the creation of this commission there does seem to be many clauses in the legislation which gives an incredible amount of authority to Executive Council to dole out patronage positions and then dole out indiscriminate amounts of salaries.

Let me look at a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it seems that . . . just a moment, Mr. Speaker. Just as the taxpayers of Saskatchewan are choking on many things these days, I'm having a little difficulty.

Let me look at a couple of examples with respect to this legislation. First of all, it seems that by removing the details of the early retirement package and by stipulating that section 22, clause 2, that any judge who is less than 65 and who has served as a Provincial Court judge for two consecutive years is entitled to a pension for life . . .

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite will say, if they have indeed read the legislation, that this section goes on to say that this will be done in accordance with the regulations. But, Mr. Speaker, please allow me to be a little bit suspicious when it comes to this government's abusing patronage positions.

Does this not allow the government to give one more of theirs — let's say, for example, a former minister or a former minister of the Crown or a former head of a Crown corporation — a judgeship?

And let's just say that this judge retires after two years. Does this allow this person to collect a hefty pension paid by the Saskatchewan taxpayer? Maybe not. But certainly, given the list of former lawyers in the NDP cabinet ranks, I think it's an important issue that must be addressed.

Further, I'm very interested in hearing the minister's explanation regarding the power given to the Executive Council under section 27(1) to provide for supplementary allowances in any amount and subject to any terms and conditions that the Executive Council considers advisable.

And you'd think, given this government's track record in terms of severance in the last few months, they'd be very, very reluctant to get into that sort of thing again. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know exactly how far and how wide-reaching this power is and just how often this government intends upon using it.

The best place to discuss most of these issues will be, Mr. Speaker, in the Committee of the Whole and we're not quite yet there.

Mr. Speaker, because this is such an important piece of legislation, I think we need more time to analyse and consult with stakeholders before we are prepared to move it along.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 3 — The Public Utilities Easements Amendment Act, 1998

The Deputy Chair: — Before we entertain clause 1, I invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to have with me Darcy McGovern from Saskatchewan Justice.

Clause 1

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Good afternoon, Mr. Minister. I'd like to welcome your official here this afternoon.

Just have very few questions on this. I guess the first one is, is why this particular change is being made at this time, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — This Bill is being introduced to put the flexibility necessary to consider accommodating new technologies and new types of companies as they develop. It'll permit a prescribed company to receive prescribed rights in the form of a public utility easement from the landowner. For example, the CO₂ pipelines will be expressly included in the regulations as a prescribed right for which the public utilities easement could be granted by a landowner.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Aside from the CO₂ pipeline, is there anything else on the horizon that has made these changes necessary at this time?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Something on the horizon would be the cable industry and some of the requirements that they have.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Has the fact that this legislation has not been amended in so many years caused any problems for the private companies?

(1500)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — It's only recently that we had some requests from some of the private companies to take a look at this Act. Up until this point, they were using caveats as opposed to easements. And that was working but there were some concerns about the long-term use of caveats.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Can you describe to us the process for requesting easements and whether this will change the amendments? Or how do you go about the easements?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — This won't change the process at all. I think the key point is that these are voluntary. And so what it is, the company and the landowner will negotiate and come up with an agreement as to what they want. What this does is then allow that voluntary agreement to be registered as an easement. And that's basically the whole purpose of the Act.

Mr. Bjornerud: — What happens in the case of a CO₂ pipeline? For example, if there's a property owner who will not

grant the easement rights or not go along with what you're negotiating, what happens? Does this automatically mean expropriation?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — There's nothing in this legislation that relates to expropriation. Everything here is voluntary. And there would be other legal remedies, I suppose, if that was a necessity. But in this particular legislation, this only deals with situations where there is a voluntary agreement between the parties.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's really all the questions I had at this time.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I'd like to thank my official for helping me on this one — he's going to help me with the next piece of legislation — and I also appreciate your questions.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 23 — The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1998

Clause 1

Mr. Heppner: — Good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your official. I wonder if you could very briefly outline the complete impact of what we're discussing here this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — This Bill is made to correct drafting mistakes. The last time we did this was in 1996. As the years go on, the legislative drafting division of Saskatchewan Justice hears comments about punctuation problems or naming problems or references to Acts that aren't in existence any more.

Those things are then recorded, and then once every couple of years an Act like this is brought forward to make the corrections.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I believe specifically, as you mentioned, we're adding a couple of commas. I'm wondering how many staff people have been working since 1996 to find these errors?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — These particular errors are found as legislation is being worked on or used; or if legislators or lawyers or somebody else notice something, letters are received by the department. There's not staff specifically sitting around looking for these particular corrections.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I guess that's somewhat reassuring, that we don't have a whole horde tucked away in a basement there that is trying to scrounge out a comma that got lost some place.

The question of commas and grammars and this sort of thing, I guess raises another interesting point. Obviously these are not being found by the people in your staff. I'm wondering, why did they show up in the first place? Like this legislation by and

large isn't that difficult. Who do we have writing these things that can't handle the English language?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I'll take that as your opinion, and thank you very much for it.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. It was an opinion. Like basically when we're writing what end up as statutes and we're writing laws, we know that dotting i's and stroking t's and commas are very important. And it's a little frightening to know that maybe we're running around with legislation that, because of grammatical structures, may mean all sorts of things we don't intend it to mean.

Having made that comment and asked two questions of great import, that concludes the information that I requested on this. Thank you for your time.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, before I move it I would like to once again thank Darcy McGovern from Saskatchewan Justice and the opposition for their question. And I move that we report this Bill without amendment.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 19 — The Physical Therapists Act, 1998

The Deputy Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce his official.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have with me today, Mr. Drew Johnston, who's with the policy and planning branch of the Department of Health.

Clause 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, a few questions regarding The Physical Therapists Act that we're discussing before us. And it appears to me that this Bill is very similar to The Occupational Therapists Act the Assembly passed last year. And I'm just wondering, are there any real differences between the two Bills in terms of the organizations or accountability aspects? In many ways there seems to be a lot of similarities, but do we have some specific differences as we talk about physical therapists and occupational therapists?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I think the member correctly identifies that basically the two Bills are almost identical to each other in terms of content. The reality is that the professions practice a bit differently but the Bills are in fact the same.

Mr. Toth: — The fact that there's a fair number of similarities and that this piece of legislation is before us this spring versus last spring, is this Bill here as a result of The Occupational Therapists Act last spring? The fact that physical therapists saw that piece of legislation, took a look at it, and determined that maybe it would be appropriate that their association had a similar piece of legislation to identify how they ran their

association? Would that have had some impact on the reasons for this piece of legislation being before us this year?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, what we're really doing is updating all of our professional Bills, professional statutes, bringing to the new legislation that we've been using over the past three or four years . . . and what this does, what this legislation does, is really brings in line this statute with the new professional legislation that we've introduced a couple of years ago.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, will there be other changes to other Acts that would be following the same guidelines coming up in the future? And if so, wouldn't it be appropriate to try and do them all at the same time, especially in the area of health, dealing with all the professions on the same basis and bringing them in together versus staging them over a period of time?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think the member makes a good point, and what we're trying to do of course, is try to bring them to fruition at the same time as much as . . . about 95 per cent of them are likely of the same nature; 5 per cent of those have some different discrepancies or changes in them. And accordingly what we try to do is to bring that practice and use that practice but our attempt will be to do that on a regular basis. This isn't the case here.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, as a result of the changes, will there be any major costs to taxpayers as a result of this change in legislation?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — No, there will be no additional costs to taxpayers on the changes that we're making in this Bill.

Mr. Toth: — The fact that this legislation is before us today, Mr. Minister, how has the profession of physical therapy been governed up to this point and this piece of legislation? Has it changed the way they've governed themselves in any major way with the results or are there major changes that are now taking place and that are, I guess if you will, just bringing them in line with I think what you talked about, the legislation you talked about, and the changes to the Act?

(1515)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well what I might do is just sort of highlight — because it might be important to recognize the different changes that are being made in the Act — and just outline for the member that there are about 400 physical therapists that are practising in the province today that have been regulated under The Physical Therapists Act, which dates back to 1984. And so this is what we're doing today, is of course bringing up those regulations or the pieces of legislation.

Included in that piece of The Physical Therapists Act there are about five or six bullets that I think that are important here to recognize.

Number one is that we include newer public accountability provisions such as public representation on the council, open disciplinary hearings that require . . . and an annual report to be filed with the Minister of Health. So there would be three issues

there.

The second bullet would be, require bylaws potentially impacting the public to be approved by the Minister of Health; the reservation of title of physical therapist for registered practitioners.

Number five, it sets out a clearer and more effective discipline process than what they had in the past. And finally, it allows for flexibility in setting registration requirements in bylaw and issuing restricted licences.

Those would be I think, probably the six areas that would be where there are actual changes within the legislation to bring this Act in consistency with the new legislation.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, how will this Bill change the organizational aspect of the college of physical therapists? Will there be any changes whatsoever as a result of the legislation?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — No, it will not change its stature at all. It will remain still as a separate entity of the college.

Mr. Toth: — I understand as well the legislation deals with discipline and investigatory procedures that are in place at this time. And I wonder if you could just explain those procedures, Mr. Minister, and reasons for the changes, if any.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Overall I think that the new process really shortens, it shortens the process period and there are several provisions here that I think . . . which were added to assist that. There is explicit recognition now that mediation can be used, if it is agreed by the complainant and a member, to resolve the complaints and then that's under section 25. And secondly, the professional conduct committee, which does the investigation, and the discipline committee now have the necessary new provisions to properly conduct those hearings. And those processes are also more clearly laid out for the member and the public.

And the appeal process has, in our opinion, been simplified a bit by taking out that necessary provision where they would go to the minister. Or could go to the minister to be involved in individual disciplinary matters. They can now . . . that process would be void; that could go directly to the council and/or could go directly to the Court of Queen's Bench. So we've taken out that central step.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess when we talk about disciplinary action or investigative action, to this point, what recourse has the public had against physical therapists who they feel have been guilty of malpractice or any type of error that has been made?

Can you just give us a bit of an explanation of the process that was there before? And the fact that in many cases the public in general have not felt that they have been truly represented or have been able to voice their concerns or their feelings in regards to therapists who they may have felt have not conducted themselves wisely.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well as is with most instances with professional legislation, the public can in fact lay a complaint.

And in this case, if it was in relationship to the practice of the physical therapist, the public would lay a complaint with the college. And then of course the college would then proceed with the investigation.

And of course, today now we have in our legislation, suggesting that we would have the processes of mediation. And that of course, in our opinion, provides for a broader public accountability of the, of a malpractice or an issue that the public might raise in terms of the professional conduct of an individual or of the profession.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I guess one of the areas of concern . . . and you talked about mediation. I think you also mention that certainly persons could go before the courts. We're all aware of the fact that courts, going before the courts may be fairly expensive. Or even raising a question of concern about practice or malpractice with the college itself.

Sometimes I think many people feel that when you're dealing directly with even that profession versus an individual practising that profession, the feeling is that if you raise an issue of concern or raise an issue of malpractice that you may not, on many cases, may not feel that you've really been listened to; that the profession itself may be trying to protect its members more than it is trying to listen to the public and I guess that's why I like the idea of explaining the appeal process of the mediation process.

And the question I would have in regards to that is, number one, I think it's important that there be a mediation process and that there be an agency outside of the profession itself. I believe each profession has an appeal mechanism within their profession to deal with concerns, but if people feel they haven't had their concerns addressed with . . . fairly, that there is a process outside of that profession.

And when you're talking of mediation, are we talking of a mediation process that is outside of the physical therapists? So if you do have a concern, if you've raised it with the profession, and then you felt that your concern wasn't dealt with appropriately, is this a mediation process outside of the profession so that people can feel that they have genuinely had a fair and open opportunity to deal with their concerns in an independent way? So that the profession itself isn't left trying to address concerns that its members may run into and feel that they are on the hook; or even that individuals themselves feel that they are just beating their heads against the wall?

Is that mediation process you're talking of here outside of or totally independent of the profession itself? So that the public in general can feel that they have had a fair opportunity to voice any concerns they may have regarding either how the profession deals with situations, or even whether or not they may feel that therapists they're dealing with are indeed conducting themselves wisely?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think the member points out exactly and precisely some of the rationale in terms of how the legislation and the Act more clearly represents the opportunity for the public to ensure that there is in fact due diligence if someone needs to be disciplined, or in fact there is a practice of the profession that needs to become, I think better identified, for

a better term.

I think that when the members talk about the significance of the public representation, and here we have now, we have three individuals from the public who in fact are on the committee as well as we have one individual who sits on the disciplinary committee.

So with this new legislation you have now broader participation of the public, which I think then addresses the question that the member has, and that is that if you're going back to your own profession or to the college, which is really your own peers, looking at providing that kind of disciplinary action that might be required without a public participatory opportunity, asks or begs the question about whether or not due diligence in fact is being provided. So a part of what the physical therapists recognize is the importance of having that public representation.

In respect to the mediation process, of course mediation processes work well if in fact the person of whom the allegations are being brought against and the individual themselves agree to that process. If they don't have a mutual consent on that, then of course you need another process in order to deal with it. And accordingly, the legislation then has two aspects to it today where in fact they can go to the council and try to get it resolved at that level, or in fact they would use then the Court of Queen's Bench . . . or the . . . yes, the Court of Queen's Bench.

The piece that we're taking out of course, is the one that we talked about, where the council could make the request of the minister to become involved, that the minister's office could become involved as a mediatory process. To date, there hasn't been a request from the physical therapists to deal with it in that aspect.

And accordingly, it becomes redundant I think, if you have the process there and nobody uses it when in fact it could be better served in the way in which you defined earlier, by having public participation there to ensure that if there are any discrepancies of which the public should have a voice in, it could be handled at that level.

Mr. Toth: — Well certainly, Mr. Minister, I think if the public feels . . . and certainly if the mediation process is working — and you're correct, the mediation process can only work if the participants agree to it.

On the other hand if someone doesn't really want to, or disagrees to the mediation process and determines that they want to go further and actually end up in the courts, it would seem to me that going before the courts or pushing an issue to the courts certainly is going to become much more expensive. It's going to add costs to the participants; probably even to the association, as you're forced to defend yourself or certainly stand up and represent a member of the association. It adds costs that the public in general may feel is a burden to them.

But I guess one would have to say we do have a process that offers a mediation process to take place. And if I understand you correctly, we're going to have members on that mediation . . . or appeal process that are somewhat removed from the association; so that it's not totally governed by the association;

so the public can feel comfortable with it in that regard. I think that's important. I think the public needs to know that when they raise a concern that they're dealing with individuals who are going to look at a case objectively versus just the profession itself. Because there's that feeling . . . and then if you don't accept the mediation process and want to go further and accept to bear the costs of going further on it, then that's a responsibility that you're going to have to accept.

And I think you and I, Mr. Minister, as representatives of the public in our capacity as MLAs, it certainly makes, will make, and I hope will make our role a lot easier as well. Because I think we sometimes get pushed into areas where the public may not accept a verdict that is brought forward or decision that's brought forward, and then of course they come to you and I asking for some assistance.

And I think it's appropriate that we have a mediation mechanism in place that totally addresses this and certainly removes the pressure that you or I as elected representatives may face when individuals come seeking our assistance.

Now I understand that there are three people appointed. When we're talking about — and I'm not sure if this is the appeal process or the mediation process — there's appointments by cabinet to be part of council, and I'm wondering specifically what that process is, what the needs are, and would the specific background of these appointees be . . . would they need to have a knowledge of the profession?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — On these professional pieces of legislation, usually the largest representation of people whose names come forward usually come from the association. So they would be people that they would have some familiarity with, that would be serving across the province in various different capacities that would have some appreciation and understanding I think, of the delivery of health care services and the quality of health care services that need to be delivered.

I think you would be looking for people who would have a sense of fairness and responsibility and would take a strong interest in serving on the council, because there would be then committees that they would be serving on, which would be the one that we talked about earlier, which would be the discipline one.

They would then make those recommendations to cabinet by and large. And cabinet would likely, in all likelihood, follow those recommendations based on the referrals that are being provided from the association, is the normal practice that we've adopted.

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Minister, when we talk about appointments by cabinet to different areas on the council, when it comes to the mediation group or panel, is the government involved under the Act to make the final appointments? And would you indeed want to make sure that there is a representative outside of the profession on this mediation panel to indeed determine that there is an area of fairness in dealing with matters of appeal?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, the member's correct in stating that on the mediation process, the selection of

those individuals to provide the mediation would likely be selected either through the profession themselves, or through the registrar of the college. And it would not be done through the cabinet process, where you would be selecting people as you would on appointing people to the council.

(1530)

Mr. Toth: — So then on that basis then, if a member is to be removed from any one of those positions it would be the college or the profession itself that removed them, that would call, if for some reason they didn't believe an individual was serving in their capacity as to an appointed position on council, the profession would have . . . I guess what I'm asking, are there provisions in the legislation that allow for removal of a member from a specific position on the council?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Are you asking about the members on council, the public members on council, or are you asking about someone who in fact might be, might have, might be in question here both in professional conduct, and if it was then determined through say a mediation process, that in fact, or through the council, that an individual needs to be removed? How would that occur? Because in the legislation there's provision there for the council to act to remove an individual from their duties or to discipline an individual if it is in relationship to their practice. The council has that kind of authority within the legislation — both to discipline and/or remove — and then I think that's the question that you're asking.

Mr. Toth: — Well there's certainly that question, plus there's also the question of individuals on council serving a period or a term. And I'm not sure what all the criteria are regarding your responsibilities on council. Are there provisions, if council feels that members who have been elected to serve on council are not serving or not fulfilling the purpose of their appointment to council . . . Does the council under the Act then have the ability to terminate a council member's time of service on council prior to the expiration of their term?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — In the bylaws, I note within the legislation, it talks under 14(g) where the:

prescribing the officers of the college and governing the procedure(s) for the appointment, election or removal of these officers;

So there is provision within the bylaws for the removal of those individuals if it was noted that within the bylaw they weren't meeting the obligations of what the bylaws would be determined for them to serve under.

I expect that — and I don't have the answer to this in front of me — but I expect that if there was an action here . . . and sometimes members who serve on these kinds of committees, there's a level of need to attend, for attendance, for example. And if you miss three meetings or four meetings, that the provisions are then within the bylaws to remove people from there. And the establishing — and I note here that under (p) of that section it says that:

(p) establishing any committees that the council consider necessary and prescribing the manner of election,

appointment or removal of committee members; (is within the purview of the council).

So it provides a broad range of powers to the council to make changes to their membership if in fact there is . . . for some reason there's a practice that the member has been negligent or hasn't been fulfilling fully, the council can remove them.

Mr. Toth: — I understand that the Act gives council the right to license people, and as well if they chose they may license someone who's not completed the necessary education or has passed their exams. And I'm wondering what would be the reasons for this provision, if I understand it correctly?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — In the practice of physical therapy, I think there are only a couple of occasions through the course of a year where in fact the exams are written and then licensure follows that. And on occasion what might happen of course, is that while they're waiting for their marks to return they might in fact be practising, but they would be practising under the supervision of somebody who is already licensed to practice physical therapy. So it would be under a . . . they would be almost under an apprenticeship, I guess is how I might best put it.

Mr. Toth: — So what that's doing is basically recognizing the fact that an individual has actually taken a lot of his education but is still waiting for final marks and approval, but already are in a position where they have the abilities. But may, as a result of time for marks to come back, find themselves either waiting or going to the council and asking for the opportunity to begin to practice, and in this case I think you mentioned under supervision until final marks are all in and they've received all the necessary certificates, if I understand you correctly.

Mr. Minister, I believe other professions . . . We've seen in other professional self-regulatory Bills, that this one gives as well, the Minister the right to pass certain bylaws, whether the council agrees with them or not. Can you give us a reason why this is done in the case of a supposedly self-regulating body?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Under professional legislation, there are, there are several options of which professions have. Whether they . . . and they, they can choose to do two of three, two or three things. They can actually pass the bylaws themselves and . . . or they can get them ratified by the membership. And in this case, because of the public representation that they have on the board, their interest was to ensure that what they would have is the bylaws approved through, through the ministry.

And so in, under this particular piece of legislation, this is direction on which the profession wanted its bylaws approved and passed, and so they, they've included in the legislation . . .

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, would you be able to give us an example of what type of a bylaw the minister would simply impose on the council without its consent if, if there is an area that this might fall into?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think that we've not, not had an opportunity to exercise that piece. But one that comes to, sort of comes to mind to us, might be one where you needed a labour-mobility provision. For example, if in fact you had the

. . . in question the credentials of someone who might be practising outside the, let's say the Saskatchewan jurisdiction, might be, might be practising in another province. We had a shortage, for example, of individuals that we felt we wanted to attract into the province and practise in, in the province, we could in fact then suggest here that we would, we would exercise the right to ensure that that individual then might be able to come into a community or come into a district and provide the professional expertise that we would be looking for.

Mr. Toth: — I believe as well, Mr. Minister, the original legislation gave physical therapists the right to charge a fee for service. And is this right still in existence or has this been removed?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think the right still exists. For that to occur, just . . . We don't believe it needs to be part of the legislation only because they can do that anyway. So it becomes redundant I think, to include it in the legislation.

Mr. Toth: — So what you're basically saying, the right is still there. If a physical therapist feels or the profession feels that there are certain services that they're providing that medicare is not, in their opinion, covering enough or an adequate amount, that they could charge a patient an additional fee if they feel that they haven't received enough by the Department of Health. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — That's correct. It's the same as what a private nurse might charge as well. It's the same, it's the same process.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, currently how many physical therapists do we have practising in the province? And how does this compare to other provinces?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — We have in Saskatchewan today practising about 400 physical therapists around the province. You question about how we compare. We're about, about the middle of the pack if we were to take sort of the Canadian average of the number of physiotherapists . . . or physical therapists.

Do we need more physical therapists in Saskatchewan today? The answer is that we do need more. In some districts around the province today, they're operating without a physical therapist. In some districts, depending on where they're located, they might have as many as two in a rural area. And it tends to be the rural areas that we have shortages of physical therapists. But currently we have 400 that are practising and are working to attract more.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, when it comes to physical therapists and where they're practising, I guess a question that just comes to mind, just chatting with one of my local media this morning . . . In fact it just so happened some discussion came up about physical therapists, and it all related to the need for the service in one of the communities.

And the discussion about . . . and a discrepancy between the board and indeed the therapist involved and the family whose young son had unfortunately had the unfortunate mishap of falling off a bicycle and maybe sustaining a fairly major head injury and want . . . desiring to go back to their community and

receive some care. And a physical therapist had offered the care, but certainly found themselves with a lack of equipment and had gone to the board.

And basically I guess the board had indicated they really didn't have funds, but there were funds made available for some equipment and the board used the funds to buy equipment to actually enhance the lives of employees in the office. But it seemed like they forgot about the young . . . in this case a young child and a physical therapist needing equipment to help provide the physio for this young child versus just employees, making sure they stayed in shape.

And I guess when it comes right down to it, does the profession itself attempt to, and do they work or attempt to work, I guess together with district boards, to determine the types of facilities and equipment that is needed in the area to meet the needs and the demand for the service in the area?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think that when you look at what's happening in terms of physiotherapy across the country, what you see is you see an expanding of their role in a significant fashion, moving from institution, which has been the case by and large of where they practice, now to community.

And I think you make a good point that there is work that's being done today by the Canadian physical therapists associations and each of the provincial physical therapist associations that are looking at how you might start to improve and enrich and enhance the level of equipment that you have, so that you can provide a broader range of services to people who live in the community today.

I know that probably the best example of a really well-working physical therapy/occupational therapy department is located in the little community of Shellbrook. And you would think that services of that nature and the quality of services that you would find would be in the larger centres — and they are, they're very good — but if you could replicate what you have in terms of the physical therapy program across the province that exists today in Shellbrook, both with an occupational therapist and physical therapist, our communities would be well enriched.

And here's an example of a district health board whose taken the opposite view about how important it is to have those kinds of people within their communities and providing those broad range of services. So you're right in saying that those services need to be extended, expanded, increased, and work is going on as we speak today between district health boards and the profession to see that you can grow that, enrich that in the future.

(1545)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I think certainly when we look at health care it certainly involves many, many different professions and groups of individuals. And I guess communities and individuals as well taking some ownership and certainly endeavouring to provide the services even locally.

And I guess it's . . . well you talk about Shellbrook. I'd certainly like to think that even in some of the communities I

represent . . . and I think we recognize it won't be in every community, it's probably physically impossible to have that service in every community. But certainly we can look at the fact that it's available in rural areas and you can provide an adequate, and more than adequate, but a very good service to meet the needs of rural residents as well, rather than forcing them into additional costs in having to drive to larger centres to receive the service.

So I would like to commend the therapists for the efforts they are making to let the public know exactly the services they provide, working with district boards in trying to meet the needs of the local communities. And in general I think their recommendations and the changes to the Act that we have in front of us, I think at the end of the day will be positive and should be positive in providing . . . and helping this profession really to enhance its image before the public as well as providing good service.

So I thank you for your comments, your responses, and I thank your official as well for the time spent in addressing the questions that we brought forward this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I too want, Mr. Chair, to thank the member opposite for his questions and certainly his commentary as it relates to the importance of physiotherapy across the province. And I know that we have a common view and a common role in how we might enrich that.

I say to the member opposite that I've met your physical therapist in Moosomin. Does a wonderful job there. I think came initially to stay for a short period of time, married a farmer, and has been there nine and a half to ten years.

So I appreciate your comments and your questions, and to thank Mr. Johnston for his assistance this afternoon.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

The Deputy Chair: — Committee members, this Bill has 53 clauses but it has a total of 9 subject titles. We've just voted off the first subject title, which contained two clauses. I'm going to ask for leave to call the Bill by subject titles right up until clause 49. The final five clauses I'll call individually.

Leave granted.

Clauses 3 to 53 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 3 — The Public Utilities Easements Amendment Act, 1998

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

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

Bill No. 23 — The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1998

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

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

Bill No. 19 — The Physical Therapists Act, 1998

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

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

The Deputy Chair: — I invite the minister to reintroduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This afternoon I have with me from the Department of Health, seated next to me is the deputy minister, Mr. Con Hnatiuk, and seated next to him in the front row is Mr. Wiley, who is Rod Wiley, the executive director of finance and management services. Behind Mr. Hnatiuk is Mr. Neil Yeates. Mr. Yeates is the associate deputy minister. And seated directly behind me is Mr. Lawrence Krahn, who is the associate deputy . . . or assistant deputy minister. Seated over to my far left behind Mr. Wiley is Dale Bloom who is the assistant to the deputy minister.

I have other officials here with me today, Mr. Chair. Miss Lois Borden, who is the executive director of the district support; Jim Simmons, who is executive director of community care branch; Carol Klassen, who is executive director of acute and emergency services; and Mr. George Peters, who is executive director of capital and operating planning.

And I don't have, Mr. Chair, anyone left in the department. If there's another question that needs to get asked they're all here to help us through this process. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Subvote (HE01)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair and certainly welcome to the minister and his officials. And I look forward to discussing health issues with the minister's officials. I have a hard time believing that they're all here with him, but maybe he's right, we'll find out.

In regards to that, Mr. Minister, there was a time when I used to think it was just as nice to sit on that side of the House as this side of the House, especially when you've had headlines in the paper. And I remember opposition members — they didn't actually have a headline like I was reading such as, health mess rival to Channel Lake, but certainly bed shortage delays health surgery, communities facing hospital closures, city could lose

only diabetes specialist, or doctor workload ridiculous, or the waiting-lists.

Mr. Minister, I'm sure you've heard and you've noted a lot of the headlines. You've heard from people across this province a number of the concerns they have regarding health care. In fact there was a time I think when people believed that if we defeat the government of the '80s and re-elect the NDP, health care is going to be a non-issue. And I think that's an area that the Premier was certainly hoping it would be.

It would become irrelevant, but I think, Mr. Minister, we have to acknowledge that there are a number of concerns, a number of issues that continue to be a part of the process in this province and certainly health care, the concerns regarding health care or health care delivery, how it's handled, how it's maintained. Issues such as the Plains, issues such as hepatitis C, and the fact that as one individual indicated the other day the waiting-lists for elective surgery, the fact that you may not receive your surgery immediately.

Well the person that had called me the other day said they were told that it would be within a year they should receive this procedure. That was last June, June 1997, and just the other day they are now informed that it could be September, October 1998 rather than by June 1998. So, Mr. Minister, we do have a number of concerns in the area of health care.

I know, Mr. Minister, as well, you have talked about the fact that the government has put more or added more money to the pot and to hopefully address a number of the concerns. Especially in view of the fact that I believe back in 1992 when the former minister, Ms. Simard, had announced that there would be a major shake-up in health care. They were going to adopt what they called the wellness model. That wellness model included closing 51 rural hospitals plus the Plains health care centre which resulted in numerous jobs being removed from the system. And it was all done at the time, the minister suggested it needed to be done to address deficit finances.

(1600)

Then the ministers changed positions, and the member from Saskatoon became Minister of Health. And when asked about and looking over the documents and the blues and recognizing that there really hadn't been any reductions in spending, the minister's comment at that time regarding the changes in health care were the fact that changes needed to come about and it didn't necessarily mean that there was a reduction in health care spending, but it meant a change in the fact that we're spending money differently. And as the public looked at it and as you talked to people, they didn't feel that spending money differently wasn't really addressing the areas of concern they had.

So as you see, Mr. Minister, I expect and I'm certain your officials are quite aware or aware of two of the facts that there are a number of concerns regarding health care. And the debate we're into today, well I don't expect, Mr. Minister that we'll be able to finalize the debate on health care or the health issue today.

But I know you're probably expecting me to go right into

questions on hep C or questions in the area of the Plains health closure. Fortunately, Mr. Minister, I'll save that just for a little . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. I don't wish to be overly harsh here. I simply remind the hon. member that rule 28 of the legislature directs members to address their questions through the Chair to the minister.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, as we're debating this, and I am not exactly sure I'm always acknowledging your position, but I would like you to acknowledge the fact that my comments are directed through the Chair. But at the same time when I'm talking to the minister, I think the minister appreciates eye to eye contact as well. And so while I may be looking at the minister it doesn't mean that I've missed out on the Chair's role in the committee. And I thank you for that.

Mr. Minister, however, as I indicated and through the Chair I indicate to you the fact that we certainly want to get into debate on hep C, and certainly debate on Plains Health closure. But a call has come into our office and in fact the call just came back in today regarding a specific issue that a family has in regards to autism. And I have to admit, Mr. Minister, that I do not understand all the impacts of autistic children or individuals who face the problems of autism.

But for the sake of the calls that have come to the office I'd like to raise a few questions so that we can certainly respond to the calls. And therefore I'm diverting from some of the areas that certainly would probably raise a greater number of questions which I can assure you we will certainly get into at length even momentarily.

But I would like to raise a couple questions that have been raised with us in regards to the area of autism and support for families who are dealing with autistic children or autistic individuals in the family. And the level of support that they can or have received from the department in the past and what they're receiving today.

And what I was . . . I have four or five specific questions in that area that I'd like to bring up and make sure that we've addressed questions based on the issue that has been raised with our caucus in this regard.

And first of all I would like to ask, Mr. Minister, what is the current level of services provided in Saskatchewan for individuals suffering from autism?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well first of all, I want to just make a couple of comments that relate to what the member has indicated in his prelude to the questions that he had put to me, Mr. Chair. I want to assure the member opposite, there's an old saying that if you're not all here, then we're all here.

So I say to the member opposite that I want him to rest assured that we have a number of . . . all of our officials who are here today are well versed in all of the subject areas that we want to deal with today; and say to the member opposite that I really do have the appreciation of rather sitting on this side of the House than on that side of the House. I have that preference. And I'm

sure that you have that preference that you work hard to try to achieve as well.

And as much as through the course of the '80s, you talk a lot about the difficult time that Saskatchewan people had, and it's true that they did, but we have in this province as you know, because of the administration of the past, which you were a part of, we have a huge, huge deficit in Saskatchewan.

And today when you talk about some of the issues that Saskatchewan people are facing in health care, of which \$1.72 billion is the largest expenditure that we've ever provided to health care in this province, and there can be the debate as to whether or not it is spent in the appropriate fashion or way, and we can do that better, district health boards can do that better, we can clearly have that debate.

But let's not forget that we in this province, where \$750 million worth of interest payments could do a lot, not only for health care but for roads and economic development and jobs, and you name it or pick it.

I want to say to the member opposite that from time to time freely in this Legislative Assembly and through our debate, I know that we'll talk about the closure of 52 hospital beds . . . or 52 hospitals I mean — not hospital beds, but 52 hospitals — across the province. And from time to time I want to say to you that the 52 hospitals in many of those instances have been converted. They have not been closed. They're being used for other purposes today.

And I mean I have language that I can refer you to that your previous leader and members of your party, as well as members of the Liberal Party, have from time to time addressed the importance and the value of those decisions having been made. So you're on record in many of your local papers and across the province suggesting that decisions were made in health reform through the period of 1991 to 1997 where you've had reductions in services. You've had facilities that have been changed and are providing different roles today. And in many of those instances you support that process as well because you're on record for that happening.

I say to the member opposite that when we talk specifically about the issue of autism, I want to say to him, and I have some notes that I might address to you, dedicated mental health services to children with autism are provided primarily in Saskatoon and Regina, as you know, through the health districts and their affiliated community-based organizations, the Saskatoon Society for Autism and the autism resource centre.

I think secondly, these CBOs (community-based organizations) provide a functional assessment in terms of what they do in the centre or the home-based intervention, support recreational and consultation services to children with autism. And on average the most intensive intervention services provided are three hours per week for three months to a year.

The Saskatoon Society for Autism also manages, for your information, two residential facilities for individuals with autism: one for adolescents and one for adults in Saskatoon. And in Regina there are three residential group homes for individuals with autism ranging in age from the late teens to

their adult years, and one residential facility for respite only, for adolescents and adults. These facilities are funded primarily by Saskatchewan Social Services.

And I think finally, in response to your question, diagnostic services and treatment planning for individuals with autism are provided primarily through the Kinsmen children's centre and the child and youth mental health services in Saskatoon, and the Wascana Rehabilitation Centre and children and youth mental health services in Regina.

Those would be I think sort of the five areas that you might have some interest. And I can provide some additional background for you, if you like, in greater detail. And I can provide that. For the record I can simply get it to you as it relates to the age groups, three- to five-year-olds with their specialized educational needs, including autism which is under legislation.

And maybe as a point here, in 1998-99 Saskatchewan Health provided in the Saskatoon Health District with \$88,830 to contribute to the operational cost of the Saskatoon Society for Autism and \$193,440 to the Regina Health District Board to support those services here in this part of the province.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think from your comments it sounds like there's a number of avenues but a question that has specifically been raised — and I'm not exactly sure if it's been dealt with in your comments — and if you have information that can be passed over as well that we can follow up with, we'd sure appreciate it.

But a further question: what access do families with a child suffering from autism or an adult suffering from autism have to specialize treatments? I think the number of agencies you talked are fairly general. When it comes to specialized treatments, what access would individuals have?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — If the member is asking, Mr. Chair, specifically what types of interventions are involved, I can provide those interventions and say to him that they're provided this way. There's intensive home-based communication, interaction, and behaviour therapy as one model; comprehensive parent training and family support services; a centre-based therapeutic preschool program; and a transitional programming into community-based programs and other community-based preschool, day care recreational programs.

Those are the four areas in which intervention is provided to and for individuals who in fact have . . . or who suffer from autism, and to their families.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, certainly I would appreciate any additional information regarding autism and some of the programs that may be provided, even if you would like to send some of that information over. It would certainly be helpful when we . . . in talking with individuals regarding problems of living with an autistic child.

Are children with autism permitted ongoing access to pediatric occupational therapists in Regina?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — My thought would be that they would be. They would be provided the opportunity for that kind of access, for that type of therapy.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I'll have to do some follow-up to and just, as I say, get more of the details if there are some questions to be raised in response to that.

Another question that was raised as well is children with autism have severe . . . and it deals with the fact that children with autism have severe sensory dysfunction that permeates everything in their lives which can be improved with the assistance of an occupational therapist trained in sensory integration.

According to the people we've talked to, this service is not provided in Saskatchewan and they must travel to Winnipeg. Is that true, Mr. Minister? Or are any attempts being made to make sure the service is provided or is there a service that is provided here that they may not be aware of, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — What I would suggest to the member if you have a specific case that you're alluding to of which they require some specialized services that may or may not, in your opinion, be accessible in the province I'd be very happy to receive that and collectively we could try to sort out, through the department, what additional services we might have in Saskatchewan that we could ensure that these people had accessibility to.

Or if there are other areas of need that they might have, either they or their family, we would be able to assist you in getting through that process. Because I can't answer the specific question in terms of whether or not the particular needs that you're asking about can in fact be met today in the programs that we have available to us.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I understand that back in 1996 there was some questions raised regarding autism, and at the time the government provided auditory integration training funding and we've now been informed that this funding has now been removed. Can you confirm this information? And if so, explain to the Assembly why it was removed.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Just to the member opposite I'm told that this specific type of programming is currently under review and that we will be able to provide the member with broader and more detailed information into the future on this particular program.

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Minister, when you say the program is under review, does that mean that the program has been discontinued for the time being while it's under review, or is funding still available while they review the current program?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — To the member, and through the Chair, just to say that what we have done is we have referred some of these clients to Manitoba, but the program is under review from the point of view of assessing the level of service that we receive from those people who in fact have gone. And into the future we'll be making some decisions here within Saskatchewan's purview of health delivery as to how we might offer those services in the province here and assess the value of

the service that we've received from Manitoba.

(1615)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll certainly look forward to following up too. And I'm not exactly sure if the one call we received would be one of those that have been referred to Manitoba, but certainly the question arises about the availability out of province.

Mr. Minister, can you tell us if people suffering from autism are eligible to receive any assistance from SAIL (Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living), for incontinence supplies. For example people suffering from cerebral palsy may be eligible to receive assistance for adult diapers or other supplies. And many people suffering from autism need the same type of supplies.

Mr. Minister, we were told that they are not covered, and that this causes great financial hardship for families. And can you explain what coverage is available and why these individuals would not be covered?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Just to the member opposite. The services that are covered by and large by SAIL are primarily for adults, as the member likely has some sense of. And what we're doing today is we're undergoing a very, very detailed and extensive review of the entire program that SAIL offers, and expect that within a short time we're going to have a better appreciation of how we're going to be able to deliver the programs through SAIL and what the catchment area will be of individuals and families that will be served through that program. So to date that program is under review, and specifically I can't provide any additional information to you until we've completed that.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I raise those questions because they're raised by an individual who . . . one of the calls that has raised the problems that have arisen in their case where as a result of an autistic child, certainly marital problems and the break-up of the home, and that has resulted in financial hardship. So I think you can appreciate, Mr. Minister, when we're dealing with situations such as this, while it may not affect a lot of people, when it does for families that it does affect, it certainly creates a hardship.

I know a family in our area that have faced some very difficult circumstances as a result of having an autistic child. The fortunate part, Mr. Minister, is that there are . . . communities themselves have taken upon themselves. And in one situation that I'm aware of just to allow the family a break and even give the child an opportunity to attend a camp, have put on a fund-raiser and were quite surprised when at the end of the day the total cost of the camp, that camp program was covered. So it just shows that people in this province are aware of different circumstances and are willing to reach out and help meet those needs.

And I think sometimes it's unfortunate that we have to call on the voluntary help and the care of individuals, when I think most people feel that these are areas where government, especially through our health program, would be reaching out to meet those needs. But I think it's certainly important to recognize that people in this province are willing to reach out and to help meet some of the financial needs that are created.

Now, Mr. Minister, a couple questions here. How many people in the province of Saskatchewan are diagnosed with autism? And also, you had indicated a number of different programs, intervention programs. How are the different programs paid for? Are they paid for by government or are, in many cases, individuals left to cover the costs of those programs themselves?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — To the member. Just to indicate that I support his comments that he made earlier as they relate to the various different situations that individuals might find themselves and the hardship of course that's related to, in particular, raising a child that's autistic. Recognize that and appreciate the effort that that requires on the part of families and the willingness in many cases of communities to come together and assist individuals and families in meeting some of those needs.

And the member is correct that in Saskatchewan we're noted, irrespective of where you come from, whether it's Moosomin or Shaunavon or Yorkton or wherever it is that you are, communities pull together, and in the very fine, excellent tradition that we're known for in this province in many aspects.

And I want to say that we have of course, as you know, the Kinsmen Foundation, which is probably a leader in terms of raising funds in this province, to assist families and young children in enriching their lives to ensure that they have a higher quality and a better standard.

To your question specifically about the number of children, there are approximately 500 children today, and adults, in Saskatchewan that suffer from autism. And the largest portion of that funding of course is covered off through grants through to the community-based organizations.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, I thank you, Mr. Minister, for those comments. And certainly we'll take some of the information that you provided us this afternoon in the area of autism and discuss some of the responses, the responses with some of the callers we've had in regards to this too.

And if there are further questions that they feel that they need some more answers on, we'll look forward to bringing forward at another date so we can indeed address all the concerns that individual family members may have.

Mr. Minister, before I move on into another area of discussion, my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena has a few questions that they would like to get into in a specific case that has been raised with them as well.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, and staff, we have a few questions as well dealing with, not on that topic but on another, that perhaps you could provide some information to us today that we can look at and raise at a further meeting in estimates.

And some of the things that we would like to know are the deficits in the districts out there. Do you have a total of where these district deficits are to date? Do you have that with you?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — To the member, through the Chair, from

Wood River. I have the annual report here for '96-97. And the annual report of '96-97 lists the districts and the financial status of each of those districts.

Now if the member is asking for a 1997-98 annual report, that annual report is yet not tabled. It will be tabled likely the end of June or early in July. So I don't have those numbers available with me today because I don't have them yet. But they'll be in the annual report at the time that I've indicated that they'll be available.

But I do have the 1996-97 report which we could make available to the member if he doesn't have a copy of it.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, what deficits are you aware of at present without waiting for the annual report? Other years we've been able to get I believe an update at this time of the year. And could you provide even an incomplete list of what districts are reporting to you their deficits will be?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member. As you know, the districts close off their operating years at the end of April, and we're now only into the first week in May. So for us to have that kind of detail today, we don't have that at our disposal yet.

So I say to the member, we'll have a better appreciation of what those numbers will be, likely within four or five weeks from now and then can provide that in broader detail for you. But today, because of the closing date for the district health boards, as I say to you it's just completed. So for us to have that information in detail today, we just don't have it.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, lately you've been making some comments about the hospital situation, the bed situation, the lack of here in the cities, but your response has been that in fact you would like to see rural hospitals play a lot larger role in taking care of people. And I commend you for that but would you be able to provide me the dollar amounts that you're going to support that statement with?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think one of the things that I've said publicly in some of the meetings that the member and I have been fairly close at, you being the Chair and you inviting me up to share the podium from about six or seven inches away from you and I appreciate the fact that we've been able to do that. But say to you that as we've been around the province together, we've been talking a great deal about how health reform has in fact in some instances enriched the value of health delivery around the province. And in some instances it has been difficult for districts and communities to fully realize the impacts of what we can achieve through health reform in the province.

And I know that we've talked at length about the importance of hospital beds, and the value of hospital beds, and particularly the Plains Health Centre here. And I've said on a regular basis that it isn't the level of beds around the province that really signal or direct or provide the quality and the level of health care services that are provided in the province. Although they are important and are a significant piece in the overall delivery of health in the province, there have been a whole host of other initiatives that are going on today that have enriched the value of health services.

Like when we look at the number of day surgeries that we provide in the province today, they're significantly higher. When you look at the number of cataract surgeries that we provide in the province today than what we did say four or five years ago, or for that matter three years ago, they're significantly higher. When we look at the number of hips and knees and orthopedic surgeries that we provide in the province today, they're significantly higher. And the processes and the techniques and the technology today that we use to perform some of these procedures are further advanced and they'll continue to grow.

And so we need to be careful around the debate. You and I need to be careful around the debate about suggesting for a moment that if we enrich or grow the number of beds in the province that we're going to have a better health care system, because that isn't reflective in the literature anywhere across North America.

When you look at what's happened in provinces in Canada, and on a regular basis I get an opportunity to sit around the table with Health ministers from across the country. And it doesn't matter which province you look at, what you see is you see reductions in the number of beds and institutional services that are provided in acute care.

That's where everybody's going with a greater emphasis on community-based services, on home care, and that's where we're going. So you try to grow those services more in your communities and you try to enrich those services so that you can keep people closer to home. And that's part of the message that I've been giving as I've been travelling around the province.

I think we've done an excellent job of ensuring that we have some of the finest tertiary centres in western Canada in Saskatoon and Regina. And our Saskatchewan rural people have a huge dependency on ensuring that those services continue to be at the level that they're at today. And it's correct in what you say, is that as I've been around the province I have a strong interest in ensuring that we increase or try to enrich the level of services that we have in rural communities.

Just recently, as you know, we were in your community and talked about the new health care facility in Ponteix, which was a difficult situation as you know. But today I think provides a broad range of services, some that weren't there before.

We recently made the announcement of the new health care facility in Shaunavon that will soon be on its way to development. I talked a little bit about the importance of a new health care centre in Balcarres. Just made that announcement not more than a week ago for a new integrated health facility in Balcarres.

We have a new hospital that's going to be built in Athabasca, in the northern part of the province, which your good friend and mine from Athabasca will be a benefactor of, as well as the people of northern Saskatchewan. We've talked about and recently approved the new hospital for Meadow Lake.

So when you look around the province and see the kinds of initiatives that are going on in rural Saskatchewan, I guess it's

our signal to say to you and to people who live in those communities, that we want to build a complete health delivery system, and an important piece of that would be ensure that we have good quality health care facilities which are appropriately staffed and equipped, so that you have that level of service for Saskatchewan people in all parts of the province.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, then following up on your comments, let's take a look at some places such as Swift Current. I believe they have already put forward a proposal to your department. Now I'm not sure if this is a thrust really of their own or at the request of the department, and you could perhaps clear this up.

But I know it's a proposal that was put forward that they could cut that regional hospital back some 54 beds. And the doctors down there, Mr. Minister, we both know are saying the same things that each and every health care professional in this province is saying, in that there is burn-out, there is stress, they are overworked.

And so when you say that we can do a lot more out in the rural areas but we're doing it at a lot higher level of acuity and we're doing it with staff that are on, you know, near burn-out conditions, and yet we are still looking at proposals coming in from places like Swift Current, how then can you stand up and say that there's going to be more health care delivered in rural Saskatchewan?

(1630)

The Deputy Chair: — Before the minister responds I just wish to bring the hon. member's attention to rule no. 28 of the Legislative Assembly rules that requests or requires all members to address their comments through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what's important to recognize here is that the article that I read and certainly the newspaper . . . or the radio clip that I heard the CEO (chief executive officer) from Swift Current speak about was that they were looking at a variety of different options in terms of what they might do for their district.

We have not received a definitive plan from the Swift Current District Health Board that suggests that they're going to be reducing a whole host of beds today. But our role will be to continue to work with district health boards, not only Swift Current's, but those across the province.

And as the member has an appreciation, there are clearly needs for us to look at how districts might work closely with each other. And the example in my visit to that part of the province, for example, the Rolling Hills Health District that surrounds the Swift Current Health District, have talked a lot about how important it would be for them to look at how they might partner up in a variety of different ways, and if they were to do that, the valuable and the enriched services that they might . . . you might see on the western side of the province.

And that's part of what my objective is, is to see if we could have a broader range of discussion between district health boards so that you might be able to further enrich, pool some of those resources that are in those areas. Because when you ask

the question about what happens in this province with the allocation of funding that we have today, I don't hear anywhere that \$1.72 billion isn't enough today to deliver health care services in the province. I don't hear anybody say to us that that's not enough money.

What I often hear and what you hear and from some of the public meetings that we've recently had, it's the way in which those funds are being used, who's administrating them, are we getting the best value for the money that's being invested.

And I guess part of the discussion that I'd like to see take place, when we're looking at enriching the level of services in rural Saskatchewan, is that you have a broader discussion with the district health boards of where you have major centres that are providing some of those specialized services that I think you and I believe need to be enriched.

So that will be my focus and my goal over the next few weeks and months to come, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, I guess we're going to sort of have a free-ranging conversation here to the end. Because when you say the \$1.72 billion is enough, probably it is, perhaps it is. I don't know — you're the minister and you're the one that should have those figures at hand and know better.

However when you take a look at the *Leader-Post* on Saturday, May 2, it has the "Saskatoon health 'crisis'" — I imagine you're aware of this paper, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister — and here it is making the statement that officials from that health district are saying that they would need an immediate budget increase of 3 to \$4 million to bring the overall waiting-list for surgery down to six months from, I guess it's a little over a year.

So given that, where we're looking at bringing it down by 50 per cent for 3 or 4 million, I have to assume that if you're saying there's enough money there, then the people, the boards that you and your government initially put in place and basically are still running health care today, and especially under the tight guidelines that you've put forward, for a few million dollars here or there we could bring these horrendous waiting-lists of 6,600 people down to an acceptable level.

So could you then provide me, as this Saskatoon District Health official has made the statement of 3 to 4 million — he knows what that waiting-list is to be brought down — so could you provide that for each health district in the province, what the dollar amount would be to bring the waiting-list down to those levels.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to . . . I don't want to get into a debate about the literature that's printed in the newspapers on a regular basis from both Saskatoon and Regina. But in the very same article that the member alludes from — and I don't have it quite handy — but I want to say to the member opposite that when in fact the Saskatoon Health District reviewed in more detail the issue of waiting-lists, what they said, I believe, is that when you compare Saskatchewan's waiting-lists to waiting-lists across the country, that Saskatchewan's waiting-lists are not any, are not any greater than what they are in other parts of Canada today.

And I'm not saying that we don't have a challenge or we don't have a goal here to reduce those waiting-lists, as the official from the Saskatoon Health District said. And I think he used his mother as the example, where he said that his mother, who was in Great Britain, was on a waiting-list that was far longer than what it is here today in Canada or in Saskatchewan, is I think his direct quote.

So if you make the case about whether or not we have an objective to reduce the number of, the number of days in which somebody waits for a surgery or procedure today, of course that is our goal and we'll continue to work hard in trying to achieve that.

And our role with district health boards, as you know, right or wrong, we have a process and a system that's in Saskatchewan today. That decision was made in 1991. We have district health boards that actually provide the direct services to individuals across the, across the province.

And the government, through its efforts, tries to provide the largest package of funding that it can to each of those health districts and then the allocations are made on, on needs-based funding. And on an ongoing basis, what you see is you see adjustments to that allocation the districts receive based on migration.

So, I mean today, as much as we might not appreciate the fact that our budget is \$1.72 billion in health care, it's 40 per cent almost of our total expenditure that we, that we, that we invest in health care — a number one priority in terms of investment. And we're of the opinion the district health boards across the province are in fact making their allocations in the best fashion that they believe meets the needs of each of their districts. And I have no reason to believe that that's not the case.

Can we get a broader utilization of those funds that go out to some of those smaller districts in particular? I think the answer to that is that we can. And that's why I talk about the importance of having a partnership between some of the districts, because I think it would get maximized in a greater way, in a greater fashion, the resources that they have allocated to them and will be able to provide enriched services at a home-based level to many of those people in rural Saskatchewan in particular.

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Before I recognize the hon. member, I just wish to remind the minister of rule 28 in the Legislative Assembly handbook that directs that comments to members be directed through the Chair.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, do yourself, do you feel that 370 days is an acceptable period of time to be on a waiting-list?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I think what's important here is that we have a full appreciation of how the waiting-list process works. And the member opposite, Mr. Chair, has some appreciation as well that waiting-lists are not new to Saskatchewan; they're not new to Canada. Waiting-lists are . . . have always been in place.

And today the decision about how people move up and down the waiting-lists are not made by me and they're not made by my department staff. They're made by the physicians in terms of their priority in which people require a particular procedure. And as you know, we have electives and we have urgent and we have emergency need. And people are categorized based on what their requirements are and their immediate need that they have for medical health services or treatment.

Now if my treatment or an individual's treatment changes in the process . . . And they might be categorized as an elective today. Based on the best medical evidence and wisdom and best practice that they would access and evaluate somebody on, they would make a determination of where they'd go on those three categories.

Now if that changes along the way, if someone's elective today and they go in to see their physician because they believe that their situation changes, they of course would move up the list if they become more critical to the piece. And always in this province that we've been able to address, always we've been able to address the emergency needs of people.

So if somebody is an emergency case in this province, you're stuck with where they are, the system accommodates them in a variety of different ways. And every day we hear about somebody who's involved in a car accident or we hear about somebody who's involved in an unfortunate family feud where there is damage done to them, or if somebody's been shot in a hunting accident or there has been a crisis like a train crash, and all of those occasions, all of those occasions — barring none — when there's an emergency situation, people get dealt with within our system.

And you and I both know, as we've been around the province, Mr. Chair, and again last night, people stand up and tell their story about how it is that in an emergency situation they're able to get to the centre of excellence in this province, or the centres of excellence in this province, at the tertiary centres, and on every, every occasion — every occasion — they get treated.

I have yet, I have yet to hear from somebody who's gone through the public meetings that I've been at with you where they haven't been served by the tertiary centre. Every testimonial says — every testimonial says — that people have been well served. The professional community has served them very well, be it the physician or the doctor. The ambulatory service has ensured that they've gotten them there. And I've yet to hear from somebody where they've to say that the emergency services haven't been well provided.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, do you see what the problem is here — you're playing a game of semantics — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I think that's what he's doing. Now we know full well you're not going to leave somebody in an emergency situation for 370 days; but those electives, they're on these waiting-lists for so long. And we've raised cases in here where it was two and a half years to get some surgeries for hip replacement and such. Now when you leave them that long . . . you, Mr. Minister, are the one who made the comment before one other day about the costs of doing surgery once they're left for far too long.

Now you can perhaps provide us with those figures for all those people that you have let — I guess it's some 6,600 people — that you have let sit on waiting-lists for a year, a year and a half, up to two years. Now there's a tremendous cost to the system.

In getting back to the question that I had asked before, Mr. Chair, does he agree that 370 days is a fair period of time to wait for elective surgery list? I didn't say anything about emergency. Surely no one would accept or believe that you'd be that cruel, to leave people go in an emergency situation. But you can't tell me there isn't something cruel and unusual about leaving people for a year on elective-surgery lists — answer that one, please.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say to the member opposite that first of all you need to understand . . . and maybe you do, Mr. Chair. Maybe you do understand the three levels that I tried to tell you about, which are the — and I'll go through them again just so that we both understand them fully — which are the emergency one and the urgent one and the elective one.

And as I say to you and have said on many occasions, that the decision about how people move up and down those lists are really made by the practitioners, by the physicians. Not by politicians, and not by district health staff, and not by boards in this province, but they're made by professionals, who are well trained and highly skilled and are physicians across this province. And they decide what level of service someone needs.

So when the member opposite asks whether or not a period of 370 days is too long, the decision about how long somebody sits on a waiting-list by and large is determined by their family physician and their specialist and the system. And so when you have that kind of determination made by those specialized individuals, then I'm assuming that they're appropriate, because I trust that they're in the system today providing those kinds of services for us because they have that kind of degree of training.

Now the number of procedures — and I want to raise with the member again and share with him — the number of procedures that we're doing in Saskatchewan today, cataracts alone, over the period 1991-92 to today, '96-97, cataract surgeries are up by 81 per cent. So we're doing more cataract surgeries today than we ever have.

(1645)

Hip and knee replacements are up by 30 per cent in this province than what they were in 1992-93. And when you take a look at what Saskatchewan's surgeries that we performed from 1987-88 to 1996-97; in 1997-98 we did a total of 77,237 surgeries, and today, today we're doing 87,378 day surgeries. Now those surgeries are up by 52 per cent. Those are day surgeries.

And so when the member talks about the number of procedures that we're doing in the province today surgically, they're far greater today, as in-patient and out-patients, than there ever have been. They're far greater today. And I've highlighted for you the two areas that have been probably most notable, and those are in the cataract side and those that we do hip and knee surgeries.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, what you're doing is cherry picking a few. When we're talking about elective surgery I have — and this was raised a few days ago in the House here — from the Saskatoon Health District, the waiting-lists for the different surgeries. For general surgery, elective, 370 days, and you can't dispute this stuff. I would like to know, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, if in fact you agree with this sort of stuff?

Because don't talk about the emergencies or the amount you're putting through, the fact of the matter is you've got over three times more people today on waiting-lists than there was 15 years ago. And that's a sign of your government.

Now you're saying, and your back-benchers who are heckling continuously here today, you're saying, Mr. Minister, that it's acceptable. We have, we have a lady that laid — what? — six days, seven days, Hope Sawin in the Assiniboia hospital, with a broken leg, broken hip. There were no beds.

So for you now to stand up and say, well it's the doctors who make the decision, it's the health district here in Regina or Saskatoon that's making the decision? Oh, come on. You know what it is? You're saying it's not a political decision. It is a political decision — it's one being made by you and your government.

Because if the beds are not available, if the staff shortages are there and they can't deal with the people, who's to blame? You can't blame the doctors and nurses if you don't give them the tools to work with. You don't provide the beds. You're putting quotas on the amount of surgeries that can happen. How can you say it's not your fault? Of course it is.

And getting back to the . . . You know, it's terrible the heckling that's coming from the member from Regina South, Andrew Thomson . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. There is a growing amount of noise in the legislature and as we're into the last minutes of this day, I ask for the cooperation of all members in allowing the hon. member for Wood River to put his questions and the Hon. Minister of Health to respond.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so when we take a look at . . . backing up a few questions ago because you didn't answer that one either and I've been trying to be civil with you, Mr. Minister, and get these answers from you.

Three to four million dollars, Mr. Chair, would take care of six months. It would bring the waiting-lists to six months. Right? So that's taking 50 per cent off the waiting-lists, Mr. Chair, in Saskatoon alone — 3 to 4 million.

I have to assume by your comments that either the administrative people that you and your government have put in place in these districts can't do the job . . . because you're saying there's enough money there. So they're not doing the job if they can't find 3 to 4 million in the Saskatoon Health District to bring those waiting-lists down. Somebody should be fired. Somebody should be. Wouldn't you agree with that, Mr. Minister? I have to assume it's roughly the same here in Regina. Well why wouldn't he?

So what are we talking about? If it's 3 to 4 million in Saskatoon, say the same in Regina, couldn't we be talking about 15 million, 20 million, to bring a waiting-list down from one year, two years? Some 6,600, people down to what was I guess acceptable level, Mr. Chair. And you'll remember well back in the late '70s when the Premier Allan Blakeney, publicly threatened to fire a Health minister if he couldn't keep below 2,000. And now 6,600 is acceptable? And for mere millions, half of what you wanted to spend in Guyana, would take care of this.

How do you answer people like the lady in Assiniboia who lays . . . an elderly lady lays with a broken hip, broken leg for that many days? How can you stand up and say that things are under control? And you play the games about emergency service. Mr. Minister, you've got a lot to answer for.

I have seen lists that go well beyond 370 days. This is for general elective surgery, and yet I have seen lists where surgery couldn't be done for hip replacements and such on elderly people who deserve a lot better than what this government is giving them. And it's gone two and a half years, Mr. Minister. And I've tabled, and the member who is heckling from Regina South has seen these documents, because I've tabled them in here — two-and-a-half years waiting-list? That's not acceptable by any standard. It's not.

Do you dispute the 3 to \$4 million figure? Is this Saskatoon District Health official right or wrong, that he could accomplish these 50 per cent reductions in waiting-lists with three to four million bucks? It would seem . . . Well that seems inhuman to not spend that much money or give that district enough money to take care of those lists.

The people who are really suffering here also, let's not forget, by and large are elderly. These are the people that pioneered this country. These are the people that went through the world wars to make sure that you and I could live in a country like this.

Well Andrew Thomson, the member . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. The hon. member for Wood River, I believe would recognize the improper use of a member's name. I ask the member to withdraw the name and carry on.

Mr. McPherson: — Sorry, Mr. Chair. I withdraw using that member's name. I meant to say the member from Regina South, who continuously . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. It is . . . Order. I asked the member to simply withdraw that name, which you did and I appreciate that. It is improper to comment on a ruling of the Chair. I ask the member to simply proceed with the Health estimates.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Mr. Chair, thank you. And I do withdraw the comments. But it does come back, Mr. Chair, to one thing — it's about compassion. Now the minister is standing up in here and he's saying \$1.72 billion is enough. Perhaps it is.

You know I think the problem that this government has had from day one, Mr. Chair, is that they have decided how much money they're prepared to spend on people's health care needs. Instead they should have always been coming at it from the other end. They should have decided what kind of care, what level of care, they are prepared to give to the people.

To the elderly people in this province, and to those who are sick and those who need the help, they should have determined what level of care they were prepared to provide. What is an acceptable period of time for an elderly person to lay in a bed waiting for a broken leg or hip to get fixed? What is an acceptable period of time for people waiting to find out how bad their cancer is? What is an acceptable period of time for each and every operation and surgery that should be happening, and funded accordingly?

That's how the health budget should be arrived at. You first determine what kind of compassion you're going to provide to society and you fund it accordingly. And if we have to err in any of the budgets in this province, you better be prepared to err in the health care budget. Or, and I'm sure this will happen, the people will deal with you at the polls.

Mr. Minister, I've asked a simple question. Obviously you're not going to give that answer today. Mr. Chair, I don't believe he is. But perhaps he could bring those figures for another day. Could I have the breakdown for each health district in this province as to what the dollar value would be to bring the waiting-lists down by 50 per cent?

Further to that, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, could we get an update on the waiting-lists in each and every health district or in the province as a whole — or/and the province as a whole — as to how many people are on these waiting-lists?

Now we're hearing from medical professionals . . . And why is it, why is it that the people can't find out from their own government exactly what the situation is? Health has become the most secretive thing we do in this . . . or that government does in this province. That's not what it should be all about. Our health care, our care for our sick and our elderly, should be everyone's business and we should all know about it.

So let's find out exactly what those waiting-lists are. Why have you allowed them, Mr. Minister, to get to 6,600? You can't, you can't accept that that is acceptable. Surely you can't. And you must know there's a serious problem for you to stand up, for you to stand up and say that you yourself, Mr. Chair — he said this, that he was on three waiting-lists himself. When questioned by the doctor . . .

The Chair: — Why is the member for Saskatoon Nutana on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, I move that we rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

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