

EVENING SITTING
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Labour
Vote 20

The Deputy Chair: — Before I call the first subvote, I invite the Minister of Labour to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Tonight joining me is Sandra Morgan, the deputy minister of Labour. And behind me, John Boyd, director of planning and policy branch; Sharon Little, director of budget and operations; Graham Mitchell, executive director, labour services division; and Dr. Fayek Kelada, the occupational health and safety division.

Subvote (LA01)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister and her officials. Madam Minister, the other day we dealt with the CCTA (Crown Construction Tendering Agreement), and we were just trying to get a feel as to where we were regarding the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement, whether or not it's something that's going to eventually fall by the wayside, and certainly in your tenure.

An area I want to deal with today is a little bit regarding strikes. And just in the past, oh, less than six months we've actually had two pieces of legislation that have ordered individuals back to work, and most notably the Power workers and the nurses in the province of Saskatchewan.

And it would seem to me, Madam Minister, that I'm not exactly sure what message you're sending. I guess the message — we're kind of wondering — is your government coming to the point of basically beginning to realize that there are certain services that would be considered essential? I believe that was some of the comments that were made. Certainly the debate on the legislation regarding the Power Corporation and the nurses.

And what I'd like to know is what your view is when it comes to collective bargaining and when it comes to workers such as the nurses and Power workers. Are you in a position where maybe you're beginning to take a close look at determining, as some other jurisdictions I understand are now beginning to look at the fact that certain professions would be considered essential.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I'll start maybe by stating that the principle is to achieve the highest level of collective bargaining that you can achieve without compromising the public good. And so certainly when it comes to an area of services that people would consider critical either to health and safety, then you're into an area where you are weighing public good against the principles of free collective bargaining.

But I would say that we only had five work stoppages due to strikes and lockouts in Saskatchewan in 1998, and this is the fourth lowest number of stoppages since 1970. And so probably about 97 per cent of agreements are settled without recourse to

any — what would you call — more extreme measures. And it's only been in the instance of areas that you could call affecting the public good where this kind of debate really heats up. And I would tend to agree with you that what we've seen here is perhaps we need a new type of tool in this situation. And what that tool should look like would be a matter of discussion amongst the parties, but I think it's fair to say that perhaps we don't have the correct tool for these type of circumstances.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, thank you. Madam Minister, I guess that is the concern right now. And certainly in the most recent disputes that we've had, especially when we look at SaskPower workers were threatening, so were the nurses threatening . . . And then the Premier spent so-called at 11 hours and yet the information we have, the union wasn't necessarily sitting with the Premier for 11 hours in discussion. And then the nurses then opted the . . . or indicated that they were going to go on strike and the government already had its legislation prepared.

And I guess one would say, well you'd be the last person we'd expect to hear talking in support of unions. I think, Madam Minister, certainly when we look at unions and individual workers across the province, I think what most people are looking for is fairness as well as being mindful of some of the safety features that you talk about.

Certainly at the time of year that the Power workers were possibly looking at strike action in the middle of winter and if you had a major power outage that creates a problem. The nurses as well to walk out for an extended period of time, that creates a problem. But I think as you indicated earlier, Madam Minister, maybe we need to review where we are and a better understanding between management and unions and government in regards to some of these situations rather than creating the animosities that we certainly see in the workplace. And that's one of the areas of concern that I think needs to be addressed.

The most notably this weekend, just chatting with some of the individuals in local hospitals, one of the issues they raised with me is . . . one person said well we'd be almost better if the nurses were back on strike, they're just being plain ornery right now . . . (inaudible) . . . this individual talking is a member of one of the other unions.

So it's . . . what has happened is we do have a lot of animosities that are showing up in the workplace and that certainly, I would think, has to have an effect on the workplace and on health and safety as well. So I agree with you that we need to certainly look at that.

One other area I'd like to raise a couple questions is regards to Workers' Compensation Board. One of the chief complaints that comes into our offices — and I know my office — is the fact of the appeals process and how long they take. And what I'm wondering, Madam Minister, is since you've become Minister of Labour, have you done anything to address some of the concerns that have been part of workers' compensation for a number of years, and what have you done in regards to these types of complaints that continue to come to the forefront time and time again?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well the workers' compensation system is an interesting one because whereas there is a high level of satisfaction, for those who aren't satisfied, they are quite often deeply unsatisfied. So you have a situation where a large percentage of the people who deal with the corporation are satisfied with the services that they get.

Now I think it's not unlike other insurance types of programs like SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) or whatever, where people have a certain view of what their entitlement is, and then the Workers' Compensation Board has their rules that they operate by.

What is my goal as minister is to make sure that the people using the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) system get as quick a response as possible given the capacity of the workload. And again you're always trading off between how quickly you can respond and how much resources are dedicated to staffing and those kinds of things, because again the services provided are fully funded out of the workers' comp fund, and that then becomes an expense to the employers to pay those costs out of the funds. So you try to get that balance between the cost of providing the service and getting that responsiveness that you want within the system.

So the Workers' Comp Board has done a lot of work on trying to speed up their processes, doing some early return-to-work programs to try to speed up the time it takes for people to get their assessments and either go back to work or get the treatment that they need. So they're constantly working on improving that. Every five years there's a board of review that meets to go over all the improvements all the various stakeholders think could happen in the program, and each time that happens, there's a series of changes that take place to try to improve the program. And I would have to say that they've made huge advances in dealing with the great unfunded liability that they had, as well as dealing with a number of changes that both workers and employers wanted to see in the program.

But I think there's probably still some room for improvement on the customer service front, and again we continue to meet with the Workers' Compensation Board to see what their ideas are for how they can deal with that issue.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, when it comes to workers' comp and some of the concerns that are raised, if I think I hear one thing more than any other, or one concern or issue, it's the fact that certainly the people that come into my office, and I'm not sure possibly even into your office, just feel that they really haven't been heard. They feel that they're treated very impersonally, a feeling of well you're just putting us on, that it isn't a problem.

Some of the concerns arise from the fact that people are forced into it. You talked about exercise and training at getting back to work quickly, and the fact that they have nagging health problems that either their physician or even a specialist indicates is there or has arisen as a result of that workplace incident, and there just are a number of frustrations.

And one of the areas of real frustration is the appeal process. There doesn't seem to be a mechanism, Madam Minister, where people feel that when they've been turned down they just don't

seem to have that avenue of really being able to sit down with somebody who can understand what they're going through and help them overcome some of the complications and the problems.

They're basically feeling that they're being treated as if we don't really listen to the concerns or follow-up and we put it off, that eventually that person or individual will quit complaining and will go someplace else. And that's an area of major concern that I think needs to be addressed. And I think, Madam Minister, there needs to be a better avenue of communication and understanding, personnel who have better communications skills with individuals. So I would certainly encourage your department to review this and to look into and see if we can come up with something with the Workers' Compensation Board. I know addressing some of these concerns with Mr. Cameron in Public Accounts was an issue that he acknowledged as well, that that was an area that they needed to work with a little more carefully.

Madam Minister, what is the average caseload right now for a workers' compensation worker and is that number coming down?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — During 1998 a total of 1,607 injured workers were assessed at 29 secondary and 11 tertiary assessment centres. So that would be the number that actually received assessments through the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) program.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, as well we get a number of people who, as a result of the feelings of not really being heard at Workers' Comp, ended up going to the workers' advocate office. And while they appreciate the help the office does supply, they also find that they face very lengthy waits simply because of the caseload of the workers' advocate office and what it has taken on.

Madam Minister, would you have any idea of what that caseload is right now? And I noted by the budget you've given a small increase in that budget but I'm not sure whether or not it will even begin to address the caseloads and the backlog that is there. So I guess the question is: what would the caseload be that the workers' advocate office has to date and how far will your increase in the workers' advocate office funding increase go to addressing some of the caseload that that office is facing?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The backlog right now is 300 and the advocates are handling about 50 cases per advocate. And with the additional resources they hope to clear up that whole backlog by the end of this year.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Deputy Chair, thank you. Madam Minister, so what you're saying is the resources or the additional funding you have put into the workers' advocate office you feel will address the shortfall and the backlog that is currently in the office, is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We're hopeful of that. There's a new manager there and that's their intention. And other advocacy agencies that the government has have tried a variety of different methods to speed up dealing with backlogs and some of these have been quite successful. So again they're going to

try within this area and I guess all I can promise to do, and I certainly hope to be able to fulfill this promise, is to report to you again next year. Although I may have to report to someone other than you.

(1915)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, maybe the roles will be reversed, we'll find out when . . . after the results of a provincial election which we anticipate very shortly. Most likely you're probably doing the same thing.

Madam Minister, a question that was raised by Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses to the director or actually Mr. Cameron, Chairperson of the Workers' Compensation Board, regarding funding. Mr. Cameron's letter indicates, and I'm reading paragraph 2:

As you know the Workers' Compensation Board is directed by legislation to provide funding for the OH&S and workers' advocate office. The legislation however does not provide any accountability for these expenditures to the Workers' Compensation Board.

Madam Minister, I'm wondering how much funding comes from the WCB to these two offices? And why would they not be given or provided any evidence of how the monies are being spent or the accountability factor that Mr. Cameron talks about not being there in the legislation.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — If I'm understanding your question correctly, it would be that the monies are vired from the WCB over into the Treasury Board process and then they're accountable within the regular budget estimate and Treasury Board process that we're in as we speak.

Mr. Toth: — Okay. So what you're saying is WCB sends the money to Treasury Board, Treasury Board then funds these two services through general revenue pool, and you have a report from OH&S (occupational health and safety) and workers' advocate regarding the expenditures in their offices. And that's how the accountability factor would come to the fore?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, and we send an invoice to the WCB for those services.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, in your votes I see that you only have one new staff person from last year to this year. And could you tell me where that staff person is.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, we've added one occupational health and safety officer.

Mr. McPherson: — So when we take a look at each of the subvotes, can you tell me in each subvote what percentage increase in salaries that you've allowed? Just guessing, it looks like it's roughly 10 per cent in most but could you give me a breakdown on each one?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — With increases, I was checking to be sure. I thought it was the case that they're in keeping with the 2,2, and 2 plus 1 scenario that all other government workers

received.

Mr. McPherson: — As I asked you, Madam Minister, could you tell me in each subvote what the percentage is because when I take a look at, say labour standards, I look at salaries. It went from 1.329 million to 1.410. I see a lot of these. To me it looks like you've increased it far beyond that.

So in each subvote, can you give me the percentage increase to those salaries, if in fact you don't have new employees?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think what the confusion is, is there's other dollars that are within that salary figure because it includes overtime, annual holiday, public holidays, termination, layoff, leaves of absence including maternity, paternity, bereavement, and equal pay provisions.

So without some fairly detailed calculation, the basic salary adjustment would be the 2, 2, and 2 plus 1. But then as individual circumstances, like leave of absence, layoff, termination, leaves, etc., it would create a different circumstance. And of course, in the public service this year, there was the equal pay adjustment which affected both men and women within the public service, and that would be variable from department to department depending on the job evaluation process.

Mr. McPherson: — So from department to department, do you have . . . are any of these departments actually receiving in a total package well in excess of the 2, 2, 2?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Within the current round of bargaining and the mandate that is so popularly referred to, it was 2, 2, and 2 plus 1 plus pay equity, and that applied to everybody within executive government and the Crowns who chose to participate in it, which most did.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, the Conservative member from Moosomin had asked some questions in regards to essential services, and your response I found to be quite interesting. In fact you were agreeing with him in saying that there has to be some new type of tool. Can you give us a definition as to what type of tool you have in mind?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well in other jurisdictions they have different ways of handling it, and one of the ways that it is sometime handled is . . . disputes over whether something's essential or not is referred, for example, to a tribunal who then meets with the parties and makes a decision about that, so it's not the government that's actually making the decision in those cases; it's a tribunal.

And there are other models that exist in other places, everything from having it laid right out in legislation that dictates it from a predetermined legislative perspective to a more open framework of a tribunal where they make the decision on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. McPherson: — So which are you looking at as a government? You must be promoting one. You're referring to one. Is it binding arbitration? What exactly is it?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — At the moment we're not looking at

anything, but as we go into a situation of this particular dispute being settled, I think in the future people will be asking themselves — and I think that includes people in the labour movement and ourselves — is there a better way to do this. And that discussion may then develop. At the moment there's nothing active going on on that front.

Mr. McPherson: — Well are you considering any type of essential services legislation?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We don't plan to do what the Liberals did when they were in government, which was Bill 2 in which they settled a Power dispute, and two hospital disputes, a nursing home dispute, electrical contractors, and well two IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) disputes, actually. So we didn't think that was the right approach either so we likely wouldn't be using the Liberal model either.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, if you could get back to answering the questions instead of thinking you're very funny politically. I'm asking you, because you, Madam Minister, agreed — you sat in here and it's on *Hansard* — you agreed with the Conservative, the Tory member over here, saying that there has to be a new tool looked at when he was talking about essential services.

Now I'm going to ask you again. Are you considering any essential services legislation?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think I answered that. I said there's a range of things you could do and until the labour movement and ourselves get through this current situation, we are not yet actively discussing it but I suspect the topic will come up.

Mr. McPherson: — Well if you suspect that it will come up, then your government has already been considering essential services legislation and some tool to in fact deal with it. So this tribunal or binding arbitration which you were opposed to last fall, are any of those being considered at present?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I will repeat once again, for the record, that nothing is at the moment being considered, either actively or inactively. I am merely suggesting that there must be a better way to deal with these issues. But I will emphasize that there is not a government that's ever been elected in the province of Saskatchewan who has not had to use legislation to solve some of these problems. So obviously, it's a long-standing issue, and if we were the ones who solved it, I think we could consider that a very big achievement.

Mr. McPherson: — Well I don't know that you've solved anything. Now further, and I have to assume you were agreeing with the comments from the Conservative member, the Tory from Moosomin, when he was talking about the strikes. He's referring to them as the strikes. Well the way the public and ourselves looked at this last fall with the SaskPower workers is that, in fact, your government locked them out. So let's talk about lockouts for a moment. Can you tell us ... because listening to ... you were able to tell ... go back in history on some labour disputes. Can you tell us how many times public sector workers have been locked out and then with legislation forced back to work?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I can't answer that question. All I can answer is the question that under Liberal governments this happened on four occasions. Under Conservative governments, it happened on four occasions. And under NDP (New Democratic Party) governments, it happened about the same amount. So there we are.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, if you know how many, can you give us the instances, the circumstances surrounding these. You must have them at your hand, fingertips.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The kind of analysis you're talking about, somebody would have to go through the list, and I don't know that it says in each case what the particular circumstance was. No, it doesn't even in the IBEW one, so that answer couldn't be provided without a fair bit of research into each one of these.

Mr. McPherson: — So you in fact don't know if you're talking about lockouts or strikes. You don't know what you're talking about?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well the fact of the matter is the issue isn't whether there were strikes or lockouts. The issue is whether it took legislation to resolve them, I presume is your main point. And the main point is that in the history of the province it has required legislation on one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen occasions to resolve disputes in the public sector.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, the document that you're quoting from — and you went through them, you weren't guessing — would you table that now?

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. Order. I simply wish to remind all hon. members, ministers quote regularly from their notes and there is no requirement in Department of Finance estimates for you to share or table, but there is no rule saying you cannot either. It's simply up to the minister.

Mr. McPherson: — So in other words, Madam Minister, you're prepared to agree with the Tories that something has to be done about essential services. You're looking at tribunals, binding arbitration. You're quoting from notes that you're not prepared to table in the House today. In fact, I don't think you're prepared to do much in the way of coming forward with the facts are you?

Now I also heard the Tories talk about ... and I find this rather ironic that on one hand, they're voting with the Liberals and saying, we don't agree with back-to-work legislation as it was used against the nurses. And today they stand up and say, well you know, we're getting all our friends and buds calling in and saying, well you know, really, maybe they should be on strike because they're sure ornery since they come back.

Madam Minister, do you think the nurses yourself are being a little ornery and hard to deal with since you've forced them back?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It would certainly not be my place to make an opinion on that. What nurses do or don't do is not a

matter for my opinion. Whether they participate in the collective bargaining process is something that our department tries to help facilitate. But it's certainly not up to me to offer opinions on their motives.

Mr. McPherson: — You probably aren't as comfortable supporting the Tories then later this evening and if they get back up with more questions, I take it.

Madam Minister . . . Mr. Chair, it's getting a little loud in here, if we could just get a few of them to calm down a little. Madam Minister, if you could . . . Mr. Chair, please. Can you bring them a little bit to order, Mr. Chair?

Madam Minister, can you . . . Mr. Chair, come on. We can't even hardly talk in here with this heckling and carrying on. Madam Minister, would you be able to . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. Order. I ask for the co-operation of members on both sides to allow the hon. member for Wood River to continue with the estimates in the Department of Labour.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're just going to change gears here for a little bit and deal with some things that happened I guess with The Labour Standards Act. Can you tell us when those changes were first brought about? There were some amendments passed regarding The Labour Standards Act, and I just don't recall how far ago it was. Was it six, seven years, or would you be able to tell me when it was?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The Act was passed in '94, and the regulations proclaimed in '95.

(1930)

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, were there certain sections that weren't proclaimed in '95?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Everything except additional hours. Everything except additional hours in lay-off and recall.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, could you repeat that because it's so loud . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. Order! Order. Now I again ask committee members' co-operation. It is difficult to hear both the questions being put and the answers given.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Everything except most available hours, lay-off, and recall.

Mr. McPherson: — What sections were they, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Section 72.

Mr. McPherson: — Were they all under section 72?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The answer is yes.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, what about section 13. Was there a section there not proclaimed?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Okay, I've got it broken down into the 3 different actual sections. Section 13(4) was the additional hours; section 43, the layoff and recall; and 72 was a provision regarding whether the Act or collective agreements took precedence.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, I'm glad that you are able to have people help you recall some of these things that you didn't proclaim as I'm sure they must have been very important to you at the time. They should have been. Now can you tell what those amendments were aiming to achieve in section 13?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The whole purpose of section 13 — and this would be something that would it be very good actually if employers would take it upon themselves to do this — but the whole purpose behind that section is that if additional hours become available in a workplace, that those hours would be assigned to the employee with seniority so that they would have a choice of building up their hours and moving towards as much full-time employment as possible. And really that is . . . the purpose of that is to try to keep hours from being split into too many small components and try to get enough hours together for someone to have a sufficient number of hours of work to make a living.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, can you tell me was there anyone in, you know, from the workforce or from any organization that was opposed to your government proclaiming 13(4)?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, all of the business organizations were strongly opposed.

Mr. McPherson: — Can you tell us why then you brought this in, in the original Act and just never proclaimed it? Did you not canvas the business community to find out in fact . . . you know, were they not going to donate to your New Democratic campaigns if in fact you proclaimed it? Or what was the reasoning? Surely you also had talked to some of the workforce at the time, and they must have felt that it was very important. Your government must have felt it was important to bring it in. But to not proclaim it, it looks like you were perhaps moving in well ahead of yourself and not sure what you're doing.

Otherwise why would you then just not proclaim it? And come in here tonight and say well the business community said we shouldn't do it. Is that who calls the shots now for your government?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I know issues like are hard to grapple with when the member finds it hard to grapple with the task of governing. But sometimes you lay out an objective, sometimes you lay out an objective hoping that the parties will be able to reach agreement. And certainly the objective would be to have people have the maximum number of hours of work that they can achieve. And we've made overtures, even after that section was there, to have the parties come together and reach a consensus around proclamation of the regulations. And until regulations are proclaimed, there is still the ability to adjust them, to reach compromise, and to reach consensus. And everybody was hopeful that that would be possible, but in the end it wasn't.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, you know obviously from your point of view the business community had some very good reasons. You must've accepted those reasons why you chose not to proclaim section (13)4. Can you give us the list of reasons for not doing so?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — There wasn't a commission on part-time work that there was representatives of both business and labour. And again we were hopeful that they would find a resolution to this.

And the problem for the business community, quite frankly, is that given restaurant, given tourist industry, given the ability to lay people off as the impact of the most additional hours was felt, predicting layoffs and whatnot.

And given the intensity of the feelings on this subject, even though we think it's an important provision and we think it's an important principle, and we're pleased that there has been an increase in full-time work in the province, there's no question that your hope is to reach some kind of a reasonable compromise on these things when there's very intense feelings on both sides of the discussion.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, how many part-time workers are there in the province in total and as a percentage of the workforce?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It's 96,000, about 18 per cent of the workforce.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, is that figure increasing in the last few years?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Part-time decreased from 98,000 in 1996 to 96,000 in 1998. And full-time increased from 363,000 in 1996 to 383,000 in '98.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, can you give me some examples of some of the business concerns with 13(4) — some real-life examples — so we can fully understand your thoughts on this?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Part of it I think is that they believe it's an intrusion on their management ability to phone the people they need to come in. It requires more administrative procedure because you have to phone in the order of seniority and you have to document that you've done that in order to show compliance with the rules so it increases the administrative load in a business where people are quite often busy trying to — like restaurants — busy trying to do what they're doing and they're not necessarily seeking more administrative tasks.

It does reduce their flexibility as far as how work is allocated and who work is allocated to. And one could say that they would feel too that they would then go to having fewer employees as they amalgamated those hours. But I think it was largely administrative and management authority that were the two main reasons why the business community opposed this.

Mr. McPherson: — But as the government, and as the government has said many times when you're doing things throughout this province that isn't falling in favour with the

people as sometimes governing means hard choices. And I take a look, 18 per cent of the workforce, 96,000 people are being affected by this. And so you're saying that perhaps a little management problem is more important than in fact having people have quality jobs and trying to move to full-time work.

So I guess it's really a case of priorities, Madam Minister. Is it your priority to deal with these 96,000 rather than some administrative tasks? Madam Minister, I ran a business for a number of years; I had, you know, employees; it wasn't no big task to know who had the most seniority and who should be called in.

But in your case, in your case you felt it was more important to look at some of these management problems than to deal with 96,000 people?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well the other issue always in labour legislation is ability to enforce. And you want to make laws that are reasonably enforceable. And so the other difficulty you get into here is that you then have to decide how much bureaucracy you're prepared to put in place to enforce it. Because otherwise it's your good employers who take a hit and your bad employers who just continue to do whatever they did before without the ability to have a significant enforcement process there.

The other comment I would make, again, is that we certainly haven't given up on the thought that it's possible to have a discussion again with people about this issue. But we're going to have to find a different approach to it because it is not our goal to add more red tape to all the businesses out there struggling to make a go of it and trying to contribute to the economic growth in the province. It's our goal to work with them, to work with the employees, to create the best environment that we can. So I'm sure that you have some quick and easy solution to this, and if you do, I wish you would share it with us because that would be most helpful.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, can you tell me out of those 96,000 part-time workers, what would be some average wages and perhaps let us know how many of those people would be at the poverty line level and/or below it?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — One figure that you might find interesting is that about 60 per cent of the people who work part-time wish to. Now of the people whose wages would be, I think, the ones you are referring to, there's about 15 to 20,000 out of that 96,000 who make minimum wage. The rest would be in other brackets above that.

(1945)

Mr. McPherson: — Can you give us some example . . . Of that remaining 40,000 part-time workers, can you tell us how many would . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. We're having some obvious problems with the microphones and so on. I'm going to suggest we try and carry on. We're going to try and deal with the technical problem while we go, but . . . Order, order. Order. If it's agreeable with the minister and the member from Wood River, we will carry on with the understanding that I'll interrupt

when the feedback bothers. Is that agreed? Okay.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of the 40,000 that are still on part-time that do want to have a better life, how many would you say are below the poverty line?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I don't think I could give you a quick estimate on that because on top of minimum wage, depending on their circumstance and whether they qualify for the income supplement and supplementary health benefits, they may have additional income supplements as well. So it's difficult to say.

If they're a single, minimum wage, working person, that would be the only group you could readily, clearly identify. But once you get into families and whatnot, with the child benefit, with the income supplement, and whatnot there's a whole variety of other things then kick in.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, you had made mention that in fact this legislation . . . one of the problems was the enforcement. And I would have to ask you, with all the time and effort and money that governments spend on bringing in legislation and amendments to, did you not give it any consideration as to the enforcement of this?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes we did and it was considered that that would be a considerable amount of enforcement.

Mr. McPherson: — So why then did you bring it in?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, if there had been less controversy and more consensus, you might have had a higher expectation that there would be more voluntary compliance amongst employers. But with the degree of negative reaction there was to it, you then are more into an enforcement situation.

Mr. McPherson: — Don't you think as government perhaps you should have had that consensus before you brought legislation in?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Sometimes bringing legislation in is a motivator to parties to resolve their differences and figure it out so that they get on with it. It gives a bit of a nudge to the process. In this particular instance, it hasn't been successful so far.

Mr. McPherson: — Were you nudged along in any direction by the 100,000 part-time workers, or did they want you to move forward on this?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I would have to say that in the absence of this legislation, we've dealt with some of those issues through the child benefit, through the income supplement, through the supplementary health benefits, and as well through raising the minimum wage three times since we were elected in '91.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, there was also a section 43 that you had talked about, and can you give us an idea what that section was all about?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The purpose of that particular provision was to clearly differentiate between layoff requirement notice

and termination requirement notice to try to deal with the problem of companies that lay people off in order to avoid paying some of the notice requirements. And quite often they're not sure if they're going to have to terminate because they may be waiting to see if they get a contract or they may be waiting to see if some business develops. And in the interim there's then a problem of issuing rolling layoff notices in order to be constantly dealing with the problem of the required amount of layoff time and pay required for a termination notice.

Mr. McPherson: — So this blanket layoff notice that . . . do you have a list of how many businesses might be engaged in such practice?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It would be a small number but the industry that it hits the most is manufacturing because they can't predict their orders always and they can't predict what their production cycle is going to be.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, then do you think it's a fair way to do business where you're giving out these rolling layoff notices to avoid other things that they should be doing in a better business environment later? Is it fair in your eyes?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It certainly would be our preference to have employers give employees the maximum amount of predictability that they could and also to give them what they're entitled to. I think there is, in some fairness, some real circumstances where employers aren't sure where the upturns and downturns are going to be in their contracts and in their business cycle, and I think they sometimes get into this kind of activity as a bit of protection for themselves.

But certainly it would be our preference that the employer follow the intent of the law and give proper notice and proper pay. And there have been some cases where this has been adjudicated in order to resolve it. But it will be an issue that we would certainly look at at the point when this Act is reopened again.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, are you aware that some workers that have as much as 30 years experience with the same employer get less of a notice of layoff or payment in lieu of notice than a person hired for only a few months at, say, a fast-food restaurant because of this break-in-service policy presently in place?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The rule is that if it's uninterrupted service, the maximum period is an eight-week notice. Now if layoff exceeds 14 days, then the clock starts again.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, you made mention that in fact there's only a few employers that are into the practice of the blanketing layoff notices. Did you not have another means to provide some relief or some latitude to these few employers rather than affect so many of the working people.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well again, we said it affects a small number of employers, largely in manufacturing, so it doesn't have a big impact on other people. It is largely concentrated in a particular sector and it is the very nature of their business that they have this kind of situation. Now again it is a situation that needs to be dealt with and I've met with parties on both sides of

this discussion to see again if we can attempt to get a resolution to this, but right at the moment it remains unresolved.

Mr. McPherson: — When did you last meet with the parties and which parties are you talking about?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It comes up at my meetings both with the SFL (Saskatchewan Federation of Labour) and with the steelworkers, but also it comes up at the chamber meetings that I attend and the chamber labour committee as well.

Mr. McPherson: — Now you single out the steelworkers. Can you give an example as to who and why it is affecting the steelworkers? Why would you single them out?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well one of the plants that does experience this problem is IPSCO because again they're waiting for contracts quite often. Sometimes they get them, sometimes they don't. So it's certainly one of the plants where this is an issue.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, are you saying because of IPSCO you're not proclaiming this Act. You're prepared to bring it in, bring it in, and I have to assume you did your homework at the day when you brought the Act in. You passed it. But because of . . . Is it one company that you're singling out that you're not going to proclaim it for that reason?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I would have to say to the member opposite that I'm starting to doubt the sincerity of your questions here as far as actually resolving this problem goes. I've mentioned that this is a problem for others in the manufacturing sector. It's a real problem for the employees as well. And we'd like to find a way to not hamper business activity and not encourage plants to relocate to the States, while at the same time meeting the needs of employees. And we will continue working on this to find a solution.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Madam Minister, don't talk about sincerity here. You're the one that raised IPSCO's name. I'm surprised you did that. But you talked about having this reopened. You're bringing both sides back to the table. Can you tell us some timetable until you have some result?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well as a famous premier once said, you have to jaw, jaw, jaw 'til you get a resolution to these things.

Mr. McPherson: — While you're jawing can you give us a timetable as to when you think this will be resolved?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I don't have a magic ball but we will continue to work diligently on it.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, have you looked at other avenues to address this particular problem if it's just a small segment?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think any tax expert would tell you, and any labour lawyer would tell you on the other side of the picture, that as many rules as there are, there are many ways to get around them. So there is no easy, perfect way to create administratively watertight compartments to deal with these

kinds of issues.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, you raised another section, section 72. Can you tell us what that section was intended to do?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The purpose of that section is to clearly delineate the Acts, the various labour Acts. And this particular Act takes precedence over collective agreements and this is an issue that was recently tested in the courts.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, can you give us a better definition of what the section is going to do? And hopefully you'll be loud enough so we can hear over the heckling.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, the principle is that the Act takes precedence over a collective agreement so that people would not have the ability to bargain away their rights under provincial laws.

Mr. McPherson: — Can you tell us why this here Act was not proclaimed?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — In this particular instance this item has been affirmed in the courts as existing so there's not a particular need to proclaim this.

Mr. McPherson: — Is section 72 one of the sections that in fact in your meetings with the interested groups that they raise and ask that something be done?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think there was some concern about how the court case would turn out but now that it has turned out the way it has, no, I don't think that this is a concern.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, also with . . . I guess there was something called the northern exemption. I believe that's dealt with in regulations, but can you explain that northern exemption?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It's not in a way unlike some of the things that have been exempted on the farm because of farm circumstances. And in the North where employees are flying into shifts, and once they're there, basically they are at the workplace and they don't have the option really to go home and back and forth. There was a provision given to be able to have a different application of overtime rules in that situation. And as the mining developments evolve there, again this is one that will come under scrutiny again. But at the moment the northern exemption remains in place.

(2000)

Mr. McPherson: — Can you tell us where this line is for the northern exemption? I think it's somewhere around Meadow Lake, but can you define that better?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — North of township 62.

Mr. McPherson: — And so, you know, we look at what's really happened in the North in the last few years I think. Roads are getting a lot better. Airports, you know, airstrips are coming in up there. So are you still today faced with the same problems

as you were in the past as far as this overtime?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — As different parts of the province and different parts of the economy industrialize, there will be a question of changing labour needs and changing labour law needs, and you probably have an opinion yourself on the application of labour standards to hog barns in the agricultural sector, sir.

Mr. McPherson: — Well I don't think the question was on hog barns and you'll have to follow closer with me on this, Madam Minister. But can you tell us now, does section 72 deal with only people that perhaps live south of — what did you say — 62? Or does it include everyone in the province?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — What we're discussing is, that's not part of section 72. It's strictly referred to as a northern exemption and it's an exemption from the hours and overtime . . . hours of work and overtime provisions of the Act.

Mr. McPherson: — But I'm just asking you if certain peoples are exempt, who are they? Are they the people that you're driving into the mining camps, or flying in? Or are we also talking about the northerners who are working in those camps as well, that live up there?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It would apply to everybody north of that township 62 line, except for Uranium City, Creighton, and La Ronge.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, then can you tell me whether Aboriginal groups have been calling for the repeal of this northern exemption?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That is one of the difficulties in changing this law is that, no, they haven't.

An Hon. Member: — They haven't?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, absolutely not. This has been a request emanating from the South.

Mr. McPherson: — Can you tell me if any other provinces have similar legislation such as this northern exemption?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, just here.

Mr. McPherson: — And the legislation, I guess, sets it out where there's no limits on hours of work in the northern third of the province and no requirement to pay overtime for those hours worked up there at all, right?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I just thought I should clarify that this is trappers, outfitters, the tourism industry, and so it involves a lot of people in seasonal tourism businesses where it's really a different situation, I think, than exists in other places. They have a very short season in a lot of these businesses here.

Mr. McPherson: — But it also includes people in the uranium industry and other mining industry and forestry as well, does it not?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, but they have collective

agreements; they're covered by collective agreements. This covers people who aren't covered by collective agreements.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, can you tell us why . . . you know, and I've seen these postcards that were sent out from the Pay Equity Coalition. Now we have I think it's eight jurisdictions in Canada that have already passed pay equity legislation, but Saskatchewan isn't one of them. Can you explain why we haven't in this province moved with legislation?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, it would be our hope to achieve the fullest extent of what we can through good public policy as opposed to legislation. But I do want to correct a misperception. There's only two provinces that have legislated pay equity in the private sector, and that's Ontario and Quebec. Everybody else has it in the public sector. Now we've already implemented pay equity in executive government and the Crowns; it has now been negotiated within all the health sector. So what we have left in the public sector is municipalities, universities, and the NGO (non-governmental organization) sector where there would be linkages to the public sector.

And what the pay equity coalition is really most interested in is legislation on the private sector. And what government decided to do was to make a commitment to address pay equity in the public sector first, and we've got 24,000 out of 26,000 public sector employees in the executive and in the Crowns covered now. This recent agreement with the health care people will cover about another 12,500 employees under pay equity agreements, and we will have gone a substantial way. I think after that there's maybe only about another 5,000 public sector employees in the province that would need to be covered. And I think we would have to, to be fair, discuss this with municipalities because there's a big dollar figure attached to this.

And you may know about the case that Safeway has in front of the Human Rights Commission and certainly there is a provision within our Human Rights Code for people to take a complaint to the commission to deal with their employer — a complaints driven process for pay equity within the private sector. And that's the process that the private sector employees at Safeway are now going through, through the Human Rights Commission.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, if there's only a few thousand left to have pay equity, why haven't you brought it in in legislation to cover the public sector then?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Because we don't fund the whole public sector. So when we do this, we are imposing a cost on organizations like SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), and all the member bodies. If we were able to pay for all of that and say, here's the money, do it, and we'll fund you forever. However, they've said things like education taxes and other things are their priority within their expenditures. When you're talking about 12,000 employees, you're talking about a permanent bump in payroll of about 100 million per year permanently to the base. And with an \$8 million surplus, we don't feel we're in the position yet to make that kind of a commitment.

Mr. McPherson: — But if we were to look at what . . . I don't know, I guess, is defined as that extended public sector . . . while your municipal governments . . . I mean they're really raising their funds by local tax base. And there's so little money coming from your government, especially your government, that I don't know that people would look at municipalities as extended public sector. But if you're looking at transition houses and group homes where their funding is coming directly from the provincial government, do you not agree that perhaps you should have included them?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, what we've done in our policy, and we've been quite open with the people concerned about this issue is to enter into a stage process: the first stage being the executive government and the Crowns, the second stage being the health sector. There won't be quite the same issue for teachers because their pay is based on a different model, although there might be some workers in that sector.

Discussions are currently underway in the universities, so largely it is municipalities and the NGOs . . . and I would agree with you that if you talked in terms of need the NGO sector is probably the highest need sector. They're also probably the most underpaid sector. But most of them are paid from about five different sources: federal government, provincial government, municipal government, things like United Way, and then private fundraising. So when you make a commitment to that I think the other partners — you'd also have to discuss it with them because they would have to increase their funding in order to pay their contribution towards the wage costs.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, can you define executive government?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That's all of the government that isn't the Crowns.

Mr. McPherson: — By and large you're talking about better paid people in government, right?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — No, what we're talking about is pay equity. And that's dealing with historical wage discrimination based on issues of gender. Now one of the advantages of our pay equity system is that it is gender-neutral. And one of the reasons why we went to a gender-neutral model was that it was a long time since government jobs had been reclassified. And due to the changes that have taken place in government over the past several years, people have picked up new duties, changed duties, there's been quite a bit of change I think in the public service. So this process not only dealt with pay equity issues but it dealt with internal equity issues too so that people doing the same kinds of jobs in government were paid comparable rates of pay.

And that's why we . . . our program's a little more expensive actually than it is in other places with pay equity, but we feel it's a better process and it includes both male and females in the process because it includes both pay equity and internal equity.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, I wish you were so articulate on the questions that I asked and not on the ones I didn't ask. The question I asked was: in executive government are we talking about more the better paying jobs in

government?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well let me put it this way, all unionized jobs pay better than all non-unionized jobs as a rule. And most of the public sector — all of the public sector is unionized. So yes these would be some of your better paying jobs in society plus they tend to be more professional jobs as well.

Mr. McPherson: — Then, Madam Minister, doesn't it seem strange for a government . . . yourself to, you know, claim that you're such a caring and compassionate group that you would leave out the poorest paying jobs in society — those working in the group homes. And our caucus is involved in meeting with some of these people that . . . that . . . you know, from the NGOs, from the group homes and such, and it is a shame what . . . what these people are getting paid for the work that they do.

But yet you're prepared to bring in pay equity into your executive government and forget about the people that really need it. Isn't that a case of priority?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Actually in the last three budget years — which the Minister of Finance could confirm as well as the Minister of Social Services — we've increased the wages to workers that we fund in that sector in every one of the past three years.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, when you look at collective bargaining in the province — and I know there's some cases I guess before the Labour Board now on whether or not your 2, 2, 2 wage gap even allows collective bargaining — do you really in your heart of hearts feel that we have true collective bargaining in this province under your government?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well it doesn't matter whether you're a big corporation or a government, everybody has some kind of a budget they're working with. And I guess I would have to ask you what your definition of fair is because what we've tried to do is take the money available and try to distribute it as fairly as possible amongst those affected, even with an element of progressivity including things like pay equity.

And you could disagree with that but when we had the issue of dealing with a \$15 billion debt, you chose to run and hide and we chose to actually deal with it. So I don't know that you understand what it is to have a budget and try to deal with it.

But I am going to quote this little bit of late-breaking news that came to me, in the essence of fairness, about your quote during the SaskPower strike:

"The people of this province can't afford to have games being played by either side at a time when we're setting record cold temperatures; the power must remain on; and we speak for the consumers of the province," the Liberal MLA Glen McPherson said Friday.

(2015)

So I don't know that I take too seriously your concern for fairness when it seems to be variable from day to day.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Madam Minister, when we talk about sincerity then you should be . . . you should be a little closer with the truth because our caucus is very firm on where we stood last fall with what your government did in locking out . . . the key is locking out — key word, locking out — its employees only to use the heavy-handle legislation to bring them back. So, Madam Minister, it's your government that's really on the hook here. You've failed dramatically in all areas.

Now you're saying, well . . . you know, you don't want to answer the question on whether or not you feel we have free, fair, collective bargaining in this province because you know you can't look at the camera and say yes we do.

So you say it's budget; it's budget; it's budget. That's what your answer is. But quite frankly, you had lots of budgets. When you're giving your CEOs (chief executive officer) of health districts who are making a hundred thousand bucks a year, you're giving some of these people 17 per cent increases. That's fine. We got health district board CEOs that make as much as probably the Prime Minister of Canada does. Now that's a priority to you.

It's also a priority when day after day we raise in this House the millions and millions of dollars that are being blown and wasted by your advertising companies, your companies that are preparing for your election and coming in with budgets that are absolutely horrendous, doubling year after year; 50 per cent growth in some of these payments to Phoenix Advertising. I say shame on you. You're talking about millions and millions of dollars. We're not talking about little bits here.

And what was saved in the IBEW lockout? What did you save? I think it was . . . I don't even know if it was a million bucks. Do you know that almost any one contract that your government gives to your hacks and flack friends in Phoenix Advertising would come to a million bucks and you're trying to tell the public tonight that you're sincere and somebody isn't.

How many times have we raised questions about your investments? Sixty-two million bucks that your government wants to stick into a TV company in Guyana . . . not Guyana, in New Zealand. Well it's a good thing I said Guyana. You're prepared to throw 30 million bucks there.

You have investments all over the world and people did not give you the mandate to make those kind of investments. You're talking about sincerity and you're talking about the hundreds of hacks and flacks that you have in government, all making huge wages and that's not to be talked about tonight because you have all these budget constraints, right?

You had budget constraints when the old jet wasn't good enough and you had to have a new jet. You needed a new airplane; you needed your new plane while you're closing the Plains hospital.

The Chair: — Order, order. I'll remind the member from Wood River — order — that we are on the estimates for Labour and that I've been listening very carefully to the last couple of minutes and we're off the subject. And I would invite the member to get back on to the estimates of Labour.

Mr. McPherson: — So what we're talking about is budgets. And the minister raised the concern that somehow they're hamstrung on their budgets and what they can do under her own budget. And that's what we're raising. There are people out there that can't make a go of it. There are seniors that can't make a go of it because of your back-door taxation with utility rates, because of your way that you're actually taxing the people of this province through forcing them to not have health care out in their own areas of the province but having to drive hundreds of miles to get their health care and sit in motels because they're on waiting lists. That's called priorities.

You can cut it any way you want. You're saying that, you know, people have got budgets and in fact 2, 2, 2 is all you got. And I don't see anyone else in society that is a friend of yours, a friend of your government, that is sticking to 2, 2, 2. Because you have hundreds of millions for your friends and you have hundreds of millions to run an election. And I say shame on you.

Subvote (LA01) agreed to.

Subvotes (LA02), (LA03), (LA05), (LA04), (LA07), (LA06), (LA08) agreed to.

Vote 20 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1998-99
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Labour
Vote 20**

Subvotes (LA01), (LA02) (LA05) agreed to.

Vote 20 agreed to.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, I'd just like to thank my officials for taking time to be here several evenings now and to be available to us, and thank you for your excellent work over the year.

The committee reported progress.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 36 — The Animal Protection Act, 1999

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

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my right is Terry Scott, deputy minister of the Department of Agriculture and Food. To my left is Dr. Al Choquer, director of livestock and veterinarian operations branch. And to Al's left is LeeAnn Forsythe, livestock and veterinarian branch operations.

Clauses 1 to 28 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 36 — The Animal Protection Act, 1999

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move 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.

(2030)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE**General Revenue Fund****Education****Vote 5**

The Deputy Chair: — I invite the Minister of Education to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated beside me is the deputy minister, Mr. Craig Dotson. Directly behind me is Mr. Ken Horsman, who is the associate deputy minister. And seated next to him is the executive director of finance and operations, Mae Boa. John McLaughlin is at the back of the room, or not the back of the room, he's seated in the back chairs. He is the executive director of teachers superannuation. Michael Littlewood is seated just off to my left. Larry Allan, seated directly to the left of the deputy, Craig Dotson. Cal Kirby is seated at the back of the room. And Gerry Sing Chin is on his way in, in a couple of minutes. Those are my officials, Mr. Chair.

Subvote (ED01)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Welcome Mr. Minister, and to your officials. I know we've had the opportunity to discuss Education estimates before for a considerable length of time, and there are a few other issues that we haven't had the opportunity to check with you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, in the area of capital, this year, surprisingly, if we look at the total amount of money that's been assigned to capital, we see for both capital expenditures and interest, we see in fact a decline from last year of almost \$2.4 million. A significant decrease, and I think everyone in the province, Mr. Minister, is aware that capital expenditures from years gone by are declining because boards were responsible for in most cases 10-year debentures. And as a result we're seeing interest charges in the capital area drop year after year after year, allowing what I thought was going to be additional monies to be put into the capital side.

Mr. Minister, could you explain to the House and to the people of Saskatchewan what you see in terms of the capital needs of school division and how a fund that has now been cut by 2.4 million is going to address the capital concerns of school divisions in this province?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well Mr. Chair, to the member, the reduction of course is just in the less interest that we're paying this year; it's the 2.4. But we're actually expending the same amount of money in capital this year as we did in the past, which is the \$24 million.

When you ask us what the capital requirements are across the province, as you well know, they're significant. And as our resources provide into the future, we're going to continue to build additional schools around the province like we have, and I think this year we're doing something like about a hundred different capital retrofits across the province, and I think five or six new projects in the province this year. In fact, just recently I was in Kennedy, announcing the project in Kennedy, of which I think the member from Souris-Cannington sitting beside you was at the event. And we're doing a number of other projects across the province.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. While we're very aware of the number of projects, Mr. Minister, a lot of school divisions have been anxiously awaiting the announcement from the facilities department. And as you've indicated, your budget for the actual capital expenditure is the same in terms of the capital projects — no change.

Mr. Minister, when I add the two numbers up of capital expenditure plus capital interest, we see an expenditure this year of \$30.1 million. Whereas, Mr. Minister, in 1991 or '92 or '93 when your government came to power, we saw capital grants of 70 million and 63 million — huge amounts of money being spent in capital. And I recall a member of your Assembly, of your government, Mr. Minister, prior to 1991, saying that there wasn't . . . 70 million wasn't meeting the needs of capital expenditures in the province. That's prior to 1991, Mr. Minister.

Here we are, eight years later — 70 million has now become 30 million — and we're now talking almost a decade of increases in costs. What are you suggesting to boards of education that they should be doing in light of the fact that we have something like 400 projects. And I'm sure your officials know the exact number of the projects that have been submitted by boards on B1's and you're telling the Assembly that you're going to announce 5 or 6 majors, and maybe something in the area of 90 to 100 small ones. What's going to happen to the other 300 projects?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I'm reading off a sheet, Mr. Member, that was prepared for me in terms of the two different areas of accounting, two different years of accounting that you speak about. And when I look at the 1991-92, when you look at the comparable related figures, it was 22.2 million of the new capital approvals '91-92; compared to 1999-2000, the year '99-2000, which is 24.2 million. And that is almost the same amount of dollars that we're expending in 1999 as we were in 1991.

I think what's important for us to recognize here is that I know that there are lots of pressures around the province, as you can well appreciate, not only in the education piece on capital. But from time to time members on your side of the House will stand up and talk about the kinds of pressures that we have in highways and hospitals and nursing homes. And so when you put all that together, you see a huge, huge need for capital all across the province.

And as you can well appreciate, if we could do away with the \$750 million that we have today in interest payments in this province, we could put that towards a variety of different things that you'd like to put it towards. We could put it towards greater

capital expenditures across the province. We could reduce the taxes in the way which you speak of, or that we can build additional hospital health care facilities in this province. There's a variety of different things that we could do.

And I think when you look at the kinds of expenditures throughout the '80s that took us to 1991, a lot of those dollars that we're talking about — that you're talking about — was really borrowed money that the previous administration had in fact borrowed. So when you talk about the expenditures that the previous administration had in fact spent, a lot of that was money that you and I are paying for today.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, from the early 1990s or late 1980s to today, there's been also a tremendous change in how capital projects are funded. In fact, Mr. Minister, if you look at your dollars and the \$70 million expenditure in capital grant in 1991-92 . . . was such that it paid for a large amount of interest costs because boards of education were responsible for a much smaller percentage of a capital project. The remainder of the project was picked up by government.

And as a result, if you looked back at those records, you'll see that government allocated its portions over a great length of time, 10 years in some cases. And the debenture interest costs continued to be picked up by your government. And those costs are payable to boards of education. So as a result, we saw a lot of projects at that time that were funded in large portion by the government and a much smaller portion by the taxpayers.

Today we see a great shift in that. We see boards that are picking up 48 per cent and 52 per cent of the capital cost. And as a result, your dollar figure, as you've indicated, your expenditure of 24 million is almost equivalent or maybe slightly larger than the equivalent back in 1991. But the difference is you're asking boards of education now to pay 50 per cent of the costs or more, and back in 1991 the percentages were much smaller.

So you're mixing apples and oranges here, Mr. Minister. I think what you need to explain to the people of the province is the kind of funding that was in place before versus the kind of funding that is in place today because when you indicate that the number is larger today in fact that number is much, much smaller.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I appreciate the member's point as it relates to the new capital approvals where in fact we're now both agreeing that the fact the difference is only about . . . is about \$2 million in terms of what we were picking up today as to what was picked up in the years 1991-92. And clearly, when I take a look at the capital grants that you talk about which is the \$70.5 million over that previous period of time, those numbers of course today we're picking up, as you say, a smaller percentage.

Now I think we can say to you comfortably, that over the next several years, our hope will be that we can continue to enrich the level of expenditures in capital across the province. And we have lots of pressure as you can well appreciate.

I think today in Saskatchewan we have something in the

neighbourhood of about 780 or 790 schools right across the entire piece. Some of these schools don't need the same kinds of retrofit or remodel that others do.

But based on the level of funding today that we have for all of the issues in . . . for all of the issues that government addresses, we'll do what we can as the finances of the province continue to improve and we continue to make education a priority for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, could you clarify one other thing in regarding capital expenditures? You've indicated — and I don't have the breakdown of that 70 million, how that was broken down in terms of what was capital and what was interest — I think you're indicating, by your numbers, that interest was somewhere around 50 million. And in 1999-2000 you are estimating \$6,000 worth of interest costs. Could you explain to the people of Saskatchewan how interest costs in 1991-92 were 50 million and today they are only 6 million?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what's important to the member, and what I'm alluding to here is the *Public Accounts* document, 1993-94, which I think is important because what you will recognize and understand is that there has been in fact a change in the way in which the accounting is currently administered or prepared.

And under the note of the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Strelieff, and I'll read from you the comparative figures as he's described them in 1993 and he says:

The 1994 financial statements are prepared using the accrual basis of accounting; however, the 1993 comparative figures are prepared using the modified cash basis of accounting.

And that's the difference in which you're alluding to today in terms of the interest charges in there, stated in that document.

(2045)

Mr. Krawetz: — In relative terms though, Mr. Minister, I take it that we're spending considerably less . . . the government is spending considerably less on capital interest today, or this next year, than it was eight years ago. Could you explain why that is so?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — My officials, Mr. Member, say to me that what's happening is that there's been . . . The change is really that we're up-fronting the payments on each of the capital projects that we're providing right now. And we're allowed to do that, of course, under the new accrual accounting system.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one other area in the estimates that I think has a number of concerns around it and I'd like some clarification, is in the area of teacher pensions. There are two pension plans, as I understand, for the teachers in this province — those that entered the teaching force, I guess, prior to 1980 and those that entered the teaching force in 1980 and afterwards.

Could you give us a quick summary — and especially for myself because I'm not quite understanding the numbers that

you have in your estimates — could you indicate to us what the two systems are that are in place and what kind of plans currently exist for all of the teachers in the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — You've described accurately that there are two plans, the one prior to 1980 and the plan currently after 1980. And as you can appreciate, these are matching contributions beyond the 1980.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, then if I refer you to page 40 of the *Estimates* and the line item that I see called Saskatchewan Teachers' Retirement Plan, I take it that that is the new plan. I'll refer to it as the new plan. And that is the plan that I understand now is being administered by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the monies that you contribute to that plan, of course, are matched by the teachers and it is totally administered. Could you confirm if that is the line item.

And also, Mr. Minister, while you're looking at that line item, I note that from the last three years, of course, we'd seen each year almost, we're seeing nearly a \$2 million increase. Do you expect that to continue to grow by that same amount?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — This is, as the member indicates, this is the new plan that we're identifying here in the *Estimates* on page 40. And clearly the number is growing because there are of course teachers retiring and so there's an additional cost here that would be appearing as you see on page 40.

Mr. Krawetz: — I see the increases in that cost not because of teachers retiring, but because of teachers entering into that plan. Is that not the correct interpretation?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — That's correct.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, the other . . . the line item that I guess is the other plan is the teachers' pensions and cost of living allowances. Mr. Minister, this one is most confusing to me because I've seen over the last couple of years significant reductions in the amount of money that is being allocated on this particular line item. I see this year in fact \$23 million less than the previous year.

Now, Mr. Minister, I know from talking with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation that the retiring teachers right now are those teachers that are retiring under the old plan. And I'll refer to it I guess as not the fully funded plan because we know where we are with the unfunded pension liabilities.

Mr. Minister, can you explain how you arrive at a figure of \$82 million which is \$23 million less than last year? How is your department able to reduce the cost of the pension costs for retiring teachers under the old plan?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Member, we're just reviewing this item with one of my officials here. The entire payroll forecast for the year — if I might just go through this for you — is 186 million. And then the small benefit payout, 65 plus 1 is 2 million. Then the total payroll cost is then 188 million. The matching contribution of that then would be \$20 million, so the total money required would be 208 million.

Then to that we would apply the credit to the retiring teachers, and the number of retirees is 475. The average dollars to their credit would be \$256,480. Total monies to the retirees then would be \$121,000,828. And then the drawdown on the surplus would be 1.2 million. The budget dollars required then would be \$82.472 million.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. A complicated set of numbers. But, Mr. Minister, the point that I'm trying to make here, I think, and I think that teachers in the province and I think that taxpayers . . . you talk about, you know, what we are currently paying for as far as interest costs because of inappropriate policies of former governments.

Mr. Minister, I take a look at what the auditor has indicated, and I take a look at the documents from the auditor's department about pension liabilities. And I see that the estimated pension liabilities in 1992 were approximately 2.2 billion — and I say approximately. And today, Mr. Minister, as of . . . not of this current year, but as of March 31 of 1998, I think we're seeing pension liabilities of \$3.6 billion. So we see pension liabilities continue to increase while we know that the teachers' pension plan, the new pension plan — you've already stated that, that it's managed by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, and we have no unfunded liability there. That is fully taken care of. The old teachers' pension plan — is that the plan that is causing part of the government's pension liability to increase dramatically?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Member, when you look at the current contributions that we're making to the pension fund, it's my view and our view that we're providing the statutory requirements to the pension fund. The pension liability, as you've said, has grown over the last couple of years. And we recognize that, and I think what we'll do is continue to work at trying to meet those obligations as time passes.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, I'm fearful for your children and my children. And let's look at this scenario, Mr. Minister. You're going to be in a situation very soon where all of the teachers who are currently under the old plan will have retired.

You're saying there are about 475 teachers that retire on a annual basis. And that's probably going to increase slightly as we move along because we know that the age of the teacher that is currently in the workforce is increasing.

So we're going to reach a point, Mr. Minister, as I see it — and I don't know where that's going to be. But if the new plan started in 1980, you can quickly do some mathematical calculations and I think you're somewhere after the year 2010 to 2015, there will be a year where you will not have 475 teachers who will be retiring of which you are using that particular fund from those teachers. That balance that you will have, there will be zero in fact, Mr. Minister.

But the pension liability that you will have, that you will have to have in this document in the year 2012 or whenever it is, it's going to have to be in excess of 200 million as you've indicated today to this House.

Now that's as I see it, Mr. Minister. Today that's an unfunded pension liability because in the 2014 or 2015, you, the

government of the day, is going to have to come up with \$200 million in the pension category. We're not setting that money aside. You're indicating that today that you're only budgeting \$82 million because of a statutory condition, even though you know you're going to have to pay out \$208 million this year in pensions.

And as a result when you get to the end of all of the teachers in the old plan who've retired, they're still going to be collecting the pensions, and you have no money now to pay them. Will that not be the responsibility then on our future generations to pick up that tab because of your government's policy of today?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I said earlier to the member that what we're doing today is that we're continuing to meet our financial obligations as it relates to the pension funds. And we can appreciate your concern as they're very much ours too as they relate to the unfunded pension liabilities, not only for teachers but we experience some of the same issues as it relates to the public sector, the public service, and can appreciate that over the next several years we're going to need to ensure that we can meet those obligations.

And I think it's important when I say that that you also pay attention to it as well, because from time to time in this Assembly you stand in your place and you talk about all the expenditures that you're prepared to make in a variety of different fronts across the province. And I think it's important then when you're making your speeches or making your statements as it relates to what the financial obligations will be of future governments of which you aspire to be one of those as well, that you keep in mind that these obligations are there.

And today this government is meeting those obligations in a way in which we can, at the same time trying to provide all of the other necessities that are required to serve the people of Saskatchewan. And I give you the best assurance that I can today that as it relates to the teachers' pension that we'll continue to set things aside over time to try and meet those obligations when they arrive here — and if they become \$200 million we know that those commitments will need to be made — but at the same time be cognizant of all the other expressions of need across the province.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, as I've indicated . . . And you haven't confirmed whether or not my question about the year 2012 or 2015 is in fact accurate. Will we require 200-plus million dollars in this line? And the other part, Mr. Minister, is this whole aspect of pension liabilities. Teachers are very, very concerned that the pension liability continues to grow and in fact, as I've indicated, the government . . . the auditor . . . the Provincial Auditor is showing that the pension liabilities are at about \$3.6 billion as of last year.

I don't know how much of that pension liability is only teachers, and I don't know how much of the 1.4 billion that this fund has grown at over the last six years is attributable to the teacher pension plan. I know teachers are very concerned that in the year 20 . . . whatever . . . 2012 when all of the teachers who are currently under the old plan have retired, that indeed there is a fund and a pension plan that can pay the pensions that they have contributed to over their careers.

Mr. Minister, can you confirm that the debt that you are creating is a debt that the people of the new millennium will be responsible for.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I am reading from the annual report 1997-98 which I tabled, and in that report it talks about the amount of dollars that will be required in the year 2014-15. And based on the sort of constant dollars will require about 166 million of which, of course, we're going to be making those kinds of obligations over that period of time. I say to the member opposite that if you're asking, you know, what the unfunded liability might be by that period of time it will depend on a variety of issues.

I think it will depend, of course, on the change of teacher salaries over that period of time. It will obviously depend on the performance of the fund, and will also depend on the rate of inflation over that period of time.

(2100)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one other question in that same section of the *Estimates* is around the teachers' dental plan. I noticed that the estimate indicates that you have increased the amount of expenditure on that line item by almost 20 per cent.

Could you indicate to the House why the dental plan costs have jumped by 20 per cent in one year?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Member, it will be . . . it will be in relationship I expect to the — well it is — to the collective agreement which was signed on March 24, 1998.

Mr. Krawetz: — Are you suggesting then that that is the premium cost to the carrier of the dental plan? That that is the sum of money that has been transferred to the dental plan carrier?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, this would be based on actual costs that the program would incur.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one final question in the area of transportation. Has your department altered the transportation grant structure that you have . . . that you pay out to both rural and urban school divisions for pupil transportation for this year?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — There is no change, Mr. Member, in that.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, I have a couple of questions on special needs children. Last week we brought up in the House the fact that disabled children are . . . have the right to special care and training designed to help achieve self-reliance and a full and decent life in society.

That's part of Article 29 of the UN (United Nations) Convention on the Rights of Children, and Saskatchewan has signed this agreement and your government has . . . supposed to be working towards the problem of making sure that disabled children have education right across this whole province.

But are we . . . the families of children with disabilities have

asked me to ask you a question, the question of what your government is doing to re-ensure that they are indeed following the . . . Article 29 and that they will . . . their children really can expect a life that will allow them to live to their fullest capability.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you for the question, Madam Member. I want to say to you that, as you are probably well aware, that last year the previous minister of Education commissioned in this province a special education review which is well underway now. In part of the rationale for the review across the province was to address exactly what you've just raised, and that is to ensure that we have the equitable and quality programs for young people today who in fact are disabled or disadvantaged.

The committee is well on its way to having met with stakeholder groups across the province and currently are meeting with special interest groups in the spring of this year reporting out likely in early this summer, early fall, on sort of the outcomes of which we need to proceed as it relates to special needs programming across the province. But I couldn't agree more with you when you raise the point that we have in this province a growing number of special needs children, and we're trying to address that in the way in which we've developed the special needs review.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, there was already a task force committee that worked on this project, and I believe they brought forward 22 recommendations the government's already . . . work that they should, that should be looked at, dealing with such items as the opportunities in urban versus rural places. And I'm wondering is this task force's recommendations going to be ignored? Are you working on some of the real issues that your government is aware of at this time?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Madam Member, I'm not fully familiar with the task force that you're talking about, and what I will do is explore with my officials what work you think might have been done within the department over a period of time or whether it was a special committee or task group that was put together. And maybe we could have that discussion. It will help refresh the work that we've done within the department, if there's been some done, and then provide a written response to you on that if that would meet with your requirements.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, the report that I'm talking about is the Special Education Review Committee and the work that they did. And they talked about . . . in 1997-98 there was 192,508 students in Saskatchewan, and out of them 2,810 were identified as having disabilities and another . . . over 1,900 of them had what were considered to be mild to moderate disabilities, and they aren't being looked at at all.

I think the SACL (Saskatchewan Association of Community Living), I believe it is, that has been trying very hard to get your department to look at these needs are getting more than frustrated with the lack of attention that this whole issue has been given. And I'm wondering if you have been talking to them about these issues that they brought to your attention for the last three or four years.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, I want to

say that the numbers that you're identifying for me and relating are ones that we do have some familiarity with in terms of the number of students across the province, or children across the province, who are requiring some additional services. And we are attempting to address that, as I said in my first comments, through the special needs review that is currently underway across the province, which I've indicated will be reporting out sometime early this summer or early in the fall.

I think what else I want to share with you is that when you take a look at the investment that we've made in special needs programming across the province, in 1991 we were spending about \$48,000,354 in special needs funding, in 1991, as I've mentioned. In 1999 that funding has been increased to 64,806,000, which will give you some idea of how much we, like you, recognize the importance of enriching the funding for special needs kids across the province. And we'll be able to speak more about this when the review comes to fruition within the next couple of months.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, one of the issues that they've been talking about is the speech and language pathologists that are required in this province. And there's such a limited number of them for rural Saskatchewan that each one of them has very high caseloads. And they're very lucky if they can get help once every four or five weeks.

Are you working with the Department of Health? Are you working with different government departments to make sure that all resources are looked at and there isn't duplication and people that actually have an opportunity to work when they're already out in that area can be used to their fullest right now?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, this is a very important area that the member raises, and certainly we are very anxious to continue to pursue this, not only with dialogue with mental health but also . . . with mental health services but also district health boards, but also pursuing this discussion with the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) because today we recognize that the need for speech and language pathologists around the province is significant. And for sure in rural Saskatchewan, from where you come and the area that I've spent a lot of time travelling around in the last several months, this has been identified as one of the areas of which we need to do more work in trying to find and recruit people.

I might say to you that there's some work being done in the Swift Current area, in that part of the province with the school division there, where there has been a fair bit of dialogue actually with the school division and the mental health folks about how they might in fact even assume some of the responsibilities of the speech pathologists really working within the school division.

And the need for the integration of services is very much on my mind and I know that it's on yours as well, so that we can provide some enrichments in those areas to young people who really are requiring these services.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, the government has already received 16 different studies supporting the auditory integration therapy and applied behaviour analysis. They are effective treatments in improving persons . . . in helping people with

autism. Now we understand that Saskatchewan Health is not willing to accept these studies. And we're just wondering how many more studies are going to be done before the ones that have already been worked on are looked at and actually some of the recommendations brought forward, not just having another study done so that people who are really requiring help are just waiting.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think, Mr. Chair, to the member, what's important here is that we recognize that there have been a number of studies that have been done as they relate by Health departments across the . . . over the period of time. What we're suggesting here is that as we review the special needs of students in this province through our review, we'll incorporate some of that documentation that's already been prepared, and at the end of the day we hope that we'll have a process in which we can deal and address many of the issues which you're identifying today. We're not unusual in Saskatchewan to what's happening across Canada. We have all the provinces today grappling with how we're going to deal with special needs of young people who are having a variety of different issues today that the schools are trying to deal with.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I guess we can't belabour this because it is an important issue and sitting here tonight isn't going to answer a lot of the questions that we have, but I'm sure that you've met with families that have children with disabilities and you understand the stress that there is in families. The fact that they just feel like there is no one to reach out to, that the schools don't have the capabilities. Maybe their teachers haven't been afforded the education and training it takes to deal with all the different disabilities that there are. And I think it's so important for you as you are dealing with this report to be meeting with the families, to be meeting with the parents, and understanding yourself, not just through a report on a piece of paper that somebody else is giving you. We're talking about the most vulnerable people in our society — young people with a disability, whether it's mental or physical disabilities; in lots of cases both of them.

And you offered a few minutes ago that maybe we should be discussing this in another forum that's not just in this forum, but I'm asking that maybe we could sit down and talk with a couple of the families in my area who I have been trying so hard to make . . . see something that would make a difference where this would give them some hope. A lot of them . . . they form support systems in small towns for each other because they don't have anybody else to hold onto. Their families and their neighbours do help them out, but to live 24 hours a day with someone you love who has disabilities is a very . . . it's something that I'm sure you and I can't really understand because we haven't been there.

So what I'm asking from you tonight, Mr. Minister, is a commitment that you will meet with me and with these families that I've been talking to, and just discuss what it really means to have someone living with you and understand what their needs are.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, you've raised a very, very important issue and one that's very close, and of which I have a great deal of sensitivity to through my years of practice as a social worker and my years of

administration of a private service agency. We had within that agency a program called Parkland early childhood intervention whose job was to work with families and young people in preparation for school programming and also in the community. So I have over the years met with many, many families whose children in fact were requiring some special needs, some special attention.

(2115)

And you couldn't express it any better than . . . or I can't express it any better than which you have, which is identifying some of the difficulties that families have today in coping with children who in fact are disadvantaged. And surely when we . . . as I've travelled around schools over the last several months, have been into many of the special needs programs that we have within our schools, and schools are having some difficulty coping with the growing pressures in this area. And through hopefully the special needs review, hopefully through the launching of the role of the schools, and that in fact we've announced that we'll see some greater involvement by inner agencies into the future in terms of how we address some of those specialized needs that children are having and families have to the school system. And certainly when you raised with me the opportunity to meet with families from your constituency who in fact are going through these periods of time, I'd be happy to do that around the schedule that we'll meet with, yours and mine.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, one other area that I'd like to hear from you on is the small schools factor. For the last couple of years, many boards of education and communities have raised the whole interpretation of the regulations around the small schools factor. And, Mr. Minister, I've pointed out to your predecessor many times in this House that individual communities and boards of education — many boards of education — feel that the interpretation that the department is using right now is unfair.

And just a quick review of that, Mr. Minister. What many communities are concerned about is that the small schools factor that is in place with the Department of Education, the small schools factor for a particular school, is determined by the next nearest school — regardless of what grade configuration is within that school. And the point, Mr. Minister, is in many communities now a lot of changes have been made by boards of education, and there has been some centralization of the more senior grades. And as a result we now have small schools — kindergarten to grade 12 schools — that are left, but they are long distances away from the next school that will have a grade 10, 11, and 12 configuration.

But your department still assigns the small schools factor on the basis of the next nearest school. So as a result, and I think, Mr. Minister, you're very familiar with your own hometown, where you grew up in, where the grade 10, 11, and 12 — in fact it's now the grades 9 to 12 — have been discontinued. Last year the community was very concerned because the small schools factor that was paid out to the community of Theodore — to the Yorkdale School Division, I should say, on behalf of the Theodore school — was very, very small because the two nearest schools were in fact a kindergarten to grade 6 school in Springside, and a kindergarten to grade 9 school in Sheho.

Those were the two nearest and second-nearest schools. Neither of those two schools had grade 10, 11, and 12 in them.

School divisions are asking, Mr. Minister, have you made a change to that regulation already? And have you adjusted for the fact that we need to start to compare apples to apples to ensure that boards of education who've tried to be efficient, who've tried to centralize but still now have a small school situation that's miles and miles away from the next large high school. But now they're being penalized because there's an elementary school eight miles away that's maybe a K to 6 and as a result now they're losing the small school's factor for their senior grades. Has your department reviewed that and have you made any changes?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Yes, we've reviewed it and we've made some changes in anticipation that you might ask this question, and so what we've done here is we've modified it to compare the schools to the nearest two schools with the same division level of instruction.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, I want to thank you and your officials for your answers and your ability to share with the opposition tonight. Thank you.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, ladies and gentlemen. I just have a couple of questions that I'd like to go back to what the member from the official opposition was pursuing. And that is something that's very real, and I recall in an earlier debate on another issue in the House the fact that our schools are now dependent upon more than just the three Rs. That there is this need for integrated services and special needs cares, not only as an extension to the families, but within the school environment itself totally.

I guess what I was wondering and the previous member alluded to your participating with other departments in dealing with these issues. It crossed my mind that perhaps when sitting down to consider the budget in the area of transfer of funds to teachers and to teaching operations, that perhaps there might be some consultation with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Health to pool some money for the kind of resources that are needed in those special care areas.

I know that the school districts have in fact brought these very real concerns to my attention and I'm sure to yours, Mr. Minister, and to other members. And it would only make sense to me that if you need a health nurse at a school that you would talk to the Health department to help pay for some of those services. As you would for emotional needs of students that you would go to Social Services and say that how about kicking in some money into this kitty because it addresses some of the problems or situations that you're responsible for, so cough up some of that money because we just don't have it in our Education budget for the extension of these required needs.

Is that a possibility that will be pursued, has it been pursued? Does it make sense to you?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thanks very much, Mr. Chair, to the member. And I want to say to the member opposite that there are lots of things that make sense on this side of the House. I can understand why there might be some things a bit confusing

on that side.

But I know that we want to say to the member opposite that there are a number of things . . . the process of which you talk about we support very highly. And this is part of the reason why we have launched what we have — and that is the role of the school — because we have been identifying for a number of months . . . and I know that the Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association a couple of years ago identified the need for us to build stronger schools and stronger communities and stronger families.

And the way in which we enrich some of that process is to integrate much of our services today. So when I look at the Nutana model in Saskatoon today, where you really see a school that's actually become functional with a variety of other disciplines within it, is where I think we need to be going into the future.

And I hear you saying some of the same things. Where in the Nutana high school in Saskatoon today what you have is you have social workers that are working alongside teachers. And you have people from the police forces that are working alongside teachers in the schools. You have addictions counsellors who are working in the schools. You have mental health staff who are working in the schools. So what's happened is that you have a greater integration of human services or public services within that environment.

Now we're doing other things today on a . . . sort of an intermittent basis across the province with the child action plan. You see a variety of different disciplines working with one another, working within the school system, and you can find school boards across the province where you have some of those shared services happening today.

So we're very much on the same page as you are in terms of that direction. We are going to try and lead that process through the roles of the school which we announced just recently and soon will be appointing a Chair and a group of individuals who'll be working across the province to try to build that.

Mr. Osika: — That's commendable that these programs are being initiated and are available. And I can understand why they would be readily available in the larger urban centres because of the accessibility to these other agencies.

But I'm talking about Deer Park and I'm talking about the Scenic Valley school divisions that do not have such immediate access. And I guess going back to my question: where do these school districts get the additional funding for those special needs and care people? Is that totally out of the Education budget? And if it is, perhaps it shouldn't be.

I guess that's what I'm trying to address, that there should be some addition to the kitty, if you wish, from some of these other departments to offset the costs taken from that Education budget, from those school districts who are already financially hard-pressed as you well know.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think that one of the things that could occur, I think, through the process of examining what kinds of services are required in schools today might see a

redirecting of resources as you outlined.

Where in the future, the school in my view, which has already become the most central piece . . . and particularly in rural Saskatchewan today where in many communities that I visit today the school is an instructional venue by day and in the evening it's used as a community hall and often on the weekends. And on a Sunday you can find the . . . it is a place of worship. So the school has in fact become a very central piece of your community, and more so as I say to you in rural Saskatchewan.

Now there may be an opportunity to fundamentally shift the way in which services are delivered in this province today where a larger part of those services can come through the school system, but the resources for them might come from the Department of Social Services or it might come from Justice or certainly could come from Health. And some of that's being done already in a small way across the province in various different venues.

But I'm . . . I guess I'm really hoping that as we go through the dialogue on the role of the school across the province and they begin to identify the various different things that schools are doing today — pre-kindergarten programs, preschool programs today, nutrition programs, a variety of different types — today where we're dealing with a growing number of single parents, so there are more and more social agencies that are making their way into the school.

And as time passes, and as the review makes its way across the province, I'm hoping to see a greater integration of those services.

Mr. Osika: — Might that mean, Mr. Minister, that we might see in the future that there is an item that's specifically identified as special needs which would be a lump sum of money that's a pool . . . that's a pool from Social Services, Health, and other agencies, and Justice as you suggested, that's identified as being specifically targeted for those special needs over and above the reading, writing, and arithmetic that schools have been traditionally known for?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I'm very much open to what you're suggesting and I think that this is part of the whole process that I think the role of the school is undertaking. I think today when you look at preventative and support programs that the government provides, in a variety of different venues, be it through Health or Social Services, you might find a line today, for example, where the child action plan in fact does some of that work.

And in the future it may very well be in the Department of Education's estimates where we might be having this discussion and I'd love to have it from this venue, you know, a year or two from now when I'm on this side of the House telling you how it is that we've accomplished the kinds of things that you and I both want. And certainly we're going to continue to work in that direction to try to accomplish that.

Mr. Osika: — Just another question along those lines. Are there any specific programs or special types of programs that may be funded or supported in urban centres that are not in

rural areas? Perhaps I can be a little more specific when it comes to First Nations communities. Are there any special, funded programs between urban and rural school districts in that respect?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think in the urban areas, what you would find, Mr. Chair, to the member, is a number of community schools. I think now we have 31 community schools now that you'll find in urban communities across the province which you would not find in your rural communities. And of course my interest would be to try to grow the community schools.

Now we have the Indian and Metis educational grant which we provide across the province to Aboriginal children, so that would be the only area where you would see some similarity.

Mr. Osika: — Just to clarify, those specific programs are geared for the urban community schools but not in the rural areas. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The community school program has also extended itself to the North. We have one in Meadow Lake as well, and we have one in your constituency of Fort Qu'Appelle.

Mr. Osika: — That would be for the member from Indian Head-Milestone's constituency, Mr. Minister, but it's near enough to mine that I'll accept that as an answer.

And I wasn't leading towards, but I have to ask, is there then some disparity when you have certain programs, if you wish, and funding available for one particular school, unless there's a specific criteria, and not for others that may fall into a similar category but happen to be in a rural community.

(2130)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I thought that maybe the boundary reorganization was already complete, and we also had won the seat of Fort Qu'Appelle as well and Qu'Appelle, but I guess that's not the case yet.

But I want to say that there are some specialized programs that are provided across the province that have some differentiation to them. For example, the community schools program, as I've identified, is primarily in urban centres. But when you look at the rural technology grant which we provide, it's specific to the rural communities. So there are occasions within the funding formula where we provide some funding to rural communities in a different way in which to urbans, and then to urbans as opposed to others in the rural areas.

But I mean my hope would be that in the future we might see community schools that would be located all across the province. Because they would have the kind of integrated component that you talked about earlier of which I think is imperative as we look at how in fact communities and families and schools have changed.

Mr. Osika: — Probably one of my last questions, Mr. Minister: can we foresee in the future four-day school weeks being expanded to a larger part of the province?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well we're continuing that examination. I

know you're asking me that only because it's in your backyard and you have some appreciation for how well it's working in that part of Saskatchewan. And we've had an opportunity to look at it and to some degree I have to concur that it is working relatively well. We're currently examining it and we'll keep you posted in terms of what the outcome of that will be.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. On that note I want to commend the Scenic Valley School Division for implementing those programs where they were able to save money. There was cost-saving measures that they put into effect. Unfortunately they weren't able to keep all that money for their special needs and for the reasons that they saved it. However I understand that now everybody's come to their senses and seen fit to return that type of funding that school districts work very hard to save and not to have taken away but to apply to their special needs over and above the grants that they do get.

So I appreciate that very much and thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, and your officials, welcome. Just a few questions. First one, Minister, regarding the issue of where people live and their children attending other schools. I had a number of calls and complaints and letters and chats with people from across the province that live in a particular school division and wish their children to go to school in another school division. And of course because of the squeeze, the tight squeeze that's being put on boards of education, the matter of a student leaving and the money following him is not something very attractive to most school boards.

Can you tell me, Minister, what you're doing to address that problem? And how you're making it work so that your thinking goes along the lines of what's best for the students and how do we get them the best possible education that meets their needs?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well it's been the tradition in this province that local school boards would really make decisions in terms of where students would attend a school. And one is a resident of a particular school division which will decide where in fact you think your child should be attending school.

And so today if there's a student that wishes or a family that chooses to have their child go to a different school division, first of all I would expect there's a dialogue between the two school divisions and hopefully they can resolve it at that level which is customary in terms of the way in which decisions have been made since we've had school divisions in this province.

Mr. McLane: — I guess, Mr. Minister, maybe it is customary but what isn't customary is the amount of money that the provincial government has put into the Education budget. And we're seeing the government's share shrinking since your government came to power, which in turn has put extreme pressure on school divisions in not wanting these children to go to another school, another school division.

So I think it's maybe time that your department and you rethought your position on that, because from my understanding and with the cases that I'm dealing with is that it's not being resolved by the local community, by the local school divisions,

even though in many cases the community is in support of the individuals wanting to do this.

So what are your plans to solve those problems, Mr. Minister, and be part of the solution instead of part of the problem?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I'm a little surprised, I think, by the member's comment or the question on a couple of fronts. One is that I don't think that the member is suggesting that the ministry should be assuming the responsibilities of school divisions in making determinations over locally elected school divisions about where it is that students should be attending a school.

Really our belief and my belief on this side of the House is that we have locally elected school trustees today who manage the affairs of school divisions in my view very, very well and the future of where students should attend, I think, really should be left to them. And I would expect that your view isn't far from that.

I want to say to the member opposite that today we in fact are investing more funds in the foundation and operating grant in the history of this province. We make the largest contribution today, and we are continuing to say that we are going to grow that, you know, as time passes . . . which when we had our dialogue with the Saskatchewan school trustees . . . or the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation just recently of which your leader was also a partner of, when I read your Liberal platform book, nowhere was it identified that you even have K to 12 education as a priority. And it's not in here at all. I have the platform document here, and I've read it from front to back.

There isn't one word here about K to 12 education. It's not even a priority on your sheets so if you haven't had a chance to look through it, if you think there's something in it, I can hand this over to you; you can take a look at it and you'll find that there's nothing here on K to 12 education.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Minister, I can see that you're more interested in playing politics than you are in the lives of our students — the next generation of taxpayers in this province, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, the question was quite a simple one. When the many cases that the issues are not being resolved, it's simply a matter of dollars that the school divisions are put in because of your government's policy.

One particular case and, Mr. Minister, I know you're aware of it because I've seen letters both from your office and to your office regarding this case down near the Swift Current area, and it's the Deobalds that have been an issue for about two years with this specific problem and want their children to go to a different school. The actual school bus goes right by their front door and they're not allowed to partake in that particular education system.

So, Minister, my question is: are you going to address these things and work with the school divisions who are indeed locally elected, and you're an elected official as well by the people in this province to serve the needs of the students. How are you going to bring these two groups together to solve these problems that are . . . and they're occurring right across this province.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, as I've already outlined to you that the decisions regarding which school divisions children will attend is really left with that of the local school boards. And certainly I have no intent, or for that matter interest, to take on that responsibility from the school divisions because they're duly elected within their school-division jurisdictions. They're elected by people who can appreciate the work that they do, and it's my view that we should continue to leave that in the hands of school trustees in the province.

Mr. McLane: — Well, I'm sad to hear, Minister, that you're not that interested in children's education. If the problem isn't getting solved, Mr. Minister, the buck stops with you. You're the last one in the pecking order, and your role is to try and bring discussions closer together through the two groups — in this case, two school divisions and a family. Why are you not interested in doing that, Mr. Minister?

You're more interested in playing politics than trying to solve the problem of a family and a children's education. And it boils down to the simple matter of economics — dollars and cents with the school divisions. If they lose some students, they lose some money. One particular case, Mr. Minister, that's what it's about. That's all it's about. And if you would be part of the solution and say, well maybe we can do this, maybe we can do that, and accommodate everyone's interests. These kids get to go to the school of their choice and get the education that they deserve.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, I want to say to the member opposite that this government and certainly this administration is very, very concerned about the future of Saskatchewan children, and that's why in fact we made the greatest investment in K to 12 education in the history of this province in the foundation operating grant today.

So it's my view that that's a clear reflection of what our priorities are. And certainly — which is not yours. I mean, when you take a look . . . as I've already said, when I take a look at the platform document that you folks have put out, nowhere in this platform document does it talk about K to 12 education. It's not even a priority.

So it's not about politics; it's about determining which party in this province has some interest in supporting or has the great interest in supporting the education system in this province.

And so I say to the member opposite, I would like for you to include in your platform how it is that you think that government should intervene or the ministry should intervene in decision-making where in fact local individuals have been selected by the ratepayers to look after the needs of their communities. So that's not where I'm going with that, but I'd be very interested if you would stand in your place and say that you would support having a Minister of Education assume the responsibilities of deciding where young people in this province should go to school if there is in fact a dispute.

Mr. McLane: — Minister, I'd be interested in standing in my place and telling you that your government has not kept up its commitment to education in this province, and certainly under the funding formula are way off base.

And our office has calls and letters coming in from municipalities all over this province, both urban and rural, saying that they can't afford one cent more in property taxes. Your government is deaf to those concerns, Mr. Minister, and you don't seem to care.

That's exactly a symptom of what's happening with these families that want their kids to go to another school, is because of the funding, Mr. Minister. So if you're not going to . . . if you're not interested in addressing the children's needs and trying to solve the problem, at least you could try and solve the funding problem.

For many years local taxpayers have been telling your government that you've got to get back to funding the lion's share of education. I can show you a stack of letters from municipalities right across this province saying that you're not pulling your weight — and you aren't. And so, Mr. Minister, my question to you would be, what kind of a commitment do you have to the taxpayers of this province to try and turn that trend around, and you take back the lion's share of funding for education, K to 12 in this province.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say to the member opposite that for him to stand in his place and suggest that we're not interested in supporting public education in this province, I think you need to take a look at what we've done over the last number of years.

And when I look at your platform I see nothing here at all that addresses itself to special education — not one word about special education. And if you were listening when I was speaking to the member opposite from the Saskatchewan Party, I told you about how we've grown the special needs programming in this province by almost \$20 million over that period of time. I want to say to the member opposite that we've put additional funding into small school grants in this province and enriched those and grown those. And nowhere here does it say anything about Aboriginal education in this province — not a word about Aboriginal education in your platform.

So I mean when you compare the differences in terms of what we're doing in Saskatchewan, directions we're going versus what you have in yours, I see a huge, huge vacancy in terms of where your platform is as it relates to education.

(2145)

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, our commitment is to the people of Saskatchewan. Our commitment is in health care, Mr. Minister, that your government has bumbled since you came to power in 1991. That's the Liberal commitment — is to fix health care in this province that you won't do. Our commitment is to the rural communities in this province, Mr. Minister, to stop the destruction of our rural communities, stop the destruction of the rail lines, the senseless bulldozing down of facilities that many communities want to use, Mr. Minister. That's where our commitment is, is to the people of the province.

Our commitment is also to post-secondary education students, to make sure that they get an education which your government doesn't seem too interested to do because your government has

cut funding to post-secondary education since 1944, as the member from North Battleford indicated earlier today. So our commitment, Mr. Minister, is to the people of the province — not to playing politics, Mr. Minister, but to make sure that children get an education in this province.

So, Mr. Minister, where is your commitment to ensure that these people that are having trouble getting their kids to go to the school they want to, to go to the school of their choice, and you intervened to try to bring the sides closer together and get the kids to the school that they want to go to.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think I'm going to repeat one more time to the member opposite in terms of what the role of school divisions across the province are. And the determination of where children go to school in this province are really determined by school divisions. Families make those initial choices. They then consult with the school divisions in terms of which school division in fact they would choose for their children to go to, and at the local level they would decide where in fact that child should go to school.

Mr. McLane: — Minister, I understand the process, and I can see that you're sincere in maybe wanting to address this problem finally. So all we're asking for is, and I know that you've had discussions with many of these people and you've had discussions with the school divisions, why won't you take the time to try and bring them closer together and say maybe there's something the government can do to accommodate them, whether it's solving the economic crisis for the school division that is maybe losing the students. Let's put the students first, Minister. Let's put our students, our young people in this province first above your politics and let's try and find a reasonable, common sense solution so that kids can go to the schools of their choice, especially when the school bus is running right by their front door.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well what we'll continue to do here is that in the case that you're talking about, I know that Mr. Luke has an opportunity to speak with the families, and I'll continue to encourage Mr. Luke to meet with the families and see if he can sort that out on a local basis.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that, that you're finally taking an interest in those students and I know you're sincere. I guess we'll take it one step farther. Now that's an individual case that I want see solved, certainly for the good of the children. I think you need some sort of a process right across the province that addresses those concerns, whatever the community they're in. And they're all over the province, Mr. Minister, because I've talked to these people.

So can you give us some reason of security that you're going to initiate some sort of a process that will accommodate these special requests that need some special type of mediation, if you will for a lack of a better word, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, I meet with the Saskatchewan school trustees on a regular basis. What I will do is I've made a note of your request in terms of what you're suggesting. I'll take it back to the Saskatchewan school trustees and we'll have a discussion about how it is that we might be able to put that process into place if there's any . . .

(inaudible) . . . or interest to do that.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. I want to welcome you and your officials here. I received a letter today that in fact was addressed to yourself and it's a public document so I'll quote from it. And it's from the Shaunavon School Division No. 71 dated April 30, 1999. And I think I'm going to read it into the record because I think it says everything that needs to be said about what's happening in rural Saskatchewan.

To the Hon. Clay Serby, Minister of Education.

Dear Mr. Serby:

Our Board of Education has just completed its budget for 1999 and wishes to share with you some of its thoughts so that you may become more familiar with the plight of School Divisions.

Once again this year our Board has had to go to its ratepayers for additional revenue in order to maintain (only) our present programs. This was done with the full knowledge that we have been told by a local village Mayor that, if our mill rate goes up in 1999, he will lead a tax revolt amongst our local municipalities. To illustrate the effect of just "maintaining" our programs, we are not providing needed repairs to our facilities nor are we keeping up with bus replacements. As a result, repair items are increasingly being referred to Occupational Health & Safety Committees by staff and we have seven route buses with over 300,000 km. on them, bringing into question the safety of their passengers.

Budgetary expenditures amounting to 60% to 70% are outside of the Board of Education's control! These items range from Saskatchewan Education initiatives to the price of bus gas. When these restrictions are combined, our hands are tied when it comes to implementing needed improvements — dare we say, to do anything!

Over the years, provincial support for the education of students in the Shaunavon School Division has dropped from 58% to 20% of total expenditures! Our enrolment has declined over those years and where possible, staffing has been reduced. You will although understand that staff changes can not be proportional to enrolment changes, as those changes occur in numerous classrooms/schools. The grant formula recognizes enrolment changes but each year we seem to lose any recognition gains in the revenue equalization factor. This year our enrolment only dropped by four students but we lost \$184,000.

The recognized local revenue factor in the grant formula is of concern as well regarding the assessment figure used. We are only able to generate tax revenue from 83% of the agriculture lands due to the .83 factor. According to the grant formula, we are considered to be receiving 100% of this tax revenue! This is extremely inequitable and we encourage your department to make the necessary changes that would see the use of actual figures rather than numerously adjusted figures that end up being meaningless.

We understand the financial plight of provincial finances, but without **immediate**, and **substantial**, increases in our school division's grant revenues, devastating results are predicted. Prior to considering any inflation or other cost increases for next year, we already know that we will be short over \$100,000. We cannot keep going to our ratepayers for the financial support that should be coming from the province.

It is difficult, in one letter, to fully describe the effects that insufficient funding to School Divisions has on schools, staff, communities and most importantly, on students. If we can be of assistance in providing more information, we are more than willing to meet with you at your convenience.

Respectfully yours, H.H. Conrad, Secretary-Treasurer.

And, Mr. Minister, I think this letter really says it all when you're looking at what's happening out there, especially in rural Saskatchewan. And I would have to ask you — we'll sort of step through this letter — I would have to ask you, do you believe there is more room to tax property owners?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, I want to say to the member opposite that first of all I take quite seriously the letter of which you've read into the record tonight, and certainly we'll be looking to see it. I have not had an opportunity to review it in the way in which you've read it a couple of minutes ago . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That would be good if you send a copy over to me, and we could take a look at it and address . . . there are a number of issues in that letter that we'd like to address.

I think what I might say to you is that there has been clearly an enrolment decline, and the assessments are certainly up in that part of the province. And I'm very much concerned about how we address, particularly on the southwest side of the province, where the population sparsity is becoming even more of an issue than it has been over the last — say — 10 or 15 years.

And so I would appreciate very much that letter making its way to me, and we'll address some of those issues directly with the individual from whom it comes.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for answering questions that weren't asked as yet, because the question is quite simple. And the letter is getting copied; you'll have a copy within a few minutes. But the question is as put in that letter, because they're talking about a tax revolt . . . do you feel that there is more room to have more property taxes? Simple as that.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think there isn't anybody in the province who wants to pay any more tax irrespective of whether it's personal income tax or . . . (inaudible) . . . the education and property tax. For sure, nobody wants to pay any more of that. But I think today, what I've been saying around the province to many people is that we have about \$1.1 billion today that we spend on education in this province.

And it doesn't matter where I go. I mean when I go to your constituency and speak to the people in your school system there, or I go to my own community, or I go to the northern part

of the province, they all say to me that we're not spending enough money in education.

Not necessarily the 60/40 of which the property tax gets 600 million and we get 400 million, but they say that we need to grow the base. And so today, through our examinations with the school trustees and with the SUMA and SARM, we're examining how it is that we might be able to provide some additional resources into the education pool, and that the property tax gets reviewed and assessed at the same time.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you really haven't answered that yet. I guess you want to skirt around and skate around the issue about whether or not you believe there's more room to raise more tax off of property, and we'll come back to that.

So for now I'll ask you: do you think there's more room to take more staff out of these rural schools and increase the classroom size?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, we're looking at a variety of different mechanisms and a way in which we can deliver education, particularly to rural Saskatchewan today. I mean, when you start looking at the small school enrolments that many of our schools have in the province today, and particularly, as I say to you, in the southwest side of the province, we're looking at different ways — like technology, for example — in which we might be able to provide greater access to some of our smaller schools in rural Saskatchewan so that we can keep those schools open to ensure that we can provide quality education for that part of the province or for smaller rural communities.

Clearly, and I agree that there's a need for us in this province to grow the level of funding that we have in education today. I don't think that you're going to find a great deal of dispute about that. The mechanism as to how you grow that, of course, is going to be dependent on the kinds of resources that governments have today to provide additional funding, and we're examining that with our partners. And our partners today are Saskatchewan school trustees, I think SUMA and SARM, of which I've already made a commitment to meet with these folks and have a discussion about what our future direction will be in terms of funding. And those commitments are underway today and those discussions are within days away.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you know it's not unlike the crisis that you were warned about a few years ago when we started . . . well four or five years ago when we started raising these health care crisis questions day in and day out. And really it's coming at you in spades, Mr. Minister.

You ignored it when you were the Health minister, and look at where it's got you now. Now you're in Education, and I think you're ignoring another crisis that's coming at you. And the question is simple enough: do you support cutting programs, salaries, not taking care of your buildings, not replacing buses? Or are you in favour of more property tax? Which is it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think I want to say to the member opposite that you draw a long bow when you talk about the education system in Saskatchewan and the level of its functionality and its service delivery. Because in

Saskatchewan today, when you look at what we have in terms of partnership with existing individuals and SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) and STF and the ministries and the department, I think you'll find an education system that will be hard to resemble anywhere else in Canada.

Because we have today a very good core curriculum; we have a variety of specialized programs within the system today; we have an excellent teaching core of people today in our environment. So we don't have a crisis in education. And the last thing that you should be promoting on that side of the House is the thought that we have a crisis in education today because it's nowhere near being the truth. Because today in Saskatchewan we have a very, very good education system that we are proud to stack up with any other province across the nation, and will continue to work at growing it into the future in a variety of different ways.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, then I draw your attention to . . . you have the letter now before you, that you are saying that we're drawing long bows and trying to say there's a crisis when there isn't one. Look at page 2 in that middle paragraph:

We understand the financial plight of (the) provincial finance but without **immediate**, and **substantial**, increases in our school division's grant revenues, devastating results are predicted. Prior to considering any inflation or other cost increase for next year, we already know that we will be short \$100,000. We cannot keep going to our ratepayers for the financial support that should be coming from the province.

To me that sounds like there's a crisis coming from the point of view of this board of education. Do you not agree that they have these crisis concerns?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what's important for the member to understand here is that in this province today we have an appreciation of each other's role, and certainly with school trustees and the ministry in the Department of Education.

I mean as late as this afternoon I'm having a meeting with the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association who will say to you that they support the foundation operating grant in this province in the way in which it's in place — they support it across the piece in Saskatchewan — the foundation operating grant. And school boards in this province will tell you, led by the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, that in fact they should have taxing authority and taxing power. So they believe that they should be involved in that process.

Now in this province today, this year we put in \$13.14 million to grow the base in education. Last year we put in \$21 million to grow the base in this province. So I mean we're continuing to go in the right direction in my view. We're continuing to grow the base in this province in education. And we make the commitment here that it remains one of our highest priorities in government and are going to continue to provide funding towards education in the province.

(2200)

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you know, take a look in the

letter here.

(For) over the years, provincial support for the education of students in the Shaunavon School Division has dropped from 58% to 20% of total expenditures!

If you're talking about your trend line, I don't think this is a trend line that you want to say is good and healthy because there is a crisis. These people want to meet with you and talk about this crisis. It comes to this, Mr. Minister, and it's no more than this.

Either as Minister of Education you're going to ask them to go back to the property tax and get their increases — hundreds of thousands of dollars in one school division — get it from there. Or they can go with another option I guess you — really by way of your actions — put before them is cut out building repairs and buses.

They have buses here. We have seven of them with over 300,000 kilometres and they're saying that they're not safe for the kids any more. And you can cut teaching positions, have a lot larger class sizes, or cut programs because, quite frankly, you're not prepared to put more money in. You mustn't be. You had your opportunity in this budget.

And you know, Mr. Minister, I remember very well on budget day what happened. And the Minister of Finance stood up and gave the budget — so coined the health budget — and all your members sat there and did nothing; barely a sound from you when you talked about things that you're prepared to do.

And yet when he stood up and announced that we're going to cut 1 per cent off the PST (provincial sales tax), Mr. Minister — because you're very close to him in your seats there — you were one of the first to reach over and give him a high-five, cutting the PST, weren't you?

And I know you know I remember that by the way you're sitting there looking. You were in favour of cutting the 1 per cent PST, a hundred million bucks, right. And you're the Minister of Education and you say there's no crisis. And we take a look here at the kind of cuts that you have promoted.

You promote these cuts to education by your inaction. You're either saying cut services, cut teachers, cut buses, cut building repairs, or go back to the property tax because you're not getting it from us. And quite frankly, you sat there — you sat there, or you stood there that day — and high-fived the Finance minister for his 1 per cent in PST cut. Don't you think it's a case of priorities?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well it may have looked like a high-five but I was just giving the signal about five people who'll be disappearing from that side of the House and that's . . . (inaudible) . . . Okay?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite that today in Saskatchewan we have a solid commitment to education — solid commitment. And when you take a look at what we've done in the last couple of years to growing the base

on the foundation operating grant, it's revealing if you look at that to see what we're doing. As I say to you, \$13.4 million this year and maybe you'll say it's not enough and that we should have . . . we should have selected our priorities in a different way.

And maybe you're going to stand in your place and say, well we shouldn't have put \$195 million, you know, into health care, and that you should have taken some of the \$195 million and put some of it into education. You might say that. Or we might have taken some of that 195 and put it into highways, but overall in the province we provided some balance for you. We provided some on highways and education and in social services and in health, and that's part of what of government is about — and balancing the books and reducing the debt.

Now in the future we're going to say, as I've said, we're going to continue to try and put additional resources into the education pool. And I'm optimistic that as our opportunities financially in this province improve, we'll continue to invest in education and into the future of young people in this province.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you know we appreciate that you sit around the cabinet table and help make these decisions and you've been doing it for some time, talking about your priorities. And when we take a look at some of the things that your government has done: whether it's even to just buy a brand new fancy jet for a few of you to fly over this province so you don't have to drive on our roads; or you know, the 62 million bucks that you've spent as government buying a TV company in New Zealand; or prepared to spend 30 million in an unstable environment in Guyana with a power company; or losing money on Channel Lake; or paying severance packages of 300-and-some-thousand; or health CEOs getting 17 per cent increase. I mean we could go on and on and on about where your priorities are.

And you can talk about all the meetings you're going to be in with this group and that group, but at the end of the day it's whether or not you're sitting at the cabinet table and saying: you know what, as Minister of Education I accept there's some serious problems. We have cut back in school divisions such as Shaunavon School Division where the . . . your proportion has dropped from 58 per cent down to 20 per cent of expenditures. Are you fighting for them? Are you fighting for them, Mr. Minister, or not?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Member, my job in the ministry — which may be foreign to you in terms of ever having an opportunity to do this job — and I want to say to you that as an individual cabinet minister around the table, we always represent the views of the constituents of whom we represent. Today it's the education people of whom I represent.

And I travel the province and get a better appreciation of what's happening in school districts and what's happening within the classrooms, the schools, and try to bring that back to the Assembly or bring it back to the table of which my caucus colleagues sit around and promote the importance of growing the education base in this province. And I've been saying that now for some time.

In fact, I said it just a couple of weeks ago when we were at the

forum with Saskatchewan teachers — of which your leader was there — and said that it's important for us to grow the base in this province and that we're going to make a contribution to growing that into the future, and that in our platform we're identifying how we're going to do that.

And when he went to speak about his — there's nothing in the K to 12. There isn't a single word about the K to 12 in your platform. And so when you say to me, where are we going in education, you can see what we're doing and where we're going. It's clear.

And so I ask the member opposite to examine that and to assure him that on a regular basis, an ongoing basis, I support very hard for the people who are delivering education in this province.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, would you accept . . . if you're not saying there's a crisis, if you don't say these kind of numbers are serious in a crisis, would you at least accept that there's a serious concern on the financing of these school districts?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I'm saying to the member opposite that we have a responsibility to grow the base in education in this province because I think that \$1.1 million today in the K to 12 system is not doing the kind of job that I'd like to see it do. And so my commitment, along with school trustees in this province, is to see how we can grow that into the future. And my commitment is very solid and I've been saying that for several months.

Mr. McPherson: — Well then are you saying that you're ineffective in cabinet. If you're prepared to vote . . . or the others are voting for 62 million bucks to be spent in New Zealand on a TV company, but in fact you've got this serious concern before you and you can't get money for the education of Saskatchewan kids, and this government is making the kind of ridiculous investments around the world that they are and putting these monies at risk — are you not effective?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say to the member opposite that I'll continue to press for growth in the education file. I'll continue to work with the school trustees to try to enrich the funding base. That's my commitment that I've made to school trustees, and I make it to you.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, you know, Mr. Minister, you talk about where our commitment is. And we've been on record for a long time to 60/40 split. We fully support that. But, you know, I recall going into the 1991 campaign, as I did, 60-40 split. You know, it . . . your percentages though are going the wrong way, and perhaps you just didn't realize that, but you've dropped in Shaunavon from 58 to 20. What do you think of that trend line, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I say to the member opposite that the 60-40 split, which is your position, doesn't do anything in terms of growing the base. It doesn't do a thing for education in this province. So when you identify education spending in this province . . . because when you look at what the financial needs in the province are, I talk about growing it. You talk about keeping it level. And if we have all of the issues across

Saskatchewan which I identify with you are there, in terms of rural technology, how we provided district resources, grow the teacher base in the province, it's about putting additional resources into the system. Not flipping 60-40 only, it's about growing it — that's my commitment.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, maybe we should back up here a little bit and you define exactly what growing the base is for the good folks of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say to the member opposite, first of all you say to me that there isn't enough funds in the system today. And I say to you that what we're trying to do is to provide a greater equity and quality of education to students across the province. That's my responsibility in partnership with the Saskatchewan school trustees, who've identified for me some of the same issues and that is that we need to provide greater rural technology where we can, to provide greater equity and parity across the piece, to provide equal opportunities and special education programming, and the list goes on and on. And the commitment that I've made is that collectively, with Saskatchewan school trustees, we're going to try to accomplish that.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, I don't think you've defined what growing the base is, and maybe if you'd get right to that fine point: what is growing the base?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — It's pretty simple for me. I mean, if the base is 1.1 and you're going to grow the base, that means that you've got to grow past 1.1.

Mr. McPherson: — What's the 1.1? Tell us what it is.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The 1.1 is the total cost of public education in this province shared by the school trustees and by the provincial treasury.

Mr. McPherson: — But, Mr. Minister, we're asking . . . when you're saying growing the base, are you saying getting other groups involved to help fund education?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well if the education base today is 1.1 million, and we . . . 1.1 billion, anything over 1.1 would be growing the base.

Mr. McPherson: — So when you're saying growing the base, are you talking about provincial share — your share? Or somebody else's share that you're talking about?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I'm talking about the total growth of the base.

Mr. McPherson: — And so you're saying then SARM, SUMA, they're prepared to put more money into this. What are they saying? They have more room in their property tax base to do it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I said to you earlier that I'm having a dialogue with school trustees and SUMA and SARM.

Mr. McPherson: — And so where, Mr. Minister, are they going to get the money to help you grow this base?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member opposite, that's part of the dialogue that I'm having with the school trustees and SUMA and SARM.

Mr. McPherson: — Maybe you'd like to give us some examples where you think they can get this extra funding?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member opposite, I've already said that we've grown the base the last couple of years. The provincial government has grown the base and 13 and a half million and 21.3 or 4 million. So we've grown the base over the last two years and continue to go in that direction.

Mr. McPherson: — So you're saying growing the base is directly from the provincial coffers, right?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — That's exactly where the growth of the base has occurred over the last couple of years in partnership with the SSTA.

Mr. McPherson: — So you weren't able to just say we're going to put more provincial money in it a long time ago, and we can avoid this. But now if you are prepared to grow the base and put more money in, how much more money would we expect to take care of these problems?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I don't know the answer to that question because that's part of some of the dialogue that I'm having with school trustees and municipal leaders.

Mr. McPherson: — If you can appreciate what you've been hearing from all of those groups up to date who are saying we really don't have any more room on our property tax base, we're all being cut short here, and it really is on your shoulders to come up as a provincial government and properly fund, you know, kids' education in this province, surely you can have a number and a timetable as to when you're going to adequately fund education. You can't give us some idea?

(2215)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I've given you a time table in terms of evaluating what the role of the school is, so we're doing a role of the school evaluation which is now underway, or soon will be underway. I have given the commitment on a number of occasions now that I'm going to be meeting with SUMA and SARM and SSTA. That process is underway. So the work is in progress today as we speak.

Mr. McPherson: — But, Mr. Minister, when you talk about all these meetings — and you and I both know what you're government's meetings have done for other groups to date; it's really just a way of creating buffers and killing time and making sure you do absolutely nothing — that's the only thing that your government has a good track record on, Mr. Minister . . . is doing absolutely nothing in a crisis.

So tell me what your meetings would do in regards to doing something with these, you know, where the enrolment dropped by four students and they lost 184,000 bucks. How are you addressing those things?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The equalization grant would look after

those kinds of shifts, both in assessment and in student population.

Mr. McPherson: — So in a school division like this where they're going to be short — as it says in the letter — 100,000 bucks, I guess a great deal of it is because of this lack of funding from you, but in fact a change in enrolment. Are you not prepared to take some action immediately? Because we're talking about this year's budget for this school division. So and what are you talking about? Having meetings for a few years where in fact more teachers have got to be let go, and buildings have got to be forgotten about, and buses can go from 300,000 clicks or miles up to what — 5 or 600,000? What is it that you're really thinking about that can happen to make some change in this year?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — As I've said to the member opposite, that the foundation operating grant really does make the adjustments for student enrolments, decreases and increases, and also the assessments, decreases and increases in assessments. The foundation operating grant really addresses those.

Mr. McPherson: — So do you expect you'll have some resolve in this particular year for school divisions such as Shaunavon's where they're \$100,000 short? Will you have some resolve in providing more funding, perhaps not investing around the world in Chile or Santiago or somewhere, but investing here in Saskatchewan, in Saskatchewan kids, to take care of this problem? Will you do it in this particular year?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well as I've said to the member opposite, Mr. Chair, that we've already made an investment in education this year. It's \$13.4 million; \$24 million in capital. Last year \$21 million in operating; \$24 million in capital, and my intention is that we continue to grow the budgets into the future for education.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you know you're just avoiding it. You've got to actually come and deal with the problem. These school divisions — you've been getting letters the same as I have. This just didn't . . . these letters didn't just come up in this year. We've been seeing them from school divisions year after year after year. And in fact you have a, you know, what's the saying: after all is said and done, more gets said than gets done.

And I think that really says something about your government. You're prepared to do nothing. These are the education of our Saskatchewan kids, and your priorities are all over the map, but it's not for Saskatchewan. I mean shame on you and your government. At some point you're going to have to face the facts. There's tax revolts; there's underfunding; classrooms are already getting too large. Do you not feel you have some responsibility as the minister to deal with this stuff?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say, Mr. Chair, to the member opposite, that we're very, very proud of our education system in Saskatchewan and today we're making a huge investment into the future of our young minds so that they can continue to grow and supply the kinds of educational needs that we have in this province for the future.

In fact we're so committed to ensuring that we have an

excellent curriculum in this province and that we have accessibility, that all teachers in the province have accessibility to our core curriculum, that just recently what we did is we put on a CD-ROM — and I have a copy of the CD-ROM here — of which on this small little CD-ROM we have the entire core curriculum of the provincial education system.

And what I have that will help the member opposite to understand more fully about what it is and how we're growing education in this province, I'd like to provide a copy of this CD-ROM to the member, and he can take it home and stick it into his computer and get a full appreciation of what it is that we're doing in Saskatchewan to help our young people educate in the fashion in which they're going to provide contributions into the future.

And this little CD-ROM, by the way, the only cost was 73 cents for this little ROM, and we provide it to every teacher in the province . . . to every teacher in the province, and to all the young teachers that are currently being trained in the universities, and we can certainly provide it for all members of the Assembly so that they have a full and better appreciation, and we'll do that. Absolutely we will.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you talk about how proud you are of the system. Would these seven school buses that have well over 300,000 kilometres bring them into question of their safety? Are those some of the things you're proud of?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think the member should be careful when he talks about the safety issues as it relates to school buses in this province and clearly . . . I mean I'm very, very much concerned when somebody raises, in this Assembly, the fact that there may be some kinds of safety issues as it relates to transporting of children in the province.

And I say to the member opposite that school divisions in this province, in my view, are responsible men and women who are elected by ratepayers of their jurisdictions. And to raise in this Assembly a question about the safety of children who travel on school buses today, who are really represented by individuals from your community, is an area that I would be very cautious about proceeding in.

And I would say to the member, if you have some concern about the safety issues of school buses in your jurisdiction, you should take that to your school board. You should let them know what concerns you have, and I'm sure that they'll address them immediately. And if that doesn't happen, I would encourage you to come to my office or send me a note or give me a call. I'd be very happy to examine it.

Mr. McPherson: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. In fact, I'll raise it with you right now because it was in the second paragraph of the letter if you would be so kind to read. And it's not me saying that there is safety concerns out there although I support the constituents when they raise that.

This is the Shaunavon School Division No. 71 board saying:

As a result, repair items are increasingly being referred to Occupational Health & Safety Committees by staff and we have seven route buses with over 300,000 km. on them,

bringing into question the safety of their passengers.

So you can point at us all you want. These people are already raising it. You're sitting there doing nothing about it, sir, and you should be. It should be a major concern with you. Obviously it's not. I dare say you know the details of the money that you're spending in New Zealand on a TV company much better than you understand the condition of our buses in Saskatchewan rural school districts. I dare say you know a lot more about how fast that jet is that you ride than the kind of buses that our kids are riding on.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Member, I appreciate you sending the letter to me. I've just received it today. It's dated April 30, and so I've made a commitment that we'll review the letter and that we'll respond through our regional directors . . . have an opportunity to speak with our regional directors and respond to the issues that are within this letter to the individuals of whom you've provided me the letter from.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, to take it a step further — because you said you have some concerns about the safety issues that were raised, some of the financial concerns that were raised — they have asked for a meeting. Can we have a date? You've got staff with you. Can we have a date perhaps right now as to when you would be able to be out there within a few days to meet with this school board? And I'd gladly be there with you. In fact I'll drive you out, if that's a concern. If the jet is being used by the Minister of Agriculture — who will not quit heckling here tonight — if he's using the jet to be in China or San Diego or wherever he's going to, I'll drive you out there.

But would you in fact come out to that meeting within a few days?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chairman, to the member, I've met now I think with probably 30 or 40 school divisions across the province and certainly I'd be very, very happy to meet with the school division no. 71. I can't make a commitment today that I can do this within the next couple of days but I certainly will make a commitment that I will meet with the school division at Shaunavon within the very near future, and I would be very happy if you could jet down from wherever you're jetting from and join me. I'd be happy to have you.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, can we at least get a commitment from you that you would be out there, say, within the next 10 days? We would like you to be out there before your government calls an election and you just forget all about it. So a week or 10 days — I don't know how soon you're going to call the election — but I think it's important for you to come out and talk about your government's priorities which you're well on record for, but come out and talk about them and talk about the priorities of the people that live under your system, that try to educate our kids, that try to take care of our sick and our elderly. Would you at least give a commitment that within a week you could make it out?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Again, I don't know what my itinerary is, Mr. Chair, at this point in time, but I know that it's full. But what I will do is make a commitment to the member that through my chief of staff and through my office and through the Department of Education and our regional director in your

school division, we'll make arrangements to get together in the next little while.

Mr. McPherson: — With that, I would like to thank the minister and his staff for providing what answers he was able to provide to some of the questions tonight. I think there was several that he didn't answer, that he completely avoided. And perhaps when he is out in Shaunavon we'll put some of those to him and get more of an answer, not of the political nature but one of real concern of our kids and what we're going to do to make sure they have a decent education.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, Mr. Minister, just a couple of questions in conclusion. You were a little put back when the member from Wood River raised the issue about buses with a lot of mileage on and that the children's risk might be unsafe. And our children in this province that ride our school buses every day back and forth to school, Mr. Minister, are often put at risk because of something that's out of the hands of the school divisions, and that's something that's in the hands of your government and that's the highways.

With roads that these buses are travelling on day after day, right across Saskatchewan, we're putting our kids' lives in jeopardy every time they get on that school bus and go on to the highways that your government is not prepared to fix.

Now in cabinet, Mr. Minister, do you take offence with the Minister of Highways and say that, well I take offence that you're not fixing the highways, Mr. Minister, or do you care, Minister? Can you tell us what your view is on the shape of the highways in this province that our school buses are being forced to drive on every day.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member. I know that he's anxious to have a discussion about the roads and highways in our province, and I know that the minister responsible for Highways and Transportation would be very, very happy to accommodate that discussion with you. And I'm very pleased to continue any kind of discussion you want to have on the education piece and would be very happy to answer any questions as it relates to the education piece.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Minister, that does certainly relate to the education system. But one last question and that's regarding amalgamation of school divisions. Can you talk for a minute on that process and how it's proceeding. How many school divisions are under serious discussions, and how many of them amalgamated, and how many do you suspect in the next six months or so that will have done that?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what I want to say to the member opposite and Mr. Chair, is that there have been 30 amalgamations in the province to date. There are a number of school divisions that are talking with each other about the process of amalgamations. And you may be familiar — I'm sure you are familiar — with the school division in your own riding where they've had some discussions with Saskatoon and Saskatoon West, but the amalgamations are continuing to proceed on a voluntary basis, and there are a number of discussions that are going on around the province today.

Subvote (ED01) agreed to.

Subvotes (ED02), (ED04), (ED03) agreed to.

Vote 5 agreed to.

(2230)

**Supplementary Estimates 1998-99
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED03) agreed to.

Vote 5 agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — In concluding the estimates, I want to thank the members opposite for their thoughtful questions in the time that we spent on the estimates from Education.

And I also want to take a moment to thank the officials from the Department of Education who have worked very hard in putting together this year's budget, because I really do believe that this is one of the more important portfolios in government. Working towards enriching the minds of our young people in this province and educating our young people for the future has to be one of the major portfolios, and I really want to extend my appreciation to the officials from the department who've worked so hard in putting this budget together. And I thank the members.

The committee reported progress.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 25

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 25 — The Education Amendment Act, 1999/Loi de 1999 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation** be now read a second time.

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

The Assembly adjourned at 10:35 p.m.

