

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to present on behalf of constituents in my riding of Rosetown-Biggar a petition dealing with the Saskatchewan EMS (emergency medical services) development project. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these petitioners come from Biggar, Cando, Saskatoon, Elrose, Rosetown, Harris, and Wiseton.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today again I stand to present a petition on behalf of residents of the Cypress Hills constituency who have expressed grave concerns about the implications of the Saskatchewan EMS development project and the recommendations forthcoming from it. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And the petition was signed, Mr. Speaker, by residents from Gull Lake, Tompkins, Hazlet, and Shaunavon.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions from citizens of the Humboldt constituency who are concerned about the loss of community-based ambulance services. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Cudworth.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition regarding tobacco use and second-hand smoke. The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this is from students of Regina. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition today regarding the EMS project.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Naicam.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with proposed conversion of paved highways to gravel. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to set aside any plans to revert Saskatchewan highways back to gravel, commit that the government will not download responsibility for current numbered highways onto local governments, and to consult with local residents, and to co-operate in finding and implementing other alternatives.

And this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Briercrest and Drinkwater.

I so present.

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to present petitions here today from residents of the province who are concerned about the health hazards of second-hand smoke. The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

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

These petitions are mostly signed from residents of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of people in the Swift Current area concerned about their hospital, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer of this petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to carefully consider Swift Current's request for a new hospital.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Swift Current, Cabri, Herbert, Regina, Mankota, Simmie, Vanguard, from Ponteix, from Neville, and from Meyronne.

I so present.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition in support of comprehensive tobacco control legislation, Mr. Speaker. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

And as is duty bound, your petitioners will humbly pray.

Mr. Speaker, and this petition is signed by members from Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too present a petition on behalf of constituents in the Indian Head-Milestone constituency. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that the Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause this government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

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

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Radville, Weyburn, Fillmore, and the Milestone area.

I so present.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition in support of comprehensive tobacco control legislation. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to pass comprehensive provincial legislation to protect children and youth from second-hand smoke and protect them from the health hazards of tobacco use.

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

This petition is signed by a number of children, I believe, from the city of Regina. Thank you.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents concerned with the

centralization of ambulance service. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to improve community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition come from the communities of Wynyard, Mozart, and the Kawacatoose First Nation. I do so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Petitions regarding:

The centralization of ambulance services;

The Swift Current request for a new hospital;

The level of services at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia; and

Protecting children from tobacco use.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 22 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: has your department made a submission to the Canadian Transportation Agency as a part of the CTA's review process; and if a presentation has been made, is it available to the public, and would the minister please provide a copy?

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 17 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: what is the foundation and methodology behind research currently being conducted by HSURC in the area of home care; when was this research project initiated and when will it be completed; to date what are the costs associated with HSURC's study into home care?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I have a second question.

I give notice that I shall on day 17 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: what is the foundation and methodology behind research currently being conducted by HSURC in the area of emergency medical services; when

was this research project initiated and when will it be completed; to date what are the costs associated with this study into emergency medical services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 22 ask the government the following question regarding the Kroll report on no-fault insurance:

Has the government or SGI done an analysis of the Kroll report and its recommendation of the premier options for reform of no-fault insurance; (2) if so, what has this analysis shown; if not, when can the government be expected to release an analysis of the report?

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 22 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Economic Development: has the company Kinetic Lloydminster received any start-up grants or funding; and if so, how much did they receive?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly and to the province of Saskatchewan, I'd like to introduce some people who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

We have representatives here today from the Canadian Home Builders' Association and the Saskatchewan Home Builders' Association. These organizations, Mr. Speaker, represent members of all areas of Canada's and Saskatchewan's housing industry including new home builders, renovators, and land developers. They work to develop the professionalism of the industry, achieve a sustainable business environment for their members, and promote the interests of the consumers.

From the Canadian Home Builders' Association I am pleased to introduce Dick Miller from Halifax who is their 2001 president and president of Clayton Developments, Atlantic Canada's leading community developer; and John Kenward, who is the chief operating officer for Canadian Home Builders' Association; and from the Saskatchewan Home Builders' Association I would like to recognize Tim Schaefer, who is their chairman and president and owner of Varsity Homes in Regina; and Mr. Ken McKinlay, the Saskatchewan Home Builders' Association executive director.

Please welcome them to the Assembly and to this province.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — And, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, if I may be allowed, I would also like to introduce a respected and distinguished gentleman with whom all members of the coalition and I'm sure all members in this Assembly are very pleased to work with and that's Mr. Sinclair Harrison who's the president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, also seated in your gallery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the opposition I too would wish to welcome the home builders' association and recognize the important part they play in our economy.

On behalf of the opposition, welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 52 grade 5 students seated in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker.

They're from W.S. Hawrylak School which is a beautiful school on the southeast corner of the city. They're accompanied by their teachers, Shirley Wolfe, Brenda Martin, and Mrs. Moore.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm really looking forward to meeting with them following question period. I know they'll have a lot of good questions for me and certainly are going to look with interest upon the proceedings during the question period time.

I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming the grade 5 students from W.S. Hawrylak School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as well I'd join the minister for Municipal Government and on behalf of my colleagues welcome Sinclair Harrison who is with us this afternoon. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we're all familiar with the work that Mr. Harrison does as president of SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), the reeve of his municipality, and Mr. Harrison and his wife Gail are very active in their local community as well.

And so we extend our welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you, and through you to all members of the House, seven very enthusiastic students from the Carrot River High School. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and they are here on a job shadow program, and I would ask each of them to stand as I introduce them.

Brandi Gerbrandt, grade 10; Becky Sawatsky, grade 10; Tyler Shore, grade 8, and I should add, Mr. Speaker, that I think Tyler is the future politician in the bunch. And Tracy Warnock, grade 7; Brittany Ralph, grade 7; and Alicia Kitley, grade 7.

I also want to extend a very special welcome to someone who has worked in my office, my constituency office now for well over a year on a job experience program, Mr. Shawn Harrower. And the group, Mr. Speaker, are being accompanied by teacher associate, Carol Perrin.

And these students, Mr. Speaker, insisted that I refer to them as ambassadors of the town of Carrot River. So I would ask that everyone join with me in welcoming these fine young ambassadors from the great town of Carrot River.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to welcome a constituent to the Assembly today, Mr. George Siemens, in the gallery behind me, farms with his wife Pat, and his son Byron, in the Fiske community. I've known George for many years. George has a real heart for rural Saskatchewan, for the agricultural sector. He's done much work. I've had the privilege of working together with him on some initiatives.

And I would just encourage all members of the House to give George Siemens a very, very hearty welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you, and through you to the members of . . . all the members of the House, Gordon Barnhart, a former Clerk of the legislature who left us to work in the Senate in Ottawa some years ago, but he's returned to Saskatchewan as many good Saskatchewan folks do. They go away to find things are much, much better at home here.

Welcome back home, Gordon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Elevator Losses Stress Highways

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week an elevator in the town of Rosthern went down in a cloud of 1930s dust. The Pool elevator was destroyed, and one of the series of elevators that we've lost throughout the province.

And I think the significant thing of that is not that the elevator's particularly gone, but that it's going to put some extended stress and strain on Highways No. 312, Highway 11, and Highway 12.

We already have a lot of . . . these highways already have a lot of stress on them from tourism. Batoche, Fort Carlton, Seager Wheeler, and Duck Lake — those areas create a lot of tourism, and increased heavy truckload that's there is going to make those highways hard to maintain and also very unsafe until we get some good twinning taking place there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Melville Community Events

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight one of the great events happening in my constituency over the past few weeks.

I enjoyed the warm reception I received at the Melville and District Chamber of Commerce Annual Trade Fair on March 2. The last week of March every year, the Chamber puts on a very

successful event and this year is no different.

I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the many Chamber volunteers who give unselfishly of themselves to organize such a successful event, and congratulate the many exhibitors on their displays.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that the ingenuity of the people in Melville and the area is amazing. Take the fundraiser for the hospital. It has had the community of Melville a buzz, you might say. The brainchild of Jim Schmidt, of the Melville *Advance* has raised a tremendous amount of money for the Hospital Foundation and lightened the load of several prominent Melville citizens.

The promotion called Buzz Cut was organized by Mr. Schmidt and included 12 members of the community and the mayor. Six members of the team would lose some hair at the trade fair, but the real goal was to see Mayor Fisher receive a buzz cut if the promotion could raise \$10,000.

Well you know what, Mr. Speaker, all expectations were exceeded. In fact they raised \$25,382.42 — \$25,382.42, Mr. Speaker. I want to quickly acknowledge the tremendous efforts of the 13 brave men in promoting the Hospital Foundation to the community and raising a donation that exceeds all expectations: Jim Schmidt, Joe Kirwan, Lloyd Haylock, Merv Appel, Ray Lalonde, Richard Hill, Dave Broda, Henry Broda, Glen Miller, Father Rocky, Bob Simpson, Phil Randall, and Mayor Mike Fisher. Congratulations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Dugout House at Craik Regional Park

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to talk about the reconstruction of a historic site at the Craik Regional Park.

This past winter Mr. Austin Eade of Craik reconstructed an authentic dugout house of the type built by some of our first pioneers in Saskatchewan. Indeed, Mr. Eade says that he built this authentic dugout house on the site of the original one built during the mid- to late-1800s.

Mr. Reed discovered the site a few years ago while walking in the Arm River Valley. He noticed impressions in the hill site, and upon further investigation revealed the depressions to be remains of the house and a barn.

After archaeologists studied the site, Mr. Eade dug into the project recreating the original structure on behalf of the Craik Regional Park.

The spartan one-room structure is furnished with antiques on loan from the local Craik Museum. Indeed the park hopes to complete the site by building the barn this spring.

With the hard work of Mr. Eade and his dedication to history people visiting the park have the opportunity to step back into the province's history. People get a glimpse of life of how our earliest pioneers survived the harsh climate by building into the hillside for shelter.

I want to thank Austin Eade for his remarkable achievement on behalf of the people of Arm River constituency and Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Snowbirds Team Names Deputy Crew Chief

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Master Corporal Mark Gegner for being selected for the position of the Deputy Crew Chief of the ground crew on the Canadian Forces Aerobic Demonstration Team, the Snowbirds.

Mark presently resides in Moose Jaw but was born and raised in Watrous. Master Corporal Gegner will fly with the team for the 2001-2002 show seasons. Mark joined the Canadian Forces in 1982. He completed his training for airplane technician in Borden, Ontario where he graduated the top of his class from the School of Aerospace and Ordnance Engineering. After completing this Mark was then posted in Moose Jaw. Mark rotated through most of the sections of the flight line, snags, servicing, and the maintenance sections working on the CT-114 Tutor aircraft.

In 1988 Mark was posted in West Germany where he served. And then in 1992, Mark returned to Moose Jaw where he was promoted to the rank of Master Corporal and now has been selected for deputy crew chief for the Snowbirds.

Please join me in congratulating Mark in his accomplishments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Health Care Centres Open

Ms. Jones: — Even more good news for the province, Mr. Speaker. Both the Unity Health Centre and the Carrot River Health Facility are new and exciting expansions to each respective community.

In Carrot River a sod-turning ceremony kicked off the construction of the new community health facility, Mr. Speaker. This project will replace all of the existing health services placing them under one roof.

As well, Mr. Speaker, residents of Unity and area have a brand new operational health centre. This health centre replaces the old Unimac Pioneers Lodge with additions and renovations to the existing Unity Hospital. The new facility consolidates community health services in one location, Mr. Speaker.

The addition of these two new health centres will provide both communities with services such as long-term care, diagnostic services including lab and X-rays, palliative and respite care, and community health education services.

Mr. Speaker, these new health centres reflect this government's commitment to working with communities and the partners of the health sector. Providing accessible quality health care to all people in Saskatchewan is one of the goals of this government, Mr. Speaker, and with investments such as these, we are achieving that goal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Election Costs

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the headlines in today's paper reads "NDP top spenders in provincial election." Mr. Speaker, that's both bad and good news for the people of Saskatchewan.

It cost a total of \$77,413 to elect one of the government members, Mr. Speaker. It cost an astronomical \$284,611 to elect a Liberal member, Mr. Speaker. That's the bad news for the people of Saskatchewan.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that it only cost \$38,230 to elect a member of the Saskatchewan Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I believe this is clearly a case of quality over quantity which, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, also speaks in relationship to the membership in the House.

Mr. Speaker, this is another example of . . . there's another example in this article, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP Party debt has risen to over 600,000. Now we see that government debt is heading in the same direction — going up.

Mr. Speaker, both in their party operations and in government, it's tax and spend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would just invite all guests to observe the proceedings and to not participate in the proceedings in any way, by clapping or anything. That is one of the customs of the House and I would ask that you observe that.

Performing Arts Centre Opens in Lloydminster

Mr. McCall: — Heed my words, Mr. Speaker, because I bring to you dramatic good news for the province of Saskatchewan.

The city of Lloydminster held a sod-turning ceremony on April 6 of this year to kick off the construction of the new Vic Juba Performing Arts Centre.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCall: — The centre is so named due to Mr. Juba's dedication to the Lloydminster community and his many years of faithful service.

This 538-seat theatre is to be connected to the Lakeland College in Lloydminster. Our government has contributed \$100,000 from the Associated Entities Fund towards the construction of this new facility, Mr. Speaker.

The new performing arts theatre will attract many performers and events from this region and beyond, which will be of great benefit to the city and surrounding area. As well, Mr. Speaker, this theatre will give the youth of Lloydminster a place to

perform and strut their stuff as the theatre will be shared by both . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Order. I just want to ask members to make it possible for our guests who are here to actually hear what's happening.

Mr. McCall: — As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the new performing arts theatre will attract many performers and events from this region and beyond which will be of great benefit to the city and surrounding area.

As well, Mr. Speaker, this theatre will give the youth of Lloydminster a place to perform and strut their stuff as the theatre will be shared by both school and community organizations bringing culture, recreation, excitement, and prosperity to all communities throughout Saskatchewan. As a goal of this government and with investments such as this, we are putting our commitments into action.

All the world is a stage, Mr. Speaker, and now the city of Lloydminster can sit back and enjoy the show. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Fyke Commission Report on Health Care

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. For nearly a year now the NDP health system has been paralyzed awaiting the report of the Fyke Commission on health care. During that time more doctors and nurses have left the province, waiting lists have grown, and health care services have gotten worse.

Mr. Speaker, the government has finally received its report. And the question is: what are they going to do with it? Are they going to follow Mr. Fyke's recommendations or are they going to reject his report and move in a different direction?

Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to make a decision. What are they going to do with the Fyke report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to be able to rise in the House and to share with members of the House and with the general public precisely what we are doing with the commission's report received this morning.

(14:00)

We will be taking the commission's report and inviting all members of this legislature to consider it over the course of the next few days. Then we will be inviting Mr. Fyke to attend to the legislature to be available in a Committee of the Whole process that all members in this House — government and opposition — will have the opportunity to put their questions to Mr. Fyke to gain a deeper understanding of the work that he has done.

I know that I have questions, members on this side of the House

have questions; I'm sure that members opposite have questions and we will have that opportunity in the week following Easter.

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, I'm inviting this legislature to create a special committee of this legislature — all-party, Mr. Speaker — that will be able and available to the public of Saskatchewan, to health care stakeholders and providers to hear their feedback on the report.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears the Premier is planning on taking quite some time to evaluate this report.

But I would remind the Premier that back in 1993 the NDP (New Democratic Party) closed over 50 hospitals. They put in place a plan to close the Plains hospital. And they drastically reduced the number of acute care beds in the province of Saskatchewan. All the while the NDP was assuring Saskatchewan people that health care services would improve.

Well, Mr. Speaker, health care did not get better. It got worse. It was the wrong prescription for health care in 1993 and now it looks like they want to double the dose. Mr. Fyke wants to close another 50 hospitals.

The NDP health care report says we, and I quote: "need to reduce the number of care beds." And then goes on to say, there are too few health care managers, not too many.

My question to the Premier: do you agree with this diagnosis? Do you think the solution is to close more hospitals, close more beds, and hire more managers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would just ask that all questions be directed through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to continue on the plan that we have outlined this day, the health care providers in particular in our province — but not just providers, citizens of our province border to border — have been saying to me and have repeated again today their desire to have a period of extensive consultation about the recommendations that Mr. Fyke has brought forward in his report.

It is to serve that end, to allow the people of our province, particularly the stakeholders in health and the health care providers, to have the appropriate feedback to we legislators — to this legislature — who ultimately will be called upon to debate and decide health care policy.

To provide for that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, we are establishing and inviting the legislature to establish this special committee who can be available to the stakeholders and the public of Saskatchewan, to work from now until the fall when we can put together a plan that will ensure — ensure, Mr. Speaker — publicly funded quality health care for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier speaks with soothing words but we have 10 years of history under this government. Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — . . . Saskatchewan people have heard these kind of assurances and soothing words in the past. In fact here's what Louise Simard said back in 1993:

I know it's hard on people because they don't see the end product yet, but when it's in place it will be clear that they have a higher level of health care in their communities than before.

That's what the NDP said back in 1993: trust us, we'll make it better.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it didn't get better, it got worse. And now the NDP is recommending another round of bed cuts and hospital closures. Mr. Speaker, why should Saskatchewan people trust the NDP now after their first round of hospital closures turned into a disaster?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, this morning I understand, on CJME radio, the critic for the opposition, Health critic for the opposition, made this comment — which I support and ascribe to — he said:

It's absolutely critical that the people right across the province can have a mechanism where they have ownership of the system rather than just be bystanders and observe what is given to them on high.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we are putting in place this day just such a mechanism that can encourage the providers, the stakeholders, and the people of Saskatchewan to have a real significant role, a groundbreaking role in establishing public policy with their legislatures.

Mr. Speaker, I invite members opposite to participate in this process, to give it their dedication as members on this side will.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we have very grave concerns about this government's commitment to health care because in the past, when Louise Simard was the Health minister, the current Premier was her right-hand man. It turns out that Louise Simard and the current Premier led a flat out attack on health care in rural Saskatchewan.

But as it turned out, Mr. Speaker, it was also an attack on health care services in our cities. The closure of acute beds in the smaller centres added pressure on hospitals in Saskatoon and Regina that led to shortages, growing waiting lists, overworked doctors, and nurses leaving our province.

And now the NDP wants to do it all over again — more hospital

closures, more acute bed closures, more pressure on hospitals and health care workers in the cities of Saskatoon and Regina. Obviously the Premier didn't learn anything from the first go around.

Mr. Speaker, how is closing hospitals and more acute care beds going to relieve the pressure on our city hospitals?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, through the work of Mr. Fyke and the Medicare Commission they made an important and diligent effort to consult with Saskatchewan people in large numbers and with health care providers.

Mr. Fyke has laid now before us, before this legislature, his recommendations — the recommendations that he has to the conclusions of. As I said earlier, I have a number of questions about those recommendations, as I'm sure members do on this side, as I am sure members do on that side. Mr. Fyke will be here available to all members to respond to some of the questions and issues.

Mr. Speaker, we are not at a point of decision-making, because essential to making good policy is to engage those people who are providing the service, who are at work in our communities from border to border, north to south, Mr. Speaker.

And that's what we're going to do. We're going to provide the very mechanism that the critic from the Saskatchewan Party this morning called for, and I'm encouraging — I am encouraging — members opposite to join with us in this regard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows full well that what he is suggesting in this committee is to exclude individual members of the public to appear before this committee. He's talking about stakeholders only, and another six or eight months of delaying of taking his responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the people know that that's the case. Health care has been studied to death. It's now time for this government to own up to their responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Fyke concluded that the only way to sustain health care of any quality in this province is to reduce services. Fyke says that people who live outside of the major centres are going to have to accept the fact that they have to travel further for services and that they are going to have fewer of them.

Mr. Speaker, does the Health minister accept this recommendation? What is he going to do to make up for the reduced services outside of Saskatoon and Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite this morning — this morning — on radio says that it's absolutely critical that people right across the province can have a mechanism where they have ownership of the system rather than just be bystanders and observe what is given to them from

on high.

Now this afternoon, several hours later, he stands in the House and demands that our government make immediate decisions on the recommendations in the Fyke Commission.

Now which is it, Mr. Speaker? Do we want a mechanism which engages providers, which engages our community, which struggles together as legislators to establish good policy, or does he want immediate decisions?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I tell you we've decided what we're doing. We are going to consult extensively with Saskatchewan people and we are going to build a plan to establish a quality health care system, publicly funded, publicly administered, in a sustainable fashion for the century to come.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, what the people of this province want is a system that on an ongoing basis will listen to their concerns; will give them an opportunity to have real ownership of the system; who will have an opportunity on an ongoing basis to be able to influence the decisions that district health boards are going to be making for them.

Mr. Speaker, this government has refused to allow the people of this province to have that mechanism. And that's what people are demanding, to be able to have ownership of the system, not just something that's imposed on them by an NDP government who doesn't understand the health care system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the people of this province are looking to the government that they elected to make some decisions about providing quality health care for them in this province.

Mr. Speaker, will this government live up to its responsibility, the responsibility of the Premier and the Minister of Health to provide the proper structure for health care in this province so citizens can count on health care?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, in my view, the people of Saskatchewan are looking for something more significant. They are looking for their legislators to on occasion rise above some of the partisan political game playing, particularly around an issue as significant as publicly funded health care.

What the people are looking for is an opportunity, an opportunity to take part in this important public debate, and an opportunity to have input on the commission of Mr. Ken Fyke.

Mr. Speaker, what . . . Mr. Speaker, they ask the questions but they don't prefer to hear the answers, apparently.

Mr. Speaker, we are engaging on a very groundbreaking process here, a groundbreaking process of engaging Saskatchewan people in the most significant public debate that I think we could have.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while we now listen to the Premier's rhetoric about this new direction, it really is a reinvention of the direction started in 1993. In 1993, the NDP said that everything was going to be fine in health care if you will just believe in what we're doing.

The NDP said that their plan to close 53 hospitals, including the Plains Hospital in Regina, was actually going to improve health services and shorten waiting lists. Well, Mr. Speaker, seven years later the people of this province have lost confidence in this image of health care. Doctors and nurses are leaving. Every day we hear of another specialist leaving.

Mr. Speaker, now Mr. Fyke is recommending that another 50 hospitals are closed or converted. Mr. Speaker, does the minister really still think that closing another 50 hospitals will improve health care in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, maybe what we're seeing is what the opposition thinks an opposition role is, which is just to be critical no matter what happens. If we were to make decisions they would be critical about the decisions, saying that you need to consult and listen to people.

When we say we are going to consult with the Saskatchewan public, and stakeholders and providers, what do they say? They criticize and say we should make decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the opposition to have the courage, my friends, have the courage to join with us in engaging in this public debate, engaging with the commission, asking about his recommendations, and talking to the people of Saskatchewan as we build a plan for quality health care, sustainable for the next century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — My question, Mr. Speaker, is for the minister. Mr. Speaker, it's really easy to do our job in this legislature, cause it's to hold these people accountable for the mess that they've created in health care over the last 10 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago the Minister of Health said, well, wouldn't you guys give us some solutions as to where we should go in health care. Well, Mr. Speaker, the people of this province are saying: you're the government, you come up with the decisions, we elected you to make these decisions.

And, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite can howl, but they know it's a complete lack of direction from that government that has resulted in this mess. And now, Mr. Speaker, will the minister stand up and say he's prepared to watch over and preside over the further closure of 50 hospitals?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly surprised to hear the member report that the people are not asking their party for solutions to health care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — But they are, in fact, asking this government.

But, Mr. Speaker, can we not, can we not take a step forward — can we not take a step forward, Mr. Speaker — and listen to the people of our province?

We have before us now the work of an expert in health care delivery who has provided for us a significant number of recommendations, not all of which will find unanimous approval, that's for sure. Many of which we will have questions about; I have questions about; they will have questions about.

Can we not take a step forward and working together work with the people of our province, listen to the people of our province, talk to the stakeholders, talk to the providers, and together build a 21st century health care plan that is sustainable and provides quality of care for people across our province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is really interesting that, after 10 years, finally we get a willingness of this government to listen to somebody in this . . .

And, Mr. Speaker, if they're in the listening mode, then why aren't they listening to the ideas that we proposed to the Fyke Commission? For example, we said that a fundamentally important part of health care reform is to make a commitment to the people of this province through a health care bill of rights and responsibilities, that this was a fundamental thing that the people of this province needed to count on. It had to be backed up by an office of a commissioner who saw to it that health care was provided for people in this province no matter where they lived.

Well if the government is in such a listening mode, Mr. Speaker, will he support our recommendation that a health care bill of rights and responsibilities is put in place so that the people of this province have something to count on other than this government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I heard or know if there was a question in that, but let me say this, Mr. Speaker, I have read, I have read . . . Well you see, Mr. Speaker, they ask a question but they will not be silent to hear the answer. Mr. Speaker, I have read the Sask Party's presentation to the Fyke Commission.

The member, the critic, the member from Melfort talks about whatever his description of it is, a bill of rights or something, Mr. Speaker. I think in fact, I think in fact, Mr. Speaker, there may well be some tea in this idea. Mr. Fyke has not brought it

forward as one of his recommendations. Precisely the point, Mr. Speaker.

We need to sit down, work together, work with the people of Saskatchewan, listen to the people of Saskatchewan, listen to each other for once — listen to each other for once — talk to stakeholders and try, member from Saltcoats, to get off of your political strategies and on to some public policy discussions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, it seems that the recommendations are more leaning towards making a bureaucracy out of everyone. Indeed in what it's talking about is taking doctors out of the system under which they've provided quality care to the people of this province for all of these many years, and putting them on a salary under the jurisdiction of health districts.

The problem with this whole idea is that while at the one time Mr. Fyke talks about the need for retention and recruitment of medical professionals to this province, on the other side the record of the NDP is driving doctors and nurses out of the province in record numbers.

Last week we heard that there were three psychiatrists leaving Regina for Alberta and two more were considering it. Yesterday we heard that a cardiac specialist was leaving.

Mr. Speaker, will the Health minister indicate if he supports the idea of putting doctors on salary and running the risk of driving even more of them out of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, as I have stated on a number of occasions today, no decisions have been made about any of the recommendations in the Fyke Commission.

Now the member will stand up and talk about the challenge that we have in recruiting and retaining specialists in our province — not a new challenge and we've been working hard at it.

He does, I notice, Mr. Speaker, not stand in the House each time a specialist comes to our province, each time doctors choose to move to Saskatchewan — he doesn't jump to his feet and say that's great. No, but he will when a doctor decides to move. Well fair enough.

But the point, Mr. Speaker, is this. We have a wide range of challenges in ensuring quality and sustainable health care for the people of Saskatchewan. There's a wide range of issues and challenges.

If we are going to meet those issues and challenges, we need to take the work that's been done by the commission, listen to Saskatchewan people, listen to the stakeholders, and try and rise above some of our partisan political activity, work together, and build a quality plan for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the Fyke report says the NDP's

first attempt at health reform, its so-called wellness model, was such a disaster that 300 people are unnecessarily losing their lives every year as a result of clinical error.

Mr. Speaker, Fyke has studied the NDP's health system for 10 months and here is what he has concluded, and I quote:

I have concluded that the quality of service is far short of what it could be and should be.

Fyke also stresses the poor quality of health services is not the fault of hard-working doctors and nurses. It is the fault of poor system design.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree with the Fyke Commission conclusion that the NDP health system is causing the deaths of 300 people every year in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, what we have done today is asked the opposition to work together with us to work with all of the people of the province to respond to some very good ideas by a very bright man working with many other people. And what we want to do is work and use the skills that we have within the province to build a better health system.

We know that we have things that we need to do, and we are going to work with the people who are in the system, we're going to work with the people in the communities so that we have a quality publicly funded health system that works for all of us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, this government has been hiding behind the release of the Fyke report for over a year and now the Minister of Health has said in a press release today that they are going to probably wait until Mr. Romanow's release is made, and that could be 18 months. The people of Saskatchewan have been put on hold long enough.

Mr. Speaker, the Fyke report says the NDP has mismanaged the health care system to the point where 300 people are dying every year from clinical error. He also says that quality problems in the health system are wasting hundreds of millions of dollars every year. And what is Fyke's solution? Close 50 more hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, does the NDP support that idea? It's decision time, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Health tell the people of Saskatchewan, does he support the recommendations in the Fyke report and, if he does not, what is the NDP's plan to fix the disaster in our health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, those of us on this side of the House who want to build Saskatchewan in a positive way have extended our hands to the people opposite to help us do that job. Now it doesn't help when they misrepresent things that are said.

We are going to work and deal with the recommendations from Mr. Fyke with all of the people of Saskatchewan. We can't wait until Mr. Romanow reports because there are many things that we need to do.

We're going to work with all of the people that are here so that we can build a quality publicly funded system that will work for all of us, that will save lives, that will do all of the things that we all expect of our health system. Let's do it together; we invite you to join us. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 19 — The Land Titles Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 19, The Land Titles Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 20 — The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 20, The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 215 — The Democratic Unionism Act

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 215, The Democratic Unionism Act.

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

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I have received from the auditor . . . Order, please. Order. Before orders of the day, I've received from the auditor a special report to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan regarding changes to The Provincial Auditor Act, Bill 14, and I hereby table it.

Also before orders of the day I would like to make a statement.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Yesterday the member for Moosomin raised a point of order concerning questions raised by the member for Regina Dewdney about the way in which another member of the Assembly chose to vote on a particular issue, in this case the budget motion.

The member for Moosomin cited rule 32 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan* which

states that:

No Member may reflect upon any vote of the Assembly, except for the purpose of moving that such a vote be rescinded.

With regard to the application of such a rule, Beauchesne's, 6th Edition on page 142 states that:

In the House of Commons a Member will not be permitted by the Speaker to . . . reflect upon, argue against or in any manner call in question the past acts and proceedings of the House.

Marleau and Montpetit further note on page 525 that:

Members may not (reflect) against or reflect upon any decision of the House. This stems from the well-established rule which holds that a question, once put and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again. Such reflections are not in order because the Member is bound by a vote agreed to by a majority.

At the outset, I believe that is important to make the distinction between any vote of the Assembly and any vote cast by an individual member. The prohibition stated in rule 32 applies to reflections on decisions of the House itself and does not, in my interpretation, apply to reflections on the voting behaviour of individual members.

In his questioning of how the member for Cypress Hills voted on the budget, I do not believe that it was the intention of the member for Regina Dewdney to revive or revisit that particular debate or to reflect on that particular decision of the Assembly. Rule 32 is clear that such an action would most certainly be out of order.

If rule 32 were to be interpreted in a broader sense, for example, that the rule does indeed apply to all members — pardon me — does apply to members questioning the votes of individual members, as the member for Moosomin is suggesting, I am of the opinion that such an interpretation would severely curtail a member's ability to attempt to hold another colleague accountable for his or her stance on a particular issue.

In the course of debate, members frequently challenge each other on their views and indeed on the way in which they have voted. I do not believe that it is the intent of this particular rule to restrict this activity.

For reasons cited, I must rule that the point of order by the member for Moosomin cannot be accepted. I thank the member for bringing his concerns to the attention of the House.

(14:30)

Why is the member on . . .

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, by leave of the Assembly, to move a motion in regards to the final report of the Fyke Commission.

Mr. Speaker, I advise the House:

That a Committee of the Whole be authorized to question Mr. Ken Fyke, Commissioner, with respect to the final report of the Commission on Medicare dated April 11, 2001; and further to this purpose,

That Mr. Speaker do issue an invitation to Mr. Fyke to attend before the said Committee of the Whole at 2:30 p.m. on April 19, 2001 in the Legislative Chamber.

I so move.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Medicare Commissioner to Appear before Committee of the Whole

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Yorkton:

That a Committee of the Whole be authorized to question Mr. Ken Fyke, Commissioner, with respect to the final report of the Commission on Medicare dated April 11, 2001; and further to this purpose,

That Mr. Speaker do issue an invitation to Mr. Fyke to attend before the said Committee of the Whole at 2:30 p.m. on April 19, 2001 in the Legislative Chamber.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being an open and accountable government, we are very pleased to table the responses to questions no. 59 and 60.

The Speaker: — Questions 59 and 60 are tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 8 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today in this Assembly to move second reading of The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001. Mr. Speaker, there are two parts to this Bill as mentioned in its title — emblems and honours.

Saskatchewan's proud tradition of establishing official emblems started almost 100 years ago. By royal warrant of August 25, 1906, just a year after the creation of this great province, King Edward VII granted Saskatchewan its first official emblem, a shield of arms. Since then our province has built a legacy of official emblems that reflect the pride of our people, the

priorities of our society, and the value we place on our environment.

Our provincial honours system, Mr. Speaker, began in 1985 with the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. It was expanded in 1995 with the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal. As our honours system is enhanced, we are incorporating provisions which bring it into line with national and international practice.

Mr. Speaker, The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act allows this government to add to the rich history of emblems and honours that help to define the essence of our great and wonderful province.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to welcome visitors in the gallery today. First of all, from my office, Dr. Michael Jackson, and from the Prairie Conservation Action Plan Committee, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I would just ask the member to ask leave of the Assembly to introduce guests.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm trying to follow proper protocol. I thought I was welcoming them, rather than introducing them. But I will, if I could, have leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you, and again I apologize. I would like to introduce visitors to the gallery today, from the office of . . . from Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, we have Dr. Michael Jackson whom I'm sure all members of this House know.

And from the Prairie Conservation Action Plan Committee, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Karyn Scalise, implementation co-ordinator; Chris Nikoluk, former co-ordinator; and Greg Riemer, core committee member.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of this House welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 8 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001 (continued)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, this committee spearheaded the initiative to have needle-and-thread grass named as one of our new provincial emblems. Now, Mr. Speaker, we currently have 10 emblems in this province. My seatmate, the member from Melville, during private members statement did a wonderful imitation of a railway conductor in getting out a whole bunch of names at once, so I'm going to try very quickly to give all members of this House a listing of our 10 emblems.

I've already mentioned our first emblem, the shield of arms,

was adopted in 1906. We also have a floral emblem, adopted in 1941; that of course, is the western red lily.

In 1945, the sharp-tailed grouse became our bird emblem. In 1961, we adopted a tartan. In 1969, we adopted a flag. We adopted the wheat sheaf logo in 1997. A full coat of arms in 1986. The white birch became our tree in 1988. Potash became our mineral in 1997; and in 1997, we adopted a dress tartan.

Today I am introducing second reading of a Bill that will add three new emblems. Mr. Speaker, this Act establishes needle-and-thread grass as the provincial grass emblem. In Latin that is *Hesperostipa comata*.

The impetus for this unique emblem came from a coalition of 16 organizations, including both universities in the province, a number of non-governmental organizations, and federal and provincial departments.

The coalition is called the Prairie Conservation Action Plan Committee. Its members conducted a vote for a provincial grass emblem to be recommended to this government. The needle-and-thread grass was the winner of their vote.

And I said, Mr. Speaker, that this is a unique emblem. No other province in Canada — no other province in Canada — has named a provincial grass.

One objective of naming the needle-and-thread grass as the provincial grass emblem is to raise public awareness of our natural environment and the prairie habitat. Let me mention here that the ranching industry has been crucial in preserving needle-and-thread grass on the prairie.

Since the Act was introduced last week, Mr. Speaker, this government has already received many, many calls from the media and, most particularly, from the public wanting to know more about needle-and-thread grass.

So I can say with confidence that the objective of raising public awareness about our natural environment is clearly successful.

Mr. Speaker, with this Bill Saskatchewan will become the fourth province — the fourth province — in Canada to have an official animal, the white-tailed deer. Again, I'm going to try it in Latin; it's *Odocoileus virginianus*. The initiative for naming a provincial animal came from *Virtual Saskatchewan* which is an on-line magazine. They first ran a viewer contest to name an official animal. And the idea, Mr. Speaker, caught on with other media and public interest and imagination soared.

Now naming the white-tailed deer as our provincial animal makes sense. It is a familiar animal on the prairies and it's also, I would say, occasionally a familiar animal in our cities, Mr. Speaker. Just last Sunday I was out for a run and I saw a white-tailed deer well within the Saskatoon city limits. Already the white-tailed deer is part of the prestigious and well-recognized coat of arms.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to our provincial sport emblem. Again Saskatchewan is setting new standards for other provinces and territories in Canada. We are the first — I emphasize, Mr. Speaker — the first province to name an

official sport. And that sport is curling. Now I'm not sure of the Latin for curling, Mr. Speaker. I only took grade nine Latin and I did that by correspondence so I will apologize in advance to all Latin teachers if I have the grammar or the tense wrong. But I think that probably curling in Latin could roughly translate as *mitera petra robustus*. In other words, send the rock strongly.

Mr. Speaker, curling is the sport of choice for Saskatchewan residents. The Saskatchewan Curling Association started the very popular move to have curling recognized as our provincial sport. In a government opinion poll and in more than one media poll, curling was clearly the popular public choice for our new official sport and that choice is understandable.

Curling has broad-based appeal in Saskatchewan. It has a colourful and a famous history and, at the same time, it is gaining in popularity with young people. Curling is enjoyed by rural and urban residents. It can be keenly competitive or just a whole lot of fun and it is a sport that is enjoyed by people of all ages, from 10 years old through to 50 through to 80 years old.

Saskatchewan has produced many of our greatest men's and women's curling champions in the sport's history. These champions are icons in our province and heroes to thousands of young people in Saskatchewan and across the country.

Curling displays the best quality of sportsmanship, teamwork, and community spirit. In short, Mr. Speaker, curling is a perfect reflection of Saskatchewan values.

Mr. Speaker, another part of this Act will also see the Lieutenant Governor automatically become a member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit by virtue of his or her office. The Lieutenant Governor, as we know, is already chancellor of the order and invests the recipients each year and will be doing so again in two weeks, on April 26. Mr. Speaker, it is standard practice across the Commonwealth for the Queen or Her representatives to be members of the orders of which they are nominal head.

As well, the Act allows the province to honour distinguished non-residents of Saskatchewan through honorary membership in the Order of Merit.

As Saskatchewan approaches its centennial year in 2005, it is appropriate that we have a vehicle for honouring persons such as foreign heads of state or government or internationally known figures.

Mr. Speaker, this Act permits our province to add to the rich history of emblems and honours that help define the essence of our great province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to move second reading of The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:45)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to address the very first Bill that the government

has presented for second reading in this particular session.

Mr. Speaker, honours and emblems of our province are indeed very important. They are a symbol of who we are and what we are, Mr. Speaker. In this particular Bill the government is bringing forward three new emblems to represent the people of Saskatchewan.

I asked around my colleagues as the minister was making her statement, giving her address to this Bill, just what needle-and-thread grass was. Now we have, Mr. Speaker, a good number of agriculturalists here, both grain and livestock producers, and not one of them could tell me what needle-and-thread grass was.

I understand that the minister has been getting a number of phone calls and inquiries as to what is needle-and-thread grass. And I can certainly understand why, because people would want to know what is this grass; where is it; where do you find it.

And clearly the minister gave no indication of where and how that might be. So I can only assume that either the minister was withholding information from us or that the minister herself doesn't know.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that that particular avenue in this Bill be investigated to determine what this grass is. Is it a widespread grass across the province that represents all the geographic and diversity of this province, or is it isolated in one small area?

Mr. Speaker, there are those . . . when we employ an emblem that represents Saskatchewan, it should in large part represent the entire province. Now we have a very diverse province, Mr. Speaker, from — as Palliser described it — a desert, Mr. Speaker, to the Northern Shield. So we're not going to have a uniformity of grasses or animals or flora and fauna of any kind across the province.

But our emblems need to represent a generality in our province. And, Mr. Speaker, personally I'm not sure that needle-and-thread grass does that. We need to determine, Mr. Speaker, how this was arrived at and what does it represent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the second emblem that the government is recommending is that the white-tailed deer become our provincial animal. Mr. Speaker, every one of us in this province in all likelihood has had an encounter with a white-tailed deer — some of us, unfortunately, with the hoods of our vehicles. So it is a very widespread animal. And yet, Mr. Speaker, in talking to my father and asking him about the white-tailed deer in southeast Saskatchewan, he told me that he had not seen a white-tailed deer prior to 1934.

So, Mr. Speaker, talking to the other neighbours in my area, they recounted similar tales because in our area there were no trees prior to the settlement by the pioneers, the breaking of the land, the stopping of the forest fires, which in turn allowed trees to grow up in the low spots to create habitat for the white-tailed deer.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that the white-tailed deer, while vary numerous in Saskatchewan and widespread from our southern boundary on the US (United States) up into the forestland, is actually an animal, Mr. Speaker, that is native to Saskatchewan. And an indication that perhaps it is not, is the second part of its Latin name — *virginianus*, meaning from Virginia, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, as my colleague says, perhaps a better deer for Saskatchewan would have been the John Deere.

Mr. Speaker, again I think we need to find out from the minister whether or not the white-tailed deer is actually native to Saskatchewan before we can possibly accept the fact that the white-tailed deer should be our emblem for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

On the third part, Mr. Speaker, the sport of curling. Now the sport of curling goes back a long ways in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. It goes back to the original Scot settlers that came to this province.

They, Mr. Speaker, though, did not use at that time what we would commonly refer to as rocks. They used, Mr. Speaker, a type of curling that is rarely seen any more, but like thrashing bees across Saskatchewan in the fall, in the wintertime a few communities, Mr. Speaker, have what is known as jam-can curling. That, Mr. Speaker, was the more likely first arrival of curling to this province.

At the time of the pioneers, at the time of the first settlement, Mr. Speaker, what the pioneers would have likely done is taking a lard can, filled it with water, sat it outside overnight, at which time it would become solid, and you could then go out onto the river, clear off the snow, and throw your ice-filled lard can down the river to see whether or not you could connect it or get it into the circle that you would have scraped out on the ice, Mr. Speaker.

So again, Mr. Speaker, curling is not actually native to Saskatchewan. Perhaps a better sport for the minister would have been white-tailed deer hunting, because that arrived the same time as the white-tailed deer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the minister commented that curling is on the increase in some areas. Well yes, Mr. Speaker, in some areas it may very well be. But in general, across rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, curling, I believe, is on the decline, not because people don't want to curl, Mr. Speaker, but because they can no longer afford to maintain artificial ice.

And, Mr. Speaker, I grew up with natural ice in curling, which at times meant you could start in November, as we could've last fall. At other times it meant you couldn't start until sometime in January, and it ended with a spring thaw when the Alida bonspiel was generally on at the end of January. So in those years curling, Mr. Speaker, was not a long-term sport in Saskatchewan. You might have got a month, Mr. Speaker, and that's even shorter than our swimming season, which isn't very long, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister still has a little bit of homework to do on this particular issue — that she needs to explain to us what needle-and-thread grass is; whether or not

the white-tailed deer is actually a native of Saskatchewan; and to explain why white-tailed deer hunting is not the sport she is recommending, rather than curling, even though curling, Mr. Speaker, is a very, very excellent sport, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore to give the minister the opportunity to find the answers to these questions, I would move that we adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3 — The Historic Properties Foundations Act

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of The Historic Properties Foundations Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is umbrella legislation. It makes it possible for individual foundations to be established to help support, preserve, enhance, and promote historic properties in our province. This give us a terrific opportunity to support our historic properties.

Here is what the Bill makes possible through the creation of historic property foundations. And I would like to read, if I may. Under section 6, it says:

The purposes of a foundation are:

- (a) to preserve and enhance the historic property;
- (b) to promote public awareness of:
 - (i) the character, setting and decor of the historic property;
 - (ii) (to promote public awareness of) the historic and cultural values of the historic property;
 - (iii) the significant events in the governance of Saskatchewan; and
 - (iv) the history of Saskatchewan generally.

Mr. Speaker, this Act will make it possible to establish foundations that can receive corporate and individual gifts, bequests, donations, and grants.

This Act specifically will allow the establishment of a foundation for Government House to focus on the Government House development plan.

This Act will define the legal status of all foundations formed under the mandate of this Act and it will ensure appropriate administrative and financial procedures are in place for the foundation.

This Act moves the Government House development project one step closer to reality, because, Mr. Speaker, the first such foundation we intend to establish will be a foundation in support of Government House.

Mr. Speaker, Government House is only a few kilometres away from this Legislative Building, but it represents a chapter of Canada's past and a chapter in the birth of Saskatchewan that, lamentably, few Saskatchewan residents know well.

For those of you who have toured Government House museum, you will know that the property is truly a gem in the crown of Saskatchewan's historic properties. The Historic Properties Foundations Act will help this province share the richness of the Government House historic property with the people of Saskatchewan and the many, many tourists travelling through Regina. We can do this by developing this delightful property to its full potential. We can do this by following the development plan outlined for the Government House historic property.

Mr. Speaker, in May of 2000 this government released a report outlining the Government House development project. It is our dream that this property will become a leading tourist and educational attraction for Saskatchewan. This could be accomplished by developing Government House to its full potential, as originally conceived, and by completing the project by the year 2005 to make it one of our key centennial projects.

Some of the recommended enhancements could include the addition of a visitor centre and gift shop; the addition of an interpretive centre, and this interpretive centre would feature Saskatchewan and First Nations history. We could also have . . . will also have new landscaping and a new administrative centre.

A major recommendation of the report was to establish a foundation responsible for raising 60 per cent of the capital funding required for the facility's development. This Act, Mr. Speaker, addresses that recommendation.

Clear vision and bold leadership for the Government House development project are needed. We want to work with the larger community to develop this unique facility by our centennial year. We want the community to discover the charm and the promise of Government House. We want the community to own the vision of this part of our heritage.

A distinguished group of Canadians has accepted government's invitation to serve on an advisory board. The advisory board is working with the province on the next steps of the development project. Members of that board are Senator Raynell Andreychuk, the Chair; former Lieutenant Governor, Senator Jack Wiebe; as well as such distinguished citizens as Leroy Larsen, Harold MacKay, David Dombowsky, Bob Mitchell, Scotty Cameron, and media personality Pamela Wallin. These people, Mr. Speaker, have faith in this project, as does this government.

This is an exciting, fresh, and innovative idea. I am proud to be speaking to this Act today. I am excited about our future. This project gives all of Saskatchewan a chance to be excited and involved with our past and to connect to the future.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I now move second reading of The Historic Properties Foundations Act, 2001.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to Bill No. 3, An Act to establish Crown Foundation for Historic Properties.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill brings up a number of questions and concerns — and opportunities, I might add.

(15:00)

As the member from . . . A timely member statement from my colleague from Arm River earlier talked about the reconstruction of historic sites at the Craik Regional Park and he talked in some length about the dugout house that the first pioneers used in Saskatchewan. And he also mentioned the sharing and the co-operation between the local Craik museum, as well as with the historical site and the park.

And it is very important that we have the people of Saskatchewan given an opportunity to step back in the province's history and get a glimpse of life like it was back when the pioneers first came to this province.

But which brings to mind, Mr. Speaker, the possibility that the minister could look at incorporating this Act with the parks and within their structure that already exists without needing to do any building up any larger bureaucracy or growing government which this government has a habit of doing.

As we know the province and the people of Saskatchewan are always faced with ever-increasing funds for health care and highways and education and in order to gain these funds we need to grow this economy through tax cuts to the people of Saskatchewan and small businesses in particular, Mr. Speaker. And I believe this is an opportunity to include some of these ideas into this particular Act.

We recognize the need to protect and enhance historical sites, but we also need to recoup costs of operating these sites and put into place a plan to reconstruct and protect and develop the sites for future generations and also for the tourists that will be coming through this province. The government must identify resources that work best to utilize them, not only for the benefit of the sites and themselves, but also for the taxpayers of this province.

And I believe integrating these historical sites into an overall economic plan for the economic development of the areas that exist is very important and many of these not only exist in the cities but many exist in rural areas. And I believe that this is a great opportunity to develop businesses and the economy of rural Saskatchewan.

As we all know, any business that's thinking of setting up in rural Saskatchewan looks at the infrastructure, roads and highways, access to cellphones. And also when they're looking at to hire employees they need to know if there's proper hospital care in the community, as well as schools for the children of the new employees. And I believe that this is an opportunity to allow small businesses to have a hand in these historical sites, whether they be in parks or outside, to develop spin-off economies to help the economy of rural Saskatchewan, and in particular the tourist industry, as well as in conjunction with First Nations.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a great opportunity to allow the private sector to take a hand in the development of the sites, to best utilize the sites to gain the necessary funds to continue to

operate them, but to also develop them for the future of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we will need to consult and discuss this Bill with the stakeholders and any third parties that may be affected, and I would like to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Economic and Co-operative Development Vote 45

Subvote (EC01)

The Chair: — Order. Before we start I'd ask the minister to please introduce his officials with us in the Assembly today.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, it's a pleasure to introduce my officials today. To my right is Larry Spanier, and Larry is the deputy minister of Economic and Co-operative Development. To my left is Debbie Wilke, who is executive director of marketing and corporate affairs. To Larry's right is Denise Haas, executive director of investment and corporate services. Right behind me is Bryon Burnett, assistant deputy minister of community and economic and business development. And to Brian's right is Lynn Oliver, chief information officer, information technology office.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the officials that are with us today, welcome. I look forward to an exchange based on some of the questions.

I would like to start out if I could, Mr. Chairman, and direct this to the minister. When I was first involved with doing the estimates in Economic and Co-operative Development about a year ago now, we were . . . I asked if the minister would be able to put forward a vision, the kind of mission that he thinks his department should be following.

I'd like him to give kind of an overview of the business plan that he would envision with this department. I'd like to see if there's a relation with what has been going on in the past and look forward to what will be coming this year.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and to the member opposite, welcome. I look forward to the dialogue that we'll have today; you being the veteran and me being the new person in these estimates.

I just want to say a couple of words. I'll go through first of all the mandate, the vision of the department, the principles under which we operate, goals, objectives. And I'll try and be as brief as I can.

The mandate of the department is to grow and diversify the economy by building on the province's existing strengths. And to realize this, the department is providing individual entrepreneurs, business, community, co-operative, and sectoral organization with services which help to focus on business information and advice, strategic partnerships, investment

attraction, and business financing.

The goals of the department are, quote, "an innovative and prosperous and sustainable Saskatchewan economy with full participation."

The principles, guiding principles of the department are client service, excellent professional, knowledgeable, committed, partnerships as a way of doing business, and continuous staff development.

I might say to the member opposite, I think the goal of government as a whole is to facilitate business opportunities and enhance the wealth of our province and the wealth of individual families.

And the role of economic development is very much one to work in partnership to help to facilitate opportunities for Saskatchewan people, and as well to attract people to our province to invest and to live and to create opportunities for their children.

So that's very much part of the vision and the principles under which the department operates.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think the overall objective of growing the province through an economic development is certainly the right direction. My question now would be then, what would be your focus in terms of the emphasis you would place on . . . what part of the sector would get the focus of your energy from the department? Are we talking about individual economic development, small business, large business? Are we talking Crown corporation? What would be the focus of your department?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well I can say to the member opposite, economic development and wealth, growth of wealth and opportunities isn't isolated either to small business or the large corporate sector or the co-operatives or the Crown sector. It needs to be a combination of all.

We've got a very diverse economy. We've got very large industries as you will know. Uranium, our largest producer in the world; potash — those are industries that need to be in contact with the government. We need to work closely. There are certainly other departments that have roles as well in that regard.

The co-operative sector, I think you and I were at a meeting last night with the credit unions and just what a large part of our Saskatchewan economy they are. So it's certainly another area that we have to grow.

And no one can nor should forget individual potential and individual desires to start perhaps a small business and grow that business into a larger one. I think that's every small-business person's dream. It doesn't always happen that a small business becomes a large business and nor necessarily should it.

But what we want to do is work in partnership and in co-operation with those who see the private sector and the co-operative sector as a means of generating wealth and

generating jobs and job opportunities for Saskatchewan people.

So in terms of the particular focus — I'm a small-business man myself so I have some particular interest in that area, as you will perhaps know — but I do know and I do understand. And I think the department works very closely with businesses of all sizes and from all different managerial structures in terms of helping to grow this economy.

So basically what we are is a facilitative body within the department. We have some programs that are under our purview that will help to stimulate some areas of activity. And I think more importantly is to keep the attitude in this province and work to keep . . . working to keep a positive attitude which results in a positive business climate. That's sort of an unseen part of this portfolio that in my short time here I'm learning is becoming very interesting. And I'm certainly looking forward to helping move in that area as well.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I certainly agree that in order for the economy to move ahead there has to be a positive approach to where we're going.

Mr. Minister, what signals would your department like to put forward and what signals have your department . . . what signals have they put forward in trying to develop a positive business approach to Saskatchewan, either to increase the efficiency and therefore the wealth within the existing companies, or trying to attract not only people but businesses back to the province? Do you have signals that you have put forward already? What do you plan on doing?

(15:15)

I think in particular of the budget that just came down, there was an actual increase in spending, but the revenues were dropping. I'm fearful that the signals that are being sent out may not be the correct signals in order to build that confidence to have people return to our province.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well I think — and the member and I may disagree on this — one of the initiatives and I think one of the strongest signals that this budget delivered under the new Premier was a reduction in the corporate income tax as it relates to small business of 25 per cent, a reduction from 8 per cent to 6 per cent; an increase of the threshold from 200,000 to \$300,000. There's legislation that is before this House that allows professionals to incorporate. And I think those are two signals that will really indicate the direction of this administration.

I think the other component that I would want to speak to, and it's not specific to my department but it certainly has impact on mood and it has impact on people's attitudes towards doing business here in Saskatchewan, and last year we introduced the largest income tax reductions in the history of this province. Those are carrying on through this year and into next year to the point where personal income tax for the average family will be down by a thousand dollars. I've indicated the business tax cuts and the introduction of a higher ceiling.

There are some other things that I think are important and a signal to young people. And as you've indicated, this budget,

expenditure is up. We've been for years in this province on a, very much, an agenda of fiscal restraint based on the pressures that we have in terms of the provincial debt, the deficit budgeting prior to us taking our position on this side of the House in 1991. So we've done eight straight balanced budgets, and I think that's a very strong signal for business that the province is going to be managed in a small "c", fiscal, conservative way. So I think those are really important signals.

I talked about this year an enhanced expenditure in government. The development of our transportation infrastructure I think is very critical, and that's another element of what we did and part of what the government did as an overall initiative; information technology in the developing of a high-speed Internet system in some 360, I think it is, communities in rural Saskatchewan.

I think our signal as well to rural Saskatchewan that we have not forgotten them in terms of economic development and opportunities in particular in rural and in small town Saskatchewan; to allow schools and to allow libraries, public buildings, government agencies, and ultimately business, allow them to do — and use modern and high-speed technology — to do their business in the rural part of Saskatchewan I think is another signal that we would like to have sent out.

This budget as well . . . And I don't want to dwell too much on the budget but I just want to sort of give an overview of the initiatives to the member. We're going to be creating 1,500 summer student jobs through the centennial summer student employment program. And I think that's very much important in terms of allowing young people who are in post-secondary venues and who are furthering their education to have a better understanding of the workplace here in Saskatchewan in areas that they might be interested in.

So there are a number of things that have been done. Not as much as we want — it never is — because we still have a fairly substantive debt load in the province and we do have a fragile economy. Everyone will know that the agricultural community is in some pretty severe difficulties. We're trying to work with them but we do have our pressures.

But I would want to say as well we do have some very positive opportunities for Saskatchewan people and people who would choose to locate their businesses and their families here in the province.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As you know signals are very important, particularly in economic development. Decisions are made daily. Decisions are made almost hourly in the city that I come from, where they compare one side of a border to the other.

And I think Lloydminster — although I've talked about it a lot and I've been probably criticized for that — I really believe that the decisions that are made there as to location, investment, expansion, and so on, those decisions put Lloydminster in a very unique position. I think it's a bit of a model and I think it could be extrapolated, that model could be extrapolated to some of the conditions and things that we want to see in this province.

I guess, however, your point about the signals that are being presented are very positive if we want to get people to come to

this province, if we want investment to come to this province, and jobs.

The problem that I have with this particular budget, although you highlighted some of the items on there, and again, the small-business corporate tax reduced by 2 per cent, I think is a very positive step. And I've commented on that before. However, we're still following — we're not leading.

Anybody that is looking in Saskatchewan, Alberta, or Manitoba, either side, this is still not the area that they would like to move into. Is it going to attract . . . it will certainly help the small businesses that are here. Will it attract new investment into our province? I guess that's yet to be determined. But I would say that that's not the most positive signal that we have. And when I look at the corporate tax, that in fact has gone down. And I'd like to talk about that just in a minute.

The signal that I see and from what businesses tell me from this particular budget, there is a . . . although you said there was a balanced budget, certainly I would agree with the General Revenue Fund. And I think the figures do show that the overall gross debt is going up when you look at both the government and the Crowns, which in fact has to be absorbed by the taxpayer. So that is a signal that I don't think is going in the right direction. There is a projected greater number of civil servants even though the income is down and expenses are up.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the Internet system that you've referred to, but I want to talk a little bit about it later. And if I could, I'd like to get your comment about the summer jobs that you referred to earlier as a signal. Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Minister, but those summer jobs, although very valuable to our young people, are they directed particularly at government jobs and Crown corporations and not private business?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I want to say to the member opposite that no one should ever challenge the member for saying the good things he does about his community. I've had some experience in the Lloydminster area in my previous role as Minister of Energy and Mines, and I've very much come to appreciate the people and the businesses and the climate in that area of the world. And they do a good job.

And it's a good community, it's a growing community, and it's a strong community. And part of it is based on, as you will know, the resource revenue that takes place and the work that takes place in that area of the province.

The member opposite mentioned the number of jobs and the incremental number of jobs in this year's budget, and he's right. The numbers of 570 jobs actually don't reflect an increase in the number of full-time equivalents, and I want to give him an example of that.

In previous years the Department of Environment and Resource Management, it seemed when we had unfortunate years and we had forest fires and then it appears that we might have one of those kind of years, it's pretty dry up North, and I know we're all sometimes worried about that. But in some of these years, we would have forest fires that would consume an awful lot of manpower, or person power, and an awful lot of money.

And the budgeting process has been changed to more accurately reflect the actual happenings. And with that comes the FTEs (full-time equivalents) and the person power as it relates to forest fire suppression, and somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80 or 90 of those are forest fighters who were in fact, through special warrants, funded in other areas.

I just want to cite other examples of not being too negative, I would hope, in terms of the number of employees. And I want to refer to the Department of Energy and Mines. It is a regulatory and it is a licensing body that facilitates a billion dollars worth of investment in a year with the oil and gas sector and the mining sector.

And one of the challenges that we had within that department, and we hope it's alleviated now, was that we didn't have the person power to process the paper in a timely manner for industry. And that was partly as a result of restraint over the years in terms of developing the budgets.

The Department of Highways, I use as another example. Without infrastructure it's difficult to transport the goods and services that we produce. And we are very much an exporting province. And of that, I think there's 90 or however many people, FTEs, in that operation. Some of those are engineers, some of them are administrative people to manage a \$312-million budget, the largest in the history of the province. So we've got a lot of contractors working. We have to have the drafts people in order to put the paperwork together to make those things happen.

And I often think that it takes people from outside of our province to tell us what we can do and what we have done. And I just refer to an article that I happened upon in the Regina *The Leader-Post* of March 3 this year. And it's titled, "10 Things You Don't Know About Saskatchewan (It's not just wheat anymore)."

And that really is so true. Our economy is probably eight and a half, nine per cent agricultural based. Our resource sector is 20, 21. Much of it takes place in your area of the world, as you will know. And there's a lot of good, positive things happening in there.

We look at the business profits that are being made and the exports are soaring is just one headline. "Jobs, jobs, jobs in . . . rural Saskatchewan," another one. And it talks:

Although cries of gloom and doom ring through rural Saskatchewan, the reality is there's been (an) impressive job growth in a number of industry sectors.

Outside Regina and Saskatoon there's been a 17 per cent increase in non-agricultural employment over the past decade . . .

And we know that that's necessary based on pressures that agriculture is facing trying to manage large subsidies in the United States and in Europe.

Have we solved all of the problems? Certainly not. We've got a long ways to go here in the province yet, but I think we've got a good solid footing on which to work.

In terms of summer employment, there has been, as the member will know, a summer student-hiring plan in the Crown corporations for a number of years. SaskPower as an example is always very anxious to hire engineering students from the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) and from the U of R (University of Regina) campuses and the reason is because they try and entice them to work, and it's difficult in a job market where job opportunities abound.

In particular, and I would refer to the province to the west of us, Alberta is very much a magnet. It's got a very strong economy; a lot of it's resource-based. They have . . . it's got a core and it's built a core in many areas and it attracts a lot of people, not only from Saskatchewan but across Canada and from the United States.

So we have our challenges. But I think, to look at the Saskatchewan economy overall, it's got a very strong base and we've got some very good opportunities for creating jobs for lots of young people and their families here.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Minister, I've had quite a few letters. I would assume you as an elected representative might be getting letters too from the business community saying, hey what about me, in terms of being able to offer these jobs.

I know there's federal programs. The time frame has often run out before people think that there is an opportunity there.

So I can see a real problem there and I would like to, I would like to make sure that when this is thought through again that you don't exclude a sector of small business that in fact I think is the generator of the economy in terms of generating jobs for this province.

(15:30)

Let me talk a little bit about job creation because I think that's a very integral part of the economic development strategy that I think you would like to see as well. And I get back to the signals that are being put forward from years before and also upcoming and I just wanted to draw your attention to, when we were talking about job creation, that it wasn't long ago that the government — your government — was projecting something like 30,000 new jobs or some very large numbers.

In this provincial budget it was downgraded substantially into what we think the job creation potential is here in this province. And I just wondered if you could explain the difference between those two projections. Have we got more of a problem than we thought in trying to develop or attract jobs?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, in response to the member, he would of course be referring to the economic division documents that have been put forth by the department in terms of the number of jobs projected. And you know, certainly the numbers that were in this year's budget documents were in the neighbourhood of 20,000 by their estimates. But there were some things and there are some things and there are some differences.

First of all a vision of creating 30,000 jobs and setting a target, maybe in excess of what an accountant might tell me the

economy would create, I think is not unrealistic. And I don't think it's an inappropriate approach to take. Because if we don't have a dream and if we don't have a vision and if we don't set targets for ourselves and goals, how then would we ever expect to maximize our potential?

The budget document this year forecasted growth in the neighbourhood of 2.2, 2.5 per cent. The economists — Toronto Dominion Bank, Royal Bank — are projecting economic growth in the province of three and a half per cent, which is fairly good by Canadian standards. And of course, all of this is subject to downward pressures on our economy, things that may or may not happen in the United States, the dollar, value of the dollar, all of these things are variables.

But I think you would agree with me that the fiscal and the growth projections in our budgets in the last while here in Saskatchewan have been very much on the conservative side. What isn't factored in, in terms of the job numbers in the budget documents, as well are the impacts of the reduction in the taxes that are taking place this year both in the business side and on the personal income tax side. And those are not factors that would increase that 20,000 jobs.

So I think it's fair to say that there's no contradiction. What there are is very conservative projections from the Department of Finance just by its nature. And I'm not speaking of course about the Minister of Finance himself, but the people that he works with are fairly conservative when they're putting together their expenditure numbers. Because I don't think they want any year-end surprises that would say, whoops, we're in a deficit position.

So having said that, I don't think there's any inconsistency. I think we need to have a goal, we need to have the vision, and we need to have the dreams that we're going to achieve to our full potential. So the documents I think are very much consistent and supportive of each other.

Because you're not going to have job growth and you're not going to have employment growth, you're not going to have business growth unless you've got a good economic base. And that's what we very much, and I think business very much depends on, from the Department of Finance and from the government at budget time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess those are the concerns that I have too, is trying to make sure that we get the right signal out there, and not by wildly exaggerating the amount of jobs and then having to back away and say oh, I'm sorry, I guess we made a mistake.

The Minister of Finance and I had discussed these things in a previous year as well, and one of the concerns that I have is that even though we recognize that we have to try and attract those people with the right signals, the fact is that from a recent publication in *Sask Trends Monitor*, it shows that employment, this would be . . . the key indicators . . . this was published in March. The key indicators in February were in fact down for employment as opposed to the provinces on either side, and in Canada particularly.

So what we have to do is try and figure out why they're down

and recognizing that some of that employment is, as you referred to, in the agricultural sector, we have to take some responsibility for those jobs too. We just can't write those off, saying agriculture is out of our hands now. We have to do something very specific to try and turn that part around. Because without the employment, we are not going to generate what we had hoped and need in this province.

In fact even in a publication published by the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development for March/April, there is a quote saying that there were 1,600 more full-time jobs in January 2001 than in the previous year. But there's conflicting signals going out from all the different kinds of publications.

There's other headlines that say, Saskatchewan economy expected to slow down despite the oil boom. And I know that those are just viewpoints of different people.

The fact is that if we want to try to expand our base, we have to understand why we're not, and try and make the changes. And I'm not sure that even though the personal income tax over a four-year period is scheduled to be going down, which is exactly what should be done, but the signal from a year ago — and people have a great memory — people from a year ago remember that the tax base was in fact expanded, and in my particular part of the world that is a real burr under a lot of saddles.

So, Mr. Minister, what we have to do, I think, is to talk a little bit about the whole revitalization, and I would like to get from you what do you think you have learned from the numbers that have been ongoing? What would you have learned from the lower-than-expected projections of job growth — in fact I think it's the other way around — is there something that you and your department can put forward that would indicate that we want to in fact move in a different direction than the indicators have been showing or the signals have been indicating?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well the indicators — certainly the member will recognize — vary from month to month and they will vary from year to year. I think what is important though, is if we look at year-over-year growth and year-over-year development. It's a seasonal economy we have and there is many things that can impact on job forecasts for a month, month over year over year. And I think what one needs to do is what is happening and what the growth of the economy is over an extended period of time. Because those are the true figures and those are the figures that will give you a very good indication as to where your economy is going.

You know, the one thing I think that one needs to look at is the wealth of the people and the wealth of your province. Is your . . . (inaudible) . . . province becoming wealthier or is it not? And I again refer to a newspaper in *The Globe and Mail*, November 6 of 2000, and it does an analysis of real domestic product growth of all of the provinces in Canada and it has Saskatchewan in the lead. That's over a 10-year period.

And so I think that's important to know that when you have year-over-year growth and when you have a sustained growth, that there must be something positive that's happened.

And some of the indicators and some of the things that I have learnt is that our economy is much less based on and dependent on agriculture than it was in the past. And that's because we've made and put in place specific initiatives to ensure that we're diversifying what we're doing. We're going to focus on manufacturing and processing. As the member will know right now, there is a fairly major thrust in terms of developing our forest resource. And I think those are all important things.

At the risk of boring members in the legislature, I want to quote from this article and it just says:

When we look back on the nineties, which province will be remembered as the star economic performer of the decade?

The nod — in popular memory, at least — is likely to go to Alberta, where the economy grew in every year of the decade. Ontario finished nineties with a strong kick, but suffered a deep recession in the early years that threw it off stride. British Columbia will be remembered as a solid underperformer all the way. Smaller provinces probably won't even be considered.

In fact, the lineup, by the only measure — the only measure — of economic growth that really counts, is quite different.

The winner is Saskatchewan . . .

And I think that says a lot about what has happened in this province in the last 10 years.

Another quote from that same article:

Saskatchewan has had so many economic problems in recent years — low resource prices, mainly — that it's hard to remember the province's stunning expansion in the first two years of the decade. With such a good start, and with a couple of other good years, Saskatchewan's economy grew more than 32 per cent over the decade.

And I think that's what we need to look at and those are the figures that we do.

And I mean, we can pull selective figures out. You will one month bring March over last March numbers that will show a decline in population. And I will, a month or two later, bring forward numbers that will show a strong increase over perhaps June . . . in last June's job numbers.

But I think what we need to do is we need to look at the year and year over year, and look at what's happened in the last decade to determine really what is happening in our province.

And I think you can make a very strong argument that Saskatchewan has had very strong growth compared to other jurisdictions in Canada.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Minister, thank you. It would appear to me that, if we had that kind of an economic growth, we must have been doing something right.

What I see, however, is the fact that people are leaving the province. We're trying to attract them back. When we were . . .

And maybe the growth, the economic growth might be understood in this particular term — and again I'm going to quote from the *Sask Trends Monitor*, the March 2001 — and this is year over year. I agree that we can be selective in terms of month to month and so on, and maybe those aren't as big of an indicator as year to year.

And I'm looking here at the employment by category, and the employment paid by the private sector has virtually been level. It hasn't changed a great deal. The employment paid by the public sector has actually gone up 12 per cent, and I'm looking at the year 1998, '99, and 2000, over that period of time.

Self-employed has actually decreased by about just over 7 per cent. The trend, as I see it there, is that even though employment might be steady or increasing — although we can debate that — it would appear that in the public sector the self-employed is not increasing in employment. And to me that's a signal that the small business or self-employed people are not staying and contributing.

If I was going to look at the statistics that were put forward by StatsCanada, and also Health Services Utilization and Research Commission, they try to look at trends, and the trend in terms of growth is the — and we're talking about population forecasts here for the province — the trend predicted annual growth rate is near zero for the population in the short term. Unfortunately, Saskatchewan has remained fairly stagnate all through the period.

Even though our economy might be looking good in comparison to before, we aren't attracting . . . we aren't keeping our young educated and trained and skilled people. I think the general trend is away.

And I guess that's why . . . and I hate to keep going in this line, Mr. Minister, but I think it's very important that we try to learn from what we have in place, why we are successful, why we are not successful, and try to correct those kinds of things.

(15:45)

In terms of . . . if I could, I'd like to switch gears a little bit, Mr. Minister, and maybe before, if you wish to have a comment, I would certainly yield for you to do that.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, and to the members opposite, you know the figures that the member quotes are accurate, but what I want to point out is they include agriculture which is what we talked about a little earlier.

If you look at the areas of decline, the agricultural community is siphoning off jobs. There are fewer people working in that industry for a number of reasons. I mean we have technology changes, we have farmers who are farming larger and larger operations to build economies of scale. But what those figures also tell you on the other side is that manufacturing and processing is up, oil and gas and the development in those areas are up, forestry is up, and certainly a lot of that is offset by what happens in agriculture.

Now if we were fortunate enough to have the support of the national government such as farmers in the United States, who I

understand are looking right now at a new support program for their farming community. If we had the kind of support from our national government that they're receiving in the United States and in Europe from their governments, my guess and my suggestion to you would be that these statistics would look much, much different as it relates to agriculture.

But that is not our case. And what we have been doing is we have been investing on a per capita basis hundreds of millions of dollars every year into agriculture in hope just to stabilize. And in many cases it can't even stabilize that industry.

And we with a population of a million people cannot fight the American governments and we know that. But we're doing what we can to support rural Saskatchewan and to support agriculture. Is it enough? I'll tell you it's what we can afford. Maybe it's not enough but it's what we have available to us.

They're going through a fairly dramatic transition and we all understand that, but as I said the statistics do include agriculture and I think that's important to recognize.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I certainly don't quarrel with the fact that agriculture is in a serious situation, really through no fault of the farmers. They're probably the best and most efficient in the world. They're up against a situation that is impossible if they are to remain in the same kind of agricultural mode that they have been in.

I would suspect that agriculture will continue to flourish in this province. I have a great deal of faith. I've been involved in agriculture one way or another for a great number of years, as my age may be a clue. But agriculture will not be the same as it has been. It has to have changes and there has to be signals placed into that area as well.

And I guess this leads me to my next question. And the question I would have is — although I'm going to refer to the office of Rural Revitalization, I realize this isn't your particular ministry but I think there's some crossovers here, not only with Economic and Co-operative Development, but with also the Department of Ag and Food — from your perspective, Rural Revitalization, do you see a redundancy here from the things that could be done, should've been done, are being done by the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development? And I'm referring particularly to the REDA (regional economic development authority) and the REDA influences in the rural areas.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And to the member opposite, I don't think there are redundancies. I think there are some synergies with respect to the role that REDAs play and the role that the department of Rural Revitalization will play.

It, as you will know, is under the same ministry as the Minister of Transportation and Highways. And so I think that there are some interconnects certainly between Rural Revitalization, that agency, and the Department of Highways and Transportation and one minister. Certainly it's not that the programs that are in place through Community Futures, federal government, provincial government programs, a combination of all of those things . . . And I guess sometimes it seems a bit disjointed.

When I look at this government just in terms of its, you know, its administration, and I look at the role the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development plays, we've got so many other economic development arms of government. There's Rural Revitalization now. There's the Department of Energy and Mines. There's the Department of Environment and Resource Management, as it relates to the development working with this department in terms of forestry.

You've got the Agriculture Development Fund as part of the Department of Agriculture and the initiatives that they do. There's SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation), another arm of government to help facilitate capital for some of the smaller businesses.

There's the role of many of the different departments and it somewhat seems disjointed. And I must admit that it may in fact be somewhat . . . I'll pass the floor to the member.

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

Mr. Heppner: — Asking permission to introduce guests?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, members of the legislature. I would like to introduce this afternoon, Mike Badham who is sitting up in the Speaker's gallery.

He's had an illustrious career in education, and I served as an educator at the same time that he was in leadership positions there, and now very strong in municipal affairs. And it's probably significant that he's here as the committee is discussing economic development and I'm sure he's interested in that for the province and for cities.

So would you join me in welcoming Mike Badham.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Thomson: — I too request leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Chairman, it's a pleasure also to welcome Mike Badham who is a constituent of mine as I am a constituent of his in the fine city of Regina. It's a pleasure here to have Mike here again.

He's of course a regular visitor to observe our proceedings and offer very insightful advice to me personally on things that I should be doing in our riding, as well as things obviously that our government should be doing for the province.

And I'd ask all members to again join with me in welcoming him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Economic and Co-operative Development Vote 45

Subvote (EC01)

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to have to find my place again because I'm not sure . . . I think I know what we were discussing but I'm not totally sure. But it had certainly something to do with department of Rural Revitalization and its role.

But before I begin trying to find where I was, I want to say good afternoon to Mr. Badham and welcome him to the House.

The role of the department of Rural Revitalization. I just talked about a number of the different areas of economic development and how it sometimes seems a little cumbersome and sometimes frustrating within government to try and get the different agencies to work together to do all the things that we want to do in terms of building this economy. The role and part of the role of Rural Revitalization is to help with the coordination of those things as it relates to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. There really is a large amount of different entities and it gets very confusing.

One of the objectives that I've observed from the annual report of Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development, 1999-2000, when you're looking at the 2000-2001 objectives, was to develop a strategic plan for the department that would address the government's overall accountability objectives.

I guess in that vein, are you able to . . . or have you been able, or your department's been able to analyse the effectiveness of some of these rural initiatives, such as the REDA. REDA, if my recollection serves right, is something like \$2.8 million in terms of your budget going to those areas.

Is there any indication that there's a return on that kind of an investment in developing rural economic initiatives in those particular areas?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I can say to the member opposite that I've been on a bit of a steep learning curve here in the last couple of months, because I've had the opportunity to assume the role and the responsibility for Economic and Co-operative Development. And it's allowed me to meet with a number of different REDAs throughout the . . . across the province.

I've met in Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Yorkton, and there are others that I certainly hope to meet to find how they're interacting with their chambers of commerce, how they're interacting with the different civic administrations in their areas. And what I'm finding is that it's money very well spent.

A lot of the time that local people put in, as you will know, in terms of developing their community, is volunteer time. And the people who work in the REDAs and work with them — I

find certainly some a little more successful than others, and some are working a little better and co-operating a little better with the different entities in their community—but what I want to say is overall the volunteerism and that component of REDAs and what they are able to do in terms of stimulating development, then I would just . . . I was quite impressed.

And I would want to share with the members of the House, I spent an afternoon in Moose Jaw. And I've known Moose Jaw well. Like some of us, I grew up in the southern part of the province and I saw Moose Jaw on a decline. I saw Central Avenue at one point in time, in the recent history, where you could have shot a cannon down Main Street and you wouldn't have bothered anybody; you wouldn't have impacted anybody.

But the REDA, working with the chamber and working with the civic administration of that community, had a vision and they had a dream and they had some goals, and they set out on a plan to revitalize their downtown core. And they're a long way along in doing that, and it's not because there were massive amounts of government expenditure. But the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development worked with the local REDAs and with the chambers, and with Sask Water in that area, another government entity, and with private investors and they put a package together to relive and revitalize that town.

And those are stories that you can see in other places in Saskatchewan. There are many communities who have been able to take those initiatives and turn them into economic, positive economic results. I think of the Watrous, Englefeld, the Humboldt area—just great examples of what people with an entrepreneurial spirit working within their communities and with their neighbours have been able to achieve. And you've got manufacturing and processing some of the most innovative farm machinery equipment anywhere in the world. And that doesn't happen everywhere.

So I think it speaks to a couple of things: one, that government can help to facilitate with small dollars some very positive things. And I think REDAs are a program that exemplifies that, but most importantly it needs to be community and it needs to be community spirit.

And as I said, I just would want to take my hat off to the volunteers who spend their time on the regional economic development authorities making good things happen throughout the province.

Mr. Wakefield:— Mr. Minister, I look forward to seeing the government's overall accountability objectives, I think, that you work through your department and see how they match up to what you had planned.

And if I could, I would—because we're talking about rural and some rural diversification and those kinds of interesting areas—and maybe while Mr. Anderson is with us behind the bar, I'd like to defer to my colleague from Swift Current for a question.

Mr. Wall:— Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question to the minister and it relates to an industry that I've become familiar with and that's basically working ranches, and specifically ranches that are in the business of attracting Europeans to come and experience western life, and I actually have been involved

directly in that sort of an operation for some time.

And not long ago I met with a ranch that I have worked with—they're also friends—and we had a discussion about what do we do this year. Granted it's a part-time business. Nobody's paying the rent off of this, granted, but it is one that's been in operation for some time. And the question that we were talking about is, do we even pursue our business for this year because of the foot-and-mouth scare overseas.

(16:00)

Given the fact that a lot of these ranches involved in this business, the heart and soul of their business remains the ranch and remains the raising of cattle. And often the tourism element is an aside to generate a little bit extra revenue to diversify a little.

We've made a decision—it's tentative—but we made a decision to sort of just maybe hold back for the year. We're in a position to do that.

Some operations . . . and there are more and more in the province all the time, by the way, Minister, as you may know. And I can also tell you that Tourism Saskatchewan, I think, has done a good job of working with that kind of a venture in trying to attract those people.

But there are more and more of those operations that rely to a much greater extent certainly than I do, or than the ranch I partner with does, on this revenue. And for them I think they have some questions. If they are going to continue with this, and I don't know how many are, I don't know that they've heard from the ministry of Agriculture and Food or from the federal government on steps that they could take to safeguard their livestock, their livelihood, and their communities from this. I'm not sure they've heard of anything and that's the question that I have for you today.

Has Tourism Saskatchewan had contact from these sorts of operations? And if they have, are they referred to the federal government or where can these people turn for very important answers to these questions on their operation?

The Chair:— Order, order. Mr. Minister, you have other officials that have joined you in the Chamber and would you mind taking a minute to introduce your further officials that are here.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch:— Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I have Roy Anderson, president of Tourism Saskatchewan; Tim Frass, who is the director of finance—I'm learning all of these new faces—and Gerry Adamson who is the vice-president of STEP (Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership) is also with us here today.

As I was saying, the question I guess is very appropriate. I'm told that there is a news release about to be issued from Tourism Saskatchewan that deals with the interaction between Tourism Saskatchewan and the federal government as it relates to regulatory and those types of issues. I'm reading it as we speak here. So what I will do is I'll pass the member a copy of this, and if there's any further questions or items that you need

to discuss with me or with the officials, we're certainly more than willing to do that.

I should say, Mr. Chairman, we had the proposal — and I'm speaking now as House Leader — and I certainly don't want to cut this debate off on the member from Swift Current, but we had agreed to move to the Department of Education at 4 o'clock. It's just a few minutes past there, so if we could move from Economic Development to Education.

We'll be back to what I've found a most interesting discussion and I'm looking forward to carrying on with this later on in the session. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I move we rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again . . . rise and report progress. Sorry, I'm learning this too . . . We move to report progress.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — I'd first of all like to ask the Minister of Education if he would please introduce his officials present with him, with the committee.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, and certainly it's a pleasure to be here for the estimates in Education.

And with me here today, I have Craig Dotson, who is the deputy minister of Education, immediately to my right. And I've also got Dr. Michael Littlewood, immediately to my left, who is the executive director of legislation and school administration. And I've got Ken Horsman, directly behind me, and he's the associate deputy minister of Education. And Mr. John McLaughlin, who's seated at the back, who is the executive director of Teacher Superannuation Commission.

Mrs. Frances Bast, who is right back behind me as well, and she's the director of finance and administration corporate services. Mr. Cal Kirby — and where is Cal — he's at the back of the room as well. He's the director of facilities planning. And Gerry Sing Chin, grants manager, school finance, and Gerry's right to my right as well.

So thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And welcome, Mr. Minister, and to your officials. I'm starting to recognize some faces, so that makes it easier to ask questions. So I appreciate the first of probably many times that we'll have a chance to get together this session.

Mr. Minister, first maybe I can start by asking if you've had the opportunity to get the answers for the global questions that we had sent over previously.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the member opposite, we have received the global questions. We

have not yet compiled the answers to those. It is my understanding that we are waiting for the final numbers with regard to recognized expenditures, and we'll have those available after April 20.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Then I guess maybe some of the questions that I have for you today, you may not have all the answers yet.

But I'd like to start by asking about the extra . . . we have \$33.7 million extra in school operating grant money this year, which I know made many school boards right across the province very happy. And it took 32.2 million of that to just keep the status quo when it came to teachers' salaries, support staff salary, transportation costs, and so on. And also this year we have the added issue thrown in that we have reassessment.

So I'm wondering if you can give me an idea today how many school divisions will actually see a change, and then we'll start by saying an increase in the money that they will be receiving this year from the department?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The member opposite asked a very specific question with regard to the budget. And I'll just make a few comments in general terms about the budget this year. Certainly it was considered by many to be the best budget that the province has seen in some 15 years.

We recognize that there was a significant increase on the foundation operating grant. There was also significant increases with regard to some of the targeted programs. And more specifically, it is my understanding that because of the size of the grant this year on the calendar year, that school divisions are actually looking at their grant numbers right now and compiling the numbers in terms of . . . before they set their mill rates.

And I understand that some of the school divisions have already indicated that with the increased grant this year, that there will be an opportunity for them to lower their mill rates. And for example, Eston/Elrose has indicated that it will be dropping its mill rate from 17.75 to 14.2 this year. And we've heard some very good news from Saskatoon public and also from the Chair of the Regina board.

And certainly when we talk about the major stakeholders in education such as the School Trustees Association and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, they rated the budget as an A this year and are very pleased with what they've seen in the budget for education this year.

And to answer more specifically the question from the member, it is my understanding that many school divisions have seen an increase in their grant, and this is on top of course some reassessment changes in terms of a global assessment. Province-wide the global assessment has gone up 10.8 per cent. In rural Saskatchewan it was 9 per cent. In Saskatoon the assessment went up 20 per cent and Regina roughly 60 per cent.

So there has been an increase in the assessment base that school divisions have to work with. We do respect the autonomy of school divisions to have the opportunity to tax this local tax base. And certainly it is my understanding that because the

province has significantly reinvested in education this year that there is an opportunity for many school divisions to either freeze their mill rate or even lower it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Actually, I know that there was many school divisions that have contacted me and said that they were going to be able to hold the line. I actually haven't heard . . . didn't know that somebody was actually going to be able to lower their mill rate.

Mr. Minister, I do know that some school divisions, like Tiger Lily, will be getting \$100,000 less, and so that's going to mean for them that they're going to have to either cut staff or they're going to have to raise their mill rate.

And I guess what I'm really looking for is to find out if you do have the breakdown yet. You said after April 20, but obviously you would know from your own figures what is going to be happening there. I imagine Tiger Lily wouldn't have contacted just my office, must have contacted yours as well.

We have had . . . Since 1991, I believe it is, we haven't seen any increases in education funding. In fact, we've seen the decreases. Pardon me, I believe last year there was some increase. So we really are still sort of behind the eight ball and behind even the inflation rate, if we'd have calculated it since 1991.

So, Mr. Minister, maybe you could tell me if there are any school divisions besides Tiger Lily that have contacted your office to date to let you know that they're receiving less money?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the member opposite. Certainly some of the concerns that we had with dealing with the massive debt that was incurred when this current government took office provided for some, obviously some significant decisions that needed to be made at that time.

(16:15)

But since 1995 there have been increases to the education budget that have actually exceeded the rate of inflation. And last year, of course, there was an increase on the foundation operating grant of \$29 million. And with the increase this year we're looking at over \$60 million in just two years, which is close to a 16 per cent increase over those two years on the foundation operating grant when the rate of inflation in Saskatchewan is projected to be 2 per cent or lower.

With regard specifically to Tiger Lily, none of the school divisions have actually contacted my office with any concerns. I think that we recognize that the funding of education in the province of Saskatchewan is a shared responsibility between the province and school divisions, and that the foundation operating grant is based on a formula that has been arrived at and agreed to by all the stakeholders, and it's A minus B equals C.

We have one part of the formula which talks about recognized expenditures within that school division. We have one part of the formula that talks about the recognized revenues based on assessment and mill rate. And then of course the difference is

covered by the province because the grant is provided on an equalization formula.

So in the instance with Tiger Lily, recognizing that here's the recognized expenditures, here's the recognized revenue, if their grant decreased then it's most likely dependent on things like enrolment which the grant is very sensitive to, and certainly these numbers in terms of how we provide grants are provided, and then they make their decisions on the types of services they need to provide and what they need to access in their tax base to provide those services.

But we do believe in the principles of equity and equitable opportunity for students in the province of Saskatchewan, no matter where they live. And the foundation operating grant principle has worked very well, and is recognized as being the proper way to distribute provincial funds by all of the major stakeholders.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, recognizing that the reassessment effect has . . . and I realize that on the west side of the province especially where the assessment really went up, there should be instances where the mill rates will go down, and it's still going to be the same amount of money charged to the taxpayer, because of the difference in the mill rates.

So I guess I shouldn't have gotten quite so excited when I hear that somebody has actually been able to lower the mill rate. It's still going to cost you the same amount of money in the long run.

But, Mr. Minister, maybe if you haven't had calls from the school divisions regarding the actual mill rates, how many calls have you had from school divisions that are saying they are still going to have to close schools?

This is an issue that is at the heart of problems here in rural Saskatchewan. I know that your new Minister of Rural Revitalization is probably looking at this issue as well. But most of the members on this side of the House have had calls from school divisions saying that we are going to have to close schools. They're all working through their budget numbers.

I know that the member from Arm River is worried about Marquis school. We've got Spalding School. Weekes School, they're afraid they're going to lose that school. And I'm wondering if this is . . . how you are addressing this issue and what kind of numbers you're talking about and the calls you're getting.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly the topic of school closures has been a reality for the province of Saskatchewan for many, many years. And just to talk, just to give some background in terms of the numbers of schools closed, we're looking at during the 1980s, anywhere from 9 to 20 in any given year. For example, 1984, there were 20 schools closed. In 1983, there were 19. In 1990, there were 20.

When we look at the 1990s, 1993, there were 18 schools closed. Last year, there were seven. And it is my understanding that this year we're looking at approximately three schools that will be closed in the province of Saskatchewan, which would actually be the lowest, the lowest total in some 20 years, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, could you tell me specifically which three schools?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The process for school closures, especially in rural Saskatchewan, is clearly defined, and the process that is followed is for notices of motion to be provided by school boards with public consultation.

Now it is my understanding that the final motions have occurred with regard to Tantallon which is in the Potashville School Division; Langbank, which is in Broadview School Division; and Spalding, which is in the Tiger Lily School Division. That's a K to 7 school, a K to 6, a K to 8. The enrolments were 26, 68, and 63.

We are also in the process where the final motions have not been received for an additional, looks like four to five other schools. That process is being followed. It's a process that's been in place for some time. And again, this is a reality that has been out there for many, many years but it looks like this year will actually be, in terms of the numbers of schools closed, less than we've seen in the previous 15 to 20 years.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one of the headlines in the paper about three weeks or a month ago now was something that I'm sure that your staff members were quite upset about. And it's going to mean that your numbers of school closures is probably going to be increasing not decreasing, because we understand that 30,000 students are going to be out of this system over the next eight years.

The article I read and the enrolment figures that we've reviewed showed that it's not going to be just rural Saskatchewan but a lot of rural Saskatchewan. And I'm wondering how your department is dealing with this when it comes to things like your teacher negotiations, and even determining where your schools are going to be built.

This is just a horrendous problem. It's something that we in this province should be ashamed of. When we're thinking that we're going to lose not only the students but the parents of these students, it doesn't give us a lot of hope.

So I guess when school divisions are looking at how they're going to be spending these hard-earned dollars that they take from taxpayers, they're going to have to determine whether they should be building, repairing, or buying new school buses to truck them down the road a little further.

So I'm wondering how your department is dealing with this issue that you received information on last fall.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well, Mr. Chair, the fact of declining enrolments in Saskatchewan is one that has been there for many, many years. We're looking at, over the course of the 1990s, approximately a 10,000 drop in enrolment.

School divisions, when they're looking at their demographics and looking at their enrolments, they have the autonomy to make plans associated with that.

Certainly the provincial government in recognizing that these are challenges faced by school divisions and that we do want to

provide an equitable opportunity for students no matter where they live in the province of Saskatchewan, that we do provide incentives such as we've introduced in this budget with regard to things like sparsity factors which we're talking about enhancing into transportation. We're talking about isolated schools, in terms of what are the schools that are far enough from other schools that they need to be maintained, and maintaining them is encouraged by the provincial government.

And also the whole factor of distance education and technology enhancement, recognizing that the reality of rural Saskatchewan is changing, and that the provincial government through public education is certainly supportive of all these initiatives to ensure that there is an equitable opportunity for students in rural Saskatchewan as well as in urban Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, the issues that you discussed about sparsity, the sparsity factor, isolated schools, and distance educations are all issues that could possibly save schools like the ones that we're closing this year and the four or five that are threatened to be closed.

Has your department contacted those school boards? Is there any way that they can be looked at? Is there schools considered viable if there was any extra funding or any extra programming available, for instance, through the new Internet training or Internet access that you've been discussing, not only in the budget but in the Role Of The School document.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, the decisions on whether to keep a school open or close it is a local decision.

All school divisions are aware of the procedures and plans that we are putting forward with regard to technology enhancement. With the announcement of CommunityNet in the budget, we will be providing high-speed Internet to all school locations. And we have absorbed the costs with regard to this. In fact by assuming the costs 100 per cent for CommunityNet, that this is a savings to school divisions of \$1.5 million globally, and that we are incurring those costs. And that actually became effective on April 1 of this year.

So school divisions no longer are paying Internet costs. They are all absorbed through the CommunityNet program.

Certainly we also recognize that through the Centenary Capital Fund, that once you've got the Internet to the wall of the school, that it's important that distribution and connectivity within the school also be provided for. So the provincial government is providing \$2 million this year and the subsequent years to provide for that connectivity within these schools.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, thank you. That sounds great. Now you're absorbing the costs of the CommunityNet, and my question to you, is this really going to save any of the schools that are in . . . I think you said four or five schools that are in danger of closing this year. Have you contacted, or have those schools contacted you, and could you perhaps tell me which of . . . could you name the four or five schools that have their resolution in place right now.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. With regard to the motions of intent, we're looking at Parkview in the

Melville School Division, which has a motion of intent for closure. And that is a grades 5 to 7.

(16:30)

Yorkdale School Division, the Bredenbury K to 6 school, Griffin School in Weyburn Central, which is a 1 to 6 school; and Hudson Bay School Division, the Mistatim, which is a K to 6 school, with an enrolment of 15 students. These are all projected with motions of intent for later this year, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Excuse me, Mr. Minister, I maybe just didn't hear you. But did you say, Griffin, McKague, Bredenbury, and I think there was one other one.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Yes, that was Parkview, Bredenbury, Griffin, and Mistatim.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, you haven't received any resolution from the Hudson Bay School Division regarding Weekes School?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Chair, the Hudson Bay School Division in the Weekes School is calling for a grade reduction not a closure.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, Mr. Minister. Good afternoon to your officials. Mr. Minister, my question is with respect to the capital expenditures of the Department of Education.

I think we all understand now that there has been no increase whatsoever from the previous year's amount of \$24 million. And I think that we also understand that this is going to create a lot of added pressure for school divisions. Costs are constantly increasing.

This afternoon I had the opportunity to introduce some students from the Carrot River High School, Mr. Minister. And while they seemed to be managing in the high school in Carrot River, there is a very, very serious problem with the elementary school, Mr. Minister, to the degree where in talking to local school board members some of them have expressed to me an outright fear of the roof possibly caving in, in the near future.

Now given the seriousness of that situation and the lack of increase in capital, Mr. Minister, can you explain to me how the people of Carrot River and the Nipawin School Division are to cope with a constantly deteriorating facility?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, the prioritization with regard to how capital is allocated is based on a standardized, very transparent formula. And health and safety concerns are the number one priority. If there is a concern from a school board with regard to a particular facility, they would contact the facilities branch of the department and indicate what their concern is, then an evaluation would occur. And if there is a health and safety concern, then these are dealt with as the top priority in as quick a fashion as possible.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Minister, there is a member of the local school board from Carrot River in the gallery, and I'm sure that she would be more

than willing to meet with you and further discuss this matter because I think they are taking it very, very seriously.

But, Mr. Minister, could you give me the specific status at this time of the Carrot River Elementary School as to what stage it is on the priority list it is?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — It is my understanding that the current listing for Carrot River Elementary is itemized as a renovation and upgrade. It is not identified as having a major structural concern. So if there is a concern, and there is a health and safety . . . if the roof is having problems, obviously then that needs to be brought to the attention of the facilities' people because we would quickly upgrade that in terms of the priority list.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well, Mr. Minister, I will take you at your word and I will either have the board member in attendance today speak to you, or I will have members of the local school board contact you at a later date. Thank you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, you had talked about Bredenbury before, you had mentioned with the motion of intent being put forth already.

I'm wondering — there's quite an active group in that community, Mr. Minister — and I was wondering if you had received correspondence from this group. They had actually gone so far as to even see if there was ways that they could possibly do such things as move the town office out of the community into the school building. A number of other services maybe that could be provided out of the building to help assist with the cost of running the building and maybe therefore being able to keep that school open longer.

I just wonder, Mr. Minister, have you received correspondence from this group and what was your response to that?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly don't recall actually having a direct message to my office from Bredenbury on this one. We recognize that school divisions do have the responsibility, and have had for many, many years, in terms of how they allocate facilities within their school division.

School closures do happen. There is a process in place where motions are provided to the public, the process is followed, and the arguments are mounted. And it's certainly up to the school division to satisfy to the public of that division that this is in fact a reality that they can't avoid and that their services for that student population will be provided in alternate circumstances.

The provincial government certainly, and the Department of Education, provides guidelines and funding based on closeness of schools, how far they are from other schools. And that information, through the foundation operating grant, are provided to school divisions.

I think it's always a very difficult and challenging decision for any school division to make to close a school, but we recognize that that is something that school divisions have had responsibility for and continue to have responsibility for, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I understand that the school division is the one that makes the final decision, but still as government we have a lot of input into what happens within the province.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, in the situation that I've described before, where they've gone as far as to even think of providing services from that building to help prevent the closure of their school, in your estimation should that or would that make a difference to what happens, how quickly that school would close. Because the operating costs naturally would be going down for that facility. And I'm not saying to the degree that the monies . . . the amount of money saved the school division maybe is looking for, but on the other hand it should certainly assist.

Mr. Minister, would that come into the decision-making do you feel, or does your department think that should come into the decision-making of still closing that school, or maybe reversing their decision.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well certainly, Mr. Chair, when local school divisions are looking at particular circumstances surrounding whether it is appropriate for them to close a school, or if there were mitigating factors such as a municipality or a library or whatever that would locate and share operating costs, that that may be a mitigating factor with regard to that school division in making that decision on that school closure.

Certainly we don't have a particular policy. We do recognize the school divisions have that responsibility, but if arrangements could be made and communities obviously felt that they could distribute some of those operating costs in a way that would allow for that school to be sustainable, then I don't think that anyone in the department would have a problem with that.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I just want to thank you for your answer, Mr. Minister, but I am sure you are going to receive correspondence from this group, and I would hope that you would possibly give them the time to show how much we value what they're trying to do here to save their school.

Last year I lost MacNutt School in my constituency, and now if Bredenbury's on the list, it's getting to the point where we're losing about a school a year in some of our constituencies in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister, and it's really starting to be a drain on rural Saskatchewan. So thank you for your answers.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, I just have one question. I understand that you indicated that you received a notice of intent from the board that Griffin School would be closing. It is my information that at their last board meeting, which was held within the last two weeks, that they had rescinded this motion. I wonder if you could clarify that for me.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Yes, it certainly would be quite possible. Obviously, if there was a recent rescinding of that motion, it certainly hasn't come to my attention or my official's attention at this point in time. But if that was rescinded, I would think that that's a decision that that school division has made.

And if it was based on new information provided with regard to the budget and the grant that they would receive, then I would welcome that they were able to look at that in a different light.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, could you just check on that for me and verify it in one of the days ahead for me, please? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — That would be, Mr. Chair, that would be no problem for us to check into that and verify and provide that information to the member opposite.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, since you're checking into these various schools, the one in my constituency that is causing a lot of concern, besides the fact that I know Spalding is closing, is the Weekes School. You've indicated that it's not going to close; it's going to be downsized.

But when you talk about the various initiatives that may be helping to look at these smaller schools with the sparsity factor, isolated schools, and distance education, have you contacted the school division; or is there any way that the mechanics there to make sure that the schools are aware of all the new initiatives, and that saving schools and the communities is at the heart of your department's intent to provide education in Saskatchewan?

So I'm asking if you'll check with Weekes School and see what they're going to be doing with their motion of intent.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, we can contact, I think it's the Hudson Bay School Division, and find out what their response is to their budget figures this year, and whether they were planning on making any changes with regard to grade reduction at the Weekes School. And once we have that information, we will provide that to the member opposite.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, we note that there are . . . their gross up has been discontinued this year on non-agriculture and non-residential assessment. I believe that's correct. Can you tell me what kind of an impact this is going to have on the assessments?

(16:45)

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, the announcement with regard to elimination of the commercial gross up was made in November of last year, so all the school divisions were aware of this. The commercial gross up was brought in following reassessment as a business tax proxy. There are no business taxes in the province of Saskatchewan with regard to property any longer. And the stakeholders, all of the stakeholders supported the elimination of the commercial gross up at this time.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, also I know there was a change in the small schools factor. Could you explain what the change is and what kind of an impact it's going to have on the small schools in the province?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — This year the small schools factor was changed to a category called isolated factor. And what it does is, through the foundation operating grant formula, actually provides greater support to those schools that are truly

isolated. It's formula driven and it's a formula that was arrived at and agreed to.

And certainly we believe that it is a better way of actually dealing with the situations where we have some schools who really do fit the bill of being truly isolated and separate and obviously requiring additional support.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, thank you. Mr. Minister, could you tell me what this formula is? Is there a distance involved? Do you have to be 25 miles from the next school? Or what other factors are part of the decision on the small schools factor?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the member opposite, the isolated school factor was . . . the information in terms of the new formula was provided to all the school divisions on budget day. And what it really amounts to is that we categorize the distance to the nearest two other similar schools and we look at the enrolments. And then funding is provided based on the distances.

Generally for kindergarten it's 20 kilometres to 40, and for middle it's 30 to 50, and secondary it's 30 to 50. And then the number of students per grade, if the enrolment or the number of students in that particular grade is small, then there's a higher amount of grant recognition. If there's more students enrolled in that grade, then there's a lower grant recognition per student.

But it is a formula that does benefit and does allow for additional resources to be provided to these isolated schools.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, could you tell us how many schools are going to benefit from this change in the formula?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To just give a bit of background on why the change was made and this isolated schools factor was created, there is an external reference committee made up of all stakeholders who have provided a recent report. And just to quote what the report said, and I open quotes:

The committee reaffirmed its conclusion of last year. The small schools factor should be replaced with funding arrangements through the grant formula that more appropriately supports schools that are unavoidably isolated. It was noted that the department had conveyed in writing, in March 2000, its intention to pursue such a course. The committee noted that any changes along these lines implemented in 2001, should be phased in and should entail increased support for truly isolated schools.

And certainly that's what we have done in this budget. And the 2001-2002 expenditure for isolated school factor has increased to approximately \$17 million.

Ms. Draude: — I think you said increased to \$17 million.

The member from Cypress Hills would like to know if the schools at Consul, Golden Prairie, or Frontier will be affected by this change in the formula?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Chair, it's actually not possible

for us to determine whether Consul or Frontier at this point in time will be getting more. Just looking at the formula, recognizing that with regard to Consul, I think the nearest school is 68 kilometres. This factor would actually enhance their grant allotment.

But just to comment in terms of the overall package for rural Saskatchewan, when we look at this budget and we look at the basic per pupil rate increase of \$396, which is the largest increase in basic per pupil rate in some 20 years, that that is the unconditional side of the grant. So all school divisions have benefitted tremendously just from the unconditionality and recognition on the basic school rate.

We also recognize that there has been a significant increase in recognition on the expenditure for rural transportation.

And we also recognize that there was also an additional \$8 million factor with regard to the enrolment decline, which is another factor that we incorporate into the grant formula more specifically for rural Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I know that the school divisions who do get grants from the government were very pleased with the extra \$396 per child. But we also know that there's, I believe, 11 school divisions in the province who get no funding from the government and about 40 school divisions who get less than the 40/60 split.

So one of the issues that we talked about last year that your government put in place was the property tax rebate for the education portion of property tax, and I've been talking to a number of constituents who are still waiting patiently to get some money back.

And I'm wondering if . . . I believe it goes through municipal government, but I'm sure that your department has some impact or you must have had some calls wondering how you're going to deal with this issue. Could you tell me, is the funds actually started to flow out to people who have applied for this rebate on the education portion of property tax?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — The education tax property rebates are administered by the Department of Ag and Food. Certainly grant . . . the rebate money has been flowing. There was some concern that not all of the rebates could be provided for the year 2000 so we have extended the deadline for both rebate years — the year 2000, calendar year 2000, and calendar year 2001 — to February 15, 2002.

So any ratepayers out there who have not yet applied for year 2000, they have until next year to actually apply for those rebates.

The other thing to note with regard to the foundation operating grant is that this is a grant that is transparent, is recognized as being the most equitable way of providing funds to school divisions, and it is 100 per cent endorsed by all the stakeholders. So there is no possibility in terms of changing that unless there was complete consensus among the stakeholders. And at this point in time the current system is the one that is recognized.

And just to correct the member opposite with regard to the number of school divisions who will receive no grants or a zero grant or a negative grant for calendar year 2001, it will be four which are the same school divisions that were last year. So the amount of increase was significant enough to actually just maintain that particular negative or zero grant board.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:58.