

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to present a petition on behalf of a number of people in the community of Gull Lake and Tompkins. And the petition concerns their worries, frankly, about the recommendations in the Saskatchewan EMS (emergency medical services) development project report. And they have a petition which 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.

I so present.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of young people in Regina who are concerned about protection from tobacco and second-hand smoke. And the petition reads as follows:

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 ever pray.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to present a petition from petitioners who are concerned about two of government's Crown corporations, SaskPower and SaskEnergy, who both recently announced significant rate increases for residential and business customers. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its windfall oil and gas revenues to provide a more substantial energy rate rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, these petitioners reside in the community of Biggar and I'm pleased to present the petition on their behalf.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today on the EMS report:

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.

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

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition prepared by citizens concerned with the proposed weight restrictions to Highway 43. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to recognize the economic harm that the plan to close Highway 43 to heavy traffic will do to south-central Saskatchewan and instead to vote necessary funds to upgrade Highway 43 in order to preserve jobs and economic development in the area.

And the petition is signed from individuals from the communities from Vanguard, Swift Current, and Ponteix.

I so present.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition on behalf of young people who . . . and I'll read the prayer:

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.

And the signatures are from students, young students from the city.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people concerned about the state of the hospital in Swift Current. Mr. Speaker, 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, a thank you to the entire Rush Lake Hutterite colony, the Hofers and the Wipfs, who live there who have signed this petition.

I so present.

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of young people in Regina also concerned about the harmful effects of tobacco use. And 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 it is signed by students in Regina.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about their ambulance service. And the petition 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 affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And this is signed by citizens of Radville, Pangman, Ceylon, and Gladmar.

I so present.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition in support of a comprehensive tobacco control legislation. And the prayer reads as follows:

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 is duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

And I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from citizens concerned about the future of the Hafford Hospital. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary steps to ensure the Hafford Hospital remains open.

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

From the good citizens of Speers, North Battleford, and Richard.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here of citizens concerned with the rates charged by SaskEnergy, SaskPower.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a

portion of its windfall oil and gas revenues to provide a more substantial energy rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

From the towns of Davidson, Bladworth, and Girvin.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents concerned with the centralization of ambulance services. 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 the community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to the petitions comes from the communities of Mozart, Wynyard, Leslie, Elfros, Quill Lake, and Dafoe.

I 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.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

The centralization of ambulance services;

Swift Current's request for a new hospital;

Reverting highways to gravel; and

The protection of children from tobacco use.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to introduce two very important people in my life who are now in Alberta, my sisters. I'm fortunate because I know the true meaning of the saying, sisters by chance and friends by choice.

My sister, Carol Secondiak is from Brooks. She's an independent nurse practitioner. She works with private companies for pre-employment medicals and drug screening.

And my other sister, Judi Legaré is from Calgary. She's the purchasing agent and customer relations person for United Agri-Products and deals with many Saskatchewan agri-businesses. And I can monitor the farm situation in Saskatchewan by just phoning Judi.

So please welcome my sisters.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, it's a privilege to introduce, in your gallery, two guests with us today: John Schmeiser, the executive vice-president of the Canada West Equipment Dealers Association, and with him his administrative assistant, Carol Wieland. They are here for meetings that they're having with the Prairie Implement Manufacturers Association from their office in Calgary.

And I just ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Celebration of Easter and Passover

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this weekend marks the end of the most sacred time of the year for two of the world's great religions — Christianity and Judaism. Last Sunday was both the first day of Passover and Palm Sunday; tomorrow of course is Good Friday, followed by Easter Sunday, when many of us will celebrate the miracle of life out of death which is the heart of the Christian faith.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, this forum is not the place for sectarian comments, but I believe that as we prepare for our traditional spring break, it would do no harm for us to take with us the central messages of this season as it derives from the shared history of these two faiths.

From the Passover celebration we are reminded that as long as any are in want we are all still in bondage, as were the children of Israel. But at the same time, there is always the hope of redemption. And I quote:

For in the time of freedom, there is knowledge of servitude.
And in the time of bondage, the hope of redemption.

And from the lesson of Easter, as I mentioned, the message of wonderful consolation that out of death comes life; out of suffering, wisdom; out of sorrow, joy. The fact that both observances come at the beginning of spring, when the earth reaffirms this message, is no accident, Mr. Speaker. As the author of the Book of Psalms says:

Those who sowed with tears, will reap with songs of joy.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we prepare each in our own way to observe this weekend, we bring you and all members the prayer from the Passover service:

Peace for us. For everyone. For all people, this is our hope.
Next year in Jerusalem. Next year, may all be free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as well to

add some comments in regards to the special weekend that we're looking forward to celebrating. I know, Mr. Speaker, that the members in this Assembly, be they government or opposition or the independent member, Mr. Speaker, and including the Speaker, we're all looking forward to going home and joining together with family and friends.

And, Mr. Speaker, as we think of this special time of the year, it's the Easter season, it's a time when we pause for a moment to reflect on the love expressed by an Almighty Heavenly Father for his people.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know we're . . . as we get together with family, we all appreciate our families, and we enjoy our families, and we enjoy the time of sharing that time of fellowship together. Certainly the people who celebrate the Julian calendar are going to be taking time to spend the time with their family, and share in that special moment.

But this moment around Easter centres around a time of what, we use the term Good Friday, but, Mr. Speaker, it's anything but, when we think of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, the greatest aspect of the Easter season is the Resurrection, it's a time of new life. And we're into the spring season where we're going to see new life beginning to spring forth.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, on behalf of my colleagues, wish each and everyone in this Assembly a very blessed Easter season.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ninth Annual National Aboriginal Curling Championships

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, good news this Easter weekend. The Metis National Council, and the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan are proud to host the ninth annual National Aboriginal Curling Championships.

The event will take place April 12 to the 16 in Saskatoon, at the Granite Curling Club. This event will see teams from Saskatchewan, Alberta, Northwest Territories, Manitoba, Ontario, and British Columbia.

This event not only brings the best Aboriginal curlers to our great province, but they are pumping in tens of thousands of dollars to the economy in Saskatoon.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the host committee led by Maynard Whitehead, and Martin Aubichon, for a job well done.

I also want to welcome all curlers and visitors, and hope their stay is a memorable one.

I also want to also congratulate last year's champions. The junior women's champ was Sharise Kadachuk from Cumberland House. The junior men's champ was Doug Sinclair from Green Lake. The women's champ was Lena Dubray from Meadow Lake. The men's champ was Marshall Bear from Little Pine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:15)

Eastend Kinette Club Marks Anniversary

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to have this opportunity to publicly recognize the Kinette Club of Eastend on the occasion of its recent 40th anniversary. This past weekend I was invited to attend the celebration of this milestone at a special dinner and program, and it was my pleasure to bring greetings to the assembled guests on behalf of the provincial legislature and the people of Cypress Hills. More than a hundred turned out for that event including many former residents of the community and several of the charter members of the original club.

Now the Eastend Kinettes chartered their club on February 2, 1961 and they've been fundraising and serving the community ever since. Their activities include the provision of school scholarships, sponsoring swimming lessons, the kid's ID (identification) program, fundraising for the food bank, cystic fibrosis, and of course Telemiracle.

Now every thriving community owes its success and its future to its volunteers and a strong leadership. It is obvious to all who live in or visit the town of Eastend that a good deal of its leadership and volunteerism have roots in the Kinettes and their fellow organization, the Kinsmen.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and congratulate the many club members who have worked tirelessly for the past 40 years to provide community service to the town of Eastend and to the province generally. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Donates Equipment

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to announce to the Assembly that SaskPower has donated some new equipment to the Palliser campus of SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) for its electrical engineering technology program.

Once again, our Crowns are showing themselves to be responsible community citizens as well as excellent providers of necessary services. Although, Mr. Speaker, this time there is a wee bit of responsible self-interest in SaskPower's gift.

The electrical engineering lab has received a gift of \$5,000, which it has used to purchase four oscilloscopes, an instrument that is as vital to scientific research as it is difficult to pronounce. The oscilloscope is used for a wide range of measurements that one finds in electronics development and scientific research laboratories. These instruments will enable SIAST students in the program to more easily make the transition from classroom to workplace.

And here's where the self-interest comes in, Mr. Speaker.

SaskPower hires the graduates of this program. A Saskatchewan corporation hiring Saskatchewan youth to work and raise their families in the province. As Arnold Boldt, SIAST dean of technology, said:

This is a prime example of education and the workplace working hand in hand.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third year in a row SaskPower has donated money for equipment so the program can remain updated. As I said, one does not have to go far to look for good corporate citizens, as far as the Crowns, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Assiniboia Rebels Hockey Team to Compete for Keystone Cup

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to recognize the accomplishment of the Assiniboia Rebels Hockey Team of the Junior B League. They started out the playoffs in southern Saskatchewan with four straight wins against Canora. Then they went on to win the southern regional B championship with four straight wins against St. Philips.

Next, Mr. Speaker, they played against the Junior B championship from the North, Saskatoon Royals, winning in three straight games. Now they advanced to the Western Canadian Junior B Championship to compete for the Keystone Cup to be held in Maple Ridge, BC (British Columbia) on April 19 to 23.

Mr. Speaker, this is quite an accomplishment in 10-0, perfect record in playoff games, and they have not lost a game since January.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of everyone in the Assembly I'd like to congratulate the Assiniboia Rebels for their successes and wish them all the best in the Keystone Cup in Maple Ridge, BC.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Hosts First Nations Winter Games

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand before you today to speak about the 21st annual First Nations Winter Games being held in Prince Albert. The Prince Albert Grand Council has some experience hosting the games as it did so in 1995.

The opening ceremonies will take place at the Prince Albert Comuniplex from 2 to 4 p.m. on Easter Sunday. There is a change in format at the games, Mr. Speaker, from previous years. The games have been divided into two parts. The younger aged groups will compete in the first half of the games from April 15 to 17, and the older athletes will compete in the second part from April 18 to 19.

Between these two areas there will be a total of more than 3,000 athletes, coaches, and chaperones participating at this year's games.

Also new to this year's games, Mr. Speaker, will be the introduction of arm wrestling and female hockey. Another new aspect of the games will be a focus on wellness. Wellness booths will be set up at each venue for the purpose of promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, these games are a great opportunity for First Nations youth to participate in sport. I would like all the members of the House to join me in wishing good luck to the athletes and to the city of Prince Albert.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Estevan and District Music Festival

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After two weeks of performances, the Estevan and District Music Festival came to a successful conclusion last Wednesday afternoon at the Estevan Comprehensive School with a concert and awards presentation.

This year the adjudicators recommended eight individuals and one choir to perform at the Saskatchewan Music Festival Association finals to be held in Saskatoon from June 15 to 17. This is the largest contingent to ever be recommended to go from the Estevan festival.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I would also like to congratulate Shirley Andrist of Estevan for the recognition she received for the endless hours of volunteer work with the Saskatchewan Music Festival Association. Shirley is involved in many organizations in Estevan and the southeast of Saskatchewan, and is a tireless worker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in congratulating Shirley, and also congratulations to all performers at the Estevan Music Festival and the best of luck in the finals. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Fyke Commission Report

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday Ken Fyke offered some disturbing observations about Saskatchewan's health care system. After 10 years of NDP (New Democratic Party) mismanagement, Fyke describes Saskatchewan's health care system as fragile. He also says the health system has, quote: "yet to achieve an appropriate level of quality." Translation — the NDP health care system is failing.

And after 10 years of failed NDP health reform, the quality of health services is substandard. But what is the NDP response, Mr. Speaker? The Premier wants to form another committee and do nothing.

Mr. Speaker, how much longer does the Premier want to wait before taking action, to fix the NDP's broken health care

system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased this morning to have the opportunity to speak to the question by the member opposite on behalf of the Premier and the Government of Saskatchewan.

I want to say to the member opposite and to this House, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan gave to Canada a very important gift. Saskatchewan gave to Canada the gift of medicare and health care not only for this province, but for all Canadians.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in this House and this Assembly, the Premier and this government have put forward a plan. A plan to examine and look at this very important issue of health care and medicare in Saskatchewan and Canada.

And today, Mr. Speaker, we've outlined how that process will work. This will be about engaging all of Saskatchewan people in the dialogue. A very important dialogue, Mr. Speaker, that will be about the future of health care in Saskatchewan.

And I say to the member opposite, we should pay attention to what Mr. Fyke said in terms of how we build a strong, integrated health care system for Saskatchewan and Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party is thinking about the invitation to sit on the health care committee that the NDP proposed. But it's really hard to conclude that the Premier's latest committee is anything more than a stalling tactic.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP just spent \$2 million on the Fyke Commission. Fyke spent the past year consulting with the public and health care professionals and, while the Saskatchewan Party is disappointed with many aspects of the Fyke report, the fact is that Fyke has now reported and now is the time for the government to put an action plan in place.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier really think that hiding behind yet another committee and doing nothing for another six months is going to improve health care quality in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the House and to the member opposite, last year, as I sat in my chair on this side of the House, I listened to the member opposite get up on a daily basis when we talked about health care in this province and he continued to ask this Assembly and put the point forward about having a public audit of the health care system, continued to be on a daily basis his wordage.

We said to the member opposite we have a process in Saskatchewan today to examine what the member opposite was talking about, to have a discussion and examination in Saskatchewan with all Saskatchewan stakeholders, people who use the health care system about what our health care system should look like.

And today, Mr. Speaker, what we have in this province, we have a document that provides us with a bit of a template about what we should be looking at in terms of the future of health care in Saskatchewan. And I say to the member opposite, why don't you join the discussion, why don't you participate in the discussion about how we're going to . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. I would ask the Deputy Premier, in his responses, to address his responses through the Chair, please.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, the government's refusal to lead on health care reform is nothing short of pathetic. It comes at a tremendous cost to the people of Saskatchewan.

According to Mr. Fyke, the NDP's refusal to take action will cost hundreds of millions of wasted health care dollars. People will lose their lives unnecessarily because of error. Doctors and nurses will continue to leave Saskatchewan and hospital waiting lists will continue to grow. Mr. Speaker, it's time for the government to stop hiding and make a decision and to come up with their plan for what health care needs to be improved in, in this province.

Does the government support Fyke's report's plan to close 50 more hospitals in Saskatchewan and, if they don't, what is the government's plan for fixing the health care mess that their government has created.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I hear the member going on about issues that he, it sounds like, has already decided about what should happen in Saskatchewan. And I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that on this side of the House and through the process that we've indicated to Saskatchewan people, there haven't been any decisions made about what the future of this province's health care system should look like.

And I say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite. Yesterday the member opposite in this House says this: it is absolutely critical that people right across the province have a mechanism where they have ownership of the system rather than just be standbys and observe what's been given and come down on high, Mr. Speaker.

So I say to the member opposite, that's exactly the kinds of process that we're engaging in over the next couple of months — over the next couple of months.

And we support the member opposite's position on this, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the member opposite, you need to be part of that process in the way . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Just to remind the member once more, use the word they or he rather than you, and direct your remarks through the Chair.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the

NDP government, the NDP government has been hiding behind Roy Romanow to avoid taking responsibility for its health care mess. Well Roy Romanow is gone. The NDP has been hiding behind the Fyke commission, and the Fyke commission has now reported. And now the NDP wants to hide behind yet another committee for another six months before making any kind of decisions.

Meanwhile, Saskatchewan is on the verge of losing our College of Medicine in Saskatoon and just this week the NDP hid while more heart surgeons and psychiatrists are leaving the province.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for the government to stop hiding and start doing its job. What is the NDP's position on the Fyke report and when will the NDP take action to clean up the mess that they have created?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite asks the question about what are we going to do over the next six months. And I say to the member opposite, if he's been paying attention to the process, the process is clearly painted.

First of all in this province this year this government, through the work of the Finance department and the Treasury Board and a budget we put \$250 million into the health care system so that we can provide some assurances to the people of Saskatchewan over the next several months as we make the . . . as we have the discussion with Saskatchewan people about what the new health care system should look like in our province. So we put some money aside to make that happen.

(10:30)

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we've said to the people of Saskatchewan and this Assembly that we're going to have a dialogue with the people of Saskatchewan on the recommendations that Mr. Fyke has put forward to us.

So we're going to bring Mr. Fyke into the House, we're going to have all Saskatchewan people participate in watching what we're going to ask. We're going to have a process where we're going to have the stakeholders come into this Assembly or into this building, have an inclusive — inclusive discussion about what Saskatchewan people want in health care for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, all that we're getting from the NDP is stalling tactics. It took a year after the '99 election to set up the Fyke Commission. Mr. Fyke spent \$2 million and another year to complete his report. He literally had presentation from hundreds of Saskatchewan people. And now the NDP wants us to set up another health care committee and listen to the same hundreds of people present their same reports over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for the government to stop hiding. The Saskatchewan Party has provided a brief to the Fyke Commission and has laid out our belief of what needs to be done to improve health care in Saskatchewan, and the NDP has done nothing. We've expressed our opinion to the Fyke

Commission, and the NDP had refused to say anything.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of the NDP refusing to act is a further deterioration of the health care system in this province. Mr. Speaker, is that the kind of price this government is willing to pay in order to delay and hide longer?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, having a discussion with people of Saskatchewan, advising people of Saskatchewan about what the process might be over the next couple of months, Mr. Speaker, is not about a stalling tactic. This is not about a stalling tactic, this is about having a discussion with the people of Saskatchewan about what the future of one of the most important services in this province is going to be — health care, Mr. Speaker.

And the member opposite says that this is a stalling tactic. Now I would ask the member opposite to go to Saskatchewan people and say to them that we're not going to involve you in the process. Because this is what he's indicating — we should not involve the people of Saskatchewan in the process.

And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, we have a process. The process is going to be to take this document, Mr. Fyke's document, present it to Saskatchewan people, have the stakeholders come back and advise us so that we can build the most accessible, sustainable health care system in the future, not only for Saskatchewan, but I think Canadians will adopt, like we gave the gift of medicare, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Protection for Children in the Sex Trade

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Speaker, this NDP government still has no legislation in place to protect children involved in the child sex trade.

The Government of Alberta passed legislation to deal with this issue three years ago. And just last month they proclaimed amendments to make their original Bill even stronger. The Government of Alberta is taking action; Manitoba has taken action. Now it may not be perfect, but without question some children are being helped. Some children are being saved from a life of misery and degradation.

Mr. Speaker, I am starting to feel like the NDP government's intent in striking the Committee to Prevent the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children was to provide them with an excuse not to take action — to stall.

Mr. Speaker, this is an urgent matter. When is the government going to act? Will we see legislation in this session to protect children caught in the child sex trade?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House, attempted to work with the other side of the House to strike a committee to look at this horrible problem that is taking place in some of our communities, Mr. Speaker. We hope that this committee will report back to the House with its findings and make recommendations both with respect to legislation and programs and services that we might institute to help us and to help communities in Saskatchewan to better deal with this issue.

If that committee wants to come to the House after question period, to present its report with its recommendations, I am sure that on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we would be prepared to give leave for the committee to do just that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, there are some very clear indications that the NDP is using the all-party committee as an excuse to do nothing. They are dragging their feet. They are stalling. They don't want to make any decisions and they don't want to take action. As a result, we will not see legislation to deal with this issue this year.

Mr. Speaker, I have been raising this issue for five years now and the NDP has done nothing. And every year that passes, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of more young girls and boys become trapped and enslaved in this demeaning, degrading activity that destroys their lives.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP is using this all-party committee to abdicate their responsibility as a government. Mr. Speaker, when will the government take responsibility? When will the Minister of Justice push his members on the committee to get the report done immediately so he can introduce legislation this session?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. This is a serious problem in Saskatchewan in some of our communities, Mr. Speaker, and it falls upon all of us, both in the provincial government and in the communities, to find ways and means of dealing with this terrible problem, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the committee does have, and the member should know because she is one of the Chairs of the committee, that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, if they don't want the answer then perhaps we can move on to another topic.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, there is your answer. There is your example of co-operation. Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP wonders why the Saskatchewan Party is wary about getting involved in yet another all-party committee. Well this is why. It's because the NDP uses — they use these committees as an excuse to do

nothing.

Mr. Speaker, every day on the streets of Regina and Saskatoon and Prince Albert, pimps and johns are preying on children and destroying their lives while the NDP sits idly by and does nothing.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. How many more children, Mr. Premier, will have their lives destroyed before the NDP decides to take action?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, when the . . . Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the Legislative Assembly establishes a committee to investigate a certain matter, then it's incumbent upon that committee to set its own work plan and to make the plans come back to the House. If there are members on the committee that cannot be available to attend meetings and the committee can therefore not proceed, that is not something that is the responsibility of the government.

If for example — if for example, Mr. Speaker — the member who is asking the question cannot be available for the whole month of January because she has to go away on holidays, as an example, then that's hardly something that the government can do something about, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I just want to say that in debate we generally do not refer to the presence or absence of members in the House and I think that would extend to committees.

Financial Assistance for Farmers

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this morning are for the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, earlier in this session we had an emergency debate on agriculture in this House which resulted in an all-party resolution asking for more financial support for Saskatchewan farmers from the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said he wanted all of us to speak with one voice in support of more federal aid for the farm families of this province. And this legislature did that. Mr. Premier . . . The Premier said that he would send a strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister indicating the extreme urgency for the situation.

Well it's been several weeks now, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, have you heard anything at all from the Prime Minister of this country? And we would ask you today if you would table the response that you have received, if you have received anything at all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would ask that all questions also be phrased through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that I did say in this House, and I say to the member opposite again, that this Premier and this government continues to pressure the federal government for additional farm aid money — for additional farm aid money.

And what we've done, Mr. Speaker, is we've sent our correspondence on to the Prime Minister, as has Manitoba sent their correspondence off to Alberta. And we have today, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Manitoba, who is the minister — the first minister of all the premiers in Canada — and he has corresponded, as I understand, with members from Ontario, from his counterpart in Ontario, with his counterpart from Alberta, and with his counterpart from Quebec, and they are looking at a strategy as to how they might be able to encourage the federal government to provide some additional dollars to Canadian farmers — not only Saskatchewan but Canadian farmers.

So that process is underway; continues to work hard for Saskatchewan/Canadian farmers. We'll continue to do our work Mr. Speaker, from that perspective.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a common theme here today. It starts with the NDP's inaction on every issue. They can't make a decision so they try to get everyone onside to take the heat off of them. That's what happened with the emergency resolution, Mr. Speaker.

Well I would like to say the heat is back on, Mr. Speaker, on this government. The Premier and his strongly worded letter have got no response whatsoever from the federal government. Roy Romanow, who isn't even the premier of this province any longer, at least got the ear of the government in Ottawa and got a job. This Premier can't even get that Prime Minister to return his phone call.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan families, farm families are simply weeks and in some cases days away from the beginning of their spring seeding operations. They can't take any more delays from this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, what is the Premier's plan now to secure more farm assistance for the people of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that in this province today we have an additional \$500 million for Canadians and \$120 million for Saskatchewan farmers because this minister and this government and other ministers from our prairie provinces went to Ottawa and said we need to have more money for Saskatchewan/Canadian farmers.

That's why we have \$500 million, brand new dollars, and that's why we're continuing to fight for 500 million more new dollars.

But I want to say to the member opposite who is the ag critic, we haven't seen the member opposite at any function, event. He hasn't talked to a farm organization, a farm group. And he should have a discussion with his friend, Mr. Stockwell Day, because Mr. Stockwell Day has everyday the Liberal caucus in his view and purview where he can ask the questions.

Mr. Stockwell Day, whom the member opposite supported on a regular basis, hasn't asked a question of the federal ministers in more than two months, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the member opposite, what have you done to work with the other . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is all so typical of the NDP — all talk, no action, no decision-making, no leadership in any area. And after the 1999 election they set up an all-party stakeholder agriculture committee and then they dictated the most narrow mandate possible. And the minute we raised concerns about the inaction of this provincial government, they accused us of breaking ranks and disbanded the committee.

They did it in a purely partisan effort. It had nothing to do with helping farm families whatsoever. Instead they set up an ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) committee with a long, obscure mandate to help revitalize rural Saskatchewan.

But in the meantime is this government doing anything whatsoever? No, they are hiding behind the committee and they will use it as an excuse to do nothing once again.

(10:45)

Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture tell the farm families of this province what actions he intends to put in place with respect to a long-term safety net before spring seeding?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite that our record is clear about what we've done for farm families over the last several years and the last several months.

But I say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, about what his interest is in supporting rural Saskatchewan families and communities. And this is what the member opposite said on January 18 of 2001, from *The Western Producer*. This is what he said and I quote: "Boyd said propping up small operations won't help," Mr. Speaker.

He doesn't believe in small farms in this province. He doesn't believe in agriculture and what was the response, Mr. Speaker, from what the people of Saskatchewan are saying about his response? And they say this, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: In *The Western Producer* of January 18, Boyd said, speaking at the Saskatchewan Party crop production show in Saskatoon says, "small farmers with small livestock operations are completely uneconomical."

And what the people from Waldeck says is this: Mr. Boyd is developing his corporate model. He knows very little about

agriculture. He needs to get connected with Saskatchewan people rather than disassociating himself, as he's been completely with . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fyke Commission Report

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. The present budget is not sustainable. Not only does it spend 200 million more than current revenue and projects 300 million in increased Crown debt, but health spending increases a staggering 11.5 per cent at a time when the economy is growing at 2 to 3 per cent.

The Fyke report has made clear that if we continue to have health spending at 4 to 6 times the growth of the economy, there will soon be nothing left for any other program. For the past nearly a year the government has avoided taking any action, saying they needed the Fyke report.

Now we have the Fyke report. Their answer is we need a study into the study, a commission on the commission, and we will have a report on the report.

When will the government take responsibility? When will it act or is it simply going to rag the puck and get groups to come in here to repeat what they have already told the Fyke Commission?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite that he should understand, Mr. Speaker, about the process that we've put into place, because Saskatchewan people have said, across the province including people from North Battleford, have said that we want to be involved in a process. We want to be included in a process. And we want an opportunity to express our opinion and position as it relates to the recommendations of Mr. Fyke.

And that's what this government is about, Mr. Speaker, it's about giving people in Saskatchewan an opportunity to respond to the recommendations.

And we say to the members opposite, we say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, why don't you become part of the solution as opposed to being part of the problem, Mr. Speaker? Why don't you become part of the solution?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the budget projects transfers from the Government of Canada of over \$1.1 billion, or 377 million in equalization. If the Ontario economy slows or if resource revenue rises, that equalization figure could dramatically fall. And if that happens, the unsustainable nature of this year's budget is going to become apparent this year rather than two or three years down the road.

At least the government needs to be congratulated on not blowing the entire \$500 million in reserve, as advocated by the Saskatchewan Party, because we may in fact not have that money in reserve.

Nonetheless, Fyke is right. We need a sustainable system. The

present system is not sustainable. Does this government truly want to govern? Does it want to take responsibility? Or has it already abdicated its responsibility for managing this province in favour of consulting, consulting, consulting . . .

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very sorry to see that the Liberal member from North Battleford has been so badly affected by the spirit of doom and gloom that dominates the benches over there.

Because it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. The member talks about the level of spending. What I'd like to say to the people of the province is that level of spending on highways, for example, is going to mean the twinning of the bridge crossing the river in that member's community. And it's very unfortunate for the people of the Battlefords that that member from North Battleford voted against twinning the . . . (inaudible) . . .

That member from North Battleford, since he left the coalition government, voted against increased funding for education, Mr. Speaker. That member from North Battleford is voting against sustainable tax reductions to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

And that may be good politics in the short term for the member, Mr. Speaker, but it's not good politics for the people of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Eagles: — To introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a couple of guests from my constituency that are in your gallery. John Len was the former mayor for the city of Estevan, and Bernie Collins was the former Member of Parliament for Souris-Moose Mountain and a former mayor of the city of Estevan.

Would you all join me in welcoming these two gentlemen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wiberg: — With leave, Mr. Speaker, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a good deal of pleasure this morning, Mr. Speaker, I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, the present mayor of the city of Prince Albert and a former member of this Assembly many, many years ago. It's good to see you in Regina today, Mr. Mayor, and I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — To introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join with the member opposite in welcoming the mayor from the city of Prince Albert. He, as you will know, was a former member of this legislature. He added a lot to the colour of the politics here in Saskatchewan and so I'd like to welcome Mr. Cody, Mayor Cody, to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — By leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — I too would like to join with the member from Estevan in welcoming John Len and Bernie Collins, fine community leaders from a fine city. And just to recognize that Bernie Collins has observed proceedings before and was an excellent MP (Member of Parliament) when he represented Souris-Moose Mountain. And the same goes for Mr. Len, who was a fine mayor when he was mayor of Estevan. And I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Shall we just revert back to introduction of guests.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I too want to join with the members who have welcomed Mayor Len and Bernie Collins to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon . . . or this morning.

I want to say that the strength and success particularly of Mayor Len's time while he was the mayor in Estevan had a lot to do with where he came from. And most won't know this, but Mr. Len had his origin and beginnings in Yorkton and his roots are there.

And so I want to recognize the tremendous contribution that he's made to the city of Estevan because most of where he got his skills and technique came during the time that he lived in Yorkton, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being an open and

accountable government, I'm extremely pleased to answer questions nos. 61 through 66.

The Speaker: — Questions 61 to 66 inclusive have been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund

Justice

Vote 3

Subvote (JU01)

The Chair: — I'd ask the minister if he'd please introduce his officials here with him today.

(11:00)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to introduce, on my left, John Whyte who's the deputy minister of Justice and the Deputy Attorney General. Doug Moen, the executive director of public law, community justice, on my right. Mike Pestill, the acting director of administrative services branch is just behind us. Colleen Matthews, the executive assistant to the deputy minister is right behind me. Don Head, the new, slimmed-down Don Head is the executive director of corrections; he is right here on my right; along with John Baker, the executive director of law enforcement services; and a number of other officials also, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to the minister and to his officials here this morning. And we'll enjoy spending some time going through some of the details of the budget and probably also some of the directions that we see in the Justice department.

And I would like to at first open this up to the minister to sort of give us an outline of where he sees his department going and what his direction is for the next while. We've just had a new budget; we've had a Speech from the Throne. And I'd like for him to outline to us and people of the province what differences and what directions he has in mind for his department in the coming years.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chair, let me thank the member for his first question. Let me thank him too for his co-operation in indicating the main issues he wanted to raise with us today. It makes it easier on the officials.

What I might say, Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Chair, in general — I've promoted you already — in general terms is that the department remains committed to ensuring that Saskatchewan people can live in safe and secure communities; that they feel safe in their homes, their neighbourhoods, and their communities; and that we expend resources to ensure that that happens. Everybody, I think we will all agree, has the right to that safety and security and it's our job to do our best to ensure that that is available to them.

With that in mind we have some significant issues that we're

addressing at the present time. And we do this more in the context of dialogue and working with communities than we do in terms of directing communities.

And I might raise with the member for example the question of Aboriginal justice, the relationship between Aboriginal people and the justice system which, as we know, has been troubled over the years. We are working with Aboriginal communities, with the justice system as a whole, police, people in communities, to ensure that we have a direction which will work and which will ensure that the justice system is more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people.

And I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to significant new directions in this regard in the future. And I would want to commend our partners in the police services, in Aboriginal communities, for their work in moving this along with us.

There are significant new initiatives in the budget, and significant new commitments of resources to continue directions we've generated in the past.

And the member will know of more money for organized crime units. We hear stories in the media, regularly, and we know the importance of addressing organized crime in our province and across the country.

We've committed more resources to the police services working in that area, to SHOCAP (serious and habitual youth offender comprehensive action program), which is the serious and habitual . . . young offenders — I know I should never try and read these things — but you know what it is, and it works very effectively, as you know, in addressing those most serious young offenders. And we've seen significant reductions in criminal behaviour on the part of those young offenders who are in that system. More resources for that in our communities.

Significant commitment to community policing. Just a conference, earlier in the week, where we met with city officials, with those in the justice community to focus on new directions in community policing. And we are constantly working with rural and northern communities as we address their concerns and attempt to meet their needs.

There are, Mr. Speaker, some significant additions in the budget. More money for policing than we've ever had before. Over the last two years, record new commitment to policing.

But all in the context, Mr. Chair, of our commitment to ensuring safe and secure communities, a justice system which is trusted and respected by the community at large and a justice system which serves to assist communities in developing social order, and an ability to move forward in both economic and social terms.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Chair. Thank you for that answer, and I think there's a number of things we'll want to explore a little further. Mentioned among that answer, some of the ideas were to have some greater emphasis on organized crime, and we'll want to have quite a number of questions on that in a little while — emphasis on youth offenders, rural and northern communities, more money for policing.

What I didn't hear in that — and it may have been an accidental omission; we'll give an opportunity for correction on that later on if it needs to be — is there was nothing in there on rehabilitation. And I appreciate the beginning of that particular answer which basically said that the key emphasis was safety and security and I think that is obviously a prime secure.

And I think that's one of the directions that we always hope that rehabilitation will take is to ensure that we don't have a criminal reoffending and breaking that peace and security that we wish for all of our citizens in this particular province. So I think those two need to work together.

I would like to go down one of the roads that was mentioned and that is more policing. And I know the promise has been made that we would have more policemen in Saskatchewan than we've had in the past. And I guess we had a promise, I believe in 1999, for 200 more policemen. And I have a question on how many police officers there were in 1999 and how many we have today to see how far down that particular road we've come.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. Let me first of all thank the member for raising the question of corrections and our commitment to rehabilitation in corrections and indeed in our community placement and so on.

Let me first go to the question of police officers. The member I'm sure will notice as he drives from Regina to Rosthern that there are now many more RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officers on the highways. I don't know if he's met them on the highways but they are there.

We have in fact, Mr. Chair, more police officers than our complement would require so we are overstaffed in a sense in our RCMP contingent. That will come down to appropriate levels as some readjustments and reassignments take place, but we have over the last 18 months added some a hundred and . . . almost 150 RCMP officers to our police service here in Saskatchewan.

And in addition, I think it's right, that about 10 per cent of those RCMP officers are of Aboriginal descent. So we've made major strides in RCMP complement and also in the numbers of First Nations and Metis officers in the RCMP. And the member may be aware that just this week Russ Mirasty was promoted to inspector in the RCMP, an important step in terms of responding to the policing needs of our province, and we all congratulate him on that.

In terms of policing in general, as I mentioned, this budget provides over \$6 million in new funding for policing, including the 1.6 million for new police officers. That's an increase of \$11 million or 16 per cent over the past two years — the largest infusion of new money into policing in the history of the province.

So, Mr. Chair, I think you can see the commitment of this government to ensuring safety and security in communities through the presence of police officers in our communities.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, let me go on to talk about corrections. We've made again significant stride in our

corrections facility under the executive directorship of Don Head, focusing more than we've done before on rehabilitation. Significant commitment to comprehensive case management. The healing lodge at Prince Albert is a good example. Programs on addiction, on anger management, Mr. Chair. Work in the communities with as much commitment to community corrections as possible. Implementing effectively conditional sentences. A whole range of new initiatives and significant new dollars in corrections, in our corrections field.

And I think the member will be aware that a large part of our new staff are in fact in corrections. They were people who were working before but who are now brought within our full budget. So I think a major commitment in the policing area, and in the corrections area too, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Continuing along the area of the numbers of officers that were committed in 1999, which was 200, we were just told, Mr. Chair, that 150 RCMP have been added, and that's now overstaffed, which means that number will be going down.

So my question is again and continues, when are the rest of these 200 are going to be added, who are willing to be added? Because obviously, if that answer is significant, then it probably won't be going into the RCMP area if they are at presently overstaffed. So where is that commitment of 200 more people going to be completed and where will they be stationed?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chair, with regard to the member's specific question about the numbers of police officers, as he will know, 20 new police officers are added this year, 25 last year, forming 45 out of that commitment of 200.

I'd like to say to the member: our commitment to safe and secure communities is a significant one. Our commitment to ensuring that adequate policing levels are available to make sure that those communities are safe and secure remains a high priority.

In the budget, significant pressures from rural residents, from our health care system, from higher education, all those things serve to slow the implementation of our 200 police officer commitment.

I want to say that our commitment remains. We have two more years left in the mandate, and I look forward and this department looks forward to filling those vacancies in the years ahead.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. A number of interesting things were raised there. I think the fact that since '99 you've only had 45 people added out of that commitment of 200 is a little frightening. And then we're supposed to wait for the rest, for the rest of the two-year mandate. We're not sure if that's going to happen. There's many people that would doubt very much that that mandate will actually last that long.

And I think the other question that comes up is if security and safety is a key item, this should have come much nearer the top of budget agendas and concerns than it probably is. I could spend hours on anecdotal situations indicating that there's definitely a shortage of police officers around the province.

Staying with the area of policing and police officers, I'd like to have some information presented on who presently . . . or where the police officers are being trained, and basically how this is funded and who funds that and what the minister sees as the future in training of our police officers in Saskatchewan is.

(11:15)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chair, in response to the member's questions, there were a number there . . . let me say that he won't find a stronger proponent for building safe and secure communities and policing those communities than me, Mr. Speaker.

And yet, we have to appreciate, as I know he does, the requirements and the needs of the residents of rural Saskatchewan with major responses in this budget; concerns about health care again, major investments, education and so on. And those pressures are all brought to bear on the general budgeting process.

But within the context of that, the member will know and I think should be impressed by the work done by the province and the federal government and by the RCMP and Assistant Commissioner Boucher to ensure that we have almost 150, 147 — I think it is — new RCMP officers over the last about 16 months. This is a major, major achievement which will contribute significantly to the safety and security of our communities, and of course, in large measure outside of the larger municipalities.

He asked about the training. The training at the RCMP depot, that training capacity is now working full bore. He will know that there was a time when there weren't as many police officers trained at the RCMP depot. But now it's working at full capacity with . . . including amongst other things, including a whole contingent of Aboriginal officers and another one in the works. That is a federal responsibility in regard to our contract with the federal government over the RCMP providing provincial police services to us.

In terms of provincial, our provincial or our municipal police services, the Police College, is essentially jointly funded by the province and by the cities. And he will know too, that that is contributing significant new police officers to our municipalities.

Let me say that that partnership between the University of Regina, the Police College, and indeed, the police services in municipalities is going very well. He may have visited the college or the graduation, but generating . . . graduating terrific citizens who risk their lives on a daily basis for their fellow citizens.

He also raised the issue of, well where will these police officers go. And let me just list, Mr. Chair, the communities which have benefited . . . which will benefit this year from the province's commitment to providing police officers: Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Estevan, Weyburn, and North Battleford, as well as some highway patrol.

So significant numbers of communities which have received support from the province. And I think if you ask those mayors

and those police chiefs, they're glad of that, of the extra police officers to serve their communities; and of course, we'll be continuing to work with them in the future as we fill more vacancies.

I hope that answers all the questions the member asked.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And I'll try and refrain from putting my questions in such a barrage next time, and try and get them a little more singly organized. I've been making notes on some of your answers and I have two things that seem to conflict a little bit. And I'll ask you to clarify on that.

You made a statement earlier on that 150 RCMP had been added and then shortly after that, you said that the number of police that had been added additionally, were a number of 20 and 25, in two different years, for a total of 45.

So on the one hand, I believe, we had 45 were added, and on the other hand there were 150 RCMP added. Could you clarify those two numbers that you gave, please?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The 147, I think it is, Mr. Chair, represents new RCMP officers in the province. Add to that the 45 police officers under the commitment to provide new police officers to our municipal and RCMP services. So, a total of, well, getting on for 200 altogether.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of the answers recently just referred to highway patrol and that there had been an increasing number; also whether I had noticed these between Saskatoon and Regina. Haven't noticed any for years. I guess it helps in being noticed by one a long time ago.

But I do have a question on the highway patrols. Some time ago there was a move to take people who were serving on highway patrols out of more rural communities and moving them into the cities. For example, my community of Rosthern had a detachment; I believe lost two officers that were moved to Saskatoon.

So my question is basically, first of all, is I question the efficiency of this on a number of areas. One is obviously there's a fair bit of time involved from moving from the station in Saskatoon to outside where the jurisdiction begins.

The second part comes in, and I notice this very much when I drive Highway 12 or Highway 11, both of which are twinned for a certain distance outside of the city, those twin sections are very safe. Very seldom do I ever see anyone pulled over on those areas because the traffic flow on those two highways for the first distance out of Saskatoon is very smooth and very safe. Then as soon as we get into the single-lane areas that sort of start at past Martensville and close to Osler, that's where we see a lot of the accidents happening.

And so if we look at the accident occurrences, taken on both Highway 12 and Highway 11, there are on those stretches that aren't divided, meaning essentially that the officers coming out of Saskatoon waste time coming out of the city, drive down quite a lengthy stretch where the flow is very safe, then when they get down to the single lanes, they're a long ways out of Saskatoon. To me that seems highly inefficient.

Added to that, in the emergency situations that take place in rural towns, these officers just really aren't there to sort of fill in, in many cases. So clarification of whether you see that working, and a comment on some of the concerns that I've raised on that particular area.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member raises the question of the numbers of RCMP officers in different communities. And I think the genesis of those kinds of concerns comes from levels which were below complement in the past, leading up to about October two years ago. That raised concerns in communities, and I'm sure the member heard them just as I did, just as we all did.

As I said, the RCMP is now up full complement, indeed a little over full complement. As some of the reallocations and reassignments take place, we will have the highway contingent to full strength at 60. It's now at around 40. So that will be a full contingent and maybe then the member will see some of them. They're the guys with the red lights behind you, Ben . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and blue as well, yes.

The issue of how many police officers there should be in each community is always an issue of major concern. We review this and Commissioner Boucher reviews this on a regular basis. We hear from communities about the need for more police officers. We don't very often hear the need for fewer. And Commissioner Boucher addresses these concerns on a regular basis.

The focus obviously is ensuring that there are enough . . . or that the crime rate in a particular community is responded to with an adequate number of police officers. In those communities where crime is lower, plainly there's a need for fewer police officers in order to ensure the safety and security of those communities.

I know that that raises concern with communities who see, because they're more law abiding, they see the potential to lose police officers. Our job and our effort and our commitment, as is with the RCMP, is to try to ensure that there are the right number of police officers for communities and for the communities they serve.

I think the member will not have heard as many concerns about this recently as in the past. It's a matter we continue to work on. It's a matter of balance; it's a matter of trying to ensure that there are the right number in communities. And as I say, very rarely do communities think that there are enough.

But we work on this, you know, in a reasonably scientific way and ensure that communities get the kind of service they deserve. And the member will also know that some communities which had their own municipal police service have more recently decided to disband them and use our RCMP services as well.

I might also say that, and the member will know this, that police services co-operate with each other all the time. The member probably has been with the police services, maybe from Corman Park or from Saskatoon or from the RCMP, and he will know that when there is a need for joint action and joint response that is forthcoming. And also we have, as we

mentioned earlier dealing with serious crime and other matters, lots of interaction between the RCMP and municipal police services as we address the significant concerns that citizens have.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think we had the proverbial square pegs in round holes. We had a great answer and we had a great question, but they just didn't seem to fit with each other.

My question was . . . and I'm going to have to ask it again. The inefficiencies that I related to very specifically as far as the highway patrol coming out of Saskatoon on Highway 11 and Highway 12, that they're enforcement areas where they need to do the enforcing and where they do do the enforcing is on the single lanes.

Just had another death on Highway 11 just last Sunday, again off the divided area probably about 25, 30 minutes out of Saskatoon. That's where the accidents are happening. That's where the patrol needs to take place.

Why then are these people stationed in Saskatoon when they could be stationed in those communities where they're right next door to it? And they wouldn't be wasting 30 minutes of driving on the highway to get out to where the critical areas are, and they wouldn't be wasting another 20, 30 minutes getting out of the city onto those particular highways.

So I thought that was a fairly reasonable and simple question relating to the efficiency of it. So I'm going to ask for that particular . . . ask that particular question again.

I'll add another one to it, and that is: if we're going to increase that contingency of traffic officers from 40 to 60, are those again going to be plugged into the city or are they going to take this opportunity to put those into those areas where they will be the most efficiently used?

(11:30)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — I should assure the member that I wasn't deliberately avoiding his question but it's sometimes hard to keep track of the eight questions he asks me all at the same time. It's not a problem for him; it's a problem for me.

There are two responses I'd like to give to the member's question, and it's a valid concern for all of us who travel the highway.

At the present time highway patrols are located in 14 communities. And in terms of the member's constituency, there would be some in Prince Albert, some in Saskatoon, and the extra 20 will be allocated amongst those 14.

I think too that once the summer is over and the reassignment of RCMP officers is complete, the member will see a situation which we have much more closely the right number of RCMP officers for each community.

Efficiencies require some kind of regionalization and that's why they're in Saskatoon and Prince Albert. He will know that they . . . well he says that he doesn't know, but they do travel from

one to the other and they do pull people over. I've never had it happen to me but I've seen it.

And I think though that the main point is that there are efficiency questions, and the RCMP officers are going to need to be where most of the traffic is. The member though raises a good point about single lane versus double lane. Let me assure him that we will take his concerns into account and I'll get back to him on the specifics for the summer as soon as I can.

And that if he has any specific concerns at any time, or indeed any of the members opposite do, they should contact either our office or Commissioner Boucher and we will attempt to address any concerns they have as quickly as possible.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Talking a bit about what's happening with Corman Park, I met with people from Corman Park, also Dalmeny, also my constituency had their own police force, and they are also working together with the community of Hepburn. And I know Hepburn is negotiating with them to sort of use their own police force there as well.

A bit of a philosophical question at this particular point. In the Speech from the Throne we had a lot made out on a new government department, Rural Revitalization. And I think in some of the things we've just discussed with the minister in the past few minutes, it would be just a great opportunity for some of that rural revitalization to take place.

And I'm wondering if he's had any discussion with the new minister from the new department to see if, when we're looking at these sorts of things, to take those officers that are now in an urban area that could be working more efficiently if they were in a rural area, put that all together into Rural Revitalization. And they have about close to; I believe a million dollars to spend on just dreaming up those ideas.

Here's an idea, and I'm wondering if he's planning on meeting with that particular minister to see if Justice can play a part in this whole concept.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — In response to the member's question — or it might have been more of a point — I share his view that the presence of RCMP officers is an important contributor to rural revitalization. There needs to be safety and security in our communities in order for our communities to survive and thrive.

And I think he raises a useful point in terms of looking at the picture globally, looking at all aspects of rural life and all aspects of government policy as it applies to rural life, which is the point behind the new secretariat, the new focus on rural revitalization.

It's many components, not just about agriculture of course, but it also includes, as I've agreed, the notion that those who provide safety and security in our communities are there in adequate numbers to ensure that that can be done. And I look forward to talking with the minister in that regard, and with other ministers too.

I might though add that the RCMP is responsible under its contract with us for allocating resources in accordance with the needs of various communities across the province, and I doubt

that the member would want me to be dictating how the RCMP allocates its resources, and I don't think he's suggesting that. But we always need to communicate with the RCMP any concerns we might have about adequate policing in our communities, and I know they respond effectively and quickly to those kinds of concerns.

I might also say that while crime is reducing in many of our southern communities, the complement of RCMP officers in those communities remains significant and it remains capable of handling the issues in those communities.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, the minister earlier on made just a passing reference to, I believe, fighting, sort of, organized crime, basically in the area of gangs and this sort of thing. And I'd probably like him to comment at this time how much benefit he sees to our particular province, particularly in some of the new legislation that's coming out of the federal area on giving the police some more authority and permission to fight gang warfare.

I think having read some of the information on that, on the one hand we tend to applaud it and say if we can keep gang warfare down, that's great. But on the other hand there's a definite area of concern that's being raised by a lot of the public to say, well how far is this going to go and what's all going to be allowed. And I'd like for the minister to comment on what he's aware of in that area and what his position is on that.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well let me say how much I share the member's view that organized crime, crime organized in gangs, is a serious matter for our province. So we have to accept that it is here in Saskatchewan as it is across the country. There are different structures, there are different types of gangs, but it is clear that we have to address this issue seriously.

We participate in various federal/provincial initiatives in order to build an effective strategy here. And we plainly, as would the member, strongly support action to address the threat of organized crime in our society.

And indeed at ministers of Justice meetings last September, there was further discussion and an endorsement of a national agenda on organized crime which attempts to coordinate our efforts in a more effective way and, as the member will know, includes legislative changes to respond to some of the challenges that law enforcement officers face when dealing with these organizations. And we support the federal government's efforts in ensuring that the police have the tools necessary to do the work they need to do.

And I'd say just in terms of our commitment, we have serious crime units in Regina and Saskatoon, and also this year we will be assisting Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Estevan, and Weyburn with their serious crime units. So this is a big challenge, a big issue.

The member will be aware, as all of us will be, of the major initiatives by police services across the country over the last few months with hopefully some major effects. We have to focus on our serious crime, gang issues here. We're doing so and we're assisting communities to have the resources in order to do that.

But I just kind of reiterate that this is a coordinated effort with the federal government, with our municipal police services, with the RCMP, and that, as I said, in this budget, significant new commitments to that.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you for that answer, Mr. Chairman. I would like to spend a bit more time on that particular issue of organized crime. And I would like for the minister to outline some fairly specific details as to what leeway is going to be given to police officers in the new legislation as far as allowing them to fight crime and break some crimes with impunity in the fighting of crimes. And then what areas could be covered underneath that, or is this just a carte blanche that covers them in any activity in any research and investigation they choose to do?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member raises the question of new initiatives at the federal level to address organized crime. He will have probably seen that legislation. If he hasn't, we can provide him with some more details.

But these proposed amendments will introduce new offences and tough sentences that target various degrees of involvement with criminal organizations; also will improve the protection of people who play a role in the justice system from intimidation against them and their families, and the member will know that that's a serious concern.

The Bill also simplifies the current definition of criminal organization in the Criminal Code. It also broadens powers of law enforcement officers to forfeit the proceeds of crime and, in particular, the profits of criminal organizations and to seize property that has been used in a crime, and also establishes an accountable process to protect law enforcement officers from criminal liability when they commit what would otherwise be considered illegal actions while investigating and infiltrating criminal organizations.

If the member needs more information and a more detailed response on that federal legislation, I'd be happy to provide him with it later in the day.

Let me though just briefly refer to the specific measures that Saskatchewan has engaged upon to deal with gangs and organized crime in the province. We provide three-quarters of a million dollars a year to Regina and Saskatoon for their serious crime task force units. We also have \$635,000 a year for a serious habitual offender comprehensive action program which targets repeat offenders, many of whom can be expected to be in gang activities.

We've also signed a federal provincial agreement under the forfeited property sharing regulations which ensures that provincial revenues to criminal intelligence service in Saskatchewan and for joint operations has been increased.

We have, as I've mentioned earlier, joint operations between the municipal forces and the RCMP.

The RCMP has an integrated proceeds of crime unit which attempts to seize property from organized crime and liquidate it, a number of specific measures, as well as the regular kind of police activity in the province, Mr. Chair.

(11:45)

Ms. Julé: — Good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and good afternoon . . . good morning, I guess it is, to you officials.

Mr. Minister, I have had a constituent of mine that had some problems with the practice of a dentist. And she pursued, with her lawyer, the possibility of suing the dentist for malpractice, I guess. And what she was told by the lawyer was that she was bringing this issue forward after a one-year period of time since the malpractice had taken place . . . or the alleged malpractice had taken place.

So she was told by her lawyer that there is a one-year limitation on liability, and that's on the work that dentists do. But she noted also that for doctors there's a two-year limitation as far as a client being able to sue them.

So why are there different limitations for doctors than there are for dentists?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — There are a number of provisions that historically have been — of this nature — have been different, Mr. Chair. The fact that there are historical reasons doesn't make it right, and we are reviewing the whole issue of limitation periods at the present time and look forward to making changes in the near future.

There isn't any particular reason why one profession should have a different limitation period over another, and so we're ensuring that this will come together.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair, to the minister, are you aware of anyone else that has come forward with this type of a grievance?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well we know, Mr. Chair, that this is a significant issue. Plainly, short limitation periods make it more difficult for people to adequately respond to injuries they may experience. It flows from the time at which the injury might be known, so it's not necessary just from the time that the injury was incurred.

But there is a . . . we do have consultation paper out at the moment. We've had representations from many groups, including lawyers and citizens, and other law reform commissions are looking at these questions too.

But we have a consultation paper out. We do expect to respond quickly. It is a serious matter. And I look forward to clarifying the situation and introducing legislation at the earliest possible opportunity.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, if there are consultations in process about this matter, I would expect that that would point to the fact that there are some very major concerns about it that have been brought to your department's attention and to you as the Minister of Justice.

And so I'm asking why has this issue not been addressed. I'm asking you also how the dentists are responding to this, or if they've given you any indication of whether they'd be willing to move on this matter or not.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member asks a specific question about whether we receive complaints from individuals. We receive some, but not a lot. But we do know that this is an area of the law which needs to be clarified and needs to be addressed.

It is not as straightforward as it might initially appear, bearing in mind that it deals with the whole area of injuries caused negligently by members of our society against others, not just in a professional capacity but in any other capacity too.

That's why the consultation process is taking place. That's why we had the consultation paper out to, for example, municipalities, all the professional organizations, lawyers, the health care system, really across the province.

It is an urgent matter. It's complex and we're moving as fast as we can on it. And we do look forward to introducing legislation as soon as possible. We know it has to be addressed and other provinces know that too.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you again, Mr. Chair. Going back to that area of organized crime and the legislation that exists in that area and, as you mention, there is some new legislation coming forward. My question is, is there any opportunity for the criminal liability that we were discussing that's coming through from the federal system right now, is there any area right now that is open for police officers to commit a crime without liability?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member raises an important question, in particular for law enforcement officers as they go about this difficult task. It's also an important issue of course for citizens at large because we do have to ensure that our law enforcement complies with the general standards of justice within our society.

But in response to the specific question, the Supreme Court of Canada has responded to this issue in the case of Campbell and Shirose and sets out some criteria for exempting police officers from criminal responsibility for acts they commit in the pursuit of their duties.

Understandably, I think the police wanted some specificity, more concrete provisions than a judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada. And that's why the federal government, the Minister of Justice, has responded with provisions in the new amendments to the Criminal Code dealing with the specific provisions. And I stated a number of them in an earlier response.

If the member would like any more detail, we'd be more than happy to provide it. Maybe we could provide him with a copy of our briefing on those specific provisions in the amendments of the Criminal Code, and he can see the detail with which this matter has been addressed.

I mean it's a question of finding an appropriate balance, enabling the police officers to do their duty while ensuring that citizens are protected.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And, Mr. Chair, we'll appreciate getting that information and we'll want to pursue this in a bit

more depth and detail at another time.

I would like to move to a little different area for a minute or two, and we'll probably take a fair bit of time on this, and that is basically the federal gun registration. I think it's Bill C-68. I'd like for the minister to comment on how successful he sees this initiative to be. And I'd like to have, or hopefully get a recommitment of his government's opposition to Bill C-68.

And I have quite a number of specific questions and concerns about where this is going in Canada and specifically in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well the member raises a question of significant concern to people in the province, and he will know that the provincial government has consistently and aggressively opposed the implementation of Bill C-68. He will know that there was an all-party representation to the Parliament of Canada, when the legislation was being considered, from this House.

And he will know that there have been significant concerns raised by both the opposition and the government about the effectiveness of this kind of legislation. I think the best we can say is we don't know whether it's been effective. But we have always harboured significant doubts as to whether this type of legislation can have any significant impact on the safety and security of our communities. The arguments — we can get into them if he wants — but the arguments are pretty well, I think, accepted by all of us in this House.

The federal government in spite of representations from many provinces continues to be committed to Bill C-68. The member will know we challenged the constitutionality of the legislation unsuccessfully and that the federal government continues with some significant difficulty to pursue this initiative.

We continue to raise the issues of concern to all of us in this province about the ineffectiveness, as we see it, of the legislation and about the fact that it effectively turns law-abiding citizens or runs the risk of turning law-abiding citizens into criminals.

I mean, I don't know what else to say other than to say we continue to be aggressively opposed to this legislation, continue to voice our concerns with the government in Ottawa, and will continue to do so in the future.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And I think there's some reassurance that at least they're onside with the opposition to it. There was a little bit of questioning as to how effective this was going to be. I know research says that there's well over a million people that haven't complied with even getting the licensing, much less registering the firearms.

I can assure you if the minister came to a coffee shop in my particular community probably about every second person there is now a criminal because of this legislation. And I guess what I would like to ask is, because the minister is basically responsible for the enforcement of laws throughout this province, what his position would be if all of a sudden we had a rather aggressive law officer decide that he's going to just start enforcing this law without having given some direction from

the minister.

We're hoping at this point the minister hasn't given any direction. So let's say he hasn't, but some officer decides he's going to go around and he's going to start enforcing this particular thing and we have these people being arrested willy-nilly, left, right, and centre. In Saskatchewan, rural Saskatchewan there will be many of them.

And I'm wondering what's the minister's position is going to be if we also have a law officer trying to decide that on his own volition he's now going to go ahead and start enforcing this?

(12:00)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well the member really raises the question of what happens if a police officer enforces Bill C-68. Well as we know it's the responsibility of police officers to enforce the legislation, the criminal legislation that's in place. And it's incumbent upon all of us to abide by the law of the land.

The member will know that it will be inappropriate for me, and I'm sure he wouldn't want to live in a society where someone in my position, the Minister of Justice, dictates to police officers how they carry on their activities — who to charge, who to pursue, and who not to.

So the operation of, or the enforcement of Bill C-68 is the responsibility of our police officers here in this province. We have though, as you know, indicated to the federal government that we will not use our prosecution services to prosecute anyone charged under Bill C-68. Our responsibility in this province, or my responsibility, is to enforce the Criminal Code. That we will continue to do.

But like many offences, like many areas of criminal law — drugs for example — that matter is outside the context of the Criminal Code but within the law of the land of course, and therefore within the responsibility of police officers to enforce.

But I want to reiterate that we have, in the strongest possible terms, indicated that we will not use our provincial prosecution resources to prosecute anyone who is charged by police officers for an infringement under Bill C-68.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I'm not sure how much comfort, like I said, every second person in my coffee shop can take from that particularly.

But I think that the problem, in fact, will become a whole lot larger at about the end of the year when registration of firearms needs to take place. Because there are a lot of people who purchased their licence, because they need the licence now to purchase ammunition and firearms and those sorts of things, who are totally opposed to the gun registration. They may register one or two just in case, you know, they need one for a hunting rifle, and in case the SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) decides they're going to start enforcing that or start checking that and those sorts of things.

But I can assure the minister that probably the large proportion

of people who have purchased a licence are now going to step into the breaking the-law category across this country. And it's going to make a very high percentage. And I find that very, very unfortunate because these are people that, by and large, have been our law-abiding citizens. But they find this particular law just so totally repulsive and ridiculous that they're not going to comply. And it will be coming a whole lot worse than it is at present.

While we're on that particular issue, I'm not sure if the minister is aware of it, but that firearms licences that are issued to Aboriginals — and I would imagine that includes Indian and Metis in the way phrasing is used — no payment has to be made on that. And I'm wondering on the stat as of January 1, 2001 only 51 of that segment of our population have, basically have purchased firearms licences. So are we now creating a real split in our society with one group that with 51 people — not per cent — 51 people as of January 1, 2000 have purchased licences, what exactly his position is on that and where we can see this going?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well the member raises issues that we are concerned about too. And in fact really what he's raising is really the proof of our concerns, of our joint concerns about the ineffectiveness of this legislation.

What he's pointing out is the importance of law being accepted by communities and responded to by members of those communities. If we have legislation, if we have criminal law which is not complied with by large members of our society, plainly we not only have an ineffective law but we also undermine the importance and the efficacy of the justice system. We criminalize people who aren't criminals. The member has made those points effectively.

The point though remains that this is federal legislation, that we do our utmost to persuade the federal government of the very points the member raised. We do so on a regular basis. And if the federal government remains committed to the Firearms Act, then we will continue to see these significant difficulties; and the member's quite right in pointing out important deadlines which will generate even more problems.

So our view is it remains the same — it's ineffective, it's costly, it damages the reputation of the law as a whole, turns innocent people into criminals, and is unlikely, in our view and I think the member's view, to actually improve the safety and security of our communities.

Indeed the reverse might be the case, as we see resources committed to this registration process which would otherwise be committed to police officers and others addressing concerns of crime in our communities.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And I appreciated the minister's concern that really what this does will create probably more criminals, take resources away from the areas that really involve peace and security in our province.

When this whole issue started numbers of years ago, there was discussion that took place dealing with the notwithstanding clause to get provinces to sort of opt out of that. And I'm wondering if the minister would like to comment on whether

this government has sort of reconsidered that as an option, or whether they just basically put that one out of hand, totally, as a way of dealing with this particular issue.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member raises the question that . . . the member raises the issue as to whether or not there is some way of avoiding the application of the Firearms Act here in Saskatchewan or indeed in any of the provinces. And we have spent considerable time inquiring into this question and have concluded that there is no effective way of doing this.

The member suggested that maybe we can opt out of its application by using the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but the member probably is aware that the notwithstanding clause has a very limited and specific application. It allows a legislature to declare that certain provisions of the Charter won't apply to one of the legislature's own laws.

So we could do that with regards to, with regards to legislation which is within our own jurisdiction to implement. But it doesn't enable this legislature to address a piece of legislation emanating from the federal government. So it doesn't enable us, the Charter doesn't enable us to say that we will not apply federal legislation. And so in that sense it's an avenue we've pursued but it's one that is not available to us.

And indeed we see no way in which we can preclude the application of the Firearms Act here in the province. The best we can do is what we have done — voice our concerns as I've mentioned here today again — and also as I have done, indicate that we will not use our resources to enforce this legislation against Saskatchewan citizens.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I want to really get into another area, but regarding the firearms legislation and the concern I have, Mr. Minister, and what you've indicated is that we are, as a province we're obligated to, and as your department, you're obligated to enforce the laws and the laws of the land.

The unfortunate part is when governments impose laws that really go against the wishes of and the will of the people. And I would suggest to you that that law that we have seen, this Firearms Act, has been on the books for a number of years. Some ministers federally have had enough fortitude to stand up and say to bureaucrats, no, we're not going that direction or that far.

Unfortunately we have had ministers who have totally caved because their vote and their popular support comes directly out of southern Ontario and a little bit from Montreal, but enough to take the effect of the western voice. And I realize, Mr. Minister, we're a population of one million in a country of, I think it's over 30 million, 30 million people now. But at the same time, that should not take away the fact that as a province we should have an equal voice.

And I know the Premier of Alberta, the former premier of Manitoba, have expressed some grave concerns. I've had concerns with this piece of legislation for a long period of time. It appears that the federal Liberal government could care less about Western Canada; could care less about rural Canada for that matter.

We take a look right now at the debate in Ottawa in regards to agriculture. We're seeing even Ontario agriculture producers are facing some very significant crisis and it's getting the ear of the federal government a little bit. But it certainly appears that the federal government does not intend or could care less about how Western Canadians feel.

And I guess what I'm saying, Mr. Minister, it's the responsibility as the minister of the Crown in this province to really reinforce with Ottawa the issues that the people of this province bring to your attention.

And I know that certainly some of the former ministers, earlier on in the early '80s, Mr. Mitchell, we had significant debates on that issue. And I know Mr. Mitchell had expressed some very strong support and endeavoured to try and relay that support to Ottawa.

And I think, Mr. Minister, what we're seeing and we're hearing . . . there's rumblings of this around the province already. And we see groups getting together and starting to talk about separation and starting to talk about how do we send a message to Ottawa. And one of the reasons we have that discussion is because we see how Quebec has, if you will, almost manipulated federal governments for years as a result of that.

And people in Western Canada are saying we are becoming very tired of federal governments dictating policy to us and as a result, we have this voice. And I think it's imperative, Mr. Minister, that we really reinforce with Ottawa the fact that there is a major issue and a concern.

And my colleague, the member from Rosthern is right. All you need is one or two individuals who decide they're really going to start imposing the law and becoming very arrogant in the way they impose the law and then you will have people up in arms. So I think, Mr. Minister, we need to really be mindful of that and be very firm in your debate with the federal government on the issue. So, Mr. Minister, I reinforce that.

But I also want to ask you, Mr. Minister, we hear of discussion in Ottawa about the fact that as a result of the cost of implementing the Firearms Act in Canada, I believe the former minister, the current Minister of Health, had indicated would just be a few hundred million dollars. Well it's well past what they had originally said. And coming back to the whole debate in this country is how we provide police services, provide the finances to provide the services so that we can protect law-abiding citizens.

It looks to me, Mr. Minister, that currently now the federal government is realizing that this Firearms Act has mushroomed way out of control. Now they're talking of bringing in possibly a private service to administer the Act.

And it seems to me, Mr. Minister, we need to be very mindful of that and really raise some grave concerns because as soon as you get a private contractor in — contractors, what do they do? Their objective is to raise money, raise funds, and they can be very indignant in how they impose the law or implement that law.

(12:15)

So, Mr. Minister, I just want to hear from you, if you have had any discussions with your counterparts in Ottawa in regards to this, if you will, if it's a rumour or whatever, regarding the privatization of the administration of this current Act.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — In response to the member's specific question, the federal government is well aware of this province's position with regards to the registry, and indeed to the process which it is apparently pursuing at the present.

I think the member should know, and he probably does, that no other province has done any more than this province to oppose this firearms legislation. We participated in the Supreme Court of Canada challenge on its constitutionality, as you know. We opted out of its administration, as you know. And we have ensured that we will not prosecute under the Firearms Act.

There is, I think the member will agree, no other province which has gone further, no other province which has done more. And the fact of the matter is, with the responsibility that falls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to enforce the laws of the land, we have precluded ourselves from as much of that as we possibly can, and left it to the federal government to prosecute legislation which we agree, all of us in this House agree, is ineffective, expensive, and not likely to improve the safety and security of our communities.

So we've left no stone unturned. We've left no initiative undone to work on the federal government on this question. And we will continue to voice those legitimate concerns of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I appreciate those comments. And certainly as I've indicated in past discussions with former ministers, we have received those verbal assurances. And certainly we will just be mindful of the ongoing debate and how firm this government is, and the minister and the department is, in regards to issues of this concern.

Mr. Minister, an area I'd like to ask a few questions on is regarding the issue of maintenance and enforcement and actually access. Mr. Minister, over the past number of years we have seen that, if you will, I think the pendulum has greatly swung in, if you will, to the extreme right when it comes to maintenance and enforcement and access.

And what I mean by that, Mr. Minister, it would appear that actually while there were some strong arguments as to the fact that maybe mothers and women in a divorce settlement were not receiving due . . . receiving proper care and adequate care, and indeed if an award was made that those awards weren't being followed up very closely to the point that the awards are probably made much stronger in favour of the mother.

And, Mr. Minister, I think that argument has always been that way because of the fact the feeling was that the mother could be the better caregiver. But on the other hand, Mr. Minister, I think we are also seeing that there are a lot of men can be good caregivers as well.

And when a couple ends up in a divorce proceeding and ends up before the courts and an award is made — and a number of

issues have been brought to my attention where a judgment is made and basically an order is made that the husband must, or the male partner must provide a level of maintenance — the award also does acknowledge the fact that that husband or male partner should actually have access to the child as well so that there's some equal balance in the upbringing of the child.

And I understand, Mr. Minister, that the federal government has had some discussions on it. And I'm not exactly sure — it seems to me there's something in Saskatchewan today, a meeting in regards to that. And I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, where we're going in really raising the profile of the male parent and the fact that there are certain situations where some good, honest, hard-working fathers are actually having limitations in regards to access to their children.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member raised a number of issues surrounding complex questions of how we deal with custody and access and the contributions made by parents when relationships break down. And these are indeed serious and complex questions.

I think I should begin by saying that in terms of . . . the job of the maintenance enforcement office and Lionel McNabb, the director of it, has just come into the Chamber. The job of that office is to enforce judicial orders. And I'm not going to get into reviewing the quality or any of the issues about judicial orders. The orders are made by judges, with the best exercise of their skills, and in response to the issues that are presented to them. And, of course, in accordance with the provisions of respective laws.

Now when we get those orders, then we do our best to enforce them. The member will know that not always are people happy with the results. Sometimes the money is more difficult to obtain than would otherwise be the case because the payer has left the province or has become unemployed or various reasons. And the member will be familiar with those.

But it is worth remembering that the maintenance enforcement office collects significant numbers of dollars for custodial parents in the province. And just, in this budget year, we increased the budget allocation to maintenance enforcement so that it can add another staff person to handle the workload. And we, in addition, provided extra staff in June of last year. So I think you know our commitment to maintenance enforcement and, in fact, the member has made some positive comments about it in the past.

The other point he made was with regards to what are we doing to address these real substantive issues about custody and access? The member will know that there was significant consultation at the federal level and at the provincial level in 1998-99. We are going through final consultations at the present time with groups and with individuals in the province.

That consultation will be fed into the provincial ministers of Justice meeting, and we will be anticipating changes to federal legislation as a result. Because it's so complex, there is a need to consult. We're finishing that consultation at the present time, all provinces are, and that will be presented to the ministers, I guess in September.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, I appreciate the fact of what the work and the efforts that maintenance enforcement is doing, and certainly, Mr. Minister, the fact that we have reciprocal agreements interprovincially so that people can't just cross borders and get away from their obligations and responsibilities.

However, Mr. Minister, I'm still concerned about the fact that while maintenance enforcement is very diligent in reality in going after funds that have been allocated, there seems to be a real laxness. And I don't know why there is in the fact that if maintenance does follow through and goes after an individual for the maintenance dollars that are supposed to be going to the other parent, and yet at the same time while those dollars may flow through as a result of the actions of maintenance, that doesn't necessarily mean that the parent who's paying the maintenance is going to have access to their child.

And in some cases it's really destroyed some husbands and fathers who still have a real love for the child or for their children, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Minister, I would like to know what is the maintenance office doing in addressing this issue.

Wouldn't it be appropriate, Mr. Minister, if indeed as we've discussed earlier, an order is given that so much value, maintenance value and dollars be handed to one parent, and that the other parent actually have a child for maybe it's one week out of the month or two weekends out of the month plus a month, and yet that provision is not being followed through on. Would it not be appropriate then, Mr. Minister, to follow through on that side of the issue?

And maybe even, Mr. Minister, the suggestion that if you don't follow through on your part of the order, then we're not . . . the issue of maintenance may be, and the dollar values that flow your way, we may have to start to consider how intensively we follow through on getting those payments on your behalf.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well the member raises an important practical question. And while the maintenance enforcement office has no power to ensure access, it certainly does encourage the custodial parent to provide access to the non-custodial parent for the simple matter that if access is provided there is then less antagonism and so on, on the part of the non-custodial parent and more likelihood that the payments will be made. So there's an encouragement to act reasonably and sensibly in the process.

We know that this is an issue, that's there's no kind of parallel between paying your maintenance and having access to your children. The consultation process which is underway recognizes this and is designed to seek a solution to this particular question of access.

I agree with the member that it raises significant, difficult, personal problems. It is not helpful in the context of the child or indeed of the two parents. So we are looking for solutions, for solutions to that.

And I might say that we in Saskatchewan have the most advanced enforcement remedies of any jurisdiction in the province. And of course the option is always available to the non-custodial parent to seek a court order regarding access, but

plainly that is not the most . . . that's not the easiest approach for many non-custodial parents, and that's why we're seeking some other process which should make that . . . which should facilitate that process.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I guess, Mr. Minister, while I appreciate the comments you've made, I'm disturbed by the fact that I think you indicated that you really don't have . . . or maintenance doesn't really have the authority to follow through on the custody side. And that's the exact question that I would like to know.

Why does maintenance enforcement not have the ability or the authority to follow through on the judges' orders in payments as well as access? And, Mr. Minister, if it means a change to the way maintenance enforcement is followed through on, Mr. Minister, is your department and are you, Mr. Minister, willing to create a level playing field and address that issue so that indeed children are not left in a position where they're really . . . such anger and hatred is created toward the other parent?

(12:30)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The simple answer to the question is that the legislation does not provide for maintenance enforcement to deal with the access side. The rationale behind that and the rationale behind consulting on a measure that can ensure access is that it is extremely complicated. It is sometimes hard to judge which story is the right story. And it's particularly hard to enforce, as you can imagine.

How do you make a person, a parent, provide access to the other parent . . . access to the child. It's very difficult to do that and you can't . . . it's expensive to do it when you have to have somebody there to ensure that it takes place.

So it is complex, and it's complex mostly because it involves complex human interaction. But the consultation is designed to try to come up with a response to this. This is happening across the country as I say, and we hope to be able to move on this significant question.

I can't agree more with the member about the seriousness of this issue. But it is not so easy to find a solution; that's why we're working on one.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, coming back to that final point, and actually the initial point in your last response, and the question that I had asked at the end of my comments earlier is, what is your department doing to address that concern?

And you indicated that actually under the current legislation there was no provision for maintenance to really address the ongoing concern out there. It's something that as legislators and as a department that you're going to have to follow through on, come up with recommendations even if it means legislative changes so that you can begin to address the inequity out there.

So, Mr. Minister, I guess the short is, what is your department doing? You're talking about consultation, but how long are you going to continue to consult before you come up with something that would really address this issue so that fathers

have equal access, children grow up learning to appreciate both their biological parents rather than just the one?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The consultation process should ensure that by September when we are — ministers of Justice across the country will be meeting, that there will be recommendations to address the issue you raise. So it is not being put off for a particularly long period of time.

It's important to really truly get to the bottom of how we might do something useful to assist non-custodial parents. It's particularly important, I think, to seek ways that will actually work, and that takes a little time.

I might say too though, that maintenance enforcement with case after case after case, with person after person after person, with all custodial parents, recommends that they provide access to the non-custodial parent. So we do what we can within our jurisdictional power within the legislation to ensure access.

But the fact of the matter is that in September we will have, hopefully, some concrete measures from consultations across the province and indeed across the country to address the very concern you raise.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, as I address this issue, one of the reasons I'm addressing the issue is because of the long outstanding concerns that have been brought to my attention. Even as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), and maybe my colleagues, maybe even your colleagues have experienced this, where you begin to be accused of actually not raising the issue, of not standing up and being a voice to make sure that there is some equality brought into the system.

And, Mr. Minister, I'm certainly hoping that before long — and as you've indicated, your department is looking at this fairly aggressively so that maybe you can even have a present when the ministers meet in September — that you can have some positive ideas to bring forward at that conference that would address this issue.

And now I know the current federal minister, I believe even two years ago, indicated that they were looking at some changes that would address this. And they had some discussions with men who have formed an association to speak on behalf of the male parent.

And in this regard, Mr. Minister, we're certainly looking forward to a means of addressing this issue so that males aren't harassed. And I use that word somewhat carefully but I do know that a couple situations in particular, the individuals who have contacted me, basically every time they try to even phone and even talk to a child, next thing they know, they're being accused of harassment; that the other partner, even just to call on the phones is a means.

And I think that comes to the point you alluded to earlier, how complex the whole issue is. And like you say, I don't know. There isn't a clear-cut answer but I think we need to make a diligent attempt to draw a more level playing field and try and get the animosity out of the whole divorce settlement.

And having said that, Mr. Minister, I come to another point. And that's, what is your department doing or have you taken a stronger look at sitting down and negotiating divorce settlements rather than . . . or mediation, using a form of mediation rather than the confrontational approach of the court system when it comes to divorce settlements to see if we can come to more amicable agreements and understandings when a couple decides that they're going to separate. So that at the end of the day, there's still some reasonable appreciation for the other partner, but as well an understanding of the hurt that children face when a divorce is entered into.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well let me say how much I share the member's concern and commitment to resolving these kinds of issues and to providing mechanisms so that these kinds of issues can be resolved in a more effective and efficacious way than is often the case when people fight. Because that plainly doesn't . . . is not the most constructive way to address these concerns, and particularly it has the potential for significant harm to the children involved.

And of course our commitment, all of us in this House, is to ensuring that children come first in these disputes and that children are indeed, their interests are put ahead of all others, and that they have access to both of their parents.

And within the context of that, there are significant family support services available to parents, and significant mediation services available to them as well. I agree with the member that mediation is a much better way of addressing these concerns than a kind of a pitch battle which sometimes takes place.

The consultation document that I've been referring to in response to the member's questions engages these issues. Ways in which we can ensure that separation and divorce is not as harmful on the children as otherwise might be the case. So the consultation will address legislative changes and also program changes such as mediation in this context too.

So I think the member can see that the consultation process is wide-ranging, covering all aspects of the issue he's raised and is attempting to, across the country, to arrive at solutions to these very difficult problems.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, under the current system of divorce settlement and mediation, what is the process?

If a couple decides that they've just come to the point in their lives where they really feel that they just can't continue to reside together and are going to pull the pin on that relationship, Mr. Minister, is there an obligation first of all for that couple to go through and seek the services of mediation before they would end up going to the court system? To see whether or not you could arrive at a consensus, an amicable consensus that would work, that would create a more caring environment, especially in view of the children, and that includes, actually includes the children in the equation of the process of the divorce settlement.

So, Mr. Minister, what is the process? Is there an obligation for a couple to actually seek the services or to go through the mediation process before they actually seek the services of the

court settlement if . . . or the court process, if they determine or just are at that point where they're not willing to accept what a mediator may recommend.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The process the member refers to, some assurance that those parents who decide to split, to split up, are in fact left with no other option or seriously consider these questions is certainly a valid one. These are serious decisions which should be made considering all the circumstances, and in particular as the member says, considering the interests of the child.

We have available across the province, parent education for these kinds of purposes, including other purposes, and we certainly do advise and encourage mediation at the time of potential dissolution. So it's our advice for people to pursue this option.

Now I can say to the member that we've had significant discussions about mandatory mediation in the province. We're looking to a pilot project to test it for the citizens of the province, in Yorkton. We're discussing this issue with the bar and with courts, with judges, with affected parties, and we anticipate being able to introduce this pilot as soon as possible. And I know the member would watch with interest the way in which that works, as we will.

So hopefully, shortly we will be able to announce that pilot, which in fact is what the member is asking for, and then we can see how that works and see the way in which we could expand it across the province.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I appreciate that and I'm pleased to hear that that's taking place. And I guess the question that I want to raise as well is what kind of acceptance do you find in the legal community. I guess my feeling sometimes is this might be imposing on the ability of the legal community as to their ability to create revenue.

And, Mr. Minister, you mentioned you were consulting with the bar, and I just want a clear understanding of the acceptance of the legal community to this type of initiative in view of the goal to really build upon that family relationship and take into consideration the children as well.

So, Mr. Minister, can you kind of give us . . . can you give us an idea of where the legal community in general is on this issue and whether you're getting some resistance from the legal community, or if they have begun to realize the importance of addressing this as an overall family issue?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member asks what is the result of consultation with the bar over this question, and I think the member can anticipate that the response has been somewhat mixed. And indeed across the province, when these matters have been discussed, that has been the case as well — a mixed response, positive and negative. But over time as the mandatory process is being adopted, the negative responses decline and the positive responses increase.

But we're, you know — the member's right, we're right, I think, in pursuing this agenda. And we anticipate a positive response from the bar and being able to move forward in this

process.

(12:45)

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I certainly would encourage your department, in the consultation process, to really reinforce the fact that this is a family issue and we have young children at risk here. And I use that term, at risk, because my colleague, the member from Rosthern, was talking about the need for police services.

And I'm not exactly sure, maybe the question we need to ask is, when we look at the number of young people that end up before the court system, how many of these young people are there because they come from situations where they feel that no one really cared for them as a result of these broken relationships?

And so if we can find a way to address this issue in the broader perspective, so that these young people feel that they are still important and loved, that we may save the judicial system down the road in the area of prosecutions as a result of criminal activity.

And so, Mr. Minister, having said that, I just want to encourage you and your department in your debate, in your consultation, that this issue be viewed in the broad spectrum, and that the family and young people certainly be taken into consideration.

And I thank you for your comments and your involvement today, and the involvement of your officials.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, I mean, I think the member and myself are on, you know, we're on the same track here and we'll do everything we possibly can to ensure that the points he's been making, effective points he's been making, will be realized.

I might encourage the member to respond to the consultation document. I think you've received a copy — if you haven't we'll make sure you do — and I think also a request to respond.

So I'll be more than happy to meet with you to discuss some of these questions, and certainly be very pleased if you have some specific points that you think will be useful in response to the document. It's a serious matter you've raised; we treat it seriously too.

The committee reported progress.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Members, before we adjourn, I would like to just wish everybody a happy long weekend.

I want to mention that this weekend, people are celebrating Easter. It's the Easter weekend and it's not only the Easter weekend for the Roman-dominated Christian sect, but it also happens to be the same for the Eastern rite, sect people who have come to this country from the far countries of Russia and Ukraine and Poland, Romania, and a few others.

And so I would like to wish you a happy Easter in the language

of my forefathers and mothers: Chrystos Voskres, which means Christ has risen; and Voyisten Voskres, indeed He has risen.

This House stands adjourned until Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:51.