

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of residents in and around Bruno who would like to become a part of the Humboldt telephone exchange. And the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to allow Bruno to be part of the Humboldt telephone exchange.

And the signators on this petition are from Humboldt, Fulda, Viscount, Bruno, and Pilger.

I so present.

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a petition from constituents in Rosetown-Biggar concerning the two government's Crown corporations. SaskPower and SaskEnergy both recently announced significant rate increases for residential and business customers. 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.

And, Mr. Speaker, these petitioners are primarily from Biggar, although I see Landis on here as well. And I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with 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 its plan to close Highway 43 to heavy traffic will do to south-central Saskatchewan and instead devote necessary funds to upgrade Highway 43 in order to preserve jobs and economic development in the area.

This petition is signed by individuals all from the community of Vanguard.

I so present.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again on behalf of petitioners concerned about the hospital in Swift Current. And the prayer of this petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And Mr. Speaker, this petition today has been signed by people from Swift Current, from Cabri, from Stewart Valley, from North Battleford, from Wymark, Kyle, and Gull Lake.

I so present.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions today on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan. These petitioners are concerned about the EMS project in the province. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners that signed this are from the communities of Bengough, Ogema, and Kayville.

I so present.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition. The prayer reads:

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

And it's signed by the good citizens of Richard, Saskatchewan.

Thank you.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition here from the citizens concerned about the high rates of SaskPower and SaskEnergy. The prayer reads as follows:

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.

Signed by the good citizens of Regina, Bladworth, Davidson, Francis, Langham, Vanguard, Kenaston, and Weyburn.

I so present.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of concerned constituents. The petition deals with consolidation 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 community based ambulance services.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition come from Saskatoon, Wynyard, Elfros, and Regina.

I so present.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition from citizens concerned with the high energy rates. And the petition . . . or 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.

As in duty bound your petitions will ever pray.

And the signatures on this petition come from the good people of Mont Nebo, Spiritwood, Medstead, and Chitek Lake.

I so present.

**Mr. Peters:** — Mr. Speaker, I also rise in regards to the health care in the province, and particularly Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary actions to ensure that, at the very least, current levels of services and care are maintained at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Assiniboia, Mossbank, and Killdeer.

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again on behalf of concerned citizens with reference to the cuts at Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary actions to ensure that, at the very least, current levels of services and care are maintained at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signators on this come from Assiniboia, Mossbank, Moose Jaw, Kincaid, Big Beaver, Limerick, Viceroy, and Rockglen.

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 on the following matters:

The centralization of ambulance services;

Swift Current's request for a new hospital;

Level of services and care at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia;

The necessary funding to upgrade Highway 43;

Substantial energy rebate to consumers;

Ensuring the Hafford Hospital remains open; and

Allowing Bruno to be part of the Humboldt telephone exchange.

Also the petitions for private Bills are hereby read and received:

The petition of the International Bible College of Moose Jaw in the province of Saskatchewan praying for an Act to amend its Act of Incorporation;

The petition for Our Lady of the Prairies Foundation praying for an Act to continue Our Lady of the Prairies Foundation;

The petition of the Providence Hospital in Moose Jaw praying for an Act to dissolve Providence Hospital;

A petition of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities praying for an Act to amend its Act of Incorporation; and

The petition of St. Anthony's Home, Moose Jaw, praying for an Act to dissolve St. Anthony's home; and

The petition of St. Thomas More College of Saskatoon praying for an Act to continue the St. Thomas More College.

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Hillson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on day 27 I will ask the government the following question:

How much is budgeted for travel outside of Canada by officials of SaskTel and its subsidiaries to investigate investments made or under consideration during the year 2001; a similar question for investments outside of Saskatchewan but in Canada; and parallel questions for the years 2000 and 1999.

Thank you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of SOCO: what are all the companies in which SOCO has invested interest, including the name of each company, the total amount invested in each company, the investment vehicle used for each investment, and the terms and conditions of each investment.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of SOCO: what were 24 companies in which SOCO invested in 2000; how much was invested in each company; what was the investment vehicle used for each investment; and what were the terms and conditions of each investment.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I too have a written question. I give notice I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Crown Investments Corporation: did Sask Valley Potato Corporation purchase any potato-growing equipment in the 2000-2001 fiscal year, and if so, what did they purchase; what was the cost of each piece of equipment?

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 27 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Crown Investments Corporation: did a number of executives of SaskPower travel to Minneapolis on or about April 18, 2001; if so, who went, for what purpose, and at what cost; what specific mode of transportation did they use and at what cost?

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. McCall:** — Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to day to introduce to you and through you to the members of this place, 22 grade 8 students, 18 grade 5 students, from Walker School in the riding of Regina Elphinstone here in Regina. They're accompanied by their teachers, Cheryl Ball and John Stark. And I look forward to meeting with you later. Please enjoy your time here today. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Hon. Assembly, a delegation of reeves and councillors from the area of Highway 43. These people are concerned with the proposed weight restrictions to Highway 43. And included are the reeve of Glen Bain; Mr. Leo Haack and three of his councillors, Mr. Henry Hildebrandt, Mr. Kal Sadden, and Mr. Reg Wagner; and the reeve of the RM (rural municipality) of Lac Pelletier, Mr. Cornie Martens and three of his councillors, Mr. Lloyd Peterson, Mr. Walter Kruszelnicki, and Mr. Ron Miller.

I understand that these gentlemen have already met with one cabinet minister today, and they have another meeting coming up.

And we wish them the very best and hope that they have a productive time in the legislature.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with my colleague, the member for Thunder Creek, in welcoming all of the people that have travelled to Regina to meet with, I think, two cabinet ministers. They had an opportunity to meet with me this morning.

I know you're going to find question period interesting. And I'm assured on this side of the House that we're going to behave ourselves so that you can hear the questions and the answers.

So thank you very much for coming to Legislative Assembly this afternoon.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

##### Saskatchewan Health Bursary Program

**Ms. Junor:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good health care is a priority for this government. And we've taken steps that prove our commitment to providing Saskatchewan's people with the best health care possible.

I'm pleased to acknowledge in the Assembly that the government has, today, announced a creation of the Saskatchewan Health bursary program. This program will help students with their tuition costs in exchange for service in rural Saskatchewan.

Students studying health care professions will be awarded \$7,000 per year. For every year that a student receives a bursary, that student will serve one year in a rural community.

Important members of the health care team such as those being trained in physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology, audiology, public health inspections, respiratory therapy, and early child psychology will benefit from this new bursary program. And I am pleased to say that no less than 23 bursaries will be awarded to Saskatchewan students.

Not only does the Saskatchewan Health bursary program help students with the cost associate with going to university but it helps to address the shortage of health care professionals in rural areas.

This program is another way in which we can help health districts across the province recruit and retain health care providers.

Mr. Speaker, this program is good for our students and it is good for the people of Saskatchewan. I wish to congratulate all involved in the creation of the Saskatchewan Health bursary program. Thanks.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(13:45)

### **Mennonite Youth Farm in Rosthern**

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity this weekend to be present at the opening of the renovations that have taken place at the Mennonite Youth Farm in Rosthern, and this is a senior care home.

It is probably, Mr. Speaker, the most beautiful senior care centre in Saskatchewan, having been bought by the Mennonites of Saskatchewan in 1943 as an old experimental farm. And so all the buildings and the trees and the landscaping is there and it's a very beautiful centre.

The renovations are a combination of effort between that particular body and as well as Gabriel Springs and also some provincial money put into that.

And it's a very impressive facility and very much appreciated by the people of that particular area, carrying out the continued tradition that Mennonites began back in 1880 in the Ukraine with taking good care of their seniors. And it's good to see and it was a great building.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Prince of Wales Cultural and Recreation Centre**

**Ms. Higgins:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to inform the House that on Saturday, I had the pleasure of advising nearly 200 volunteer fundraisers in Assiniboia that the Government of Saskatchewan is adding just under \$1.1 million to their efforts to fund a multi-purpose cultural and recreational facility.

The Assiniboia Civic Improvement Association took on the task of fundraising for the \$4.2 million project less than 7 years ago. With only \$3,000 in their bank account to begin with, the association has raised over \$3 million which, along with the \$1 million-plus grant from the Associated Entities Fund, permits construction to begin this summer.

This centre will house a theatre, a cultural performing arts centre, a curling arena, as well as the Assiniboia Palliser Regional Library, multi-purpose area, and community meeting and board rooms.

As Civic Improvement Association Bill Batty said at Saturday's luncheon, the government is proving that it is serious about its commitment to rural revitalization.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 200 residents of Assiniboia and area stated repeatedly on Saturday they feel revitalized by the government's commitment to rural Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Unity Lazars Midget Girls Hockey Club Win Female Provincial B Championship**

**Mr. Peters:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations are in order to the Unity Lazars Midget Girls Hockey Club for winning the female provincial B championship. In the provincials, they eliminated the teams from Turtleford and

Lashburn, and in the finals came up against the team from Eston to win the championship.

They also won the east-central female Alberta Hockey League championship, defeating Irma in the final game.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate coach Larry Heitt and manager Rick Hill.

These girls come from the communities of Wilkie, Unity, Luseland, and Little Pine. And I wish to extend our best wishes and congratulations to the Unity Lazars Midget Girls Hockey Club. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Canada Book Day**

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the Assembly and the public that each of us today should do the following: we should go to the Internet, log on to [www.canadabookday.com](http://www.canadabookday.com), and then vote for our favourite Saskatchewan author — W.O. Mitchell, Sinclair Ross, John Hicks, Maggie Siggins, Gail Bowen, Ken Mitchell, Diane Warren, Connie Gault, Lorna Crozier, Gary Hyland, and that just started my list, Mr. Speaker.

Or, if you must, vote for your Canadian author. This national poll to find Canadians' favourite authors is being conducted as part of Canada Book Day, which in turn is being celebrated as part of World Book Day, a day that Canada joins more than 80 countries to celebrate books and what they represent.

And what they represent, Mr. Speaker, is the active life of the mind, without which there would be no self-expression, no interchange of ideas between individuals and between cultures, and no intellectual freedom and, frankly, no joy. The ability to read is a fountainhead of civilization. Those who give us the ideas, the stories, and the information to read are gatekeepers.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this day is to encourage people to read to their kids and for themselves. And it is a day to remind ourselves that there are Canadian authors, publishers, and booksellers who are more than worthy of our support and we wish them a great deal of luck.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Smeaton and District Care Home Co-operative**

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to bring recognition to the village of Smeaton and the rural area surrounding the village.

Mr. Speaker, on December 1 of the year 2000 the Smeaton and District Care Home Co-operative opened its doors for the first time. This community-owned and operated facility also took in its first residents on December 1, and in only three months the care home was being fully utilized.

The Smeaton and District Care Home has been made especially

attractive and has been connected physically to the Smeaton Health Centre. Thus, Mr. Speaker, residents in the care home have access to nurses, pharmacists, doctors, chiropractors, therapists, and many more valuable services.

The board of directors are very proud of being a part of this amalgamation, Mr. Speaker. But one aspect of the home makes everyone especially proud, and that fact is this \$800,000 home was built with no provincial government help. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the village of Smeaton and the surrounding community have built this care home entirely of their own initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating the Smeaton and District Care Home Co-operative and their board of Tom Jensen, Roni Jean Grunerud, Margo Marshall, Doreen Willness, Mike Rudnicki, Leonard Backlund, Dwayne Ealey, Lorne Butterfield, and Morris Davyduke.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Melfort Co-op Sets Sales Record**

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This time from the thriving city of Melfort.

For the second straight year, Mr. Speaker, the Melfort Co-op has set a new record for total sales. Obviously something good is happening out and about in our province because Saskatchewan people are expressing confidence in Saskatchewan-owned institutions by supporting them with their dollars, and in this case, with their memberships also.

Sales figure for the Melfort Co-op in 2000 totalled \$22.73 million. That's up 13 per cent or 2.7 million over last year. As the general manager, Gordon Dymtruk, pointed out, many sectors of the Co-op showed impressive gains with the fuel purchases leading the way.

And there is more good news, Mr. Speaker. Several successful products were undertaken to expand and upgrade the services offered to members in the Melfort area.

And at an annual meeting a major capital project for the near future was announced — the development of an integrated lumber and agro centre. The 16 acres for this development has already been purchased. These plans for the future are signs of the confidence in the future.

One thing for sure, Mr. Speaker. With this much shopping going on in downtown Melfort, it's fair to say that the good citizens of that community do not buy into the rhetoric of doom and gloom.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Volunteers from Humboldt**

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is

National Volunteer Week. And I'd like to recognize two volunteers from my constituency, from the city of Humboldt, Ed and Isabelle Brockmeyer.

Although the Brockmeyers farm about 10 miles out of the city, they always seem to be in the city, helping out one organization or the other. And it is something they have done for years now.

Last year, Ed was recognized for his efforts by his hometown and was named Citizen of the Year 2000 by Humboldt and District Chamber of Commerce.

Ed has been active in the Wildlife Federation, a founding member of the Community Cross Country Ski Club, a Scout leader, a board member of the Waldsea Lake Regional Park, District Volkspport, Friends of the Water Tower, and the Humboldt and District Historical Society. He has also been heavily involved with Sommerfest.

Ed wishes he could have shared his volunteer award with his wife as she works alongside him in most of their volunteer activities and contributes a great deal through her great culinary skills. Isabelle has been seen and found preparing great special fish recipes for the Wildlife Federation banquets and baking for functions and helping to entertain tour groups at the Willkommen Centre.

Their volunteerism really took off when Humboldt adopted the German theme. Both Ed and Isabelle are of German descent and this became the focus of their volunteerism. Both are very involved in the German Heritage Society, singing and dancing.

When asked why they have become so involved in the community, the Brockmeyers said that it's payback time as Humboldt has been very good to them. In Isabelle's words: you got to do for other people; you don't gain anything by doing for yourself. And, Mr. Speaker, that is what volunteerism is all about.

Thank you, Ed and Isabelle, for giving so generously of your time.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **ORAL QUESTIONS**

##### **Closure of Lanigan Hospital**

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week the people of Lanigan learned that the Lanigan Hospital would close from June 15 through to September 15. The health district says that the closure is due to a staffing crisis but the health professionals in Lanigan are concerned. They say at no time did the health district ask them how they could handle the summer staffing concerns.

I have a letter from Dr. Saxena of Lanigan who says, and I quote:

We have quite a few acute emergencies from heart attacks, congestive heart failure, and multiple injuries, especially at this time of year with farming accidents. Having this hospital closed is jeopardizing the life of those patients.

I, along with the community, would appreciate that you impress to the Minister of Health to stop the proposed closure of the Lanigan Hospital for the summer months.

Mr. Speaker, with the Minister of Health listen to the people of Lanigan and stop the closure of their hospital?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, I apologize for my voice today and I will speak a little more quietly than usual. What we know in Saskatchewan is that we are going to continue to build a very good health system, working with all of the people involved.

We know in the Lanigan area that they have had some difficulty recruiting enough staff to provide coverage, and so the board in that area has been working with the local people to figure out how they can provide coverage for the summer as well as give some people who have worked very hard over the last year or two years needed summer vacations.

The solution that they have proposed involves having those people take their summer vacations this summer and have the coverage being covered by another hospital within their region.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke about how they're working with the people, but on April 11 many community leaders and stakeholders in the Lanigan Hospital met with the health district to discuss various issues of health delivery in the community. These people say that at no time was the prospect of their hospital being closed even mentioned. They were shocked to hear just one week later that their hospital would be closed for three months.

The doctor and nurses at the hospital say that they were prepared to co-operate with the health district and work out a staffing schedule amongst themselves so that the 24-hour health care could be provided during those three months.

They were also very concerned because there's a new doctor preparing to come to Lanigan in July, but if he has no hospital to work out of, they believe he will decide not to come.

Mr. Speaker, how does the Minister of Health expect to attract doctors, specialists, and nurses to the province when they close the facilities right out from under them?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we will continue to work with the local people. We know that the local health districts have worked on this issue. It's very clear that if we get involved in micromanaging these whole systems, we will not come up with solutions that work in local areas.

The health district has been working with the staff. And presumably if there are suggestions and ideas about how to work with this particular problem this summer, then those people will be able to do that. We prefer to allow those very capable people to make some of these decisions in their local

area and we will continue to work with them. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Obviously the minister doesn't want to take responsibility for what's happening. And they did not talk to the people, they did not talk to the stakeholders or the nurses or the doctors.

Last year the then minister of Health said that there would be no major changes made to health care delivery in the health districts until the Fyke report was finished. Well the Fyke report is finished and there are health districts still facing major operation decisions.

This district has decided to close the Lanigan Hospital for three months and move long-term care patients out of their community, leave their existing doctor without a hospital, and potentially lose the services of a new doctor. The people of Lanigan aren't interested in more study of the Fyke study. Their crisis is happening now and they want some answers about the summer closure of their hospital immediately.

Mr. Speaker, when will the minister stop hiding from dealing with the immediate problems facing our health system and make some decisions to help this province deal with issues of staffing shortages?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, I think if the Premier was looking for a minister who would hide, he would have picked somebody a little smaller.

(14:00)

Mr. Speaker, what we know is that this particular situation involves a shortage of staff. We are working very carefully with SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses), SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association) and other professional organizations, as well as the School of Nursing to increase the numbers of people who are trained so that we can have the full amount of staff.

What we also know is that we will continue to work with the people as we develop a plan for the province, because all of these things are important as we make sure that all of our people have the services that they need.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Saskatchewan's Centennial Celebrations

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Provincial Secretary.

Mr. Speaker, this morning the minister released a report on celebrating Saskatchewan's 100th anniversary. We look forward to celebrating this important milestone and all the achievements of Saskatchewan people in our first 100 years. But, Mr. Speaker, what is the first recommendation of this report — set up a new Crown corporation.

The NDP (New Democratic Party) has decided that we need a new Crown corporation to celebrate Saskatchewan's birthday. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why do we need a new Crown corporation to celebrate Saskatchewan's centennial?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the member opposite was able to attend the media announcement this morning. And it was wonderful to be able to officially and formally thank all the members of the anniversary committee who worked so hard over the last three years to develop the recommendations.

And she is indeed right, that the first recommendation that that committee made was that we should establish a Treasury Board Crown in order to be able to facilitate the planning and development of the very great ideas that are coming forward from the people of Saskatchewan.

I'm sorry that the member had to leave early. She would have heard me answer this very question to the media. And the answer, Mr. Speaker, is that this will facilitate budgetary planning from year to year so that this Treasury Board Crown will be able to work in progress for the next four years with the plans for the centennial.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, in 1995 Saskatchewan hosted the best Grey Cup in history without setting up a Crown corporation. This year Saskatchewan will host the Memorial Cup and the Olympic curling trials. Great credit to our province. But they did this without setting up a Crown corporation.

Our province routinely puts on world-class events and celebrations of Saskatchewan achievement without setting up a Crown corporation. Mr. Speaker, why does the NDP think it needs to set up a whole new bureaucracy to celebrate Saskatchewan's centennial?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the member opposite, while full of Alberta envy, is very conveniently ignoring the fact that Alberta will also be celebrating its centennial year in 2005 and they have set up a Crown corporation to manage it.

And perhaps the member opposite is a little shoddy in terms of her history and has conveniently forgotten that the Grant Devine government also had a Crown corporation for Celebrate Saskatchewan.

And I realize that the member opposite perhaps would not remember that the great historian in this province, Dr. John Archer, who was involved in the jubilee celebration also had recommended and was part of a Crown corporation for that celebration.

This is simply a tradition that we are carrying on.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, no one is more interested than the Saskatchewan Party in celebrating our centennial. After all, we plan to be the government in year 2005.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — We want to make sure that it gets done right.

But we are also very interested in open and accountable government. This morning the minister said one of the main reasons for setting up a centennial Crown is so they don't have to bother running their expenses through the General Revenue Fund. Isn't that typical of the NDP — more bureaucracy, bigger government, less accountability.

Mr. Speaker, how much money is the NDP going to spend on another unnecessary bureaucracy and how many taxpayers' dollars will be spent paying the board of directors of this new corporation?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely dumbfounded because, you know, this morning was a wonderful announcement of a great celebration that all people of Saskatchewan, regardless of their political ideology, will be participating in.

I wouldn't have thought that the Saskatchewan Party would choose to play cheap politics with the celebration. But quite frankly, if she doesn't want a Crown corporation, would she want an all-party committee? I kind of doubt it.

And I'm a little worried that if they should happen to form government, which I do not think will happen at all, Mr. Speaker, what would they do with the centennial Crown corporation? They'd probably sell it off.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### SaskTel Investment

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SaskTel. Mr. Speaker, on Friday we learned that SaskTel lost about \$2 million trying to get into the business of collecting and selling people's health records to drug companies. I got the distinct feeling that the minister was learning about it on Friday for the first time as well.

SaskTel went to great lengths to keep the purpose of this company hidden, Mr. Speaker. While IQ&A was mentioned in the annual report to the government, exactly what IQ&A did was never, ever even summarized in those reports. There was no news release when this company was started back in 1998, and it seems like SaskTel didn't really want anyone to know that they were buying and selling people's health information.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister. What was SaskTel up to? Why would they go to such great lengths to hide the activities of this company?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding that there wasn't sale of health information. But I do want to point out, as well, the member, as I said last Friday, the member chooses to point out the fact that this Crown lost money.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go through a list, if you will . . . if I could, I should say, of the companies that made money. Leicester Cable made over a hundred million dollars, Mr. Speaker. Saturn/Austar made 37, over 37 million. Regional Cable over 8 million, Mr. Speaker. Alouette made over 6 million, Mr. Speaker. ISM Westbridge, over 23, just about 24 million. And yet that member chooses to pull out one Crown corporation that loses money, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the government and the minister specifically, seems more than happy to start taking responsibility for some of the Crowns he just mentioned. When will he take responsibility for this Crown, and others that risked and lost taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker? That's what we're asking him to do in the legislature over the last number of days.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, IQ&A put out an annual report each year, but they never mention the purpose of their business. They never once mentioned they were in the business of buying and selling people's health care information. It seems like a pretty important detail to overlook.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of other people must have had big problems with this idea because in two years, they didn't make a single sale, this company. All their partners bailed out; they lost \$2 million. Obviously people were very uneasy about the idea of SaskTel buying and selling people's health care information.

To the minister, Mr. Speaker: is buying and selling people's health information an appropriate business activity for a Crown corporation?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is that IQ&A asked Saskatchewan Health for access to their information. They responded, no way.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, don't you think SaskTel might have then in fact phoned the Department of Health ahead of time before investing a million to \$2 million in wasting the taxpayers' time and money. How about picking up the phone and asking the question, Mr. Speaker. This is unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, the sad part is SaskTel spent \$2 million getting into the health information business. And they obviously had no assurances from anyone, including their own Department of Health, they had no assurances that anyone wanted to do business with them.

At the end of the day, no one ever did use the service. SaskTel

never made a single sale — not one. They never generated a thin, lonely dime of revenue. And Saskatchewan taxpayers are left on the hook for \$2 million. So there's a whole series of questions, Mr. Speaker.

Where was the business plan? Where were the signed contracts? Where was the due diligence? Mr. Speaker, SaskTel blew \$2 million and never made a dime on the venture. Who is responsible for the gross mismanagement of Saskatchewan taxpayers' money?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — I would ask the question, Mr. Speaker, where were the questions from the opposition one year ago, in 1999, Mr. Speaker, when there were annual reports that talked about this very situation over a year ago. He talks as if he's revealing some big secret to the public of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this legislature many times, the Crown Investments Corporation and our Crowns will make investments that will lose money, Mr. Speaker; but they will make many more investments, Mr. Speaker, that will earn much revenue and dividends for the people of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, the minister asks why we didn't ask about this question last year when it was mentioned in the annual report. There was no mention of the fact that this government had set up a subsidiary of a Crown corporation to sell people's health care information. Not one.

And more to the point, where was the minister when these reports were being made to him that this company was losing money and not making a single sale. Where was the minister, Mr. Speaker?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, SaskTel set up IQ&A in 1998 with four partners. But by '99, the partners realized there was no demand for the service and they decided to wind it down. Yet on July 19, '99, SaskTel spent another \$830,000 to buy out the four partners. Why on earth would SaskTel pour another \$800,000 into this thing, when it was clear that it was already going down the tubes?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Mr. Speaker, of course hindsight for the opposition is 20/20. Mr. Speaker, it is clear — it is clear — we're admitting, Mr. Speaker, that there will be investments where the Crown Investments Corporation, in our Crown corporations, will lose money, Mr. Speaker. But in every case there is due diligence, there is audits completed, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Crown Corporations Board goes through the investments, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, 9 times out of 10, Mr. Speaker, the Crowns make money and return profits and dividends to the people of Saskatchewan. They diversify a risk when it comes to investment in insurance, Mr. Speaker.



These investments will not always be profitable but the majority of the times, history has shown that they are profitable, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the due diligence on this project was apparently so exhaustive that at the start of the outfit in the first place, they didn't bother to phone the Minister of Health to find out if she was even prepared to sell them information in the first place. That's just absolutely ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, in the face of a \$2 million loss of taxpayers' dollars.

I'll ask the minister the direct question again, Mr. Speaker. Why did SaskTel — and the minister did not answer this question — why did SaskTel spend \$800,000 to buy up the remaining 40 per cent of the company?

He mentions hindsight. Well by then it was clear to SaskTel and the government that this thing was going nowhere. So at that point, why did the minister invest another \$800,000 of taxpayers' dollars when this business was already going down the tubes?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Mr. Speaker, why didn't we sell the Cameco shares when those members suggested we should? And why did we not sell our share in the Bi-Provincial upgrader at Husky when those members said we should, Mr. Speaker? It was because we had good advice from our financial analysts who knew better than we did, Mr. Speaker.

And in every case, Mr. Speaker, there's due diligence and there's audits performed. And, Mr. Speaker, in the majority of cases by far, Mr. Speaker, they will make money and will not lose money. Sometimes there will be money lost, Mr. Speaker. That's what happens when you invest, Mr. Speaker.

But for the people of Saskatchewan, it is always our intent and history will show that they will far more often return profits to the people of Saskatchewan than lose money, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(14:15)

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, we're not getting answers to some very important questions about taxpayers' money and about the waste of taxpayers' dollars so we're going to keep asking them, Mr. Speaker. You can have assurance of that.

I'll give the minister another chance to answer the question. When it was clear that this company was going nowhere — in fact in this legislature not less than a year ago the then Minister of Health confirmed that the province wouldn't be selling health care information — when it was clear that this business idea was going absolutely nowhere, why did the government, why did SaskTel, purchase an additional 40 per cent for \$800,000 worth of taxpayers' money? Why did the government do that?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Mr. Speaker, well first of all, we're not going to get into as a CIC (Crown Investment Corporation) Board, — and I've answered this question a number of times — into the micromanaging of the investments in the corporations, Mr. Speaker. We will absolutely not do that, Mr. Speaker.

It is up to our officials — who have historically shown clearly, who have a reputation of solid investment and solid advice — that we will allow them to provide us the information, Mr. Speaker, the advice and the recommendations. Mr. Speaker, and their recommendations and the history has shown that they will make money way more times than they will lose money for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Two million dollars is not micromanagement in the constituencies we represent on this side of the House. And as a news flash for the members opposite, it's not a small issue for your constituents either. It's \$2 million we're talking about here, Mr. Speaker.

There's another question for the minister — where did the money go? IQ&A's annual report shows that only about \$350,000 was spent on capital assets like computers. About \$1.8 million simply shows up on the annual report as operating expenses. There's a lot of operating expenses for a company that never generated any money, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please explain what were these operating expenses? What or who received the \$1.8 million?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — You know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about a loss of something under \$2 million and we shouldn't trivialize it because it's important, Mr. Speaker. But that member's party, Mr. Speaker, racked up a debt that's costing us \$2 million a day, Mr. Speaker — a day, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, what did they do when they were in opposition . . . when they were in government, Mr. Speaker? They racked up debt in our Crown corporations of over \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker. They stripped away the retained earnings, Mr. Speaker. The credit rating of this province hit an all-time low, Mr. Speaker.

What did we do, Mr. Speaker? We've reduced the debt, Mr. Speaker, and we've seen nine consecutive credit rating upgrades, Mr. Speaker — upgrades. And I think that shows that the people that advise us in our Crown corporations provide us good, sound financial advice, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line for this project is that the NDP blew 2 million of the taxpayers' money on a company that never made a single sale, never earned a single dollar of revenue.

Taxpayers have a right to know. Where did this money go? There is absolutely no disclosure in IQ&A's annual report on this — and I'll tell the minister because it's clear he hasn't read

the annual report — that you can't find this detail in that report. It just says operating expenses. What were these operating expenses? Was it salaries? Was it consulting contracts? Where did this money go? Who received the \$2 million SaskTel blew on this company? Answer the question.

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well again, I'm not going to get into the details of micromanaging our Crown corporations or the investments that they make, Mr. Speaker.

I've made no secret about this, Mr. Speaker. Our Crown corporations will continue to invest in investments that they think are good for the people of Saskatchewan and they will lose money sometimes, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes they will not be profitable, but the history has shown, Mr. Speaker, that they will return investments and dividends to the people of Saskatchewan many, many more times than they will lose, Mr. Speaker.

The evidence is as I have just listed. Over \$200 million in investments that they made for the people of Saskatchewan versus 20 million that they've lost, Mr. Speaker — ten to one.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 204 — The Justice System Review Act

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move the first reading of Bill No. 204, The Justice System Review Act.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

## WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure on behalf of the government to table the answers to written questions 77 through 91.

**The Speaker:** — Written questions for 77 through to 91 inclusive are hereby tabled.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

### SECOND READINGS

#### Bill No. 10 — The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 2001

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the Assembly today to move second reading of The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 2001.

It's a very important piece of legislation for the province and the oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker. This legislation provides the framework for a comprehensive program that will ensure Saskatchewan's oil and gas wells, facilities and related sites are properly abandoned and reclaimed once they are no longer

needed.

Within industry, the program is generally known as the oil and gas orphan program. A number of amendments of housekeeping . . . of a housekeeping nature are also included in this Bill to update The Oil and Gas Conservation Act and strengthen the authority to make minister's orders and regulations.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, represents another example of our government's commitment to responsible protection of the environment. Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 41,000 oil, gas, and service related wells, along with numerous flow lines and facilities like oil, batteries, and gas processing plants in this province.

Nearly 10,000 wells are already inactive. At some point in the future, when no further economic need or use can be identified for the wells and facilities, they must be properly abandoned and the sites reclaimed. The costs to carry out this work will be significant.

Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas industry is prepared to guarantee the proper abandonment and reclamation of wells, facilities, and related sites if the province introduces a comprehensive abandonment and reclamation liability management program and strictly enforces the provisions of that program.

The program that we are introducing through this legislation will ensure that the responsibility for proper well and facility decommissioning and cleanup rests with industry and not Saskatchewan taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's oil and gas orphan program will contain two important parts. The first consists of a more comprehensive licencing system for wells and facilities, along with a system of financial guarantees to ensure that all licensees will be able to meet their abandonment and reclamation responsibilities.

This part of the program will focus on steps necessary to prevent wells and facilities from becoming orphans. An orphan in this context is a well or facility where the owner is defunct or missing.

The second part of the program will consist of a fund financed entirely by industry, which can be used to abandon and reclaim orphan wells and facilities.

I am pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that the provisions of our oil and gas orphan program are based on the recommendations of an industry government committee that has been reviewing this subject for more than a year.

Industry had suggested that we model our program after Alberta's orphan program. We acknowledge that our program reflects many of the principles and provisions contained in Alberta's orphan program.

Mr. Speaker, I want to specifically acknowledge and thank the three industry associations that worked with our department and Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management in the development of this environmentally responsible program. They include the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the

Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada and the Saskatchewan Swab Producers Association.

The associations will continue to work with us over the next few months to develop the regulations necessary to have a fully functioning program.

This is a very forward-looking and responsible piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. While the oil and gas industries expect it to be a very important part of the provincial economy for many decades to come, now is the time to adopt measures that will ensure the final stage in the resource development cycle is properly managed.

I commend the industry for its interest and support in this environmental stewardship initiative.

With those brief remarks and comments, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 2001.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to enter into the debate on Bill No. 10, The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act.

A number of issues have come to light, when I heard the minister speak on this amendment Act . . . Act; as well, as our critic has touched on a number of issues that we have some concern with and want to follow-up a little bit further.

One of the first things that the minister talked about is how no one can drill without ministerial licence or having to go to the minister for a licence. And it was just a short few minutes ago he was saying how, as a minister, he didn't want to micromanage. And I'm just wondering how that works when now everybody has to go ask the minister to drill before they can.

But certainly, the oil and gas industry in Saskatchewan is an area that we really need to flourish and to really carry this province into the future, as we all know that agriculture is having its troubles but the oil and gas industry with the rate increases that we've experienced through the gas area is a very, very important industry to the province.

And there are a number of things that we need to do to increase the capacity of our fields and hopefully this Bill goes towards some of them.

The reclaiming costs of orphan wells and how that's going to be transferred onto companies so that we don't have environmentally reckless people out there and so there's some responsibility on the companies, we think is a good thing. But there's a number of companies that we want to deal with, and touch with, talk to regarding that very issue.

It was also interesting that the minister had talked about how they're going to model it after the Alberta experience, and we've often said some of the things that are done right in Alberta and commented on them, they keep calling us, saying to us that all you have is Alberta envy and everything else. Well

it's always interesting, when they bring legislation in from Alberta, I wish they would have thought of this about 30 years ago and followed the Alberta experience back then and we would never be in the situation that we're in.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McMorris:** — So, Mr. Speaker, we would like to take this Bill and certainly do a lot more consultation with the people in the industry. As I said, we realize that these people are very key to the growth and the expansion of our province, the economic well-being of this province, and it would . . . so we'll adjourn the debate now and consult with the groups that would be interested.

Debate adjourned.

### **Bill No. 11 — The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, 2001**

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the Assembly again to move second reading of The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, 2001.

The specific amendments, Mr. Speaker, will be firstly, provide clear authority for the province to levy a tax on crude oil that is recovered from certain oil field facilities and that was never measured at the time of production for purposes of applying a Crown royalty or freehold production tax; secondly, to protect royalty revenues that have been collected to date on recovered crude oil; and third, prevent crude oil recovery facilities from being used as a means to produce provincial royalty . . . to reduce, I should say, provincial royalties and/or taxes.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that we are not changing our basic policy of levying a royalty or tax on oil recovered from oil field facilities such as water disposal plants and waste-processing facilities. The province has levied a royalty on recovered crude oil since 1983, Mr. Speaker. I also want to make it clear we are talking about raw crude oil and not used motor oil.

Recently questions were raised regarding the province's authority to levy a royalty on oil recovered from certain oil field facilities including waste-processing facilities. The legal advice we received, Mr. Speaker, suggested that our authority to levy a royalty on this oil was not as strong as it could be and may not stand up to a legal challenge. We were also advised that a tax, rather than a royalty, should be applied to this oil. For this reason we are taking the prudent step of ensuring that clear authority exists to charge a tax on this oil.

Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of oil produced in the province is measured at the wellhead or at a battery where the fluids recovered from a well are separated into water, gas, sediments, and saleable crude oil. Unfortunately some of the oil is retained in waste materials, such as saltwater or produced sand, and is not measured as production while part of the waste product. If the oil is not measured as production, no royalty or tax is assessed.

We are pleased, Mr. Speaker, to see that operators of various oil field facilities are recovering oil from waste streams. Clearly we do not wish to discourage this practice. At the same time, there is concern that certain crude oil recovery facilities could be used as a means to reduce or avoid paying royalties and taxes on other oil production if this recovered crude oil was not subject to some form of levy.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation provides the authority and framework for a tax on recovered crude oil. The specific details of the calculation of the tax, the level of the tax, etc., will be provided for in the regulations. We will be consulting extensively with crude oil producers and operators of waste-processing facilities in the development of those regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure the members of this Assembly that we are not looking to increase revenues from this source. As we work with the industry on the development of the regulations, we will have an opportunity to design a system that recognizes the unique nature of crude oil recovered from oil field waste streams. We want a fair and administratively simple tax system which encourages crude oil recovery yet protects against possible abuses.

Again with those brief remarks, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, 2001.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments on Bill No. 11, The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act. And a couple of . . . Again after listening to the minister and having a brief look at the Bill and not a lot of time to go through it, clause by clause, but certainly any time that we hear the government or the members opposite talking about adding another tax, it really makes us nervous. And it makes us, you know, want to do as much research as we possibly can.

As I mentioned before that the oil and gas industry is extremely important. And I realize that, you know, if there's some crude oil being taken that the proper royalties aren't being paid to it, paid on it, there maybe needs to be some steps. But I'd be concerned that if you're starting to raise tax on this, whether the companies would find it profitable then or not. And so that's some of the issues that kind of come to light when we talk about this Bill.

As I mentioned, the last thing that we want to have is companies from around — well, mainly Alberta — but around the country that are coming into Saskatchewan and saying well there's the government of the day, the NDP government raising another tax, are we going to invest in that province? And so many times they decide not to. And I think that's one of the reasons why, as I mentioned before, that we find our province is lagging behind in a number of areas.

So the minister is talking about a tax rather than a royalty, that type of thing. But again until we consult with the groups that we think this is going to affect, we would like to make sure that they're comfortable with it and that the crude oil will still be taken from waste streams and not just simply, because of the cost is too high, ignored.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time though I'd like that the Assembly do now proceed to item 3 under second reading of a private members' public order, Bill 212, The Balanced Budget Act, 2001.

The division bells rang from 14:36 until 14:46.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

#### Yeas — 22

Hermanson	Heppner	Julé
Krawetz	Boyd	Stewart
Eagles	Wall	Bakken
McMorris	D'Autremont	Bjornerud
Weekes	Kwiatkowski	Brkich
Harpauer	Wakefield	Wiberg
Hart	Allchurch	Peters
Huyghebaert		

#### Nays — 31

Calvert	Kasperski	Hagel
Lautermilch	Atkinson	Serby
Melenchuk	Cline	Sonntag
Goulet	Van Mulligen	MacKinnon
Wartman	Thomson	Prebble
Belanger	Crofford	Axworthy
Nilson	Hamilton	Junor
Addley	Jones	Higgins

**The Chair:** — Order, order. The vote will continue.

Harper	Trew	Osika
Lorjé	Yates	McCall
Hillson		

### SECOND READINGS

#### Bill No. 11 — The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, 2001 (continued)

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could, I would like to add one or two comments that I'd like to put forward with regards to the amendment on this Act.

Some of the things that I've noticed referred to in this Act affect my particular area to a great extent. One of them, of course, is the talking about the freehold gas and oil holdings. There's a great number of freehold leases in my constituency and I'm afraid that when the tax is put on these, as opposed to a royalty, there's a great concern because people will be looking at that as a particular signal.

Another thing that is a particular problem in our area, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that there is a lot of by-products that come up with the oil and the gas. There is a great deal of water, salt water is generated, a great deal of sand is generated, and because of this the expense level in my particular area is very high.

A lot of effort is put into recovering anything they can from this

particular . . . these particular by-products, and the fact is that this costs the oil companies a great deal. There is an expense for separating the oil, making . . . separating the sand from the oil, making sure that the sand is moved and deposited in such a way that it is acceptable to the Saskatchewan government regulations.

Also the water that is generated has to be disposed and it has to be disposed in a proper way. Very expensive for the companies and there's no revenue for these kinds of things.

Anything that can be generated for the company would certainly help offset that and in fact, allow these companies to expand and to try to develop even further in our province. By putting a tax on this — a further tax — is certainly not the right signal to try to develop further into this province.

Now when we're talking about developing the regulations much like they were in Alberta, as was referred to earlier, I think we could learn a lot about the kinds of, the conditions that are given to these companies in Alberta to try to make them move ahead and develop further and not, and not tax them.

A lot of consideration must go into these kinds of Bills. Certainly I would like to spend more time with the companies in my area. And for that reason, I move that we adjourn debate.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

#### Clause 1

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We just have a few questions to ask of the minister and her officials. And I'd like to welcome her official, I guess. I was out of the room for the introduction, so welcome.

In terms of each of the symbols of the government, Madam Minister, the government has decided to proclaim these official symbols of Saskatchewan. Can you tell us the decision process in selecting the white-tailed deer, the needle-and-thread grass, and curling as the provincial sport.

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Thank you. I'd like to thank the member opposite for her question. And before I answer, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce someone who is no stranger to this House. I would like to introduce our chief protocol officer, Dr. Michael Jackson, who will be assisting me in answering the questions today.

With respect to the decision process, I would like to inform the House that this whole thing basically got started by an on-line magazine, I believe it's called *Virtual Saskatchewan*, who were doing a poll of people — an on-line poll — about what should be the official animal. And when they started the poll, I'm not sure which commercial radio station — and I believe it was a commercial radio station — grabbed on to this and started

doing a poll with their listeners and pretty soon it extended to the non-commercial radio station, and people all over Saskatchewan just got very excited about the question of having a provincial animal.

With respect to the provincial sport, we had the Saskatchewan Curling Association come to us and ask that it be designated as the official sport.

And the grass emblem basically came about because we had a coalition of groups who are involved in conservation wanting to do something to have us designate an official grass. And they were the ones who basically chose the grass because of the value that it has to ranchers in Saskatchewan.

So that's really how the thing started. It's a process that seems to have risen, if you will, almost organically. It seems that the people of Saskatchewan are looking for more emblems and honours, and I think that we are fortunate in this Legislative Assembly to be able to respond to that grassroots groundswell.

And while I'm at it, I do want to thank the members opposite for their assistance in helping to fast-track this Bill so that it can be proclaimed. And I think that the willingness of the opposition to assist in this process is part of that whole groundswell of recognizing that it is important that we add to our honours and emblems in this province. Thank you.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Madam Minister, you mentioned that the Curling Association of Saskatchewan came forward recommending curling.

I'm just wondering, did you give opportunity for other organizations involved in sports to forward, of course, what they would think, which obviously would be the hockey association would think hockey should be, and baseball — baseball. Was this opportunity given? Or did you just go forward with curling because they had asked you to?

(15:00)

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Well I did mention that the Saskatchewan Curling Association requested curling to be the official sport. After that, then there was an omnibus survey and there was a lot of polling that was done with respect to choosing of the official sport.

And I recognize that it's always very difficult. For instance, there's a very popular morning broadcaster in this province who was holding out for basketball as the official sport and she didn't get that.

We decided to go with curling because it's a sport that people of all ages and both genders can participate in. It requires teamwork but at the same time requires a lot of skill. And we have so many provincial curling champions that we wanted to recognize indirectly by naming curling as the official sport.

So that's the reason ultimately that we decided to go with curling as the official sport.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Madam Minister, you said we decided. What exactly do you mean by that? Did you have a committee? Did

you have a group from your ministry or who was the who in we decided?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — To the member opposite, I did refer to the omnibus survey that was done and also a number of radio stations conducted their own polling, and curling seemed to draw up to the button on this one.

So it seems that while various people have different sports that they want to put forward, the one that seemed to be the clear winner was curling.

And so the department brought forward the recommendation based on the omnibus survey, based on the radio stations' polls, then I took it to cabinet and we're now bringing it here to the legislature.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Madam Minister, I think the people of Saskatchewan will be interested in what other choices there were. And I mean I think we are on this side. Just like did you choose from three sports, or how did you . . . you know, what were some of the other choices that you eliminated?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Well Sheila Coles of CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) will be disappointed to know that one of the options that was considered . . . that was not considered in the omnibus poll, was not basketball.

There were four options for an official sport: curling, football, hockey, and soccer. Curling ranked the highest at 47 . . . Soccer is amazingly popular and growing in popularity . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, in Saskatchewan, in Saskatchewan.

So because of the popularity of those four sports they were the ones that were included in the omnibus poll. And here's the ranking that happened on them. Curling ranked the highest at 47.3 per cent, followed by hockey at 31 per cent. I'm sorry I don't have the rankings for football and soccer. But I will point out to the members that over 50 per cent of the rural residents who responded to the poll favoured curling. So that's why we've gone with curling.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Now that these symbols have been selected, what happens now? Does the government let the province, everyone in the province know, or have you already . . . do you feel that you've already let this information out?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — We're not actually planning an official communications strategy on this. We will be letting the Curling Association trumpet curling as the official sport. I think it's going to sort of happen organically. Part of what's happening is the debate in the House. There's been a tremendous interest in these honours and emblems. And of course once we officially pass the Bill, then more people are going to become aware of the official grass, the official sport, and so forth — the official animal. And it'll gain speed on its own.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Are there any other forthcoming official symbols that you are planning to initiate or bring forth?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Certainly not for the time being. But I would say that in my travels I have seen what a great publicity

tool and a sense of awareness and chauvinism, in the positive sense, symbols can be. When you designate certain symbols it allows people to feel a sense of pride for their home province, or their home state as the case may be.

In my travels I once saw in the state of Minnesota an official passport. And I noted in there they had an official fish, an official drink, an official pie, and they even had an official muffin, if you can imagine. So if the people of Saskatchewan want to have a muffin, I suppose we could entertain that notion. But right now for this legislative session we're interested in adding to our emblems an official sport, an official grass, and an official animal.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you. In terms of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, what is the process to select who gets this award each year — or is it awarded yearly, and what is the process?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — In response to the member, I would say that it is awarded annually, and it's done in response to public nominations. We have an entity called the Saskatchewan Honours Advisory Committee, chaired by Ted Turner, and they're the ones who make the recommendations for the awards.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. And who makes the final decision then? Is there an independent board or the Premier or . . .

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — The process basically, to the member opposite, is that the Saskatchewan Honours Advisory Council makes the recommendations to the Premier. The Premier then concurs, and then makes recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Has there ever been an instance where the recommendation has been rejected by the Premier, or is it an automatic?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I'm advised that the Premier has never turned down a recommendation of the advisory council.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Madam Minister, the Act refers to current or long-term citizens of Saskatchewan in terms of eligibility for receiving this honour. What is meant by long term? Is there a time frame attached to that and could you tell us what it is?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — In response to the member, I would advise that there is no specific time frame. The advisory council has discretion to determine that. And an example of someone who has been awarded the honour would be Pamela Wallin, a few years ago.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Changes are now being made under this Act to the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, and there's a process called honorary inductions. How is that different from what we have now?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I would advise the member that while the advisory council makes the recommendation to the Premier and then on to the Lieutenant Governor in the normal way, the difference is that these people will not be required to be necessarily Canadian citizens nor necessarily be present or

long-term residents of the province. But other than that, the process will go in the same normal way.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, just a few follow-up questions. I don't have a lot for you this afternoon on this Bill.

Certainly we recognize that with the important events that will be taking place here on Thursday that there is some need for hastiness, and we're certainly willing from this side to want to co-operate fully.

I think for the record we'd like to have a few things clarified. One, we know that, you know, you certainly used some prudence in this process. You indicated to the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy that no committee was struck. You used basically polling by CBC Radio and what have you. How has that . . . were you able to, though, through some portion of time, attribute cost to your department to get from your start-up to this point in time?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — In response to the member opposite, I would first of all like to thank the opposition for their co-operation in allowing this Bill to proceed. You've been very helpful and I do appreciate this.

With respect to the question of costs, there really were no incremental costs with the emblems. It was the time of the officials, but they were hired anyway so there weren't any extra costs.

There will be in the future — and I mean in the very immediate future — some incremental costs because we intend to publish a new symbols brochure. The old one is very badly out of date. It doesn't even have, for instance, our mineral, potash, in it.

So we will be putting out a new brochure. There will be that kind of incremental cost. But that's really to keep us up to date.

(15:15)

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, to the minister. The member from Weyburn-Big Muddy discussed with you at length the choosing of curling as our provincial sport. And as a curler, I thought it was a very good idea, but as a hockey player, I of course am somewhat disappointed. I know you had to pick one. And as someone who has no interest at all at this time in soccer, I'm glad it didn't get to be chosen.

But, Madam Minister, there is some curiosity from my part in the choosing of the provincial grass. I know from many of our members on this side of the House, the choosing of needle-and-thread grass was probably quite relevant.

Those of us who are a little farther north, of course, never heard of this grass being as we don't have that a little farther north. And certainly ranchers in this province are going to feel some pride that a grass that they are dependent upon for their livelihood is being recognized as the provincial grass.

Madam Minister, though, there is a large area of the province, a lot of our provincial population whose cultural association with the natural world derive a great deal of significance from a very

different type of grass.

I'm wondering, Madam Minister, if you might be able to elucidate for us how many grasses that you looked at in choosing this symbol. How may . . . or what process was used to eliminate many of the other grasses?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I would like to thank the member opposite very much for that question.

The grass emblem is basically coming forward by virtue of the Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan committee. And that committee has several members. I'll just read them for the record because I think they've done an excellent job and I would like to commend them at this time.

The Canadian Wildlife Service; the Canadian Plains Research Centre; University of Regina; Ducks Unlimited; Parks Canada; the grazing and pasture technology program; Nature Conservancy of Canada; Nature Saskatchewan; PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration); Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food; Saskatchewan Energy and Mines; Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management; Saskatchewan Research Council; the Saskatchewan Stockgrowers Association; the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation; the University of Saskatchewan; and the World Wildlife Fund.

Now that committee, which is a very hard-working and dedicated committee, also considered the western porcupine grass and the June grass before making its selection.

And if you will permit me, I will make a few comments about the grass that they ultimately did decide, the stipo comata, or needle-and-thread grass. Though some of us — I hate to say it — probably know it by a name that we used more commonly, which is spear grass.

It's a native of the Northern Great Plains region of North America, and it is a component of the vegetation on nearly all of the 14 million acres of native grasslands of Saskatchewan. It's a major component of mixed grass prairie in the drier parts of the province. The stipo comata is nutritious forage and it's a high yielding species, as those of us who've gone walking on the prairies and had to pick the spears out of our socks can attest.

It's very conspicuous in the field with its prominent flag leaf and long-curling awns. It can be used, which I think this is why it got the nod actually, it can be used in reclamation activities when disturbed sites need to be returned to a long-lived hardy species. The stipo genus of grasses, which this is part of that family, is considered to be the oldest grass genus on the planet.

And as well, people are busy working, biologists are busy working cultivars of the needle-and-thread grass to make it even more adaptable to wildlife and reclamation plantings. So we think it's an excellent choice of a grass and we do commend the people for their choice on that.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Could you repeat the other two grasses that were eliminated, please?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Certainly. Western porcupine grass was eliminated and June grass was eliminated.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess those of us from the North . . . Could you elucidate just a little bit these two grasses, so that I could get a little clearer understanding of . . . I understand now the grass that you've chosen. It's quite a historical context for Saskatchewan and for certainly North America. But these other two grasses must have some significant context also, if you could just explain those a little bit to me.

I guess what I want to try to get to is, why in Saskatchewan with the historical relationship between our First Nations people and their culture, that sweet grass was not looked at?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I'm going to give you a two-pronged answer. First of all, the Stock Growers' Association were very active in this committee, and they find that the needle-and-thread grass is just an excellent grass in terms of reclamation and forage and so forth. And so that's why they were really pushing for this grass; it's very useful in the ranching business.

Secondly with respect to sweet grass — and I'm sorry I'm even debating if sweet grass is a grass — but with respect to sweet grass, it is an important Aboriginal symbol. It's used in important observances, and I would doubt that First Nations people would want such an important symbol to be declared a provincial grass.

It's important in many of their observances, and so we don't want to tread on their toes by appropriating it. There have been far too many appropriations of symbols by the dominant culture throughout the centuries and we would not want to give offence to First Nations people in that sense.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, to the minister. I appreciate your comments and I welcome the thought process that you've . . . I guess, you know, when you listed off the associations and the groups that were involved, one of them I noticed that was conspicuously absent was anyone representing First Nations people. So I guess I would have some concern that a decision like this would be made without their input.

You could be right, that they may find that because of the religious context of sweet grass, that it would be inappropriate to have it as a provincial grass. But without that input from them, we, being the dominant again, would be making a decision on their behalf. And I think we need to be a little more cognizant of that in the future, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, though, I want to switch at this time to the official animal of the province, the white-tailed deer. And certainly as a wildlife enthusiast, someone who has these animals wandering across his lawn on any given morning in the summertime, the beauty of this animal and its ability to provide sustenance for many centuries in this province to the people that have lived here, I understand a great deal of the attachment for this animal. And certainly the member for Rosthern now is going to be able to have some use for that head that he picked up in his grill the other day.

But, Madam Minister, again I have some curiosity. This is an animal that is basically restricted to the bottom 40 per cent of the province and there are certainly other animals that range over a much larger percentage of the province. So I'm wondering, what other animals were considered and what process was used to eliminate those ones?

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

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Requesting leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

## INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Mr. Chair, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House a group of grade 7 and 8 students from Willow Bunch. And they're here visiting today for a short period of time and their teachers, Jeanette Mondor and Marc Cheriyan. I would like everybody to join me and welcome them.

But first I'd like to say to the group, it seems kind of quiet in here right now. You should have been here about an hour and a half ago when question period was on and it was a lot more lively then. So would you please join me in welcoming the group from Willow Bunch.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

#### Clause 1

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I would like to thank the member opposite for the question.

And before we move off the grass, I do want to just say officially, for the record, that department officials did consult with the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) with respect to the naming of an official grass and they approved of the recommendation for the needle-and-thread grass.

Now with respect to the animal, I believe I'd already indicated that the initiative came from an online magazine and then the various radio stations took up the cause. It really caught fire in the province. It seems that there's a great deal of desire to have an official animal in this province.

There was some polling, and I'm going to admit right upfront that the white-tailed deer didn't come out on top on the polls.

But what came out on top on the polls was something that most of us would consider a pestilential roadkill, actually. The gopher came out on top. And when we analyzed the results, it seemed that it was more out-of-province people who were voting for the gopher than not. And we have, you know, we know that there are major concerns with the gopher. Farmers



are very concerned about the problems that gophers can create.

So the close second was the white-tailed deer. It was followed at some distance by other animals. The fox, for instance, got 9 per cent; the antelope got 5 per cent.

**An Hon. Member:** — Coyote.

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I don't think coyotes even came in on the radar screen.

But I would point out that our coat of arms has the white-tailed deer, or a version thereof on it, so it was decided that the white-tailed deer should be our official animal.

(15:30)

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, to the minister, I guess, you know, from someone who has been given the opportunity by my leader to critique the area of northern affairs, I was hoping that maybe the two ministers from the North would have had some influence.

You indicate that the animal on our coat of arms could have some resemblance to a deer. It could also have some resemblance to a moose, which is a far more wide-ranging animal in this province, and certainly has been a long-time staple of the First Nations people of this province, especially those in the North.

And again there is that one animal that at one time was almost extinct in this province, the buffalo, which is making a strong comeback in private enterprise. It was also a long-time staple of the First Nations people of this province, and probably would have been something that could have been looked at by the province.

Again I have some concern I guess of using polling from people from outside the province. Those people I'm sure, who would find great favour from the member from North Battleford when he talked about the Richardson's ground squirrel, or gopher, as it is more commonly referred to.

Madam Minister, I guess we still need to establish, I guess, a provincial rodent. And so the gopher then, its opportunities remain alive and well, although maybe not along the roadsides.

Madam Minister, I was also reading in this Bill, Bill No. 8, this section that you're amending regarding people who can qualify now for honorary membership to the order of Saskatchewan. And you talked about this earlier, that if nominations can now be open to people who are not Canadian citizens, people who may or may not have even lived in Saskatchewan but who could be nominated because of the . . . what could be appropriately termed, as having made contributions to social, cultural, and economic well-being.

I guess I would like to hear explanation as to why we would honour someone who is not a resident of Saskatchewan and may or may not have even lived here.

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — I would like to thank the member opposite for his question. As I recall it's a two-part question.

So I want to just for the record indicate that the white-tailed deer has tremendous economic value to this province. It's estimated at almost \$172 million in terms of . . . by virtue of studies done in other jurisdictions. But we certainly, just from white-tailed deer hunting alone, generate almost \$30 million of economic benefit to this province. So we think that this is a good animal to have as our provincial animal.

With respect to the question about the honorary membership, I think that's quite a fair question to ask. Right now the province has no way to honour distinguished international figures. And so we feel that this is the one way to do it.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of this province, we will be wanting to look to honour various people and people are actually doing an honour to us by accepting the award.

I would point out to the member opposite that the Order of Canada, for instance, has honorary membership and also the Order of Quebec has honorary membership. I'm sorry I can't recall off the top of my head right now, members with honorary membership in the Order of Canada though about one person a year is so designated.

But certainly with the Order of Quebec, various prime ministers of France have been given that honorary membership. And the great humanitarian, Jean Vanier, was also awarded the Order of Quebec.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, to the Minister: in this clause, and you explained it also clearly to the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, that the Premier will receive a recommendation and very seldom or has never rejected a recommendation on who should receive these Order of Merits.

Now I'm wondering, Madam Minister, for this process of when someone who is not a Canadian citizen, who may or may not have ever been here before, should receive an honorary recognition, is that in all likelihood going to bypass the present type of processes that are in place, coming straight out of the cabinet, or how do you envision this happening?

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — To the member opposite, I would say that it will be exactly the same process as for all other recipients of the order. And that's what the legislation says. I will just quote. Section 27.1 will be amended. A new sub (6):

Notwithstanding subsection (1), a person who is not a Canadian citizen or who is not a current or former long-term resident of Saskatchewan may be invested with the order as an honorary member of the order on the recommendation of the council to the President of the Executive Council.

So it will be exactly the same process as for other awardees.

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, to the minister, we're going to wrap this up now. Thank you for your indulgence this afternoon, and I want to thank your official for taking the time to be here.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 11 inclusive agreed to.

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before I do that, I would be very remiss and certainly wouldn't be a terribly good Provincial Secretary if I didn't, first of all, thank the members opposite for their questions. I really appreciated the opportunity to answer them, and I think that they were very keen, very compelling, and very cogent questions. So I would like to thank the members opposite.

And I would also like to thank my official, Dr. Michael Jackson, for his assistance, as I shepherded my first Bill through the legislature.

So having done that, heartfelt, I will say, because I think . . . I do, again, want to thank the opposition for their assistance in this and for helping me with my first Bill in the legislature.

I would move that Bill No. 8, The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001 be now read a third time and passed under its . . . No, I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to move . . . I'm going to report it then. Okay. Thank you. You see? I need an awful lot of assistance on this.

What I'm going to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead of what I planned to do because I'm jumping the gun, I'm going to move that we report the Bill without amendments, absolutely without amendments.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

### THIRD READINGS

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

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 8, The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2001 be now read a third time and passed under its title.

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

(15:45)

### COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

#### General Revenue Fund Environment and Resource Management Vote 26

#### Subvote (ER01)

**The Chair:** — Before we get underway, I'd invite the Minister of Environment and Resource Management to please introduce his officials in the Assembly this afternoon.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my immediate left is Stuart Kramer. He's a deputy minister. And to my immediate right is Dave Phillips, the assistant deputy minister of operations; and to my back right is Bob Ruggles, assistant deputy minister of programs; and immediately to my back right . . . or back left, sorry, Lynn Tulloch, executive

director of corporate services.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister. And welcome to your officials as well.

Mr. Minister, just a couple of brief items before we move on to a number of items that may take a little more time here. In the past you were, as well as being the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, also the associate minister for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. Is that still your status, Mr. Minister, and can you indicate to us what duties are involved in your associate minister capacity?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you. Just to clarify that I'm no longer the associate minister. That position, of course, has been taken over by a very capable minister. I'm just at this stage of the game primarily the Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Economic and Resource Management). Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And with respect to the Forest Fire Contingency Fund, last year for the first time the government budgeted a separate line item of \$50 million for the Forest Fire Contingency Fund. I note that \$3.85 million were charged against that fund last year, Mr. Minister.

Can you give us a bit of an indication of what was included in some of those expenditures, and what types of costs were covered by the 3.85 million of the \$50 million Forest Fire Contingency Fund?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you for the question again. And first of all, just for the information, there are two firefighting budgets for SERM. One is a \$28 million operational firefighting budget and another is a 50 million contingency escape fire budget.

And what the \$50 million last year was primarily to deal with the fires that we deemed escape fires, that are 100 hectares or above, and that of course are the fires that do cost quite a bit of money.

Last year was a fairly good year. We expended 3.8 million on large fires, thereby decreasing that 50 million contingency fund by 3.8.

And approximately 50 per cent of all cost of firefighting goes to the rent of aircraft; 10 per cent go to firefighting wages — and these are approximate numbers — 9.6 go to supplies and provisions; 2.2 go to rental of heavy equipment; other goods and services, 5.1; overtime, 10.7; fuel, 10.7; and other costs, 1.1. So those are the approximate costs of the overall firefighting budgets combined.

But clearly there are two budgets: one budget for 28 million; another backup budget for 50 million in which any fires over 100 hectares, we take the costs of fighting those fires from the 50 million Contingency Fund.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, was the \$50 million Forest Fire Contingency Fund ever legally established? Was that fund set up where the money's actually physically set aside? Can you describe how this fund was structured and the way in which the \$3.85 million that was used

and charged against it was expended?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — The answer is, certainly, yes it was. The only difference between our regular budget and the Forest Fire Contingency Fund is that there was no separate Act that was necessary but two separate votes: one vote, 26, which established our regular operating budgets for the entire SERM operation; and vote 72, which was the Forest Fire Contingency Fund. Legislation is the same, it's just that there's two separate votes identifying the two sources of revenues for firefighting and operations.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, the fund of \$50 million as I understand it — and we have a letter from the Minister of Finance to this effect — that fund was never legally established. And that the unused monies, in his words, lapsed from it.

So I guess my question is: how did you charge \$3.85 million against a fund that was not legally established? And how do you intend to deal with the \$40 million that you're proposing be set aside this year in a Forest Fire Contingency Fund?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to clarify, it doesn't need a separate Act to be legal. It is not established as a special fund.

It was established as a legal appropriation through the Appropriation Bill like the SERM budget. So it is a vote in the Consolidated Fund — the same as SERM's budget.

And I might add that it's been through some great work of our Finance minister that some of the expenditures in SERM have increased and we are able to do more forest firefighting preparedness work that will lessen the cost overall for fighting forest fires in future years.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, if then, in fact, the way that you describe it last year was appropriate, why is the minister suggesting, and I quote:

A legally established fund will be created, using legislation to be introduced during the current session.

Why is he suggesting that this budget cycle you will, in fact, be requiring separate special legislation in order to maintain the \$40 million Forest Fire Contingency Fund?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you for the question. Just to advise you that last year the \$50 million was set aside. It was a fund that was intended to back us up in case we had the larger forest fire season that we had in 1995, as an example, or 1998. There was some very tough years in firefighting.

But the difference between last year's budget and this year's budget is last year's budget lapsed. At the end of March 31, all the dollars that were left in the \$50 million Contingency Fund lapsed.

This year, we have \$40 million. We want to make sure that the funding stays within SERM's forest firefighting operation and that it doesn't lapse into next year.

So that is a critical difference and that's why legislation this year is different, because first year \$50,000 . . . the money that was set aside for that lapsed. The \$40 million that we're setting aside this year, the legislation is going to be introduced to make sure that it doesn't lapse at March 31, 2002.

(16:00)

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. A couple of questions then, very quickly.

Are you suggesting then that \$46 million lapsed and was returned to the General Revenue Fund? Can you indicate as to where that money went?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, the answer to that question would be yes, it would be returned to the General Revenue Fund. And to point out as well that one of the reasons why we have the Contingency Fund — and it was through the wise advice and support of the Finance minister — is that we are able to look at the yearly challenges of forest firefighting costs. And these costs go up and down, as you can appreciate. And some years are really good and other years are very low.

And what this Contingency Fund does is it allows us to have some continuity in our forest firefighting budget so we're able to continue to operate in a sensible way financially, but also give assurances to the folks out there that there is a good, solid fund in place to fight forest fires in northern Saskatchewan and throughout the province as well.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I note that this year the Contingency Fund, as we've discussed, Mr. Minister, has been reduced to \$40 million.

First of all, I would be interested to know why it is \$10 million less this year than what was anticipated would be needed last year?

And the other thing is I noticed that the categories have changed. Last year the \$50 million was charged against something called supplier and other payments. This year the reduced amount, the \$40 million, is going to be charged against something called transfers for public services.

Can you explain why we are charging it differently? And can you also explain where supplier and other payments were in last year's budget, if that was where the \$50 million was allocated?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you. I think the change, you know, reflects that the \$40 million will be transferred to a special fund once it is created. In the first . . . (inaudible) . . . when you have supplier and other payments, that was directed to mean that we would . . . and we're anticipating costs that would be high, and that's how the fund was characterized, as a supplier and other payments fund in anticipation of forest firefighting costs.

This year once the special fund is created, it's going to be transfers for public services. So really it is a defined cost in the first year, as you mentioned, to supplier and other payments, to a new name under the transfers to public service, once the fund is created.

So really it's not much of a difference in terms of the intent. It's just an interpretation of the uses because there's going to be a lot of activity on the preparedness side, so we're able to do more work in anticipation of forest firefighting as opposed to the actual forest starting . . . we want to spend more money to prevent the fires from carrying on. And that's why you also see a difference of 50 million down to 40 million in this particular fund once it's created, to more activity at the front end of our forest firefighting budget of plus 9 million.

So really we're spending more money in preparedness and trying to stop the fires from getting big or starting at all; and the interpretation that you make in reference to, it really is meant more to, you know, reflect some of the change that the \$40 million will represent once it's transferred to a special fund, once that special fund is created.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — I guess a couple of things, Mr. Minister. Do you expect then that this legislation will in fact be introduced this session? And could you better define then transfers for public services and what kinds of expenditures might be involved in that category? And can you — I realize of course it's tough to predict the fire season — but can you give me some indication as to what the expectation of expenditures from that fund might be this year?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Again just for your information, the use of funds for 2001 will be the same as for the year 2000. It's going to be for escape fires — any fires above 100 hectares or more. And the costs for this fund of \$40 million would be clear, would be used for anything from rent of aircraft to firefighting wages to rent of heavy equipment to other goods and services.

So the first part of your question, to be perfectly clear, is that the intent of the fund this year is going to be the same as last year. And the costs that were covered of last year's Contingency Fund will be the same as this year's.

In reference to the prediction of the forest firefighting costs and the dipping in of this fund, I am glad to see that you can appreciate it's difficult to assess how the firefighting season is going to be.

But what I would say is that legislation we hope to have in this year. And what I will say also is that we're about 75 per cent of the snow cover right now in northern forests. It's very difficult to predict how the firefighting season will be.

We do know that if we put more money into preparedness, that will help us reduce some of the costs of fighting huge escape fires.

So we're looking at being more proactive before the fire begins. And of course, hiring more folks is always something that's going to help us out in the long run.

But clearly I think with the cooler weather during April . . . and like farmers we hope that there's good moisture levels throughout the year so we can kind of hope that it limits the forest firefighting problems that we have in northern Saskatchewan. So we're continuing on being prepared. We're certainly hoping we get some more rain. And again, as I mention, we hope to have the Act introduced this session and

the use of funds for 2001 would be the same as 2000.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, and, Mr. Minister, the 2000-2001 budget projected a use of \$150 million from the Crown Investments Corporation. This money was never expended, and in fact no money whatsoever was used from the Crown dividend pool.

Why didn't you use \$50 million of the Crown Investments Corporation dividend to create the Forest Fire Contingency Fund throughout fully, legally legislated fashion in the first place?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you for the question. You know, with all due respect, I appreciate some questions we have coming our way but that's a question for the Minister of Finance. And when he's here I'm sure that he will answer the question. Thanks.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, how much money out of the Forest Fire Contingency Fund and out of the fire management and forest protection part of the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management budget was used for firefighting out of province and out of country? And how much of that money was recovered by the department?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. Both for in country and out of country, the total cost was 2.7 million. And as you can appreciate many of our firefighters travelled to Alberta, to BC (British Columbia), Manitoba, the Territories, the States. And the full amount of 2.7 million was received back by the province of Saskatchewan.

And that is a deal that all the inter-jurisdictions made amongst themselves, that obviously some jurisdictions have some difficult times during the firefighting season and other jurisdictions come along and help them out. And there's been numerous examples of how the Saskatchewan forest firefighters have been asked for — and they're one of the better-trained squads — and they go out all throughout the States and other provinces to fight fires. And they're really highly touted as being very professional firefighters.

So very quickly, they're a very good firefighting crew. We have agreements with other jurisdictions because from time to time we also need their support, where if we send in our men or equipment, then the cost for sending them in will be paid by the other jurisdictions. So last year 2.7 million was the cost and we received 2.7 million back in payments.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I noted that on budget day the minister of SERM was one of the ministers over on the other side with the bigger smile on his face, and after I seen the public service hirings in the budget . . . We all know now of course that the civil service is going to be increased by 570 new personnel, but the lion's share of those are in fact going to Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. One hundred and three and a half new positions will be created this year alone in the department.

Mr. Minister, can you give us an indication, a breakdown of what those positions are, what those jobs, those new jobs will

be, and a bit of an indication as to how they will be distributed throughout the department, whether in enforcement, administration, or what particular areas that they will be hired into?

(16:15)

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you. I certainly was very pleased with the budget from SERM's point of view. We're pleased with the budget throughout the other departments. As you know, the budget was a tremendously good, powerful, positive budget.

The 104.5 FTEs (full-time equivalents) that you notice in the budget documents. Just for an explanation is that 71 of these FTEs were employees of the seasonal staff, of course, as you know which has typically being used for forest firefighting costs. So the 77 that were on there, or are base staff members . . . I'm sorry, the 71.

So some of the other additions to the SERM budget. Of course 17 FTEs would be new positions, and these new positions are the initial attack and preparedness efforts that I spoke about earlier; that we're going to spend more money attacking the fires before they start or before they get big. So I think the most important thing is . . . the logic that we use is that if we're to prepare better for a fire that begins or is at a small size, to respond to it quicker, then it would stop it from becoming a big fire and costing the province of Saskatchewan a heck of a lot more.

So as a result of that we added 17 new positions in our initial attack and preparedness efforts. And I think that's money that's very well spent on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

The other additions. Of course we have ten and a half FTEs in the safe . . . drinking water problems, and challenges that the province faces. As you know, there's been challenges with the quality of water right throughout Saskatchewan. And again, the Minister of Finance saw a lot of wise use of money, and said having a response team to be able to help some of the communities to ensure we have some safe drinking water guidelines and standards being implemented and followed, and as a support system to many of the RMs and the municipalities and folks out there, that this would be a wise use of money.

And as well, as you know, we have an industry in forestry that's going to be expanding and getting bigger, and we added seven more additional FTEs here to ensure that the forestry companies are complying with our new regulations in forestry.

So you throw in the mix the fact that we have had a core group of people that are now a part of our regular budget, that were under special warrant before. That includes the 71. You throw in the 17 FTEs for fire management, for preparedness, initial attack, and the whole exercise of responding quicker to a fire. And you throw in the FTEs for safe drinking water. And you throw in the FTEs for making sure that folks out there that are harvesting the forest are doing it in a wise, sustainable fashion. It all adds up to a good, solid environmental program. I think it will benefit the people of Saskatchewan for the money that it has taken. Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I would like to follow this up with a little more discussion, but for the moment I would like to relinquish the floor to my good friend, the hon. member from Saltcoats.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And I also want to welcome your officials here today, Mr. Minister.

I want to go to a bit different area than the member for Carrot River was with you, Mr. Minister. And I think you know where we're coming from on this one. At the present time SERM is in the process of taking the RM of Churchbridge to court and has been delayed again I believe till June, adjourned till June.

Mr. Minister, we've seen out in my area in the Saltcoats constituency, and for that matter in a number of constituencies on that side of the province, since going back probably before 1995 where we had many areas flooded out there, we've had many roads washed out, and we've had very large number of acres out in that area that have been under water, or somewhere throughout the summer with the heavy rains that we've had, cropland washed out after the inputs have been in out there.

And I guess the point I'm trying to get across, Mr. Minister, is that farmers right now are struggling as it is and when they put inputs into a crop, which may be as high as a 100 to 140, \$150 an acre, and to see that crop washed away in the middle of the summer by heavy rains which can happen every year out there it seems in the last while, it's becoming the norm more than the exception.

And then to have a problem come along where the local council, local elected officials try and find ways to clear beaver dams, clear drainage ditches, do things that may help alleviate the problem, and it can't completely alleviate the problem, Mr. Minister, but it certainly could help the situation out there.

When local elected people such as reeves and councillors who are answerable to the local people out there try to do something to help them and then we have — and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Minister — but I believe Sask Water was the first one to take these people to task out there. Even went as far as to try and bring a hoe out there and backfill some of these things on a Saturday when I felt they probably thought no one would be around. A hundred farmers gathered, or a hundred plus farmers gathered in the town of Bredenbury and stopped that from happening.

And it seems somewhere along there, Mr. Minister, that SERM got involved again in this and decided that if Sask Water wasn't going to press charges against this RM, that SERM would.

And I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, when the situation has been so wet on that side that . . . why would SERM . . . what is their purpose of going to the extreme of taking this RM to court? What is their reasoning for doing this, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — One of the things that's very difficult in this particular challenge is that we represent the province as a whole. And there is no delight that I take as a minister of having to charge any people of Saskatchewan at all, in any way, shape, or form.

A bit of the history on this particular file. In the fall of 1998, the RM conducted channel clearing of more than 100 kilometres of watercourses on the Blackbird Creek system. They'd done so under the approval of SERM and the work was closely monitored and completed with minimal problems.

And some of the work continued. SERM investigated. The Justice department had a look at this and said that there is basis for charging.

Now I know you can appreciate this: that this is before the courts and I can't make any further comments on this particular case.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Well, Mr. Minister, I don't know. I have a big problem when I see a department of government, a wing of government, coming along and overruling a local body, a local elected body out there that, who are better qualified to represent the people out there.

Now you say you're here to represent the whole province and that's fine; I agree with that. But on the other hand, what on earth does what's happening on the east side of the province have to do with somebody in Kindersley, Rosetown, Swift Current? Absolutely nothing. So that one won't fly, Mr. Minister.

I honestly believe there has to be more to this than we're seeing. A court case aside, Mr. Minister, I realize and I was expecting that answer to come and questions certainly will come as soon as that court case is over.

But, Mr. Minister, what is it that SERM is trying to protect out there? It's certainly not the local farmer. I think some of the reports I've heard out of the court case that even some of the explanations were to do with fish. Well I've lived out there all my life, and in some of these runways if you could find a minnow or a bloodsucker, you'd be lucky. And you certainly wouldn't be out there with your fishing line fishing for anything, so that's not a good excuse.

Mr. Minister, not to do with the court case, but what is SERM trying to protect out there? What really . . . to prevent the removal of beaver dams and we have them in a number of RMs out there; they've been a tremendous problem for us. They've even hurt RMs as far as our roads are concerned, back up into fields. Who really is SERM trying to protect, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. And again I want to re-emphasize is that we take no joy in charging any people of Saskatchewan. It is not something that we enjoy doing at all. And to point out that the laws that we make from SERM's perspective are provincial laws and in many times some of the laws apply; it may seem unfair, but they apply right across the board.

And we have general laws that are made for all of Saskatchewan and what I want to point out is that in the background of this, the RM and SERM work together to clear over 100 kilometres of water courses. That's a significant amount of distance. And the work was closely monitored and there's minimal problems after the work was completed.

However, the work continued on, and there are laws on proper processes for drainage. The investigation was done on these activities. And Justice has determined that there is a basis for charging. And again I go back to my earlier comment, we take no joy in this particular exercises. And again as I mentioned, I can't make any particular comments about this case as it is before the courts.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, then one question. And I touched on it a bit before and I don't believe, unless I missed it, that you maybe touched on it. Why did the jurisdiction . . . (inaudible) . . . has been removed from Sask Water? It seemed to me, all my constituents out there were dealing with Sask Water and all of a sudden Sask Water seems to be out of the picture and SERM is involved.

Can you explain how that happened? Why jurisdiction went from Sask Water and ended up with SERM?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — I just want to point out that both SERM and Sask Water are working together on this one. There are laws and regulations in reference to drainage, and what we want to ensure as a government, that is we have drainage activity happening in a confined area. That we want to work with all the effects of drainage, and that's one of the reasons why SERM and Sask Water have worked together very, very closely on this one.

And of course, what we want to ensure as well is that any drainage activity happening throughout all of Saskatchewan, that we have some influence and that we have some role to play to make sure that the effects are monitored very closely and that the effects are minimal.

(16:30)

So as a result, Sask Water and SERM are working together and it's under the SERM Act that charges were able to laid upon Justice's advice. Now as I mentioned earlier and I'll state it again, it is not in any of our desire to see people of Saskatchewan charged. It is not.

We do a lot of work to try and work with as many stakeholders as we can to see how we're able to bring processes and bring the parties together to see whether it is a resolution or a mediation that can happen. It is not our desire to go down the path of prosecution all the time.

What I also want to say is that we can appreciate some of the agricultural value that many of the farmers contribute to the province. We understand that completely.

But the fact of the matter is that there was activity happening. Justice had a look at this. There was some concern and charges were laid.

And again, as I mentioned before, I don't want to make any further comments on this particular case.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, can you explain to me then . . . You say Sask Water and SERM are both involved in this court case or the bringing about of this court case. Who will be picking up the legal costs of this, Sask

Water or SERM or both or who?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — It would be my assessment that the Justice folks would be paying most of these prosecution costs.

**Mr. Bjerneud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, are you telling me that — SERM initiated these I believe and probably Sask Water I guess, from what I understand today, was involved — that there's no legal costs to SERM or to Sask Water through this procedure; it's all through our Crown . . . the Crowns that's going to pick up the tab for this?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you again for the question. Just to clarify, the legal services are being provided by Sask Justice and SERM. Sask Justice provides us with all the legal services, and Sask Water of course have their own legal counsel. And since I'm not the minister of Sask Water, I can't speak on their behalf.

**Mr. Bjerneud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Then maybe I could ask you a question in a little bit different direction. Has SERM budgeted any dollars in this budget for the cost of this court case?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — The answer is no. There is no budgeted cost for legal counsel for SERM. All costs, as I mentioned before, are covered by Justice.

**Mr. Bjerneud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, just a different area . . . well actually in the same constituency but a different thing. The Assiniboine Valley study is now over, and that was kind of a holdup, I believe, to the Langenburg C&D (conservation and development) and the Marchwell drainage system.

Where are we on that now? Those projects now — are they still on hold or is there anything happening with them?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you for the question. Just to report again that the study has been done, completed, and right now is being looked at by Sask Water, by SERM, by the federal government. And all the recommendations on the Upper Assiniboine River Basin study will be looked at very thoroughly by those partners. Thank you.

**Mr. Bjerneud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just one more question on that line, Mr. Minister. Will we get some kind of a recommendation or some answers from that study very shortly? What's the timeline on that?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Again thank you for the question. Just to point out that the report was done several months ago. And if you'd like a copy of the report, we can certainly forward that to you.

What we want to do is we want to give the partners an opportunity to look through the report and then see what some of the issues are. And to also point out that SERM is one of the people that are looking at . . . one of the folks that are looking at this document and to point out that the lead here is Sask Water. So again we can ask for Sask Water, but to point out that if you want a copy of the study, we can get you a copy.

**Mr. Bjerneud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Actually I have a copy and have read that. In fact I have had it for a while, and that's why I was wondering what the holdup is now.

As we know, this procedure has been going on for a long time out there. This is an organized drainage system set up out there, through that C&D, and because of this the Assiniboine Valley study, has put this project on hold for a number of years, and it looks to me like it's far from over yet.

Mr. Minister, I just want to go back. One question I just missed when we were talking about the problem with the Churchbridge RM out there. I believe right now that someone has hired legal counsel to try and quash a subpoena to have past ministers Lorne Scott and Bernie Wiens testify at that court case.

Now I understand you can't talk about anything to do with the court case, although I would like to know, I guess the question would be is, who hired legal counsel? Is it Sask Justice, or did SERM have anything to do with trying to squash that . . . quash that subpoena for these two people to testify?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you for the question. Just to point out that I can't make any comments on the case that's before the courts, other than to tell you that Justice handles all our legal talks.

**Mr. Bjerneud:** — Okay. Mr. Deputy Chair, thank you. Mr. Minister. I want to thank you and your officials for the answers. And I will pass it back it back over to the member for Carrot River.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Minister, I'd just like to spend a little bit of time on the whole issue of the recreation sites. As you will recall, your department embarked on a scheme to demolish and decommission 46 recreation sites around the province. There was certainly a huge degree of opposition to this, a lot of it coming from northeast Saskatchewan.

I guess my question, Mr. Minister, is where is the department at with the decommissioning of those recreation sites? How many have been decommissioned, and at what stage would the entire process of the demolishing of those sites be at?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. Just to point out that it is always incumbent upon any government department to continue looking at ways and means in which we're able to operate our, our different operations.

And in this case when we look at the rec site closures, and generally what we've done for the park system, and so on and so forth, through the Centenary Capital Fund and through a number of other funds, we are very, very pleased to say that there's been an increase in funding to a number of other provincial park systems, the regional parks systems, and so on and so forth. And that we continue to take part in the 10-year, \$25 million infrastructure program for provincial parks.

So there's no question that there's a lot of subsidies that the province gives to the provincial park system, and what the people demand back is that we continue being very diligent against some of the costs and some of the ongoing costs of our

provincial park system.

So in reference to your question about the rec sites, is that they'll be green space forever. These rec sites are not going to be shut down or closed. They're going to be decommissioned; there's going to be less service to these sites, but they'll be, continue to be operating as green zones or green areas.

And of the 30 areas slated for, you know, the reduction of services and facilities, and so on and so forth, action has been completed at 19 of the sites so far.

(16:45)

Of the other sites that are out there that we're looking at completing the work on, we are dealing with a number of different groups. And we are going to try and see if we could either contract or make lease arrangements with the other folks that are being impacted with some of these rec site closures. And the rec sites themselves are good sites — I'm not saying that they're not — and that the utilization will continue.

What I am saying though is that we have to always be aware that there are some operational costs and ongoing costs in operating all the parks throughout the province, whether it's rec sites or whether it's regional parks or whether it's provincial parks. And we're just trying to make sure we're able to maintain a good core of park services for the entire population of Saskatchewan.

Now rec site closures are really tough. And I'll have to say to you as well is that six of these sites were closed in my constituency. And of course that has an impact on absolutely everyone. And some of the sites that were being closed in my constituency had limited use. So I can appreciate where we're heading now when we talk about some of the choices that we have to make.

So what we're doing now as in all the other cases, we're advising the communities in the impacted area, these are our plans. Did you want to join us to try and figure out a plan which we can keep these sites open for green spaces? Do you have any plans?

And we're doing that for six sites in my constituency and we hope to continue that work throughout the province as well.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, the assurance that you've just given me on the remaining sites that local communities, municipal government, service clubs, those kinds of things will be approached and a discussion will take place as to what their role might be in the future in those sites is exactly the same assurance that you gave me last year just prior to the 19 being decommissioned and demolished, Mr. Minister.

So I would certainly hope that this time, that you do hold true to your word and that those people are in fact consulted with.

A couple of very specific questions. In the case of the Hudson Bay area, Mr. Minister, I understand that there is a partnership agreement with the town of Hudson Bay, the RM of Hudson Bay, and Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. And that partnership agreement very, very clearly

calls for the partners to consult with each other prior to doing anything that may affect one or the other.

And I think one of the things that those communities were the most insulted by, when the rec sites were decommissioned, was that that partnership agreement was not abided by in any form or fashion.

I think the other thing, Mr. Minister, that frustrated a lot of people was the fact that there appeared to be no logical criteria for the decommissioning and the destruction of these sites. As a matter of fact, I'd like to quote from a *Post-Review* article. And I quote:

In a telephone interview with the director of parks and special places branch, it was noted that the closures were made as part of the 2000-2001 budget process when a \$150,000 was cut from SERM's budget. Even though he couldn't say how these particular 46 sites were chosen, it apparently had something to do with the low ratio of visitors and the perception that the sites have therefore deteriorated.

So I guess, Mr. Minister, I would very much appreciate you indicating what type of criteria were in place prior to the decision to decommission those sites and what type of criteria you will be using in the future. And if you can assure the people of the communities in the Hudson Bay area that in the future you will also honour your partnership agreement with them?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well there's no question, Mr. Deputy Chair, that, that . . . I have a copy of the agreement that the member was making reference to and I will share the agreement with him. And throughout the agreement there was really nothing in reference to the rec site area that he made reference to. And I will forward a copy to him.

The agreement that he makes note of is primarily a forestry agreement, and I think if you look at the activity in forestry in the Hudson Bay area, it's the largest free-standing structure in all of Saskatchewan — a tremendous opportunity for the Hudson Bay area and the employees that work in Hudson Bay. It's just a tremendous forestry opportunity.

So the agreement that he makes reference to is an agreement I think the province of Saskatchewan filled with . . . filled right to the absolute limit.

So when he makes reference to the agreement, there's no question in my mind that the agreement was a forestry agreement and that the government paid in full the agreement that they have with the people of the Hudson Bay area.

On reference to the rec site closures, there's no question that the reporter that spoke to the official from SERM — in the reference that you made — the reporter certainly can put their stories in their own words. And I can defend with honour the staff member that you made reference to; that in all occasions of my dealing with him he has been forthright and honest and he has been very, very brave as well.

I made the reference of shutting down six sites in my constituency. So he didn't hide that fact from me, so I doubt



very much if he'd hide any other facts from me as well.

So I think the reporter obviously has his interpretation of how the interview went, and I know that the rec sites that we're looking at, closures is always a difficult thing to do. And as of today — I gave you my word last year that we would continue working with the communities — that offer is still on the table. We are still working forward with the RM as you mentioned, with the village, and we're talking with them on options in the future.

So if you look at the three points raised by yourself, I can assure you that, number one, is that we are working very hard with the RM, with the Indian bands, and with the village to try and see what we can do, or with the town of Hudson Bay to try and see what we can do to maintain these rec sites in a co-operative fashion.

And secondly, the reference of the partnership agreement, it's been paid in full.

And the third aspect as well, in reference to the staff member's comments, I can assure you that his comments are primarily those that made sense at the time of the assessment of the sites and that he has always been an employee that has served well in his capacity as director of the parks and special places branch.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I would like you to indicate at this point the specific status of the rec sites at Greenbush, Dagg Creek, Armit, and Pasqua River.

I would also at this point, Mr. Minister, thank you in advance for the answer and thank your officials for attending today. And subsequent to your providing of the answer, I will be relinquishing the floor to my colleague from Shellbrook-Spiritwood.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to answer the member's question. First of all, as we are having these discussions, as we're standing here with both the town of Hudson Bay and the RMs and several Indian bands and in the spirit of co-operation and fairness — and I know the member appreciates that — I just want to add that these discussions, negotiations, and meetings are happening as we speak. And in order for us to not compromise our partners on this, I would much rather not make any assessment of the sites right now because these are all being discussed, as I mentioned, as we speak.

So what I will do is, as soon as some of these discussions have proceeded to a point where an announcement can be made, then we will most certainly hope that the members are around for those announcements and we'll fill them in prior to the announcement so there's a full understanding as to what the town and the RM and some of the Indian bands in that area have negotiated with the province of Saskatchewan in reference to the four sites that he spoke about.

**The Chair:** — It being near 5 p.m., this committee stands recessed until 7 p.m. this evening.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.