

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of some of my constituents who are concerned about the loss of their community-based ambulance services. 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 not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Cudworth and Prud'homme.

I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition about two of the 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 the Saskatchewan consumers.

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

Mr. Speaker, most of the signatures are constituents of mine from Lucky Lake, Birsay, and Beechy, although I do have signatures from Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan, as well. And I'm happy to present them.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today as well regarding the EMS (emergency medical services) report which we believe will have a detrimental effect on rural Saskatchewan:

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

The people that have signed this petition are all from Rose Valley and Archerwill.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of people in my area concerned about the high energy costs. 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 rate rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

Signatures on this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Melfort, Tisdale, and Kinistino.

I so present.

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

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

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

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens very concerned about the ambulance services in this 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 as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And this is signed by citizens of Rose Valley and Archerwill.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of the people in Swift Current and area who are concerned about their hospital facilities in Swift Current. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, today this position — petition rather — has been signed by people from the city of Swift Current, from Maple Creek, from Beechy as well.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency who are concerned about their ambulance service. And the prayer reads:

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

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And this is signed by the citizens of Radville, Gladmar, and Lake Alma.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition concerning the retention of the Hafford hospital. The prayer reads:

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

And signed by the good citizens of Hafford, Richard, and Speers.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here from citizens concerned about huge profits — SaskPower, 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 rate rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition has been signed by the good citizens from Craik, Bladworth, Saskatoon, Regina, Aylesbury, and Langham.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens. 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.

The petitioners come from the communities of Mozart, Wynyard, and Wishart.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding the high energy costs.

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 the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Spiritwood, Saskatoon, Medstead, Lloydminster, and Meadow Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition also signed by folks from Saskatchewan concerned with the high energy costs and the petition 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 the Saskatchewan consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by the folks from Spiritwood and Leoville.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

To discontinue use of public money for funding events that are pornographic; and

Petitions that are addendums to sessional papers nos. 3, 4, 5, 10, 58, 65, and 110.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 29 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Finance: in the fiscal year 2000-2001, how much revenue did the provincial government take in from the 1 per cent fire prevention tax on insurance premiums, and how much funding was then provided to the office of the Fire Commissioner?

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 29 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: was SaskTel's decision to initiate IQ&A Partnership approved by cabinet and, if so, what is the number of the order in council authorizing this investment; (b) was SaskTel's 1999 decision to acquire the remaining 40 per cent of IQ&A Partnership approved by cabinet and, if so, what is the number of the order in council approving this acquisition; and (c) was SaskTel's decision to wind down IQ&A Partnership approved by cabinet and, if so, what is the number of the order in council approving this decision?

And then there's a whole series of additional questions along this line, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I shall on day no. 29 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: what specific policy changes have each of CIC, SaskPower, SaskTel, SGI, and SaskEnergy implemented in response to the October 15, 1998 report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations on Channel Lake?

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 29 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Justice: how many rural municipalities across Saskatchewan have paid for their portion of RCMP services to date, and please provide a list of those RMs that have paid.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 29 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Crown Investments: what does the government mean by the phrase, quote: "due diligence" and what objective standards are there to determine when due diligence has been achieved?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Merci, M. le Président. Mes chers collègues, je vous présentez mon ami, Raymond Mathieu de Bombardier. Bienvenue, M. Mathieu en Saskatchewan.

Id like to ask all my colleagues, and to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, to recognize my friend, all the way from St. Laurent, Quebec, Raymond Mathieu from Bombardier. Welcome, Mr. Mathieu.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome a citizen of the province in your gallery; a former Speaker of the province who I think will be well-known to all members of the Assembly, John Brockelbank. John it's very nice to have you with us this afternoon.

I had the pleasure of serving with John in the Assembly; a pleasure which I very much . . . an opportunity which I very much enjoyed.

And I'm sure all members will want to join me in welcoming John back to the Assembly and recognize that this is a member who served our Assembly over a span of time that exceeds two and a half decades. So we really appreciate you being here, John. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, 29 students who are seated in the west gallery. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Vollet. They're from historic Davin School which is located not that many blocks away from the legislature. And it's my pleasure to often welcome the students of Mr. Vollet here at the legislature. And I would ask all members to give them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members through you, my cousin, Peter Cline, who's sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. And Peter is a farmer at Zelma, which is our ancestral home.

And as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, Peter ran unsuccessfully for the Liberal Party on a few occasions. And fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, he didn't quite make it. But he has managed to make it to the Legislative Assembly today. And so I'd like all members to join me in welcoming Peter here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Ms. Tanya Petrova, a guest visiting us from Bulgaria. Ms. Petrova is the executive director of BARDA, the Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres in Bulgaria.

She's here in our province to learn more about economic development initiatives that we support through the provincial regional economic development authorities. BARDA is an umbrella organization of independent regional development agencies and business centres in Bulgaria that work to develop small business and regional economies.

Ms. Petrova will spend the day in Regina and then will travel to Saskatoon tomorrow before beginning her journey home on Friday.

(13:45)

Please join with me in welcoming Ms. Petrova to Saskatchewan and give her a display of warm Saskatchewan hospitality.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the

members on this side of the House, I do wish to welcome the honoured guest. We hope you enjoy what you'll learn here today and have a good time when you're here in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Shaunavon Co-op Association

Ms. Higgins: — More good news in rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — The Shaunavon Co-op Association generated record sales for the year 2000. During the co-op's annual meeting, it was announced that sales climbed to just under the \$15 million mark last year.

The co-op, along with enjoying sales increases, also maintains its generous level of community support in 2000, contributing almost \$14,000 through product and cash donations to local groups and organizations.

The co-op general manager, Don Declerq, stated and I quote:

The Shaunavon Co-op is strong and healthy, and like any business in our community, will only be viable as long as we are supported.

This government agrees, Mr. Speaker, and with the support of local residents, along with our government, rural Saskatchewan will continue to thrive into the future. It is success stories like this that prove the effectiveness of this government and our policies. Working together is an essential aspect of the success in this province, and we are committed to doing just that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Administrative Professional Day

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we say thank you to those in our offices who handle all of the mail, make travel arrangements, field tricky phone calls, and basically organize our lives. I'm referring to our administrative assistants.

The work done by our administrative assistants is being recognized today, even though that work has changed dramatically over the years. Our assistants train staff, do research, and serve on committees. They are an integral part of our workplace and everyone in this room would probably not function very well without them.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party caucus, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to all of our administrative and constituent assistants on this very special day. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Speaker, it also gives me great pleasure to stand before the House today and address and thank some of the people who keep our busy lives in order. I am referring as

well to the celebration of Administrative Professional Day.

Today is the national day to celebrate the workplace contributions of administrative assistants, executive assistants, medical secretaries, marketing assistants, secretaries, staff assistants, and all other administrative professionals.

During the information age, Mr. Speaker, administrative professionals are doing more and more for us all. Behind every successful office, there is an efficient team of administrative support staff making those of us fortunate enough to have support look good.

Though we are thankful for the work of our administrative professionals every day, we do not often get a chance to express and say how essential their work is to us. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, today is a day we can openly and officially express our gratitude to administrative professionals.

Today is also the perfect time to acknowledge teamwork, Mr. Speaker. Teamwork is an integral aspect to the success of any business or organization. We work as a team and know that no one individual is more important than the whole.

On behalf of all my colleagues, I wish to express our gratitude and appreciation for the work of our administrative professionals, secretaries, and, most importantly, our constituency assistants. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Poem — The Unknown Soldier

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to tell the House about a constituent of mine who recently won a national poetry contest. Leah McDonald of Elrose wrote the poem "Who is the Unknown Soldier?" and won a Veterans Affairs Canada writing contest.

Last Friday, Leah, a grade 12 student, was honoured with a public reception in Elrose and was presented with the certificate and prizes by the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Today she is in Ottawa where a few hours ago she had the honour of attending a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier with Prince Charles and the Prime Minister.

I would like to read Leah McDonald's winning poem, "Who is the Unknown Soldier?"

He is the one who led the way
so the general could make it home;
She is the one who saved the child
and was left to die alone.

His dreams were cut off
by his untimely death;
Her innocence shattered
by her last shallow breath.

He is the voice
that echoes our pride;

She is the eyes that
for our freedom cried.

He is the rain
that waters our souls;
She is the river
holding secrets untold.

He's in the wave
crashing Normandy's shore;
She's on the wind
over Dieppe once more.

He's in the song
that Paschendale sang;
She's in the bell
from which freedom rang.

His death was a pledge
prayers can not suffice;
Her life, a gift,
at the ultimate price.

I know that with one voice we'll extend our congratulations to Leah McDonald of Elrose for this national prizewinning poem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Volunteer Week

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, Saskatchewan people are amongst the most dedicated and giving people in the world when it comes to serving their own community. Many cultural, sports, health, and community improvement organizations enjoy support from volunteers. In some cases these organizations would cease to exist without the support of our volunteers.

And this week, April 22 to the 28, we will celebrate those accomplishments during National Volunteer Week.

Among those volunteers who improve the quality of life in Saskatchewan are the SaskTel Pioneers. The SaskTel Pioneers is a volunteer organization made up of more than 4,000 past and present SaskTel employees. In order to celebrate the International Year of Volunteers, which is this year, Mr. Speaker, the SaskTel Pioneers have pledged to work a total of 60,000 volunteer hours.

This year the Pioneers who chose the prevention of child abuse as their corporation's social cause have chosen to volunteer for the Pipestone Parenting Plus program and for the Provincial Association of Transition Houses of Saskatchewan.

SaskTel Pioneers will volunteer their time to help children and families who have had to escape abusive situations and who are staying at shelters across the province.

Please join me in congratulating SaskTel Pioneers for their dedication to improving the lives of the people of Saskatchewan. Thank you to them and to all volunteers who greatly enrich our lives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

University of Saskatchewan

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in a speech to the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce the president of the University of Saskatchewan said that his institution is in serious trouble. Provincial operating grants to the University of Saskatchewan are among the lowest in Canada; behind provinces like New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Newfoundland.

Last year the *Maclean's* survey rated the University of Saskatchewan dead last in its category, and 13th out of 15 in terms of dollars spent per student. In constant dollars we are putting less money into the university today than we were a decade ago.

The university president says there will have to be significant tuition increases as the only way to counteract declining government funding.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't just municipalities that were shut out of the recent high-spending budget. We all know this administration is no friend of local government; it is less easy to understand why the university has been shut out by the provincial government.

In the last election both the Liberal and the NDP (New Democratic Party) platforms stressed post-secondary education, yet now the reality comes through. Our university is declining and students will be forced to pay significantly higher tuition fees to try and prop it up.

Good News for Biggar

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, there's good news for the town of Biggar which I would like to share with members of the Assembly. This is a good news story about co-operation, about environmental protection, and about the preservation of scarce natural resources through recycling — worthy and necessary contributions.

Just recently Biggar gained its own used oil filter and container ecocentre which opened at the Biggar recycling centre. This business is one of more than 30 now operating in our province under the support of the Saskatchewan Association for Resource Recovery Corporation or SARRC, not to be confused with SARCAN, recycling operations for drink containers.

These are all owned and operated by local owners and operators in their communities. SARRC is a non-profit corporation formed by the oil and oil filter industry in Saskatchewan to develop and maintain a province-wide, used-oil recycling program.

In Saskatchewan we discard about 20 million litres of used oil a year but not all of that is collected and recycled. An organization like SARRC and the business in Biggar managed by Wayne Oesch will do a great deal to see what we could do to move towards total collection.

Businesses like this, Mr. Speaker, will meet the highest environmental standards and which perform vital service to the

community are a welcome addition and I'm glad to see one come to Biggar. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Student Exchange With Quebec

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last Sunday evening I had the privilege of attending a social function sponsored by the Strasbourg Rec Board. The community gathered to welcome 21 high school students from Charlesbourg, Quebec. The students arrived last Friday and are being hosted by families in the community.

The evening started with a delicious chicken supper followed by an entertaining program in which both students from Strasbourg and Quebec participated. A quiz show consisting of three teams made up of local and visiting students matched their wits on Canadian trivia. That was followed by a number of musical performances with again both visiting and local students performing for the people that had gathered in the community hall.

Mr. Speaker, exchanges such as this . . . This exchange visit was initiated by Mr. Paul Bedier, the local French teacher, who had organized an earlier trip for students from Strasbourg to Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, exchange programs such as this will greatly benefit Canadian unity since it allows young people to get to know one another. And I'd like to congratulate Mr. Bedier and the citizens of Strasbourg for doing their part towards Canadian unity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Workers' Compensation Board

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Labour told CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio that his department has had the review and audit of the Workers' Compensation Board since last October. For seven months this report examining the administrative policies and practices of the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) has been collecting dust.

And while the minister has been sitting on this review, four top management staff were fired and the chairman of the board who resigned was paid a huge severance and existing staff members planned an outrageously expensive farewell party for this person, only to have it cancelled at the last minute by the minister.

Mr. Speaker, businesses who fund the Workers' Compensation Board and workers who require these services want to know what the results of this review are.

Mr. Speaker, why won't the minister release this report? What is he hiding? And why is he allowing the people at the board to determine while he . . . while he had the Dorsey report in his hands?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed I reported previously that I have the Dorsey report in my possession. The Dorsey report was commissioned by the former minister of Labour. I received the report, I guess technically, the day that I was sworn in, February 8. It took me some time to review the Dorsey report along with a whole host of other concerns that I as Minister of Labour have.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have committed that this government will be — I will be — releasing the Dorsey report to the public at an early opportunity. The Dorsey report is in the works and I look forward to making it a very public document relatively soon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is not good enough for the people of Saskatchewan. It's certainly not good enough for the injured workers and for the employers who fund WCB.

Mr. Speaker, James Dorsey was contracted to review, audit, and report on the WCB's administrative policies and practices at a cost of \$96,000. It was part of his contract to submit his final report to the Minister of Labour by last September, and the minister confirmed his department has had this report since then. So why spend almost \$100,000 on a report, then not release it and not take action on it?

It sounds vaguely familiar to another report the NDP government is not commenting on at this time. In fact, the minister told CBC Radio exactly that: that he is still studying the study. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the minister is still studying the study.

Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable that the Minister of Labour continues to hide this report from the public. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Labour quit hiding and immediately table the review of the Workers' Compensation Board?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the way for that response, or that question.

The Dorsey report was commissioned by this government, Mr. Speaker, to look at the whole operation of the Workers' Compensation Board. And it was to look at the administration thereof and to recommend improvements in how it is that the Workers' Compensation Board operates. That is how it spends the premium dollars to provide, to provide income replacement and other services to injured workers, of which there's about 32,000 injured workers in a typical year, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting that the members opposite would ask the question of the cost of the Dorsey Report, Mr. Speaker, because I want to share this. In their beloved Alberta, Workers' Compensation premiums this year went up an average of 14 per cent. In Saskatchewan, Workers' Compensation premiums went down an average of 2 per cent. It's the third year in a row of

decrease in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Confidence of Saskatchewan People in the Future

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, according to a survey in today's paper, only 22 per cent of Saskatchewan's residents expect the province to be better off five years from now.

That's a scathing indictment of this government's performance. And is it any wonder, when you look at the NDP record; the longest waiting lists in Canada, the worst job growth in Canada, the worst out-migration in Canada. That, Mr. Speaker, is the NDP record, and it's destroying the confidence of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party believes that Saskatchewan has a bright future and that future begins the day we get rid of this NDP government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier. Why is the NDP destroying Saskatchewan people's confidence in our province, and in its future?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very pleased to answer on behalf of the government. And I want to say if the criteria for making members opposite happy is the defeat of this government, they're going to wait a long, long time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Now, what I, what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is I've travelled this province speaking to chambers of commerce, tourism boards, people in communities; there's a lot of optimism. But I want to tell you, it's quite clear where the negative attitude is centralized, and it's in members opposite.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, given the difficulties that their federal counterparts are having in Ottawa, and Mr. Day only having the majority support of his caucus, it leads me to the question is that maybe the gloom and the unhappiness is because that Leader of the Opposition doesn't have the support of all of his caucus either.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, for the umpteenth time, here they are again blaming the Saskatchewan Party for their problems. But, Mr. Speaker, they didn't read the newspaper today. Mr. Speaker, *The StarPhoenix*, front page, "Surgical wait list system in crisis."

Mr. Speaker, the next headline, "Fewer cops an option." That's here in the city of Regina.

Another Regina story in today's paper, "Owner moving business to Alta." Why? "Fed up with taxes in Saskatchewan."

And, Mr. Speaker, back in Saskatoon "Public school board hits homeowners with \$33 tax hike." And then, Mr. Speaker, in *The Leader-Post*, "Mayors blast tax increases."

Mr. Speaker, the papers today are just full of stories about the failures of this NDP government. Mr. Speaker, it's their record. It's the NDP record. When is this Premier going to take responsibility for his party and his government instead of destroying the confidence of Saskatchewan people in their province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I guess the Leader of the Opposition wants to trade newspaper headlines, so I shall. "Sask. exports to grow", "Saskatchewan job prospects to bloom for spring", "Regina's job economy looks good", "Labour market said to be tight."

Mr. Speaker, let's look at the facts. The economy of this province has grown year over year for the past decade. We've got the lowest unemployment rate. Businesses are looking for people to come to work in the jobs that they have available for them. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that 90 per cent of the people who graduate from the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) campuses who find jobs here in Saskatchewan don't have the negative attitude that that Leader of the Opposition does — not by a long shot, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the one thing this government doesn't have is they don't have the fiddle while Saskatchewan is burning. They're doing everything else wrong.

Mr. Speaker, in today's paper, the owner of Precision Machine Works in Regina is moving his business to Alberta. He cites four reasons for doing this — the Saskatchewan Party is not one of the reasons. He says the expanded PST (provincial sales tax) is driving him from the province, increased property taxes, skyrocketing energy bills, and a lack of skilled workers due to high income taxes.

So who's to blame, Mr. Speaker? In every case it's the NDP government that is to blame. Is it any wonder, is it any wonder that less than one-quarter of the people of this province are not optimistic about our future.

Mr. Speaker, when is this government going to stop driving businesses and people out of the province of Saskatchewan? When is the NDP going to stop destroying the confidence of our people in our province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I just jotted myself a little note. In the last week and a half, I have visited the communities of Rosetown, Nipawin, Tisdale, Melfort, Weyburn, Humboldt,

and Indian Head. You know what I found in each of those communities, Mr. Speaker? An optimism about the future of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I attended to the trade fair in Tisdale, Saskatchewan. Literally hundreds of people engaged in economic activity in the trade fair in Tisdale, Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, there is an optimism across the province. Is there any wonder, Mr. Speaker? The leading Canadian economists and the chartered banks — what are they, Mr. Speaker? Bullish on Saskatchewan's growth. That's what's happening in here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I refer you again — the Leader of the Opposition is quoting from newspapers today — I want to go back to a quote of his in a newspaper in this province, Friday, April 6, 2001, the Regina *Leader-Post*. Quote:

If the Saskatchewan Party wins the next election, Hermanson said the population outflow would be stemmed within a year or two and the province would then grow, if the weather and the national economy cooperated (Mr. Speaker).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

If the NDP is looking for someone to blame for the gloomy attitude of Saskatchewan people, all you have to do is look in the mirror. In the last provincial election, the NDP promised to reduce hospital waiting lists that had grown to be the longest in Canada. Well, Mr. Speaker, here's what appeared in the front page of today's *StarPhoenix*. It says, "Surgical wait list system in crisis."

Mr. Speaker, Saskatoon's hospital waiting list has mushroomed to over 13,000 people. And according to a consultant hired by the government's own health advisory council, the waiting lists are growing out of control.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain what action the NDP is taking right now to stop the explosion in Saskatchewan's hospital waiting lists?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This report, which was released yesterday around the operating room times in Saskatoon, was commissioned by a group that was started by the Department of Health. The Health Sciences Advisory Council is working with the Saskatoon District Health and the University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine to address some of the issues that relate to the operating waiting room lists in Saskatoon.

This is a problem that we've been working at for a while. This is part of the solution, Mr. Glynn's report. But this government is also continuing to work on the plans that relate to establishing information for everybody around waiting lists in the province. We've also added money into the whole system to address

some of these things. What we have to do is work very carefully with the professionals to make sure that we get the right solutions to the problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. The report of their own committee is suggesting that immediate action is necessary in order to deal with the NDP's massive hospital waiting list. Health expert Peter Glynn is saying in his report to the NDP's Health Sciences Advisory Council and I quote:

The situation cries out for leadership. The issues are of such severity that only urgent action will give any hope of reversal.

And what's the NDP's response, Mr. Speaker? We're going to study it some more.

Mr. Speaker, what action will the minister take right now? What urgent action as is recommended will the NDP take in order to bring an end to these severe waiting times?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the Health Sciences Advisory Council requested this report to deal with what is a very difficult issue in Saskatoon. The University of Saskatchewan Board of Governors and the Board of Directors of Saskatoon District Health will be meeting within the next couple of weeks jointly, together with authors of the report and other professionals, as they develop an action plan to introduce a system in Saskatoon that will work. They are working very carefully with the professionals, with the surgeons who are involved in the process.

We want to do it right. We want to do it with the people involved so that we will provide better health service for all of the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Policing Services

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Municipal Affairs minister. This morning's headline in *The Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker, reads, "Fewer cops an option, City council to debate eliminating eight police jobs." Especially frightening when at noon today we hear that car thefts in Regina have gone up another 11 per cent.

The article goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that the city of Regina is considering cutting eight police positions to avoid a mill rate increase of two and a half per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP in the last election campaigned to lower taxes and to hire 200 more police officers. But now we see that people are having to choose between higher taxes or fewer police on the streets.

I find it ironic that the minister who constantly reminds us that he once wore the red serge would lead municipalities to this

choice.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister increase revenue-sharing grants to municipalities or will he insist on forcing cities like Regina to fire police officers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to answer that. Those decisions have not yet been made, Mr. Speaker. But I do want to remind, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to remind the members opposite and the people of this community, that the commitment by this government to municipalities is very, very strong.

Let me just remind, let me just remind the members opposite that the city of Regina received an additional \$3.5 million in this year's budget, Mr. Speaker. The total, including all the targeted programs, the targeted and unconditional programs, amount to \$17.43 million, Mr. Speaker. That is a commitment to this community to assist them in the serious decisions that they, like all other people, have to make across this province.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, that part of the gloomy situation we face is thanks to the people opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well it seems like he doesn't quite know what's going to happen in the city of Regina. I imagine he's studying that too as we do everything else. It's getting close to June; you better do a lot of it.

Mr. Speaker, maybe the Minister of Justice has some thoughts on this issue. The Minister of Justice has repeatedly said the NDP will fulfill their four-year promise to hire 200 new police officers, new police officers, Mr. Speaker — let's underline new; 200 additional and we should underline additional officers — over and above the number of officers in 1999.

With retirement rates in Saskatchewan police forces, if municipalities are forced to cut police positions there will actually be fewer officers, Mr. Speaker, fewer officers on the street than before the NDP over there made this promise.

Mr. Speaker, how does the man who should have been premier try to meet his goal of 200 new officers when his government turns around and forces municipalities to cut police positions? Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Justice find it in his budget to replace any police positions cut because of the NDP's insistence on freezing revenue-sharing grants to municipalities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to respond to the member's questions. Actually I thought that he'd forgotten all about me, but it's a pleasure to remind the member of this government's commitment to policing in this province.

(14:15)

He talks about new police officers to the municipalities and indeed to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) across

this province too. He should know, he should know, before the last election there was no provincial funding going directly into police officers and into the cities and into the RCMP. We now have 45 new ones as a result of this budget. We have the highest number of RCMP officers in this province ever. We have more police officers in the RCMP than in fact our complements suggest.

We have the largest, single commitment to policing services in this province ever in this budget. And the member should be supporting that not voting against it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Education

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Education minister. Last month the Finance minister delivered his latest budget and reaffirmed the NDP's commitment to make big government bigger and keep taxes high.

Then we were subjected to the Education minister blabbing on about how the NDP's budget was going to keep education taxes from going up. Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual the Education minister's bluster turned out to be a lot of hot air.

Mr. Speaker, there's another headline in Saskatoon's paper today. It says the Saskatoon Public School Board is being forced to increase education taxes again this year because of a reduction in funding from the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, why did the Education minister tell the people from Saskatoon that property taxes were going down and then force the Saskatoon Public School Board to raise taxes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, again the members opposite are misinformed as to their information.

First off, the grant to the Saskatoon Public Board increased 4.6 per cent this year despite having an overall increase in their global assessment by close to 21 per cent. So we did not cut back the grant to the Saskatoon Public Board. We increased it by 4.6 per cent to the highest level ever — to \$42 million.

The fact is if you look at that report, if you would have checked into the report, you would have noticed that last night as well the Saskatoon Public Board dropped its mill rate from 20.59 to 17.22. I wish the members were better informed, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister doesn't understand the relationship between high assessment and mill rate. Just because you lower the mill rate, if your assessment went up, you're going to pay more taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the people in Saskatchewan strongly believe in the province of Saskatchewan. They just don't believe in your government. And we have had to listen to this day in, day out. And the people — you're wondering why they have no faith in your government. It's the same . . .

The Speaker: — I would just remind the member to direct her comments and questions through the Chair. The member may continue.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, it's the same old story. The Liberal leader and his new NDP friends say one thing and then they do something totally different. That's why people don't trust the NDP government. First the NDP promised to cut taxes and then they turn around and raise taxes instead.

Mr. Speaker, will the Education minister explain why he promised the Saskatoon taxpayers he would lower property taxes and then increase the education portion of it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at the Sask Party platform, their vision for education from the last election. And you know what they said in education for a new millennium? They said, launching a comprehensive K to 12 review. In fact their platform is ripe with more studies and reviews.

But when it comes to the bottom line, would they increase funding to education? No. When we looked at their bottom line, Mr. Speaker, they said, we would freeze the rate of funding to K to 12 education to the rate of inflation.

Well in fact, Mr. Speaker, this government has increased grants to school divisions by 16 per cent in the last two years, when inflation has been sitting at 4 per cent. If we would have followed their plan, every single school division would have been required to raise taxes instead of lowering mill rates, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Impact of Tax Increases for Small Businesses

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, another example of tax increases thanks to this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, my question's for the minister of Municipal Government. Robert Ducan is someone who is trying to make Saskatchewan a better place. He moved to Saskatchewan to start a hotel in Val Marie.

Last year he helped organize Val Marie residents to patch their own highways. And this year his business is being nailed with a \$30,000 tax increase. And what's the minister doing about it? Absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker. No increase in revenue sharing; no plans to address this massive tax hike. In fact, Robert Ducan says the minister failed to offer any solutions at all to crippling tax hikes.

Mr. Speaker, why is this minister attacking small hotel owners like Robert Ducan with these massive tax increases?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Well I appreciate the question from the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, and I share his concerns, as I share

Mr. Ducan's concerns as well. And I'm sad to hear that he feels, and people feel, I haven't done anything.

I met with the people in southwestern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. I listened to their concerns and, as we speak . . . as I speak here now, Mr. Speaker, and even by the time I had returned, there was already a review being done of the assessments in that particular area.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time, I'm not sure what the opposition would expect me to do. First you listen, then you investigate, and then you take whatever action may be appropriate that's within your jurisdictional powers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 221 — The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 2001 (Appointment of Directors)

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 221, The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 2001 (Appointment of Directors).

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please, order. I would ask members on both sides just to lower the level two or three decibels.

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

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, members, as President . . . Order . . . as President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for the legislature of Saskatchewan, I'm pleased to table the 32nd annual report for the year 2000.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government I'm very pleased to table the answers to written questions 92 through 99.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 92 to 99 are hereby tabled.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 2 — The Securities Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured today to rise to move second reading of The Securities Amendment Act, 2001, an Act that will enhance investor protection and ensure Saskatchewan law remains current.

The amendments in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, are part of this government's ongoing efforts to keep securities legislation up to date and consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions. Current

legislation requires dealers and salespeople to register every year. These amendments, Mr. Speaker, will allow for a permanent registration system, which will eliminate the requirement to reapply each year. As well the Bill will eliminate the requirement for underwriters to register as a separate category under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, new provisions in the Act will also enhance investor protection. The Act will now prohibit anyone with the intent of making a trade from making a statement, which contains a misrepresentation.

The amendments confirm that the commission can provide information about market participants to other regulators and law enforcement agencies. However, Mr. Speaker, regulations will now set out the terms and conditions under which such information can be disclosed. Mr. Speaker, this will ensure that the commission can provide information to regulators for the purposes of conducting investigations across provincial boundaries.

In addition, the commission will be able to share information in the context of national electronic planning systems. This database will house information about all securities registrants in Canada and will permit firms and individuals to apply for and maintain registration in all provinces and territories.

Mr. Speaker, certain provisions of the Act are being repealed and will be re-enacted in the regulations. This will allow for the consistent development of important areas of securities regulation across the country. For example, Mr. Speaker, the first trade provisions and details respecting insider reporting periods will be re-enacted in the regulations.

Moving certain provisions from the Act to regulations assists in the coordinated development and implementation of national reporting systems based on electronic filing of information over the Internet.

Several provisions in the Act require that documents be delivered to security holders by prepaid mail. These specific requirements are replaced by a general delivery requirement that documents be delivered or sent, enabling documents to be electronically delivered. These changes are consistent with the principles in The Electronic Information and Documents Act, 2000, Mr. Speaker.

The amendments will also extend the period for which disciplinary action can be brought against a former registrant from one to two years. The Securities Commission has requested the change due to increasing complexity of cases.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the amendments will enhance investor protection, modernize the existing Act, provide for consistency with other securities regulation in Canada, and ensure that the commission has the mechanisms to continue to participate in national initiatives in this important area.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of an Act to amend The Securities Act, 1988.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to reply to the minister's comments concerning Bill No. 2, The Securities Amendment Act, 2001 which repeals the registration renewal requirement for dealers and salespersons and replaces with an annual report requirement.

Also repeals the underwriter registration requirement and the requirement that registrants give the commission notice of certain changes, and introduces a provision, which would permit the commission to provide personal information about market participants to other regulators, law enforcement agencies, subject to complying with regulations, which will thus supply the conditions in which the commission may share the information.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill raises some concerns and questions in the opposition's minds and the people of Saskatchewan's minds. I guess one question, Mr. Speaker, is does this Act reduce and streamline regulation and the red tape, which is a very high concern for small businesses in Saskatchewan?

According to a recent CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) member survey, government regulation and paper burden ranks fourth, a full 60 per cent of response concern over more government regulation and a paper burden.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, also permitting the commission to provide personal information raises concerns, first of all, to handling of confidential information not only of the business community, but also for the protection of the consumer.

And in light of these concerns, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party would like to consult more widely with stakeholders concerning this Bill and I would like to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker: — Yes, why is the member on his feet?

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, there are a number of guests in the galleries this afternoon that I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and to all the members of the Assembly.

Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Ray Hilderman, president of the Saskatchewan Canola Growers Association, and also Mr. Rob McGregor, the second vice-president, along with Lanette Kuchenski, their executive director.

And also in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Zenneth Faye, chairman of the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, and their executive director, Mr. Roy Button.

And also, Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to introduce someone in the east gallery, a former member of this Assembly, Mr. Gordon MacMurchy, who represented the seat that I now

represent.

And I'd ask all members to welcome these guests this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — With leave to respond to introduction of guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the member opposite with respect to acknowledging our canola producers here in your gallery. They are very much part of what has assisted us to diversify the agricultural base in our province.

I want to as well acknowledge Wayne Hovdebo, Gordon MacMurphy and another Mr. Hovdebo, as well . . . (inaudible) . . . our galleries.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming our guests to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 13 – The Class Actions Act/ Loi sur les recours collectifs

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to rise to move second reading of The Class Actions Act, an Act that will significantly benefit individuals and families seeking relief as a result of mass injuries.

Examples of mass injuries, Mr. Speaker, would be a mass product liability case such as a silicon gel breast implants case, a mass environmental injury, or a mass injuries through negligence such as airplane crashes.

In the absence of class actions legislation, actions that involve multiple parties are governed by the rules of court that allow for representative actions. Historically, these rules have been narrowly interpreted so that representative actions are not allowed unless each person who's injured suffers an identical loss.

Mr. Speaker, class actions legislation is based on plaintiffs having common, not identical, issues of fact and law. A class action may be allowed even if the class members' damages will have to be individually calculated or class members are seeking different remedies. The proposed legislation will help consumers and other plaintiffs launch a class action in situations where they would now be discouraged from pursuing individual claims due to the potential high cost of litigation.

Class action legislation also sets out rules for the consistent, uniform, and transparent treatment of such cases and ensures that a judge has sufficient discretion to ensure that the rights of

absent plaintiffs are protected. Under this legislation, Mr. Speaker, the judge must approve the type and contents of the notice to plaintiffs, the agreement for payment of legal counsel for the class, and any settlement agreement.

In 1996, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada adopted the Uniform Class Proceedings Act. The Uniform Law Conference commission has recommended legislation that is consistent across the country as many of the situations that give rise to class actions will not be limited to one province, but will give rise to claims in several jurisdictions.

It's important to note this legislation also provides for a certification procedure to protect the interests of absent class members and protect defendants.

Certification process is a court proceeding to determine whether the cause of action is appropriate subject matter for a class action, if there's an identical group of claimants, if the claims raise a common issue, if the class action is the preferable procedure, and finally if the representative plaintiff will adequately represent the interests of the class.

The certification procedure will also permit the court to establish the parameters of a class action, Mr. Speaker: to describe the class, the nature of the claims, the common issues, and other provisions the court may consider appropriate.

The legislation also sets out rules for the conduct of class proceedings including the role of the court and a provision allowing residents of Saskatchewan who share the characteristics of the class to opt out of the proceeding and non-residents to opt into the proceedings should they wish.

The legislation also permits the court to determine what sort of notice must be given to members of the class. The court decides the method and the contents of the notice.

Finally, the legislation includes provisions respecting remedies that may be ordered by the court and respecting termination of proceedings, appeals, limitation periods, and costs.

Mr. Speaker, class actions help to address problems that arise in the area of mass wrongs that have been difficult to resolve through the traditional civil litigation process. They offer a more efficient way to litigate mass torts. For example, a lawsuit based on widespread environmental damage can be much more effectively litigated when all those who suffered damages are represented in one claim. The expense of pursuing a claim, based on a mass wrong, would be a significant barrier to many people.

The primary benefit of the proposed class action legislation is to enhance access to the courts by reducing the costs borne by litigants.

Mr. Speaker, this Act contributes to a justice system that operates in a way that is fair, certain, and efficient for proceedings where a number of plaintiffs have the same or similar claims against the same defendant or defendants.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to move second reading of An Act respecting Class Actions.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, class action in courts is something that has probably went across most of North America, if not all the jurisdictions in Canada. Clearly, we're one of those areas that up until now has not had the opportunity for our citizens to participate in class actions.

There are benefits and there are some potential problems, Mr. Speaker, when you are dealing with class action suits as the one-size-fits-all may not necessarily suit everyone.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a fairly important Bill, a very involved piece of legislation. Before a person can pass judgment on this, whether it has benefit or whether it will have a negative impact on the people of Saskatchewan, it's important that the people who will be affected by this legislation, our citizens and those who must deal with it, and particularly the members of the Law Society, they need an opportunity to review this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and make recommendations on it.

They need to be able to talk to the Minister of Justice and government members. They need to be able to talk with the members of the opposition, Mr. Speaker. Since this legislation is just new before the Assembly, these people have not yet had the opportunity, the stakeholders have not yet had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to respond to our queries on these particular issues.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs Vote 30

Subvote (IA01)

The Chair: — I invite the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to introduce the officials in the Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is rather interesting here because we are doing two sets of estimates, two ministries, and one department. So the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and I are divvying up the duties and I get the very great privilege and honour to introduce the officials.

And so I would like to welcome the officials who are joining us today and who will be providing us with their usual highly professional, very skilled advice as well as deal with the estimates.

(14:45)

I would like to first of all introduce Mr. Brent Cotter, deputy minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and deputy minister of Aboriginal Affairs; Mr. Paul Osborne, assistant deputy minister of trade and international relations; Mr. Al Hilton, assistant deputy minister of federal-provincial relations; Donovan Young, acting assistant deputy minister of Aboriginal Affairs;

Glen Benedict, executive director, Indian lands and resources; and finally but no means the least, Melinda Gorrill, director of administration, without whom we couldn't function terribly well. I would ask all members of the Assembly to welcome them to the Assembly. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to welcome the ministers and their officials. And I guess the first question I would have is why do we have two ministers for one department?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was assured that we were going to be dealing with Intergovernmental questions first but I think that really, since I'm the second minister to be added to this portfolio that I should probably answer the question because in point of fact we do have two ministers and I'm very pleased and very proud that we have two ministers.

I think that Premier Calvert very accurately identified that it is imperative that we focus in a strong and respectful way upon the needs, concerns, and opportunities that are presented to this province by building and developing stronger relations with First Nations, Metis, and off-reserve people and ensuring that they have the same kind of good focus by government as all other people in Saskatchewan have. And for that reason the Premier decided to highlight our considerable respect and our considerable awareness of the needs and accomplishments of Aboriginal people by appointing a separate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Well I can appreciate that. I guess the question I have as Intergovernmental Affairs critic, is why the split in the department and why could Intergovernmental Affairs not be handled as well by the same minister?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Well it probably could be possible to handle it with one minister. But what that would mean would be that, given the great number of meetings and events that it is necessary for both of us to attend, that one or another aspect of our portfolios might be overlooked.

And I want to repeat again that the Premier decided, and I think quite wisely, that it was imperative to accord First Nations, Metis, and off-reserve people the respect that they deserve in this province. They are a growing part of the demographics of this province, and it was decided that at this point in our province's history, we should be highlighting that and establishing a separate, stand-alone ministry.

Ms. Bakken: — Madam Minister, well I guess I fail to see how having them together takes away from the importance of Aboriginal Affairs. It seems strange that we have to now have . . . I guess you could explain to me — do we have two separate administrations or do you work together as ministers? Or how exactly is this split?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think what the addition of a separate minister for Aboriginal Affairs does is recognize an increasingly important factor in Saskatchewan life, in our economy, in our community, and our political life. And that is that we have an increasingly large Aboriginal population.

It seems to us on this side of the House that this represents both our greatest challenge and our greatest opportunity. Challenge in the sense that it is critically important that we respond to the interests and concerns of Aboriginal people and the province and that we do everything we possibly can to ensure that there's full participation of Aboriginal people in the economy, in the life of this province. And we know we have some work to do there.

It's also our opportunity. Because the extent to which this province will be successful will be the extent to which we are able to ensure that Aboriginal people play their full, complete role in our society.

So by recognizing that importance, by recognizing that dimension to our province, by having a separate minister, we, I think, identify that the Aboriginal population, the proportion that they represent in our society and the challenges and opportunities they present, we recognize that special, that special significance by having a separate, by having a separate minister.

And I think we look forward to ensuring more and more partnerships, more and more participation, more and more success in fully integrating Aboriginal peoples into the life of this province, into the economy and into the politics of this province. I might add that both Alberta and Manitoba have done the same thing, I take it, recognizing the same phenomena.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Minister Axworthy. I don't have a problem with your explanation and I fully agree that we do have to address the Aboriginal concerns in this province and the critic for Aboriginal Affairs will address those concerns with you.

My question was: what is the split in administration? Do you have a separate administration for Intergovernmental Affairs and Aboriginal Affairs? Or do you have the same administration?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I'm sorry. To the member opposite, I guess I was so caught up with talking about the importance of having two separate ministers that, I guess, I didn't hear the fine point of your question.

In point of fact there is one administration. There are two ministers and one administration. We have our deputy minister, whom I've already introduced earlier on, and then there are three parts actually to this department.

Provincial Secretary, which includes office of the protocol; there's the office of French-language co-ordination and so forth, that's one part; there's Intergovernmental which deals with all the important issues of relating with Ottawa and the other provinces as well which the member for Saskatoon Fairview heads up; and then the Aboriginal Affairs part of that which I head up.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Could you tell me then why expenditure and salaries has increased greatly if there is no more . . . if there is not additional administration to run two separate departments or two separate ministries?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I understand the member's question, she's asking why then has there been an increase in the administration budget of the department. Is that right?

That can be accounted for by just identifying that one of my ministerial assistants has been identified as being within the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, bearing in mind that I now have both those responsibilities. So there's not actually any extra money spent on an administration, it's transferring a part of a position from one department to another.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well then I trust if we look in the Department of Justice, we'll see a decrease in salaries. Is that what you're telling me?

The expenditure by type is . . . I would hope that we are not paying one ministerial assistant \$600,000. We see 1.516 million to 2.118 million, under salaries, expenditure by type. Could you please explain that?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member now is asking specifically what extra staff have been, have been added to the department and the numbers break down in this way.

The member will know that just recently I made an announcement about immigration policy and coordinating our immigration efforts on behalf of the province. That adds 10 people to our staff.

And we've also appointed a head of international relations which has been there for some considerable period of time, but having filled that, it's also the case that three and a half positions have been added to — in fact the Provincial Secretary can talk about this — to the Lieutenant Governor's office, to the office of French language coordination, and to the . . . and to Government House. And then the one position in administration reflecting a minister's office.

So there are fifteen and a half new positions in the whole . . . in the department; 10 fall under immigration.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You said that you had announced that you were coordinating the immigration department. How is this different than what you have been doing in this department today?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. . . . what are you? Deputy Chair today I guess? No, Chair. The efforts the province had committed to immigration in the past have been committed in the Department of Economic Development . . . Economic and Co-operative Development. And the member will know that from the business community, and indeed many others across the province, there was a recognition that we needed to do more to attract immigration to the, to the province; that in particular there was some labour skills, shortages, that needed to be, to be addressed.

And that the member will also be familiar, I'm sure, with problems of accreditation — physicians, engineers, who are in the province, who are unable to perform their professions because of accreditation problems. You probably have heard that from a number of constituents.

So there's a process of, first of all, taking the responsibility for immigration from Economic Development and placing it in Intergovernmental Affairs and ensuring that it is a much more integrated, a much more, a much more complete process.

And I might say that when, when realized we will have a director of the division. We'll have three immigration advisors who will promote Saskatchewan to potential immigrants. And the member can appreciate what a significant task that is when you're looking at potential immigrants from around the world. And we'll also assess provincial nominee program applications, which ensures that we are doing our best to bring economic, economic immigrants to the province.

There will be a policy person. A person who will work full time on these accreditation issues which are significant to people who are presently here and to the retention of immigrants who have arrived in Saskatchewan. As is another position which will be focusing solely on settlement and integration issues.

The member, I'm sure, will be familiar with, with people who find it difficult for various reasons to integrate into the Saskatchewan community. It might be language. It might be culture. It might be a whole range of activities. And we'll have one person focusing on those kinds of issues. And there'll be support staff to that department too.

(15:00)

So we look for great things from the department. We look to ensuring more immigration to the province. We look forward to ensuring that we keep more immigrants here in Saskatchewan. Of course time will tell, but that is the focus of this new department and this new initiative.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, minister. My question then is if this responsibility is moved from Department of Economic Development, is these new positions or what happened to the people that were handling this in immigration?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Three of the positions moved and there are nine new ones. There's an extra commitment of \$400,000 into immigration as a result of this process.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Minister. Do you have some kind of a process to see if what you plan to do, within a year's time or whatever, has produced results and the addition of nine new people and \$400,000 is warranted?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Yes, we do. The taking of the immigration function from Economic Development, placing it in IGA (Intergovernmental Affairs), and the expansion of the department has been as a result of significant amount of consultation with stakeholders, with the business community, as well as with the settlement support groups across the province. It's been welcomed by them.

In fact, just last week, I met with the settlement support community from across the province and they're looking forward to expanding their role and to working with us to ensure that this new process works.

But it's critically important for us to ensure that we make sure

that our investment in this activity bears fruit. We can do that anecdotally, but we're in fact ensuring that there is a multi-evaluation process to make sure that we are doing what is needed to attract immigration to the province and to ensure that immigrants who come to the province, in fact, do stay here and contribute to the economic development of our province.

We all know the importance, the impact of immigration to the province historically. We know that the numbers of immigrants have not been very high over the last few years. We're looking to turn that around and to ensure that we meet some labour shortage skills and that we ensure that those immigrants who are here, in fact, do stay here and continue to contribute to the province.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you please tell us what countries you are targeting or how you're going about achieving your goals?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The approach that we're taking with regards to targeting immigration and targeting our efforts — because quite plainly in what lies behind your question is we could hardly, we could hardly do a good job attracting immigrants from every single country of the globe — is to consult with the business community, to assess their needs, and to work with them to attract the kinds of immigrants the business community needs. It's us responding to the needs of the community at large, rather than us telling the business community how we would function.

So we will consult with the business community to identify their needs and identify with them which countries to focus, to focus on. And of course we will continue to evaluate that over the years.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Minister Axworthy. Could you then explain why would this not have been amalgamated into Economic Development, the intergovernmental part, as opposed to creating another ministry aside from Economic Development. It seems to me that you should be working with them, not as a separate identity.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — In response to the member's question, if I may say so, it's a question that we should all ask: why are we moving something from one place to another and why are we expanding it?

The reason for the immigrant program to be in Intergovernmental Affairs rather than Economic Development is because it encompasses more than just Economic Development. That's plainly an important part of our immigrant, or our immigration policy of focus. But the issues of settlement, for example, the issues of accreditation, are wider than issues which might more appropriately fit within Economic and Co-operative Development. So there are wider issues.

There are also intergovernmental issues. As you will know, immigration is primarily a federal responsibility, so it was felt most appropriate that Intergovernmental Affairs be the host department for this new immigration program.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well I guess if we

read down the list of what Intergovernmental Affairs is responsible for, we have federal-provincial relations, international relations, constitutional relations, trade policy and immigration. It seems to be that most of these are very closely integrated with economic development and other departments. And in light of the fact that we would like to get taxes down and hold the line in Saskatchewan, it would seem that we should be moving to amalgamate departments, not expand them. So I think that would be something I would hope that your government would take into consideration.

I'm just wondering, the new positions that you've created. Are these positions filled, and were they advertised?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — To date . . . well, in the near future we'll be appointing an acting director of the immigration division who will be . . . is basically being reclassified.

We've advertised for . . . we've appointed one clerical person for whom the position was advertised. The other positions will be advertised and will be filled in the normal process for all government employees. And this will take place in the next short while as we continue to consult with the stakeholders and as we move our division along.

So we will have shortly an acting director and some clerical support. The rest will be filled in due course and each of them will be advertised.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd just like to ask you one . . . on one final issue. There was a recent decision — I'm reading from a SaskTel Mobility letter:

A recent decision of the CRTC requires all telecommunication service providers in Canada to contribute a percentage of their revenues to a national subsidy fund.

Would you like to explain this to us please?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The member raises a question which is of significant importance to the province and it is about really how do we ensure that services are available in smaller communities and in rural Saskatchewan in similar . . . at a similar price and similar quality to the cities.

And one of the concerns that this government had when SaskTel became . . . came under the jurisdiction of the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) was to ensure that it could still have some flexibility to support development of services in rural Saskatchewan. And indeed it really was at the behest of this government that the CRTC agreed there should be a focus on . . . a focus which brought with it some financial commitment to ensure that the interests of rural Saskatchewan and northern . . . of rural Canada and northern Canada were better respected and were addressed.

So what we have here is a levy taken from the phone companies which is then enabling . . . which then enables them to support development in a rural and indeed in less-populated parts of the country. It's a national fund, it's a national fund which this province fought for because of our commitment to ensure that

services — quality services — are available in rural Saskatchewan. And I think we can see this as a really significant victory in our interprovincial relations, if you want; in our relationship between this province and the federal government in the sense that the federal government's regulatory powers now include, now include SaskTel.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well I guess I just fail to see how this can be positive when we're going to turn around and charge everyone in Saskatchewan now 6.25 a month. That's the system access fee of \$4, and now we have the new system administration fee of 2.25. My question is: where does this money go, and what is it used for?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chair, the way in which it benefits the province is that SaskTel contributes 4.5 per cent of its revenue to this national fund, which is then . . . and the fund is then distributed according to need across the country.

In order to effectively support and minimize telephone telecommunications costs in rural and remote areas for Saskatchewan residents, SaskTel has to find about a hundred, or previously had to find about a hundred million dollars. It presently, as a result of this national fund to which it contributes, is able to draw \$10 million from that fund, and so in fact the province telephone . . . I mean the supports to rural and remote residents has been provided in such a way that the province saves \$10 million.

So in other words, this fund has enabled the province to draw \$10 million from it to support telephone costs and programs in rural and remote areas. So it's been a net gain of about \$10 million.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So the net gain is to the province, but it's not to the people that are using the service because the people that are using the service are now having to pay more. There's an additional \$2.25 system administration fee in Saskatchewan on top of the \$4 fee that was there.

So the people that are using the service, the residents of Saskatchewan, are paying more but you're telling me the government is spending less. So how does this work?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The end result is that residents, telephone users in rural or remote areas will pay less than they would have done before as a result of the fund. And this is a program which is supported by SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), which is supported by regional libraries, which is supported by small communities across the province.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chair, the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood would now like to ask some questions.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs perhaps to clarify and explain the role of his department. I have an understanding that his department would coordinate efforts between the provincial government and other levels of government and so on, but I'm not exactly sure on what his involvement is when other departments enter into negotiations with, say, the federal government and that sort of thing.

And I wonder if the minister could clarify his role for myself and for the people of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chair, the member's question focusing on the role of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs and its relationship with other government departments is, I think, a useful one. It gives me the opportunity to clarify that for him and for those who may be watching this on TV. The ... (inaudible interjection) ... Don, your mother's watching, I'm sure.

The role of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs is essentially to promote Saskatchewan's interests in relationships with other provincial governments, with the federal government, and with governments overseas — that's the general function.

And within that context, of course, the department will be involved in many areas of activity which are also in ... which are primarily in other departments ... departmental jurisdictions.

So what the department does is it assists in coordinating these functions. It has significant experience in negotiating with other governments and presenting Saskatchewan's case to other governments. And I'd point out that the matter we've just been discussing of the national fund in the telecommunications sector for remote and rural residents is a good example of success of that negotiating strategy.

So it coordinates and it provides its expertise and support of initiatives across government, it reviews agreements to ensure that they fit within our priorities and our policies, and it also serves to advance the interests of other departments.

You might also have seen just today I think that legislation in North Dakota which was potentially damaging to the province, which would have added a duty to exports, agricultural exports from Saskatchewan through North Dakota, was defeated in the North Dakota legislature. And other legislation in Montana which was equally difficult, that would have proven equally difficult for us, was ... died, essentially went away.

This doesn't happen just by chance. It happens because ministers work with their counterparts in the United States. Minister Serby worked with his counterparts in Washington to bring to bear the pressures ... or bring to bear the interests of the province on North Dakota and Montana.

And the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs ... I dealt with both executive branches in Montana and North Dakota as did Minister Serby. So you see an example of how a coordinated approach across government can actually achieve the goals we want in what is sometimes a very difficult area — trying to stop another jurisdiction from passing legislation.

I think you can imagine how we would respond if somebody told us to stop passing legislation which we think would be in the province's best interests. So there's an example of a coordinated effort involving Intergovernmental Affairs which achieved the goals we set out to achieve.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his

answer. And I'd like to ask him then what role has your department played in the negotiations with the federal government in the area of agriculture, in negotiations of some of the farm support programs that the federal government is imposing upon us, and generally what type of coordination is there between your department and the Department of Agriculture on these issues when we're dealing with the federal government in that area?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — In regards to the role of Intergovernmental Affairs in dealing with the federal government over agriculture, primarily the role of the department has been one of supporting the Department of Agriculture and agri-food, both in its preparation and in its lobbying activities.

There of course are opportunities for lobbying across the departments of government. That needs to be coordinated in some way. Some opportunities for investigating where the federal government might be most responsive, how we might get them to move in the direction we want them to move is something that the expertise of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs can assist with.

And also, in order to move the matter from just being a matter of ministers of Agriculture to the level of Premier/Prime Minister and premiers/Prime Minister, that requires coordination efforts and work with other provinces, and that is the kind of thing also that the department did in the whole agriculture piece.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Minister, would it be your opinion that the Department of Agriculture, provincial Department of Agriculture seems to go it alone more often than other departments when they're dealing with Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — As I mentioned, the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs has a supportive, coordinating role and as such played that role in the negotiations with the federal government over agricultural aid packages this year and in previous years.

I think you can appreciate, and I think we all appreciate the pivotal importance of the federal government providing its ... fulfilling its responsibilities to agriculture in this province and indeed across the country. And it can be anticipated that that relationship between the Department of Agriculture, provincially, and the Department of Agriculture, federally, will be an important and busy one. That is the case and our role, as I say, has been one of support, coordination of logistical and strategic advice, and so on. And we would anticipate that would be ... that would continue.

The same kind of situation would arise if, for example, dealing with a national transportation policy, anything of that sort, that that might be something which would flow primarily out of the Department of Highways. We would provide again the same kinds of support, coordination, advice roles.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister for his answers. I would take from his response then that we could allocate some of the blame and the lack of response we are getting from the federal government in the recent letter that the

Premier received, I would say then, would suggest then that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs had a small role to play and therefore we could allocate some of the blame and lack of action in that area.

However having said that, I think my colleague from Humboldt would like to continue this discussion.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Never leave an opportunity to go by to get a little dig in.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank the minister and her officials for being here today. Most of my questions will be addressed to the minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs. So I'm pleased to be able to stand today and to ask some of these questions on behalf of both First Nations people and Metis people throughout the province who have brought some of their concerns to my attention. In addition, I will have some questions in direct reference to the budget for the minister.

And, Madam Minister, I would like to start in fact by referencing my remarks as they pertain to the budget outlined this year. Madam Minister, in the budget estimates there is an additional \$180,000 for support for Aboriginal organizations and issues.

Could you please outline what these organizations are and what are their functions? And I wonder if you could possibly give me a breakdown on monies that would be distributed to First Nations people and monies that would be given to Metis people; if I could get a breakdown between those two, please.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I hope I've understood your question correctly. And I'm going to try and answer it, and if I don't have it right, we'll just keep at it until we get the very specifics.

I heard you say how much money do we give to First Nations and to Metis people? And I hope I'm not being unduly technical when I answer this, but in fact virtually no money goes to individuals.

What we do do is to provide grants to organizations who support the work to advance the various goals and initiatives that we have with respect specifically to the Metis and off-reserve strategy. And I would like to . . . You talked about \$180,000. Specifically, there's \$125,000 that is going to the Aboriginal Employment Development Program and \$60,000 to the urban management authorities.

And the increase, I'm going to just quote here or read out what it is. The 125,000 — which I mentioned earlier — is to further enhance and expand the AEDP program (Aboriginal Employment Development Program). And this funding is needed to secure 12 new partnerships with public and private sectors, as well as economic development related initiatives with the Regina Health District and with Federated Co-operatives Limited.

(15:30)

The provincial funds — because I'm sure this is the next question you might be asking me — the provincial funds are used by the recipients to offset their initial costs related to

implementing the communications, planning, and coordination of new partnerships. And these partnerships, as we know, will lead to the employment of potentially hundreds of new Aboriginal employees, with the employers paying all of the costs of wages, training, and salary . . . salaries, rather.

Now the 60,000 that I mentioned a little earlier is to further develop and expand existing First Nations public authorities in urban service program delivery in Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and in Yorkton. The provincial funding will be used for planning, consultations, and development, and it is essential for leveraging federal funding which covers the majority of the operating and program delivery costs.

I hope that I've answered your question as specifically as you were asking it. If I haven't, please just give it to me again and we'll try to get it right.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in your comments you made reference to funding going to First Nations organizations, as I can understand it.

So what I would ask you now is that any funding that would go through to Metis organizations, where do they acquire the funding from? It's my understanding that they do get a certain portion of gaming money through the First Nations Fund. And I'm wondering if there is any other money from the province that goes through to Metis organizations in any way or form.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Okay. As you are aware, Madam Member, the constitutional and fiduciary relationship with Metis people in this country is with the federal government.

However having said that, because Metis people are citizens of this province, we recognize that it is important to provide certain funds to assist in various initiatives that they undertake. So we do have a bilateral process and we have budgeted specifically under the bilateral, \$125,000; that is primarily for negotiations and relationships between the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan and the province of Saskatchewan. So that's 125,000.

Under the tripartite arrangement, there's budgeted \$285,000. That goes for activities to support relationships between the MNS (Metis Nation of Saskatchewan), the province of Saskatchewan, and the Government of Canada.

And then finally you referenced gaming funds. I'm very pleased to inform you that we do . . . that \$2 million goes directly into the Clarence Campeau Development Fund. That money is used for economic development for Metis people, and it's done according to a set of very strict investment criteria that have been developed through mutual negotiations. And we have two provincial officials who sit on the board of the Clarence Campeau Development Fund Board.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. So I have had a number of grassroots Metis people bring to my attention that they have some concern with not only funding that goes from the province through gaming to Metis organizations, I've also heard from First Nations people who are concerned about the money in the First Nations Fund.

I would just ask you at this time, Madam Minister: in respect to the clawback, I guess we could call it, in the First Nations Fund due to the SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) incident, has all of that money been paid back at this time?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you. The answer is no. The more specific answer is that one-eighth of that money was recovered the end of March. There are seven more quarterly payments that will be recovered. They are approximately \$170,000 each.

Ms. Julé: — Madam Minister, just recently I received an order in council statement that there would be, through an order in council, well over \$2 million, I believe it was, that would be issued to the First Nations Fund. So could you tell me what that money has been used for, or what it will be used for, and explain this order in council for me, please.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I believe the answer that you're looking for with respect to the breakdown of the First Nations Fund and the payment which was \$2,017,965 was the OC (order in council) that you're referring to. That is broken down as follows: SGC (Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation) profits of 1.34 million; SIGA of 2.09 million less the 1999-2000 overpayment of 1.25 million. And if I'm correct, that adds up to the slightly more than \$2 million order in council that you're referring to.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess what I'm asking, and I would appreciate a bit of discussion on this to clarify for me and for other people that are inquiring about this issue, it is the understanding of the people of Saskatchewan that there would be a commitment to pay back the money owed to the province that was . . . I don't know how to put this nicely, but basically it was simply owed to them due to the SIGA incident, and that that would come out of First Nations Fund until that time. Then it seems to me that there should be no monies going into the First Nations Fund in order to ensure that that amount was paid back, and there was some transparency here in regarding responsibility.

So I'm just wondering if you can, if you can make a statement for me that would explain why this money in the amount of \$2,017,000 would be going into the First Nations Fund at this time, if in fact we're waiting for some of that money that's owed to come back?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — When I answered your question a few moments ago, I didn't refer to the \$169,000 clawback because I had answered that in the first question. That was also included in part of that 2 million order in council that you saw. That's the clawback, and that's the arrangement that we have arrived at in order to deal with what you, quite correctly identify, as a very unfortunate incident.

We will be having that clawback of . . . well it's 170,000 approximately over eight orderly payments. One payment has been made so far. As you know, Madam Member, the First Nations Fund goes to support very important economic and social initiatives in First Nations communities. And we take the position that it is important to have that money repaid, but it is also important that it is repaid in a way that does not victimize innocent bystanders.

And so because we have control over the funds, and because we

are doing it in an orderly, and indeed in a gentle way, we see that we . . . that the First Nations communities will be able to continue with the very valuable and very worthwhile economic and social programs and services that they offer, while at the same time we will be able to recover that money from what is admittedly an extremely unfortunate set of circumstances.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and that is a good explanation, and I appreciate it very much. It clarifies just how the process is in place, and I would have to agree that it is wise to do this in a fashion that would not cut off the needed money from grassroots people.

Madam Minister, my next questioning . . . I would like to predicate with comments that would pertain to your responsibility and your relationship. And it's simply this: in respect to your ministry obligations, what is the relationship and the responsibility attached to that relationship between the minister, yourself, and First Nations and Metis people?

So what in fact is your total responsibility as a minister in relationship to your workings with Metis and First Nations people? And I guess I would reference that in a sense to . . . in regards to accountability issues, transparency issues.

And I'll let you answer it at this point and I'm going to be probably going on with further questions around this question.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Again, Madam Member, I hope I'm going to be answering your question with the level of detail that it deserves and that you're asking for.

First of all, in my role as minister, it is my responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal Affairs works with Saskatchewan's Aboriginal people and organizations to develop and implement policies and programs that advance our common interests. And also to ensure that Aboriginal Affairs can work to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the social, cultural, and economic identities of the province.

And we're doing that by showing respect for Aboriginal cultures and identities, by facilitating and partnering with Aboriginal organizations and institutions and the federal government to ensure functional and accountable First Nations and Metis governance structures. And finally, we're focusing on practical matters in a strategic and coordinated approach that's advanced across government, between governments, and through our relations with Aboriginal organizations.

You referred specifically to accountability and transparency in your question. I would like to mention to you that when we give grants, in every grant that we give to organizations, every grant has an accountability clause and a follow-up report is required to verify that the organizations did what they said that they would do.

And it is our experience that Aboriginal organizations are extremely accountable. We are very pleased with the reports that they provide and we believe that the accountability clause that we have in those grants answers the concerns that you are perhaps raising.

(15:45)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, it was brought to my attention by members of the Piapot Reserve that there was \$177,000 that went through the provincial government to Piapot, and I believe that they indicated to me that it was through the First Nations Fund.

They are having a great deal of difficulty understanding where the money is being spent — not only provincial money but where federal money is being spent. They have addressed this issue with the federal authorities and basically have been put off as far as a meeting with one of the federal authorities go and they're waiting for that yet.

But in the meantime, you know, their questions are simply this: how can they know exactly where the money has gone because they claim that there was a lot of social development needs, etc., as well as health needs and so on, on that reserve that are not being met. And basically they're being told there is no money, that all the money is spent.

They fail to realize . . . from what some of them are saying, they fail to realize any benefit from that money. And so they're asking whether or not they can depend on you as minister to look into these matters for them.

They are asking that they be able to see an audit done of the spending within the last year or two. And it is certainly their knowledge and my understanding that the Provincial Auditor here does not have the right or the ability . . . not the ability but certainly not the right or the authority to do a provincial audit on these funds.

So my question to you is: have you received any letters in reference to these concerns from people from the Piapot Reserve?

Have you any way that you could make available for them an audit that is done by whether . . . I'm not too sure who does it, but I would imagine it may be KPMG. Is that audit available to the public and is it a detailed audit so that these people can be assured and know how the money is being spent that is, in fact, meant for social development and health issues pertaining to people on-reserve?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much. This seems to be my day for dealing with issues from Piapot. This morning at 8:15 I was meeting with a group of people about Piapot, but that was a slightly different issue.

With respect to your specific question, have I received into my office letters talking about fiscal accountability at the Piapot Band, the answer is no I haven't. And I certainly though don't want to be seen to be stonewalling you or your very legitimate concerns that you're raising. What I do want to ask is if you could perhaps, outside estimates, provide me with more detailed information about the concerns that are being raised with you.

I can make the commitment that I certainly will follow up to the extent that it is possible. I am very mindful though of federal responsibility in this issue. I am very mindful that we put funds into the FNF (First Nations Fund) and then they go to the bands. We don't actually have a role in terms of auditing those . . . what the bands actually do.

But I don't want to dismiss your concerns. I am prepared to communicate with the appropriate authorities and to get a response from them. I think, though, that this is probably a matter that you and I should sit down and I should get more detailed information from you so that I can deal with it in a responsible manner and ensure that I'm not taking on responsibilities that are more properly the purview of the federal government.

Ms. Julé: — Madam Minister, I appreciate those comments. I guess when I asked you earlier a little bit about your role and your responsibilities as minister in relationship to the First Nations and Metis people, I wanted to know in fact whether you feel that you have an obligation under your ministry, your portfolio, to take those concerns on behalf of people that are of First Nations ancestry or Metis ancestry here, to take those concerns and relay them to the federal authorities on this. Because they seem to be getting really very frustrated with not being able to have answers to the point where they're asking if they can see an audit and possibly have forensic audits in place. And I'm not too sure.

In fact the Minister of Justice is here; Intergovernmental Affairs minister, possibly he could answer whether or not these people have a right to have access to those audits. Could you answer that for me, please, Mr. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, the member from Humboldt. First of all, I want to start out my remarks by saying that it is imperative that we understand, recognize, and respect the autonomy of the various Indian bands.

I also am concerned that I think . . . I don't know what your detailed and specific concerns are with respect to Piapot, so I think that it is important that you and I arrange an early meeting — perhaps even this evening or right after we finish with estimates — so that I can get more detailed information and find out what your specific concerns are. And as I have said, I will undertake to ensure that they are passed on to the appropriate authorities, whoever that may be.

I also do want to tell you though, since I think what you're trying to get at is what's the exact nature of my job, I do see that the ministry of Aboriginal Affairs can provide a very useful role. And this is what I told SARM just a few hours ago. My ministry can provide a very useful role in terms of mediation and facilitation to resolve issues of concern and to move it forward so that we can ensure that we are dealing in a respectful manner with First Nations, Metis, and off-reserve people in this province.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in the Provincial Auditor's report there's observations that were made by the Provincial Auditor, and this is not the first time that these observations were made. And I guess he is simply stating to the people of Saskatchewan that in chapter 9 he says, we again report that the trustees of the First Nations Fund have prevented us from carrying out our responsibilities to the Legislative Assembly. As a result, the Assembly does not receive sufficient information to hold the government fully accountable for its use of the public money the Assembly gives to this fund.

We have not audited the fund since the Assembly established the fund. The fund has received \$22.2 million since it was set up in 1997.

And the mandate of the fund is to carry out economic development, social development, justice, health, and other initiatives related to First Nations people.

I guess I would ask, Madam Minister, if you can tell me just how it was determined that the Provincial Auditor would not have the right to audit the First Nations Fund and who came to that determination? Who were the parties that agreed to that? And if you could answer that for me at this time I would appreciate that.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Madam Member, I appreciate the concerns that you're raising on behalf of the Provincial Auditor. I think though that we need to do some full quoting from the Provincial Auditor's report. And I'm going to read from the 2000 Fall Report, Volume 3 because in point of fact, we did:

On November 13, 2000, the (then) Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs (now an independent member in this Assembly) informed . . . (the Provincial Auditor) by letter that he had again requested the Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations . . . to provide . . . (the Provincial Auditor's) Office with the necessary access . . . (so that the Provincial Auditor could) fulfill . . . (his) duties.

On December 1, 2000, the Chief of the FSIN informed . . . (the Auditor) that the FSIN and the Trustees . . . (were) willing to co-operate with . . . (the Provincial Auditor.) (And) . . . Chief (Bellegarde) also reaffirmed FSIN's authorization to KPMG to provide . . . (the Provincial Auditor with) access to their files and to co-operate with . . . (the Provincial Auditor).

And I'm going to quote directly from page 247 of the auditor's Fall Report and the auditor says there, quote:

We think the Minister's efforts and the FSIN's willingness to co-operate with us will allow us to fulfill our duties to the Legislative Assembly.

So, I guess, in answer . . . short answer to your question, we believe that our office has provided a useful, facilitative role in this function, and this issue has been resolved satisfactorily for the Provincial Auditor. I guess we'll have to wait until his next report to find out.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in reference to your willingness to intervene on behalf of Metis people and First Nations people, if they should have any problems with funding accountability, etc., I'm really quite happy to hear that you're more than willing to do that.

In fact, it's quite a refreshing stand to take in spite of the . . . or rather, in regards to the minister . . . the last minister that had this portfolio because I brought a number of issues to his attention and he certainly was not willing, and certainly did not appear to be very supportive of Metis people who . . . and First Nations people who were questioning some of the practices that

were going on.

Madam Minister, I received another letter brought to your attention also, from Mr. Ken Nelson, president of the Delisle local no. 173. And this was in . . . regarding matters relating to the 2001 Metis Nations of Saskatchewan election. There are allegations by Mr. Nelson and I know that he took these . . . he and other Metis grassroots people took their concerns, and there was an appeal board which they could present all of their concerns before. The Metis Electoral Commission and the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan senate, it was said, during these elections abused their power to maintain their stranglehold over the citizens of the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan.

(16:00)

Now certainly that's not my contention, but it is the contention of a number of people . . . thousands of people out there. There still is a lot of questions surrounding the practices of these elections, and in view of the fact that you have received a letter from Mr. Nelson, I'm wondering whether or not you have responded to him. And is it possible for you, for instance, to recommend, possibly through your ministry, in view of the many, many disturbing accounts of corruption and fraud that we are hearing, is it possible for you to recommend that the Metis elections be organized and conducted by the Chief Electoral Officer of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I think you were sitting in on a meeting I had a little earlier, so I'm going to give you . . . First of all, I'm going to start out with a quick answer, Madam Member.

No, it would not be possible for me to recommend that their elections be conducted by the Chief Electoral Officer of Saskatchewan. And the reason for that, Madam Member, is that we are very mindful of proper jurisdictions here and the relationship with Metis people, quite properly we believe, should primarily flow with the federal government.

So if there were going to be an elections body that would assist the Metis nation in their election process, it should not ought to be the Saskatchewan office of the Chief Electoral Officer. It should be the federal office. So I'm very much aware of those kinds of processes.

But having said that, Metis people are citizens of Saskatchewan and so they have the right to expect a fair election process. And I have communicated that with the president of the Metis nation of Saskatchewan, indeed, in a letter that I sent him today. I did specifically say that I want to ensure that he and his executive deal with the concerns that people are raising with the processes that have been established for such purposes and, very specifically, to address these concerns as expeditiously as possible.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I move that we report progress to the Department of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

**General Revenue Fund
Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation
Vote 53**

Subvote (SP01)

The Chair: — Order. The next item before the Committee of Finance are the estimates for the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation and I would invite the minister responsible to introduce her officials with her this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce to you and members of the committee five officials from Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation who are here with us today.

Beside me, John Law, the president; behind John would be Debbie Koshman, the vice-president, finance and risk management. Immediately behind me would be Garth Rusconi, who is vice-president of accommodation services; behind Garth is Paul Radigan, the director of finance; and right beside Garth would be Rob Isbister, acting vice-president of commercial services division. And I would like to thank them for coming to appear before committee today.

Mr. Peters: — To your staff here, it's good to have you here. I would like to start with . . . can you tell us of any changes in policy or direction for Saskatchewan Property Management in the coming year, in terms of operations and other similar changes in the coming year?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you. Mr. Chairman, SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation), as the member opposite would know, is dedicated to providing a diverse array of accommodation, transportation, warehousing, distribution, and purchasing services to a wide range of public sector organizations. We have people providing important services in more than 200 communities throughout Saskatchewan. And along with SPMC's regular course of business this past year, continue to see many positive and innovative changes at SPMC.

The corporation is now into year three of our five-year strategic business plan that was developed in 1999. And that will continue. The plan lays the groundwork for where the corporation wants to be for the new millennium. This past year saw the development of four strategic priorities based on our strategic business plan. Our strategic priorities provide a positive and focused course for our corporation over the next few years. Our corporation will place a focus on our customers, viable lines of business, our people, and investing in assets that support strategic objectives. And of course advancements in technology would be a part of that as well, Mr. Chairman.

So I think when we're saying if there's a new direction undertaking this year, it's the continuation of those things outlined in the business plan in the vision brochure that I gave you, the member opposite, last year. And we will continue in those four strategic priority areas.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you tell us how much space in Saskatchewan is currently leased by Saskatchewan Property Management, and how does this compare to last year or recent years? Is there any major increases or decreases in leasing properties?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, this year our space is, in the lease area, and continues to be about roughly 30 per cent of the total portfolio. So this year our lease space is about

249,100 square metres. And at this time last year in our portfolio, in the lease area, we had about 257,000 square metres. So just a slight reduction in the amount of lease space.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can the minister tell us what is spent on lease space in a given year?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, in the budget year 2001-2002, our lease expenses would total about \$39.6 million.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. How much of this lease space is currently vacant?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, I can only say at this point that our total space . . . we average about 3 to 4 per cent, which is well within the industry standard for vacancy rate. But I don't have the breakdown of the leased to our own space, and I will certainly get that for the member opposite as soon as we can have that available.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister, that would be very much appreciated.

Is there any lease space that is currently vacant that is subject to long-term lease agreements?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, the member asks do we have any long-term lease arrangements, and I would believe he's talking about hold-over arrangements from the time where we got into arrangements with individuals for a very long term.

The major focus of SPMC over the last number of years, and particularly since this government has been in power, is to look at those and, where we can, reduce the amount of space in that way. And so at this time there may be some smaller spaces within larger buildings, but if you're talking about a long-term leasing of a building we're not aware of any at this time.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Of the current leased office space, what percentages would be in the city of Regina, Saskatoon, P.A. (Prince Albert), and Moose Jaw, those four major cities?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, just by the nature of program and department activity, it's reasonable to assume that there's going to be a lot of leased space in those areas.

We don't have the exact amounts by location but we're certainly willing to get that for the member opposite, and we will bring that to his attention as quickly as possible. But also fair to say that throughout Saskatchewan departments provide a variety of programs and services and we try to accommodate them in those centres to the best of our ability in a leasing way, or perhaps in bringing departments together to provide efficiencies. But we will get that information for them.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister, how much leased office space in Regina is currently vacant?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, I thank the member opposite for the question. We believe it's probably lower than the 3 to 4 per cent that I indicated earlier, but the exact amount, I will get that information to him. We didn't break down the

lease information per location, and so we will do that for the member. But it's safe to assume it's less than the margin that we talked about earlier.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, Madam Minister. I would also like to welcome the officials from SPMC.

And I have a number of questions that I would like to ask, and they're all aviation related.

An Hon. Member: — I wonder why.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — I wonder why also.

My first question, Madam Minister, is: how many planes do we have in the SPMC aviation department, wing, or whatever we wish to call it from SPMC, and where are they based out of?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — I thank the member opposite for the question. And I think that SPMC officials are favourably disposed to the member with all the good work he did on the Echo Valley Centre and the ability to save that centre and to see it viable into the future.

To the air ambulance question, or to the air question, we have two air ambulances — they're two fixed-wing Cheyenne aircraft that operate through the air ambulance centre in Saskatoon, and we have three here. Two are, again, Cheyenne aircraft and the one is the King Air.

They're used for supports to executive government and to the programs and consultations that are required for the work that's needed for government to take its work to the people. And we have one of the Cheyenne that is always used as a backup for the ambulance services as well.

So the answer would be a total of five.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. And yes, I did do some work with some of your officials on the Echo Valley and very much appreciated working with people like Mr. Lawand his staff.

My question, my next question relates to some information. I believe I read in the paper, and maybe it's just speculation, but it was indicated, Mr. Chair, that there's a plan in process to purchase a new King Air. And I would like to know if this, in fact, is correct; and if there is, in fact, any plan of replacing any of the five other aircraft or, if there is a new one, if it is to replace one of the others or will be in addition to.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, and I thank the member opposite for the question. The new plane that is being purchased is a King Air 200 air ambulance plane. It's in partnership with the Department of Health and they've acquired this plane for ambulance services.

It will replace the old Piper Cheyenne II that was purchased in 1978. So this is an aging aircraft and not reliable. And certainly by that age the expenditure for any replacements is becoming very costly, as would the operating be. The plans are then to mothball the Cheyenne, and so that it would be sold once we've

taken out the equipment that's been in place.

And the new plane will be available probably by June or July. And right now, as we speak, it's currently being fitted with the required modifications and medevac equipment, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, can you give me a cost of the new King Air?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — The value of the new aircraft once it has been totally outfitted would be approximately \$6.2 million. And some of that will be offset when we have the sale of the old Cheyenne II, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, my next question is very much related to that 6.2 million — does that include life-cycle spares, all the test equipment? I understand life-cycle buying and I'm just wondering if life-cycle costing is put into this 6.2 million.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chair, to the member opposite, if we're talking about the life-cycle costing over the cost of the whole lifetime of the aircraft, no, that would not be included.

But what does come with this, with the purchase of the new plane, would be a warranty that covers parts and the ongoing requirement of those parts, some ongoing warranty work that would be done on the aircraft. It covers the training of the pilots and free parts for the first 1,200 hours of operations. So those would be the additional coverage that we would get with the purchase of the new aircraft.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, my next question deals with the usage of the fleet of aircraft, and I would like to know from the minister if they have a breakdown of costs per mile of the aircraft and/or if it's broke down in costs per passenger mile.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Over the last few years, Mr. Chairman, the average cost per mile would be about \$4, and that's for the executive air. We don't have the air ambulance breakdown and their costs, but we'll get that to you as quickly as possible, Mr. Chair. So you're looking at about an average of \$4 as costs per mile.

(16:30)

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, my next question goes right along with that. At \$4 per mile does that include costing such as hangarage, payroll, insurance, and all of the other ancillary costs?

And I guess where I'm coming from on this, if you are a private operator all of your cost is based on a cost per mile. It's a total expense that you have to outlay, including the purchase of all of the facilities, the payroll, the fuel, and everything. I'm just wondering if this is all inclusive and what the costs would be, or if there is a formula that has been used to be an all-inclusive cost per mile with all of those considerations taken into consideration?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you. It was taking us a while,

Mr. Chair, because we were talking about . . . of course, we'd had a hangar for a number of years and our accommodation costs sort of depreciated over a period of time. But that's very minimal now and all other costs — if you're talking about insurance, the operating, the salaries — all of those other costs are in that amount of dollars. And we will endeavour to get you a breakdown of those that bring us to the figure of about \$4.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Madam Minister, Mr. Chair, I would definitely be interested in those figures because I talked to charter operators in various parts of the country and wherever they have to purchase a building, they don't have the luxury, in some cases, of long-term owning a building because they're going out of business because of competition or whatever reasons. So I would very much appreciate those figures.

I know I hear charter operators that figure that doing work is unfair, if you wish, in competition with government-run aircraft when you come to cost per mile. And so I'm very much interested in those figures.

Mr. Chair, to the Minister, this is kind of an all-encompassing one also, is I'm very interested in the number of staff employed for maintenance and whether they're specific to the Cheyenne and to the King Air, or if they're cross-trained or if they're two separate entities, and the number of maintenance people per aircraft. Or if your formula works out to the number of people per hour flown or what kind of a process that's used to determine the number of maintenance workers.

I'd also like the same information for the flight crew, if I could please.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — In the area of maintenance, we have a total of six. We have one maintenance manager in Regina and one located in Saskatoon. And they are all cross-trained for both aircraft so they would be able to provide that for both kinds of aircraft.

In the area of the flight crew, we have seven pilots out of Saskatoon. And they would predominately be associated with air ambulance services. That's what is stationed in Saskatoon. And we have five in Regina, providing for government services.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Again, Mr. Chair, I think you know where I'm coming from. This is the cost of the total operation vis-a-vis what it might cost a commercial operator to do much of the same work.

So I'm just wondering if, you may not have these figures with you, but if I could get them at a later date, a breakdown of the total cost per year of the operation of the fleet of aircraft that's owned by the government and even a breakdown of the salaries for the key people, your aviators and also your AME (aircraft mechanical engineers) type people, your engineers — if I could get a breakdown of that. But I'm very interested in a total cost of operation. And also at the . . . I don't know if you have a figure like that for right now.

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — We don't at present, Mr. Chair, but we will endeavour to get those figures. I think where the member's coming from is saying, and the comment that was made earlier, that perhaps somehow we're trying to subsidize this service,

and so it's very unfair for the charter outfits that are operating. I think that's what I was hearing you say.

And we don't . . . we have a good relationship with the charter people in Saskatchewan. For example, in the area of air ambulance, there are private operators that assist us and provide backup in that way and in the charters as well. But the charter services really don't want to see this as a core part of their services, just by the nature of the work of government and the kinds of meetings that are attended, the types of things that happen when you're in very serious meetings, for example, trade talks. And if there is an opportunity to talk with people to further the Saskatchewan goals in those talks, there might be a layover experience, so then you would be paying additional costs for the layover. Those charters then can't get back to do their core businesses and things like that.

So they've suggested to us that this would not be something that they see in direct competition with them. And I'll try and get that information over to the member opposite as soon as possible.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's something that at a later date we can definitely debate at great length. But I understand also it's not in direct competition. But that's why I'm asking the questions vis-à-vis the cost per mile, etc., because if we're operating government aircraft at a cost per mile vis-à-vis, what I would have to, if I started a company and there's an unfair playing field, and that's why I would like all of these questions answered.

And my last question, Mr. Chair, is when the government aircraft are used by a department, is in fact that rate charged back to the particular department using the airplane?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank the member opposite for the question. As we talked about earlier when I was giving an overview of SPMC and what we provide, all of our services are on a cost-recovery basis. And this would operate no differently.

So, Mr. Chair, we would develop that charge-back rate and then we would charge that to the departments who were requesting that service, as we would do for accommodation and other services that we provide.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Madam Minister, and your staff, that's all the questions I have. I'd like to turn it back over to the member from Battleford-Cut Knife.

Mr. Peters: — Madam Minister, in December 16, the year 2000, SPMC placed an ad in the Regina *Leader-Post* calling for tenders for a large amount of office space in Regina. Why was this office space suddenly necessary?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, the member opposite is correct. There was the proposal call for approximately 25,000 square metres of office space in downtown Regina. This wasn't a sudden need. This is a renegotiating or a process where we have together a large number of departments where leases are coming due. We would work with those departments to look at what their needs are and what they're requesting of the space that they feel would accommodate them. And we would also then enter into studies of the marketplace and what's happening

in the markets.

And in this instance, we're working in a partnership with the federal government. But I think it's also important to stress the co-operation and the work that we do with the city and the city's planning.

As you would know that there are a number of office spaces in the downtown, but our definition of downtown Regina was quite a bit looser than the development plan of the city of Regina. And they requested of us, we would tighten our definition of the downtown boundary and that we would work with them on planning of some of our program needs.

So these are departments that have already been in existence. They have about that number of square footage of program needs from what they've been doing on an ongoing basis today. And projecting what they might need for the next five to ten years. I say that amount of time because we would be looking at, again, the marketplace and determining whether we can get a good deal in the marketplace over a five-year period or whether the responses would come back for a 10-year period of time.

So these are all leases that have come due and we tried to coordinate that because we know the impact that that has for the city and particularly the downtown of Regina.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, can I ask the minister specifically what will this space be used for? Or are there some . . . are there still some unknowns in this lease arrangement? Who's all going to be in those spaces?

(16:45)

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — I might mention, Mr. Chair, that that amount of space, it only really does take a few of our large departments to come due and you would be looking at a RFP (request for proposal) of this magnitude. And that probably the lease space in downtown Regina would be about two and a half percent in total; not this particular RFP, but in total about two and a half per cent of the lease space in Saskatchewan.

So when we are talking about who requires this space, the five agencies that had expiring leases include: Highways and Transportation; Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing; Women's Secretariat; Education and Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training. Those are the departments who have leases that will be coming available and would need to be looked at, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you. Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, I understand that the first need of occupancy is about September 1 of this year. Can you tell us over what period of time all of this space will be necessary?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — I don't know if it's a glad circumstance or not, Mr. Chair, that all of that space would become needed at the same time because of the leasing arrangements but that's the case. And the member opposite is correct. The first occupancy would be needed by September, 2001, and many of them would need the space as soon as that can be arranged.

We're negotiating now. And so as quickly as we could get those

leases into place, those departments would start to move and probably be completed over the next year.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, when will the government make a decision on to which proposal they will accept?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — The member opposite probably, because he's read to us the date of the RFP, would know that it closed and we're now in the process of negotiations. And we could see those concluded within the next 10 days or two weeks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, what is the Saskatchewan Property Management's policy in as far as awarding these tenders? Does it go to the lowest bidder or are there other considerations taken into account?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank the member opposite for the question. I think quite often during my time on city council we talked about lowest, qualified bidders and what that meant, and there are many phrases that we can use for how people do that. But when we're looking at a bidding like this, what we would do is talk with all of the departments and we would articulate in advance the program needs, and what the department is looking at that would best set their needs.

And we would put those criteria out in advance so the people who would be bidding on the leases would know what the requirements are. Now they would try and meet those requirements in maybe varying ways, but once we're assured that they've met all of the qualifications, the projects are awarded . . . the leases are awarded, Mr. Chairman, on the lowest, qualified bidder.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, the request for proposal also states that the government would consider purchase of needed space. Have the funds for these potential purchases been budgeted for in the current year?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — In the accounting systems that we use, Mr. Chair, if we were to purchase a building, those funds would be accounted for in the year that that building is purchased.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. What dollar figure would you expect your department to be willing to spend on the purchase of a new building or of new office space?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — When we're putting out an RFP, Mr. Chairman, SPMC would look at all of the options. It would look at the lease option, the lease/own option, the lease-to-purchase option, and we would do that based on the net present value.

We would then weigh what's more economically advantageous to the corporation. And we would do that by costing it over the life-cycle basis of the arrangement. So we would consider the net present value, the market, and we would pay the market value, but only if it's advantageous to the needs of government, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Are you suggesting to me that you have no idea what you would be willing to spend on that building or that office space?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, if the member opposite had a specific building in mind, it would be easier to answer that question. But on an overall basis, I would say yes. We would do the detailed analysis work necessary to know what would be the best possible arrangement we could conclude if we were looking at purchasing a building. And how we would do that is we would . . . we always work with the federal government if this is the situation — they're part of the marketplace. We might work with the private sector to determine what those market analyses are and the values are.

And then when we have someone come forward who presents us with an option like that, then of course you also have to consider that those buildings don't come designed perfectly for program spaces and arrangements. So then we would also have to factor in the cost of converting those spaces.

So it's difficult for me to give him a figure. I don't know the size of building he's talking about. I don't know the location. I wouldn't know what marketplace, what the type of building he's talking about, whether it's class A space or it's a class B space.

But yes, we would do due diligence. We'd be open and accountable in that way and we do work with the private sector to determine those values.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, you also stated in this request for proposal that you would be willing to enter into joint-venture opportunities for this needed office space in Regina. Can you explain the nature of a joint venture?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, when we go out into an RFP, what we're trying to do is provide the private sector with the widest range of options available to them. So that might be a purchase, it might take the form of a lease, and in some cases — depending on the economic opportunities or joint partnering for opportunities with the city-of-Regina-identified economic development considerations — there might be a joint development proposal that might come forward. We don't want to preclude that.

So that might mean that there would be some public sector involvement and some private sector involvement in development of a building or a space. Traditionally, that would be in the form of government taking some portion of that space to lease for their needs. Again, it has to make sense within the market analysis that we would do and the detailed assessment of what the space requirements would be and the costing per square foot.

So we would also consider if there was a proposal that came forward that we would take an equity position in the building; we would look at those options and not discard them. Because we want to, in whatever we're doing, provide space that is effective for the departments and their program space but efficient and also cost efficient, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Speaker, does Saskatchewan Property Management have a policy in place in terms of long-term lease agreements?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Chairman, I think it's fair to say from past experience, we do not want to see long-term leasing arrangements that go beyond the business . . . one business cycle . . . or one particular business cycle.

So we generally would be looking at a leasing time frame of about five years. That provides the greatest flexibility and we find the greatest ability to look at the market.

If there's going to go . . . arrangement that must go beyond that five-year cycle, for example, it might be advantageous in the marketplace and people would come back and say to us if you were looking at a 10-year arrangement the costing is in a preferential way for that number of years, then we might consider that. But that's a very serious consideration because we didn't want to see what had happened in the '80s reoccur.

And so, Mr. Chairman, what we would do, that would require SPMC, the people involved in providing all of the information to the board and that would be a board decision, Mr. Chairman.

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — It being past the hour of 5 o'clock, the House stands adjourned until Friday, 10 a.m. And let's all now go have a good dinner.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:02.