

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here regarding the provincial government's report, the *Saskatchewan EMS Development Project*, which calls for provincially run and centrally operated ambulance services. 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 affirms its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Biggar and Kinley and Rosetown.

I'm pleased to present this petition. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The people that have signed this petition are all from Yellow Quill Reserve.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition regarding health care in the province and reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Redvers Health Centre be maintained at its current level of service, at minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctoral services available as well as laboratory, physiotherapy, public health, home care, and long-term care services available to users from our district, southeast Saskatchewan, and southwest Manitoba and beyond.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by people from the communities of Storthoaks, Parkman, Redvers, Fairlight, and Antler. I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the possible conversion 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 this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Briercrest and Moose Jaw. I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from citizens concerned about ambulance services. 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 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 residents of the Yellowquill Reserve. I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people from southwest Saskatchewan concerned with the state of the Swift Current hospital. And the prayer of this petition reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by residents of Swift Current, of the Saskatchewan Landing, of Hodgeville, of Stewart Valley, Kincaid, Waldeck, and Webb. I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about the loss of 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 residents of Radville and Tribune. I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition from citizens concerned about health care in Blaine Lake. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to overrule the Parkland Health Board to change its decision and allow the Blaine Lake Medical Clinic to have a permanent physician with consistent hours and days.

It's signed by the citizens from Blaine Lake and Leask. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here from concerned constituents of mine and constituents from members opposite concerned about the high costs SaskPower and SaskEnergy rate increases:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The constituents are from Moose Jaw, Chamberlain, Regina, Whitewood, Waldheim, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned with the centralization of ambulance services. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitions 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.

And signatures to this petition come from the communities of Leslie, Foam Lake, Wynyard, Elfros, and Jansen.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from folks concerned about the health care and particularly the Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Limerick and Assiniboia.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again with a petition to stop further cuts at Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge.

And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed this petition come from Mazenod, Assiniboia, Crane Valley, Limerick, Willow Bunch, Fir Mountain, Mossbank, Moose Jaw, all over southern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the petitions presented yesterday have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received. These petitions are addendums to sessional papers nos. 3, 4, 10, 58, 65, and 121.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Monday give the first reading of The Election Amendment Act, 2001 (Financial Disclosure).

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 34 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: what monitoring is done of river water entering Saskatchewan; and specifically, does the province of Saskatchewan receive regular reports of sewage treatment for effluent from the city of Edmonton entering the North Saskatchewan River?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker:

To the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Health Information Network: how much has been spent on the Saskatchewan Health Information Network (SHIN) to date; when will it be operational; are any pilot sites pending; are any attempts being made to market this system beyond Saskatchewan?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the rest of my hon. colleagues in this Assembly, I would like to introduce some very fine people that represent the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development.

In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Linda Pipke who is the executive director. Mitch Ozeroff who's the chairman and Louis Hradecki who's the vice-chairman. And I'd like you all to welcome these fine people who have very positive attitudes towards the spirit of Saskatchewan and truly believe in our rural areas. Please welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of this Assembly I'd like to introduce 20 grade 11 and 12 students who have come in from the community of Windthorst. Actually, Mr. Speaker, they're coming from a community where there's a lot more water than there is in the rest of the province of Saskatchewan. But they're with us today. They're joined by their teacher, Mr. Mark Edmonds, and chaperone, Mrs. Trudy Kerslake.

Mr. Speaker, when I was talking with the students just before we came into the Assembly, just chatting with them, asking what they had done this morning. I believe they have toured some of the provincial court and I think they learned a few things about the court and about why they really wouldn't want to be in there on any specific occasion. And we trust that this afternoon, they're going to . . . indeed as they join us in the Assembly, just to learn a little bit more about the proceedings of this Assembly. And I certainly wish them well in the rest of their day.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to invite all members to welcome this group here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly, 15 students ranging from ages 6 to 18, students from Morning Star Christian Academy located in Regina Elphinstone, my riding. They're here today with their teachers, Mr. Shawn Allen and Ms. Julie Povey.

And I look forward to meeting with them later, although I hope that the opposition won't conspire to move a motion to take me away from them as . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through you and to you to the rest of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce a number of guests in your gallery that are associated with the air cadets, air cadet movement. And you'll notice some uniforms in your gallery. And I'd just like to introduce from the Cadet Detachment in Regina, a long-time friend, Maj Peter Garton, and Capt Rhonda Notschaele. From the Air Cadet League, Maureen Drolet, Ernie Callow, and Richard Petrowsky.

And what the program is all about, Mr. Speaker . . . we have two parents also, Ms. Sharon Dogett and Mr. Phil Noonan. But the program is really about cadets and I would just like to introduce the cadets from 34 Squadron that are in your gallery. It's WO Saxby, Sgt Noonan, LAC Enright, LAC Gamblin, Cpl Gibbons, LAC Dogett, Cpl MacDonald.

Mr. Speaker, would everyone join me in welcoming these people to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you, and I know all members will want to welcome back to the Assembly, a former member, Mr. Ian MacDougall, now of Regina, member of this Assembly from Estevan for the years 1960 to 1971.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too want to join with the member from Melville in welcoming guests. Although he's already mentioned the one gentleman earlier, I would like to join him in welcoming Louis Hradecki, a constituent of mine, Mr. Speaker, to this honoured Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, just to refresh everyone's memory, if you'll remember on Monday I also made a member's statement which included Mr. Hradecki as I spoke about volunteerism in this province.

I'd like all members of the Assembly to please join me in re-welcoming Louis Hradecki.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young student from my constituency that's seated in your gallery Jonathon Turner. Jonathon Turner is a high school student who is spending a week of work experience in my office and today is his day to come and see what we do here. He's keenly interested in the political process and I'm sure he'll enjoy today's proceedings.

I would like all members to welcome him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Women Entrepreneurs Week

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, today marks the start of Women Entrepreneurs Week in Saskatchewan. This is a week when we pay tribute to the many contributions Saskatchewan businesswomen are making to our economy.

Today more women than ever before are expanding their employment opportunities by operating their own businesses and enjoying such benefits as independence, creativity, and personal satisfaction.

Statistics show that women run roughly one-quarter of the province's businesses and that those businesses employ 90,000 Saskatchewan people. Statistics also show that women are starting their own businesses at a rate faster than that of men. In fact, there are four times more women under 30 starting businesses than men in the same age group.

One of the main organizations that support women is the Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan. Since it was formed six years ago, Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan has

played a valuable role in getting businesswomen started. It has lent more than \$4 million to new and existing businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the legislature and all citizens of the province to join me in recognizing Women Entrepreneurs Week and in celebrating the many accomplishments of the province's talented, bright, and ambitious businesswomen.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Air Cadet Movement Marks 60th Anniversary

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I'm very proud to rise in the House to announce that Canada's air cadet movement is celebrating its 60th anniversary. While the official birthday was April 9, 2001, individual squadrons will be marking the anniversary with various activities throughout the anniversary year ending May 30, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's air cadet movement came into being in 1941 in response to critical need for trained young men and women to fly in defence of freedom. Since 1941, Mr. Speaker, approximately one million young Canadians have participated in air cadets.

The focus of today's air cadet movement is on citizenship and leadership with an orientation towards aviation.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's air cadet movement is recognized as one of the most successful youth movements of its kind in the world. There are approximately 25,000 air cadets presently enrolled in Canada's 450 squadrons. Each year they turn out about 320 licensed air cadet glider pilots. One out of every five private pilots in Canada at the present time is an ex-air cadet. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan currently boasts 38 air cadet squadrons and approximately 1,500 young men and women.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this House I'd like to offer congratulations to all air cadets, past and present, and I'd like to also like to commend and thank the officers, instructors, parents, and support sponsors for their dedication to helping young Canadians successfully meet the future challenges of our province and our country. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Campaign Profiles Successful Businesses and Individuals

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day Saskatchewan people are achieving great successes in business. They're developing new products, they're advancing new technologies, and they're exploring new markets. To recognize and celebrate those many business achievements, the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development this morning announced a new campaign called The Saskatchewan Dream.

The Saskatchewan Dream is a series of radio and television vignettes that'll be aired several times a week over the next year. The vignettes will profile successful businesses and

individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the campaign is an innovative partnership of government, the private sector, and media sponsors. As a result, it will be an effective way for us to help combat an issue of disparaging attitudes and misunderstanding of Saskatchewan business opportunities. Many people, including our business leaders, are telling us we need to do more to promote a positive attitude in Saskatchewan. We need to do more to boast a little bit about all of our accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, this province is filled with hard-working, imaginative people who have many success stories to share. It's time we all started — all started — to remind ourselves and tell others what Saskatchewan people have done and continue to do.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage all members to join with us in telling these stories of our successes and to remind Saskatchewan people there are many wonderful opportunities right here at home.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mill Rates in Kelvington-Wadena Constituency

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Municipal Affairs seems to have difficulty understanding that tax reassessment and reduction in the mill rate may still mean taxpayers are paying more in property and education taxes.

The Melfort Journal had two articles relating to the effects of reassessment and mill rates which will have an effect on the constituents within Kelvington-Wadena. The first one entitled "Drop in mill rates will have little impact on taxpayers" states:

At its meeting Tuesday night the Melfort school division set its 2001 mill rate at 18.4 mills down from the 20.3 mills last year. However, the actual amount of revenue gathered from this mill rate will be an increase of \$490.

Another article, "Tiger Lily mill rate cut may not help once again" states:

The board approved the new mill rate of 16.24 mills, a drop of more than 3 mills from last year. But the mill rate will generate 5 per cent more increase in revenue.

I have a letter to the editor from Prince Albert which doesn't agree with the minister of Municipal ... assessment of reduction of the mill rate either. Mr. G. Leybourne states:

Last year when I paid my taxes on property in the RM of Lakeland, school taxes cost me \$645. This year it's going to be \$1,690.

Mr. Speaker, it concerns me that the Minister of Municipal Affairs doesn't understand reassessment and the impact on Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to educate the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

White Buffalo Youth Lodge

Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, there is more good news for the province of Saskatchewan. The White Buffalo Youth Lodge in the heart of Saskatoon, previously called the Saskatoon City Centre Project, is now providing new programs for at-risk youth.

In the past month or so several new programs have been added to the array of services that are already offered at the White Buffalo Youth Lodge. These new programs have a focus on traditional culture with storytelling, drumming, and singing programs, accompanied by an elder-in-residence.

There is also an evening woodworking program that has hopes of expanding to a day-program.

Mr. Speaker, this program is aimed at the children and youth in the core area of Saskatoon. Its goal is to offer an intersectoral, holistic approach to meet the needs of the high-risk child and youth population in the city. As well, 80 to 100 youth access the programs available at the lodge on a daily basis.

This project is an excellent example of collaboration at the community level, Mr. Speaker. The original partners have undertaken extensive community consultation and as a result, the project has broad support among many agencies including Aboriginal and Metis youth.

The White Buffalo Youth Lodge truly represents the spirit of Saskatchewan — youth and elders working together for the common good of the whole. The White Buffalo Youth Lodge works in partnership with parents, families, and the community to provide educational and social supports to promote success at school and in life. Success, Mr. Speaker, in implementing programs such as this to keep our most abundant natural resource — youth — in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

St. Gabriel's School Presents Play

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Tuesday evening I had the privilege of attending a play by Tim Kelly, "Meet the Creeps." The play was presented by the students of St. Gabriel's School in Biggar, Saskatchewan. The presentation was warmly received by members of the audience who reside not only in the constituency of Rosetown-Biggar, but also Battleford-Cut Knife and Redberry Lake.

The cast included many talented actors and actresses. The leading roles were performed with great skill and determination by Lisa deBussack, playing the part of Mrs. Tarantula Creep, and my son Marshall Weekes who played the part of Mr. Sinbad Creep.

The storyline took place in a fictional town of Edible Falls and included a corrupt civic politician, an illegal subdivision, a visit by an Egyptian prince, hiring of non-union staff, romance,

suspense, attempted robbery, and a hostage attempt. The good news was that the prince was not forced by union picket line to go to another town to spend the night. And also, the writers and producers did not go on strike.

The bad news, Mr. Speaker, was that there was a bribe offered and accepted. The bribe came in the form of pizza and pop after rehearsal and was enjoyed by all. The bribe had its desired effect by encouraging the cast members to work hard and deliver their lines with a great compassion and skill.

A special thank you to all the cast and crew, the teachers who gave up class time, put up with interruptions and helped with props and set. Also Bill and Bryce at North American Lumber. Please join me in congratulating the cast, students, staff, and parents at St. Gabriel School for a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Pioneer Co-op

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan. Another successful business thriving in our province. This time the news comes from Swift Current and the local Pioneer Co-op.

The Pioneer Co-op annual sales reached a record of \$99 million the past year, Mr. Speaker. It now has its sights set on the \$100 million mark. The management believes that the current renovations to both the gas station and the grocery store, along with the support of the community, the bottom line will continue to go up.

The Pioneer Co-op service station renovations were completed in early 2000. As well, Mr. Speaker, the pharmacy and grocery department upgrades have now been completed, with additional work to be completed at the photo department and cafeteria.

All of these recent renovations have allowed the Pioneer Co-op to remain competitive in a changing marketplace. In the words of Co-op's general manager, Stuart Dryland, and I quote:

We can't make a return without an investment. We believe that this investment in our community will provide us with good returns in years to come.

This government also believes in investing in its communities, Mr. Speaker, making smart, fiscally responsible investments, ensuring the continued growth of Saskatchewan as an important role for our government, business, and community. We believe that working alongside the people of this province is the key to the future success for all those who call Saskatchewan a home, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Reasons for Resignation of Former Minister of Crown Investments Corporation

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, over the past few days we have

seen a systematic effort by the NDP (New Democratic Party) to discredit the legitimate concern raised by one of its own former ministers about NDP mismanagement of Crown corporations.

Yesterday the Minister of Justice called her concerns groundless. The CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) minister said pretty much the same thing. So this got us wondering — why did she really quit cabinet? She doesn't seem like the kind of person who's prone to rash decisions; like accepting a senior cabinet appointment and then quitting less than three weeks later.

Mr. Speaker, so answer our curiosity. To the Premier: what is the real reason the member for Saskatoon Idylwyld quit your cabinet less than three weeks after being appointed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I could refer the Leader of the Opposition back to the very public statements made by the former minister of Finance and former minister of Economic Development and myself at the time she made a very personal decision to step from cabinet. A personal decision based on her desire to, as she indicated, to leave political life at some point. Her desire to write and publish, what we know is going to be a very significant work.

And if I may say, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet — while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker — this House and all Saskatchewan people, I think, should be united in their gratitude for the work that the member from Idylwyld gave while serving as Minister of Finance and as Economic Development.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly looking forward to reading the last chapter of the book. It may read a little different than the Premier's story that we've just been given. Because here was a minister, Mr. Speaker, who was prepared to rein in the Crown corporations. Yet she quit after less than three weeks of being the Minister of CIC.

Mr. Speaker, isn't this the real reason the minister quit? Because she wanted to rein in the Crown corporations but the Premier would not back her up. Mr. Speaker, nobody believes the Premier's little cover story. And he went into it today but he omitted the part about it would help select a new Speaker because of course the facts proved that to be wrong as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has far bigger problems. He has Crown corporation heads running all over the world losing millions of taxpayers' dollars. And then, Mr. Speaker, his first Minister of CIC tries to rein them in and he would not back her up.

My question to the Premier: is this not the real reason, the true reason, why the minister resigned?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, point number one: I'm relatively confident that when the former minister of Finance,

former minister of Economic Development authors her book, we'll know what's going to be in the first few chapters, Mr. Speaker. It's the job that she and others had to cleanup the mess left by that political organization when they were in government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite's got some questions about organizations in a government or in a political party, he may want to phone up his federal cousin, Mr. Stockwell Day, and ask what's going on down there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, they ask questions in this House but . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Order. The Premier will continue.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, they obviously like to ask questions but they obviously don't like to hear the answers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this again. At the time of the minister's choice to leave cabinet, it was very, very clear her reasoning and my willing, but not glad, acceptance of her stepping aside from cabinet related to her circumstance to step beyond public life and into other endeavours, her desire to be working on what we know will be an important piece of history of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, we've learned from the member from North Battleford that this government likes to put up a cover to obscure from people what's actually going on. And we see the Premier practising that same practice, Mr. Speaker.

But the truth is leaking out. There was a March 2 column in *The Leader-Post* about the minister's resignation. It suggested she wanted CIC to place less emphasis on risky public investment and more emphasis on efficiency. However, that didn't go over too well with the new regime and with the new Premier, who is described as socialist in today's *Leader-Post*.

The column goes on to suggest that Frank Hart, Ron Clark, and . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition will put the question, please.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, at least there are six socialists that clapped for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, Frank Hart, Ron Clark and Don Ching opposed the new direction. Three weeks later the Minister of Economic Development was ousted and replaced by a do-nothing minister who's prepared to let the Crowns gamble and lose as much money as they want.

I ask the Premier this question. Who is running things over there? Why was your first minister . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I would just remind the hon. member to phrase all of his questions through the Chair, please.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition seems to have a certain amount of envy in his question today about the nice headlines I'm getting in *The Leader-Post*.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Leader of the Opposition to know that yes, sure enough, right here in today's *Leader-Post*, the headline reads: Calvert delivers socialist message. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that the message I delivered was to the . . . a large, large gathering — 600 people — involved in the business community in Regina and southern Saskatchewan. And as a result of this socialist message, Mr. Speaker, I got a standing ovation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I would invite the Leader of the Opposition, there are many issues of concern to the people of Saskatchewan, to the public of Saskatchewan, many important public policy issues that we should be debating in this legislature — health care, transportation, taxes, the economy — can we move on to what is a substantive issue for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Debt Restructuring

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Premier of the province. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced a major restructuring of its debt totalling over half a billion dollars. My question to the Premier, Mr. Speaker, is: did the Saskatchewan government have any involvement whatsoever in helping the Pool restructure that debt?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the government to say to the member opposite and to this House, that in this province the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool has made a tremendous contribution to the welfare of not only rural communities but to the economy of our province.

And as we look at the restructuring decisions that the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool makes in this province, we're encouraged that they'll continue to play that role in Saskatchewan, and want to say to the member opposite and to this Assembly that there has not been any government funding that has gone into the restructuring of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — To the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, while you've indicated that there has been no loan to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, can you confirm to the people of

Saskatchewan . . .

The Speaker: — I would ask the member to rephrase his question once again please, through the Chair.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister to confirm to the people of Saskatchewan that there has been no loan, no loan guarantee, or any other commitment to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool of Saskatchewan taxpayers' dollars in their restructuring of their debt.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, there has not.

Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation. Following my questions on Tuesday relating to the taxes the corporation owes the RM (rural municipality) of Rudy, we received a call from the RM of Canaan.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I'm sure the members would like to hear the preamble to the question and the question. Order. Order. I assure you that the Speaker would like to hear the preamble and the question.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are good questions and they should be heard. My question again is for the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation. We received a call from the RM of Canaan.

Sask Valley Potato Corporation owns land with potato storage facilities and other buildings near the town of Lucky Lake in this RM. They're in the exact, right now, they're in the exact same situation as the RM of Rudy. They sent Sask Valley Potato Corporation a tax notice based on the assessed values of the property at just over \$155,000. In return they received a cheque for \$469.

Some government official pulled out a big black pen and basically rewrote their own tax notice. In one stroke, they knocked off a cool \$155,000.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation owes two RMs that we know of over \$300,000. Will the minister explain why this corporation refuses to pay their 2000 taxes to the RMs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are good questions and I've heard those good questions a number of times, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will repeat the very good answer that I gave the other day as well, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that my officials within the Sask Valley Potato Corporation are working with the RMs to try and find resolution to this problem that the member legitimately raises.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, we know members of this RM council met with the Minister of Finance at the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention. They also met with the Minister of Municipal Affairs at the SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) convention. And they met with Zach Douglas and Murray Gettle at CIC on April 6.

At that meeting one of the CIC officials suggested the taxes owed by Sask Valley Potato Corporation should be based on its ability to pay. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure many taxpayers in this province would love to be able to pay taxes using this method.

But maybe that is the problem. Maybe the Sask Valley Potato Corporation can't afford to pay its taxes to the RMs because of the money they lost in SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) — on account of the money they've lost and are going to continue to lose.

Mr. Speaker, this is a huge amount of money for these RMs. And other ratepayers are being told they may have to pay more because this Crown corporation, established with ratepayers' own tax dollars, refuses to pay its tax bill.

Mr. Speaker, what is the holdup here? Will you commit to the ratepayers in the RM of Rudy and Canaan that the Sask Valley Potato Corporation will pay their tax bills immediately?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well again, it's my understanding that my officials are working with the RM to try and find a resolution to this problem.

Mr. Speaker, let me speak more broadly of the issue as well. Mr. Speaker, our Crown corporations have invested across the province, and across the country to try and bring revenues back to the province. Part of the investment here is to try to grow an industry, Mr. Speaker, that I believe is seeing real progress. Mr. Speaker, we've been seeing real progress.

My officials will continue to try to find resolution to this. I am assured, Mr. Speaker, by my officials, and I'm confident that they will find resolution in the very near future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker. I have a letter written by the Minister of CIC to the reeve of the RM of Canaan on April 18. It says that Zach Douglas would be, and I quote:

... in touch with the management and board of Sask Valley Potato Corporation ... out that CIC is desirous of attaining a resolution to this issue as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the RM says on April 25 during their budget meeting they phoned Mr. Douglas and asked him if the tax bill would be paid. And he said he would still urge Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation to settle the matter. But to the date the RM has not received payment, or any further dialogue with the government or Crown officials on this issue.

They're concerned that the resolution of this issue, or settling

the matter may not necessarily mean that the corporation will pay its tax bill.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will the RM of Rudy and RM of Canaan receive their total grants in lieu owed from the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation, and when will they receive them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I've instructed my officials to try to bring resolution to what is an obvious disagreement around the amount of tax that should be paid, Mr. Speaker. My officials I am confident will work with the RM. They say they are making progress on this issue. I am confident that they will find resolution to this problem in the very near future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Investment in Clickabid.com

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker my question is for the minister responsible for CIC. I'd like to ask about another one of the NDP get-rich-quick schemes that we've learned about. It's called Clickabid.com.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999 the NDP decided SaskTel should enter the Internet auction business and take on eBay. Clickabid launched its services in June of 1999 with a lot of fanfare and a huge advertising campaign. And by December 2000 they were out of business. Clickabid.com was in business for exactly 18 months and they lost \$2 million taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: who approved this investment and what were they thinking?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — First of all, Mr. Speaker, just to point out a correction, they were not taking on eBay — eBay wasn't in Saskatchewan or in Canada and the member knows that from the questions he asked this morning in Crown Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you and the public of Saskatchewan ...

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to, through you, to the member and to the public of Saskatchewan tell you why our Crown corporations are investing to try and bring revenue to the people of Saskatchewan. Here's why, Mr. Speaker. This morning SaskTel Mobility is investing — announced that they would be investing — \$24 million over the next three years to expand digital cellular network in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, blanketing much of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I ask that member what private cellular utility would provide that kind of service in rural Saskatchewan? I'd guess none.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister wants, maybe the minister wants to explain how losing \$2 million on a dot-com company helps you bring digital service to rural Saskatchewan.

Let's just review Clickabid's financial statements. In its first six months of operation, they spent about \$770,000 on advertising generating a total of \$12,600 in revenue. At this point most other businesses might have said, well, maybe this isn't working.

But not SaskTel, Mr. Speaker. Oh no. SaskTel ramped up their advertising. The next year they spent \$1.1 million to generate — and get this — \$14,000 in revenue. \$300,000 in new advertising to generate an extra \$1,400.

Mr. Speaker, why do the NDP let Clickabid keep throwing good money after bad? Why didn't they shut them down when it became apparent that nobody was clicking on Clickabid?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, there's obviously something not clicking over there, Mr. Speaker.

The member asks why, Mr. Speaker, the member asks why they make those investments? Here's why, Mr. Speaker. SaskTel made \$176.7 million in just five investments, Mr. Speaker. They made those investments, Mr. Speaker, so that they could, Mr. Speaker, so that they could make investments in rural Saskatchewan — most ridings that they represent, Mr. Speaker.

I quote out of the news release:

This is the largest expansion project ever for SaskTel Mobility as an example, and is an example of our commitment to all of our Saskatchewan customers (Mr. Speaker).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, this morning at the Crown Corporations Committee meeting we asked SaskTel's president Don Ching if he would show us the due diligence and business plan SaskTel did before launching Clickabid. And he said, oh no he couldn't do that; they might be giving away some valuable information to their competitors.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is just a hunch. But I don't think you have to worry about eBay wanting to steal the Clickabid business plan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for days now we've been asking the minister what kind of due diligence CIC is doing before it makes these investments? This is a defunct company. It's no longer in business. Why doesn't the minister just release the business plan to show us what kind of due diligence is done before you risk taxpayers' money?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about due diligence again. I'll talk about the due diligence that occurred in the 1980s when they spent over a billion dollars a year more than they earned, Mr. Speaker.

Here's the due diligence, however, that our government and our Crown corporations did, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the due diligence around Leicester cable earned the people of Saskatchewan over a hundred million dollars, Mr. Speaker. The due diligence on Saturn/Austar earned the people of Saskatchewan \$37 million, Mr. Speaker. The due diligence on Regional Cable earned the people of Saskatchewan \$8 million, Mr. Speaker. The due diligence on Alouette earned the people of Saskatchewan \$6 million, Mr. Speaker. And the due diligence on ISM Westbridge earned the people of Saskatchewan \$23 million. And that's what due diligence on this side of the House does.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Investments by Crown Corporations

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of the Environment. The provincial government has spent 1.2 million on foreign travel for the Crowns. In the case of IQ&A the travel was to sell health information the Minister of Health says wasn't for sale.

In the case of ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan) 45,000 was spent by one official, mostly visiting the United Kingdom to flog an incomplete and unproven technology that is not yet functioning in Saskatchewan, much less ready for the international market.

This year's budget calls for a \$9 million increase on the cost of fire suppression. The fire season in Saskatchewan is only three to four months. If we want a truly modern, mobile firefighting force would it not make more sense to have a public-private partnership that would make available the fire suppression force to other parts of the continent outside of our fire season?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that the province of Saskatchewan does is take their firefighting responsibilities very, very great.

As you travel to northern Saskatchewan you will see that there are many community people that are involved with the firefighting efforts that have to be undertaken, and a huge amount of people that work for SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) in firefighting are Aboriginal people in the North. And what we're going to do, Mr. Speaker, is we're going to build a very solid firefighting force of northern people so we're able to respond very quickly to protect all the people of Saskatchewan's interests.

And I think that's a very sound investment on behalf of the government and I think we're going to stay there, and that's where we're heading, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, while Saskatchewan turns in the worst job creation record in the country, the NDP continues to

drive business away. In the case of ISC, the former minister said we were investing in international schemes where there are, quote, "no concrete opportunities for new revenue." Worse than that government policy is discouraging private investment in information technology. In the case of home security systems, the NDP is trying to drive private operators out of the province.

Would it not make more sense to partner with private enterprise to develop a mobile fire suppression team that would work the year around and could earn money for Saskatchewan rather than put the entire expense on Saskatchewan taxpayers? That would be an innovative approach that would require the NDP to consider partnering with private enterprise rather than considering private enterprise the enemy.

Has the minister considered offering private enterprise the opportunity to invest in a fire suppression service that could be marketed in places such as the US (United States) during our off-season?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, we're doing exactly that. As we speak, SERM is looking at various options to not only make sure that our aircraft are working all year around and helping suppress fires right across the country and right across the continent and all throughout the world. We're doing some of that work.

But, Mr. Speaker, we're also partnering with the First Nations communities in northern Saskatchewan and the Metis communities. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have a five-year fire suppression agreement where we're hiring hundreds of people over the next five years to fight the fires in northern Saskatchewan.

Why, Mr. Speaker? Because we believe in northern Saskatchewan communities, we believe in the Aboriginal communities, and we believe above all else that we have the best forest firefighting force in all of Canada.

And what we want to do, Mr. Speaker, is we want to market that force. We want to be able to export that force throughout other jurisdictions so we're able to create some value for the people that are out there now taking training, that we're able to create employment opportunities year around and above all else market some of the solid work being done in SERM's forest firefighting exercises.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the things the NDP were rightfully critical of the old Tory government for was Crown corporations paying dividends to the General Revenue Fund when, in point of fact, there were no revenues. There were losses. ISC paid dividends in \$8 million when, in fact, the corporation was not making money but losing money.

My question for the minister is why would dividends be paid when there is no revenue but a loss and how many other Crown corporations are in that same position of paying dividends to the GRF (General Revenue Fund) when there is no revenue?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, for once the member is right. It is not often the case,

but in this case he is right.

The ISC transferred \$8 million to the GRF for the licence fee to operate the land system and, Mr. Speaker, that's an annual obligation of the land corporation. And as the member rightly points out, that accounted for almost all of the paper loss that ISC experienced last year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very pleased to stand up and table responses to questions 133 through 146 inclusive.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip is submitting responses to questions 133 to 146 inclusive. They're hereby tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Convert, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — 147 is converted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment and Resource Management Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

The Chair: — I'd invite the minister to introduce those officials with him here in the Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my immediate right is Stuart Kramer who's my deputy minister. And to my immediate left is Dave Phillips; he's the assistant deputy minister of operations. Directly behind me is Bob Ruggles, the assistant deputy minister of programs and . . . Sorry to the, to the left . . . or to the right of me is Bob Ruggles. To the immediate back of me is Lynn Tulloch, who's the executive director of corporate services.

(14:30)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and once again welcome to your officials as well.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to start if I could with a situation that has been in the media a lot lately and that is the situation in North Battleford with respect to the water supply there. And I'm sure that you are well aware that not only are the residents of the community of North Battleford concerned, but I think people right across the province are concerned when they hear of a situation such as that.

I was wondering if you could give us an update as to the

situation in North Battleford, where things are at, and specifically what is your department doing at this point in terms of assisting the community and the officials in the community in dealing with this difficulty?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. There's no question that this is a very serious matter. The Government of Saskatchewan certainly wants to do as much and all that they can to help the city and the people of the Battlefords ensure one thing — and that's the safe quality of water.

In terms of the situation, the city of North Battleford, SERM, the health district, and Health Canada were looking at all the circumstances that led to the situation in North Battleford.

As the Minister of SERM, we have provincial water regulations and we have the belief that these water regulations are sound; they meet or exceed the national standards.

And the preliminary results indicated cause of cryptosporidium entering the North Battleford water system, and we believe that an operator restarted the plant before the filtration system was operating properly. The way to prevent crypto from entering a treatment system is to properly maintain and to operate that system.

It's still very early in the initial stages of looking at what may have went wrong, but anything that we can learn to improve the water quality in Saskatchewan we will implement. This could include a wide area, whether it's infrastructure testing, monitoring, and even if there's room to increase the levels of our standards, we certainly will do that. But again as I mentioned we believe that our regulations are adequate.

What I do want to point out is that from our perspective the response was immediate. We called a gentleman off of holidays to go into North Battleford the moment we heard that there may be some problems. The next day of course, if my memory serves me correct, we ordered a precautionary boil-water advisory just to make sure this particular problem, if it was water-borne — we couldn't be for sure that it was water-borne — and once we determined that it was water-borne and there was some crypto in the water system, then that's when we collaborated with Health and certainly Health made the call to have the boil-water advisory . . . sorry, the boil-water order.

And that's where we began to make sure that once you found out where the problem was and there was a lot of indication that it was water-borne, and that we would issue that boil-water order immediately.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister: what are the total number of cases now of cryptosporidia and do you have an estimate of the number of people affected?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I think the most important thing that we want to point out is that we are collaborating with Health on this particular matter. The health district is also involved.

I don't have any answer specifically as to what Health is doing in terms of this particular challenge. But what I can indeed tell

you, and that's the limit of my health knowledge, is that we have 20 confirmed cases. We don't have an estimate as to how many may have, over the period of the month of April, may have gotten ill as a result of this problem.

We have to make certain what we're dealing with first of all and get very specific information. It's very hard to speculate.

But I can share with you without getting too much into detail, the fact that we have 20 confirmed cases. We know that there's other people that have complained of other health challenges. So we expect that number to increase. And what the final tally will be, we don't have an estimate for you. But Health would have the more specific details.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister. You indicated in your previous answer that there is a boil-water order in effect. Can you indicate if there are other communities that are affected by this order, and how long do you expect that the order would remain in place?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Ruddell, North Battleford, and the town of Battleford, have all been given the boil-water order. And we are simply not going to take any chances with this particular challenge. We will not lift the boil-water order until we're absolutely certain, based on the tests that are done, to ensure that the water is as risk free as possible for consumption by the people of North Battleford and area.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, since the North Battleford incident, have you had any other communities either in that area or anywhere else in the province, for that matter, come forward with concerns about their own water supplies and cryptosporidia?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. I just wanted to point out that there are the current orders in place for North Battleford and area. And those are the boil-water advisory we have now; there's two of them.

And at this point in time we also have 37 communities that are under a boil-water advisory, which we're not certain whether . . . exactly where some of the problem lies, but we make sure that we tell the folks that if there is a problem with your water supply, that we would tell them to take precautionary boil-water approach.

And I also want to share with you that immediately, we understand, that there is some information coming out of North Battleford. We don't have all the specific details and what is being said, but I understand that the announcement is being made as we speak.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Cryptosporidia from what I understand has never been tested for previously in North Battleford, and as I understand it, in any other community. Is this a test now that will be required and that your department will be making sure communities with water treatment facilities are testing for?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I just want to point out that there is two areas that do their testing for the crypto and one of them, of course, is in Medicine

Hat and the other is in the city of Saskatoon.

We are now looking at whether testing would be part of the North Battleford situation as to ways and means that we can increase and improve our standards as I mentioned earlier. At this stage in the game, that there is no jurisdiction in Canada that does regular testing as part of their standards for crypto.

So certainly Saskatchewan wants to learn as much as they can from this particular challenge in the Battlefords. And so I think the key thing that I want to point out is that we want to ensure that we do as much as we can to learn from this particular exercise because as I mentioned before this is a very serious matter and we certainly want to do all that we can as a government to help address this particular challenge.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, to the minister. Last year after the Walkerton tragedy I requested some information from your department and your department was very helpful in providing a number of different documents to me that I found most interesting.

One of them was a document that had the compliance rates of all of the communities in Saskatchewan, the compliance rates around meeting the regulatory requirements of the department in submitting water samples to the department. Now I think you and I will agree that probably the vast majorities of municipalities in this province are very, very responsible and do in fact meet the requirements, submit the samples on a timely basis as required.

I was surprised however at the number of communities that have a very, very poor compliance rate. And if I remember correctly there were probably upwards of a dozen communities that hadn't complied at all; in effect were being requested to provide, you know, six or a dozen samples over the course of a year to the department and weren't supplying any.

What is your department doing in order to make sure that these compliance rates are improved and that the rural and urban municipalities in this province understand the importance of complying with those regulations?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — There is no question that as a government that we are working very, very hard in working with the communities to ensure that they do their testing of the water. Often, as the minister, in many of my addresses I encourage folks to get their water tested, and if you are a citizen of some of the communities that have continual boil-water advisories and especially if you have the boil-water order, that you would continue checking with your civic officials and folks within the health districts. And certainly SERM would be a part of the team to make sure that you would get up-to-date information.

One of the things that we want to do to assist the municipalities and the RMs and the cities and the communities in terms of ensuring that we have compliance in the standards and the water testing, and certainly the operation of some of the water plants, was the additional 10 new staff that I spoke about.

Obviously this is a new budget and these 10 staff members — while I don't have the specifics as to where they will be

stationed — their primary role is to be a support team to the municipalities that operate their water and sewer systems to make sure that they're operating them right and within the standards. And if they operate them at optimum levels, the way the water plants should be operating, and if they follow the standards and if they take the team approach that we want to be a part of, then I think we would minimize the risk of the Saskatchewan people's health to water-borne illnesses.

That being said, there's always the challenge and we must assume as people in the province to make sure that we continue being diligent in water-quality challenges that the province and the world faces. And as I mentioned before, standards, compliance, operations of the water systems — those are all things that we cannot and should not take for granted, as evidenced in the North Battleford area.

And as well our approach in SERM is that we want to be part of the technical team, part of the operational team, to make sure that we afford as much and the total support that we can to some of the communities that are having this particular challenge with water quality.

And as well, as a result of the increased awareness that occurred, we also of course have some new staff at the provincial lab and these tests, as I understand, are being done more quickly. And all that is intended to do exactly what you have mentioned: is to continue being diligent with this very, very serious matter.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, if we are successful in increasing the compliance of communities with the testing requirements — and certainly now there will be a whole new awareness around the importance and the seriousness of doing that — I am expecting that there will be far more pressure put on the department and on the people who do the testing for the department, just in terms of sheer volume.

Do you have the capacity, do the people that you retain to do that have the capacity to meet an increased volume should the compliance rates increase and you get more requests for testing as a result of a higher awareness?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. The answer to your question, post-Walkerton we've certainly seen an increase in the activity of testing. And we certainly expected and anticipated more pressure on SERM for some of the volumes of testing that many of the communities will want.

And that's one of the reasons why, based on the increase of testing and the increase in activity and the awareness that's been going on, that we anticipated the increase. And that's one of the reasons why we had 10 new staff hired, as well as provincial lab folks to again meet the demand for that testing.

As always, as we mentioned before, we continue to monitor the situation. We have, as I mentioned, 37 boil-water advisories that are out there and it's for a variety of reasons. So as I mentioned time and time again, that we must not — the municipalities, the government, the communities, the average citizen — must not become complacent in water quality. It's very important for us to, again, be ever diligent in this particular challenge.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Chair, to the minister. I think you're absolutely right. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to never become complacent when it comes to water quality and water safety.

And I think that particularly extends to the government. And this last budget . . . I mean we've seen another budget where there has been a zero increase in municipal revenue sharing.

You yourself, Mr. Minister, are a former mayor of, I believe, your hometown, and I'm sure you understand the pressures that were put on your community with all of the off-loading that went on in the early '90s, the decreases in funding.

And I think communities have been put in an untenable position in the sense that they're having to make some very, very difficult decisions out there and it's been hard for them to maintain their water treatment plants, their water treatment facilities.

And I guess the question, Mr. Minister, now that you've seen first-hand the results and the consequences of the lack of appropriate and proper funding, the lack of increase in revenue sharing, what will you be doing to encourage your colleagues and the Minister of Municipal Affairs to increase funding to municipalities in order that they themselves can better address a lot of these situations before they get to the degree that they have in North Battleford?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I just want to clarify that the situation in North Battleford itself, I believe the application for the infrastructure work was primarily related to capacity and it was not really related to the quality of water.

Certainly, as I mentioned before, this is a very serious matter. We have to look at all these things. And I understand that the Municipal Affairs branch, Sask Water, and SERM are doing a review of all the different systems that are out there to try and see how we can improve the system. And that review goes on and on; it continues on.

And what I'll also point out is that through our budget, through SERM's budget, as a support towards municipalities that are having some difficult times — and I talk about the advisory committees — that have the boil-water advisory, have a difficult time with this particular challenge, we are affording them the support that is needed. And of course as always people would like more support and we'll do our very best to meet some of that demand.

I concur with you that as a former mayor we certainly seen the belt-tightening exercises in the early '90s. But we understood that because of the deficit the province was facing, and the huge debt, that we all had to tighten our belts at that time.

However, in Ile-a-la-Crosse we continued operating our water plant and we continued providing good service. We always were diligent in ensuring that the water quality testing went on.

So while the challenges of funding is faced by many sectors, we certainly appreciate the fact that we have to do all we can to support the communities particularly with this issue of water

quality.

So we are not sitting on our hands; we're supporting the communities and municipalities as much as we can when it comes to water quality testing. And there is always room for improvement, as I mentioned, and we're looking for ways to improve.

Thank you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Chair, to the minister. Mr. Minister, a couple of times now you have referenced reviewing procedures, current practices, that kind of thing. Can you indicate to me just what is being reviewed, to what degree, what are the different processes that you have in place, and I think maybe indicate how you see that ultimately impacting regulations.

Because one of the things that very, very much surprised me was the director of the public works department in North Battleford saying that the city of North Battleford had been fully complying with provincial regulations, but that they now realize that that wasn't enough.

So does your review encompass regulation in its entirety?

The Chair: — Order. Why is the Government House Leader on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly, and the officials who are here today helping the Minister of Environment during his estimates, to a group of 33 students from Prince Albert.

And these are grade 4 students; there's 33 of them, Mr. Chairman, and they're from W.J. Berezowsky School. Now I need to tell you a little bit about W.J. Berezowsky School.

It's about a block and a half away from my home, so many of these children will be neighbours of mine. Three children, the only three that I have, all attended W.J. Berezowsky.

My daughter, my oldest daughter, was in the first kindergarten class at W.J. Berezowsky, and they're all really proud of receiving the beginning years of their education at W.J. Berezowsky.

I think they turned out pretty good from the tutoring they got in that school, and I'm sure you all will as well.

So I'm asking all members to give a very warm welcome to the grade 4 students from W.J. Berezowsky, and I look forward to having drinks with them later.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

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

Subvote (ER01)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. I again point out the comment I made earlier that the standards that we have we believe are very good standards, and that if you follow the standards and you operate the water plant to your optimum levels, that you should certainly diminish the challenges associated with safe water quality to the people that you are serving.

For the Saskatchewan perspective, Sask Water is leading a review of water treatment infrastructure across the entire province. And on a Canadian basis, Canada, SERM also sits on a Canada-wide committee to review and update standards. So if there's other jurisdictions that have specific information and specific standard improvements that would be of value for all of Canadians, and certainly Saskatchewan as well, we certainly take great interest in that, and we're certainly a part of that national committee.

Now in reference to the North Battleford problem, the preliminary — and I underline preliminary — results show that there were problems with the operation of the plant. Now it's still too early to draw the final conclusions, but the preliminary results show that there was problems with the operation of the plants.

As we mentioned before, we set the standards as a province and we certainly work with the communities to have that compliance. And if you operate your water treatment plant as it should be operated, at its optimum level and following the standards, then you would minimize risks to the people that you serve. Thank you.

(15:00)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister: can you confirm that M R 2-McDonald of Regina has been retained in order to review the city's water system, the city of North Battleford's water system. And can you explain what the expectation of their work will be and what their mandate is at this point.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I think the issue that we're trying to ensure through this whole process is to provide very strong leadership and support. And we certainly want to thank the city of North Battleford for providing that leadership.

I can confirm that it is again, it is our belief that the city of North Battleford has hired M R 2 consulting and I believe the mandate is to completely review their water system. So certainly, we want to thank the city for taking a strong leadership role.

And again as we mentioned earlier, we're primarily here to support their efforts to fix their problem and to ensure safe

delivery of water to the people of North Battleford and area.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, to the minister, it's my understanding that the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment held a two-day meeting just this past Monday and Tuesday in Winnipeg. One of the topics for discussion, ironically, was the protection of surface and groundwater sources for drinking water.

Mr. Minister, could you tell us if you attended that meeting and, if not, did Saskatchewan have representatives there and who were they?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Just to answer the question very pithy here. Stuart Kramer, deputy minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, attended on my behalf. As well, I believe Bob Ruggles, the assistant deputy minister of programs, also attended. And of course I could not attend, primarily because I was sitting in the Assembly here.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Minister, I'm just curious if the Saskatchewan representatives that attended were able to gather any information that might be helpful to us in this particular situation here or could be of use to us in the future. And if so, would it be possible that that information could be made available to my office?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well, thank you very much. That certainly is a very, very important question. I just wanted to again reiterate the statement I made in reference to SERM sitting on a Canada-wide committee to review and update standards. And a department staff attends these meetings on a regular basis. And that's above and beyond the ministers having a meeting.

And I can also advise the House and yourself that some of the issues that we discussed, that were discussed at the CCME (Council of Canadian Ministers of Environment) in reference to water was the longer term issues.

The ministers there decided to put a lot of emphasis into two specific areas — and there's other areas as well — but the two specific areas were the research into water quality and safety, and certainly the more important part of monitoring of water. Those were the two areas that primarily took a lot of the discussion time.

And I can also tell you that through both SERM officials meeting on a regular basis of the Canada-wide standards, and the Council of Canadian Ministers of the Environment talking on a regular basis of water safety and the quality of water, that this is a very serious and important issue for all of Canadians.

The follow-up meeting for your information will be held in October 2001. And while there wasn't anything specific in short-term, certainly the urgency to begin to look at this particular issue was very prevalent at that meeting.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, at this point I would relinquish the floor to my colleague, the hon. member from Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also have some

questions with respect to water supplies for the minister, from my constituency. The town of Kincaid identified, in excess of a year ago, a problem with their water supply and have been on a boil-water advisory since last June.

My question for the minister is can he tell me what action has taken place, if any, to assist or rectify the situation in the village of Kincaid?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I just wanted to report that on a regular basis we have met with all the communities that had either a boil-water advisory or a boil-water order, and Kincaid has been one of those communities. And I don't have the specific details as to the date of our visits and certainly how many visits we had.

What I will undertake to do is to get that member a complete update as to what Kincaid has been asking for, what the prevalent problems are, and certainly what our visits have found.

As well I would also indicate to the member that as a result of us having 10 new staff that we would certainly, at your wish, continue to focus on Kincaid and all the other communities to ensure that we're there to support them and to provide as much advice as we can to ensure that they do have the water-quality standards and the operation of the water plant are followed, and that the safety of the residents of Kincaid and all of Saskatchewan people aren't put at risk.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, my next question would be the role of SERM in this water issue. This is a — as you've identified very correctly — this is a very, very serious issue in a lot of our communities. It appears to me that the role that's been taken is to identify and depart.

And I would like to ask the minister, Mr. Chair, what the role of SERM is. If it's solely to identify water problems or if it's to work with the communities to resolve the problems rather than just identify and leave?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — One of the things that we want to assure all the members of the Assembly is that it is not our premise to identify and then leave. What we've done is we have, without question, we have been very aware of some of the challenges associated with the water-quality problems in many of the small communities.

And what we do is, we go into the communities and we advise people if they have a problem with their water. We look at their operations and we determine whether it's an operational problem or whether it's an infrastructure problem and we begin to work with them. And as a result of some of the increased pressure to respond more, we hired 10 additional people.

So clearly SERM understands that the municipalities operate these water systems. We want to be as much a support role as we can. And this is where we certainly have the manpower to provide them with the advice that they collaborate to seek out different options to ensure that water quality isn't compromised, and to make sure that we always are diligent in this partnership mode to work on this challenge.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, again I just want to reiterate the fact that it's been 10 months that this community has been on a boil-water advisory. And I received correspondence from them some two or three weeks ago, which they haven't received any information from any agency in the last number of months, which prompted myself to write a letter to you.

And I wrote a letter and I included — because again, the seriousness of this, they're worried about a Walkerton in the town of Kincaid — so I included the Minister of Health, the Minister of Sask Water, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. And I asked in my letter if one of you would take the lead in looking into the problems and issues that come forth from all communities that have a water-related issue.

Mr. Chair, can the minister tell me who the lead agency is for issues such as this? Because here we have a town that's basically been left out of the process ever since it was identified they have a problem; or if they've not been left out, they're getting mixed information from various agencies from government.

So my question again is who is the lead agency and who can my people from the town of Kincaid speak to on this issue? Because it's extremely serious and it's 10 months old.

(15:15)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. I again wanted to point out that we'll give you the history of how we've been dealing with the community of Kincaid. And what I want to point out is that one of the things that we want to do is when we issue a boil-water advisory, and certainly the order, we will keep that boil-water advisory or the boil-water order in place until we're absolutely sure. And sincerely I apologize to the community of Kincaid. If they've been boiling their water for 10 months, is we have to make absolutely sure that there isn't any threat to the public. And that's one of the reasons why we continue issuing the boil-water advisory or the order.

Now what I'll advise the member is that we will give you in full in writing exactly what we have been doing with the community of Kincaid. And as I mentioned a few seconds ago is that we'll continue ordering or issuing an advisory boil-water statement until we're absolutely certain that the entire system is purged of any threat to the public health of Kincaid.

And certainly we're continuing to work with the municipalities and the Municipal Affairs department to identify some of these communities that have infrastructure problems. And SERM, we're certainly going to work with the communities that have operational problems. And that the team approach we're taking is very, very serious.

But as you may know that many of these communities have had these ongoing problems with water, and from my perspective as the minister, the direct orders are . . . number one is if there's a problem, we will issue in concert with Health a boil-water advisory or a boil-water order. And we'll not lift that order until we're absolutely certain that there is no threat to the public health. And this is where public health and SERM collaborate.

And furthermore that we would insist that we would identify these communities and work in collaboration with the Municipal Affairs minister to ensure that some of these communities are also prioritized to try and receive some of the infrastructure money to improve and upgrade their system if it's an infrastructure problem.

If it's an operational problem of course we'd work very close with the communities and point out some of the deficiencies in the system and ensure again the safe quality of water.

And finally, what I would point out is that as a result of us increasing our staff and the collaboration with Health, Municipal Affairs, working with the communities, we have established a kind of SWAT (special weapons and tactics) team approach where these communities are there, they have a problem, we go in there, we put these boil-water orders or precautionary advisories into place, we advise the community, and we work with that community until the problem is settled.

If the problem takes more than 10 months we'll continue on not taking a chance with people's public health and we'll continue having that boil-water or the precautionary order in place.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. I very much looked forward to your reply, reference Kincaid. As you are aware, I've not received a reply yet from any one of the ministries to which I wrote.

But I just wanted to follow up, Mr. Chair, because I did not get an answer to my question. Who is the lead agency in these water-related issues? Is it Health? Is it Municipal Affairs? Is it Sask Water? Or is it SERM?

People in the communities are very concerned because they seem like they get a little blindsided when they go to one agency and they say, no, sorry that's not under our purview. So I would like to know who is the lead agency for these issues.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well first of all, I would point out that what you want to do is you want to encourage the communities that own their own water systems to be very careful in the manner in which they operate. We would also want to encourage them to follow the standards and to certainly operate their water plant systems in the optimum level that they should be operating.

So the responsibility, we want to make sure we continue stressing that to the communities because we appreciate that many of these communities own and operate their own waterworks. But we don't want to, as you earlier said, advise and then leave town.

Certainly from health risk and the water analysis on specific questions to that particular area, you can certainly approach the provincial lab; and certainly the health officials at the community level or the health district officials could certainly provide specific information to Kincaid.

With the Sask Water Corporation, their primary role would be the infrastructure and the source water supply, where they would work with the community if there is an alternative water supply that is necessary. And also in some of the infrastructure

challenges that they have, they would also be able to talk to Sask Water as well.

But in terms of trying to afford this process, a lot of leadership, SERM certainly is going to be setting the standards. And we want to ensure that people are following those standards.

And also we have the direct contact with the communities. So if there is some challenge we're the first one along with Health in the communities advising people and putting some of these orders — again, in collaboration with Health — putting some of these orders in place.

So my comment to you would be in terms of specific health challenges and analysis of water at the provincial lab and the Health department would be the first initial place that you would go.

And certainly for the infrastructure and some of the water source challenges the community may face, certainly Sask Water Corporation would also be an avenue that they can look at.

But certainly in setting standards in communication and direct communication with the communities, SERM has been doing that and SERM will continue doing that.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, and to your officials welcome this afternoon. I have a couple of questions again to do with water concerns and mostly in small towns.

I know that everyone is concerned about water quality. And the town councils and village councils are especially concerned, especially when they have very little funding to deal with their failing infrastructure. I've had many calls from small villages that are saying, I would love to be able to conform but we don't have either the funding or maybe even the trained personnel to deal with this.

How are you addressing this issue through your department?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — One of the things we do in terms of our role as SERM is that we immediately go into a community and we assist the community in making sure that they, if they have a problem there, that we advise them of the standards and work with their operators.

And if there is a problem, in collaboration, in conjunction with Sask Health, we'll either issue a boil-water advisory or a boil-water order. An advisory is not as stringent as an order. And what this is intended to do, first of all, is to find out if there is any threat to the public in terms of their water service.

At this stage of the game, Sask Water is leading a review of the water treatment infrastructures across Saskatchewan. And we're trying to collaborate with them and indicate where there is a problem with the infrastructure compromising water quality, that we would prioritize these communities and these systems. And we are doing our darnedest to make sure that much of the infrastructure dollars that are available is directed to water quality.

And of course, we also want to continue promoting the

responsible position that certainly SERM will do their part, Sask Water will do their part; and the communities since many of them own and operate the system, we want to make sure that we work with them to again ensure that their water-quality standards are being met and the operations of their water plants are at their optimum level. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Maybe you could tell me how many communities are not testing their water right now and how many that are testing, are actually failing?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. And just to point out that every community that we license are required to do the monitoring. And while you can appreciate the past year the monitoring has gotten better, but there are still some communities that don't comply as much as they should. And we continue working with them and pushing them to ensure that they monitor their water.

And what I will do today as I mentioned to your colleague from Wood River, is that we would submit to you complete lists of those communities that are not complying and would look forward to your assistance to ensuring that the compliance would be there on their part, and your co-operation and help would be appreciated.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I assure you I would love to work with you.

Mr. Minister, you said that there's testing done by every community that has a licence. Do you mean there are some communities that don't have a licence?

(15:30)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. Just in terms of SERM licences, any system over 18 cubic metres of water that's being delivered — that's roughly 4,000 gallons — so any system that operates on 4,000 gallons per day has to have a SERM licence.

And some of the ones that are not regulated by SERM, and most of the communities are, but some of the ones that aren't regulated by SERM would be for example a restaurant not connected to the community's water supply. They're in the middle of nowhere; they have their own water supply. Restaurants of that nature of course are being monitored by Sask Health.

So to answer the question very specifically, most of the communities are licensed by SERM. Any water system over 18 cubic metres of water use per day has to have our licences. And as I mentioned, the smaller ones, for example a restaurant out in the middle of nowhere, certainly Health does the regulation there.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, is there different regulations if a community is using an artesian well than the ones just pumped out of the ground?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Generally, the testing requirement for water is the same. However, there are some more stringent rules for surface water as opposed to groundwater because surface

water, as you can appreciate, is subjected to more environmental challenges than the groundwater.

But nonetheless, the standards and the testing are the same for both sources of water, but there are more stringent guidelines for surface water because of the close proximity to the outside world.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, before I close, I just want to ask you how closely you're working with the Minister of Rural Revitalization when it comes to our small towns and their concerns with the water quality and the infrastructure that's failing because of the lack of funding in the past number of years.

We all recognize that in order to keep a small town viable, there are some things that are absolutely essential and water being one of them. So, for example, in my constituency, I have one small town who was wondering how they're going to be able to continue to keep their water to their residents when they can't afford to upgrade their infrastructure and the training they'll need for their personnel.

So the Minister of Revitalization should be . . . should have a lot of . . . should be working with your department, hand in hand, to make sure that this is happening, and also the minister of Municipal Government with the infrastructure money.

So I'm wondering how you are working to ensure that our rural communities can remain viable when there seems to be three different departments that are pulling in three different ways.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. And what I want to point out as well is that being from a small Saskatchewan community myself, I think the notes and the comments that you made are very important.

And from our perspective, working with all the ministers, whether it's in Municipal Affairs or Northern Affairs or Sask Water, I think there's no question that water quality is very important to all of us. And we're going to collaborate as efficiently and as quickly and often as we can to ensure that we are addressing some of those challenges.

Now when you talk about being specific, one of the things I mentioned earlier is that the municipal branch has been doing an assessment with Sask Water and SERM on all the sites and the systems throughout the province to see where the problem and challenges lie. Once the assessment is done, we're also going to try and direct some of the infrastructure spending to those specific communities that have problems associated with the safe delivery of their water that is due to infrastructure problems.

If there's other problems — say, for example, operational problems — then of course SERM would also go in there and offer some of the advice.

So that work is ongoing. And from my perspective of being the Minister of SERM, if there is a challenge with water quality in a specific community, we are going to work in collaboration, in conjunction with Health to ensure, number one, is that public health is not at risk, and this is where you have the boil-water

advisories. This is where you have the boil-water orders if necessary, because it's certainly a more stringent form of control.

We're going to advise the public as well that this is a challenge with their water supply. And we're going to again collaborate with Sask Water and the Municipal Affairs department to say, look, listen, we've had this ongoing problem with this specific community. We need to make sure that there is some infrastructure money that is designed to alleviate the stress.

And certainly it would be perfect if we're able to address all these infrastructure demands out there overnight, but our attitude is to try and do it overnight, and time of course is very important on this. And we're continuing to be diligent in ensuring a timely response to some of the challenges of water quality in rural Saskatchewan, northern Saskatchewan, and urban Saskatchewan.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, seeing as we're discussing water and water quality, and issues that affect . . . as we're finding out it's an issue that's coming to the forefront in many communities as they try to address their water problems. And one of the problems I think we face out there, Mr. Minister, is an aging infrastructure, and the ability to properly aerate water and treat it properly before it goes to the consumer.

The question I have, Mr. Minister, is: while your department maybe works with communities to determine the quality of water, what does your department do when it comes to addressing infrastructure and some of the pumping, and the system, the maintenance systems that are in communities?

Does your department make recommendations? Or would your department, if you're checking water and you begin to recognize that there may be a quality problem here, do you start looking at the equipment, and do you then put forward recommendations to communities as to what you believe they should be doing to address that problem?

And then when you've done that, if you actually do do that, what other positions do you take then as a department to maybe discuss with other agencies, like municipal government, avenues of funding that would be necessary to address these concerns?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I just wanted to thank you for the question and to clarify some of the earlier comments I made to a couple of your colleagues.

And first of all what SERM does in terms of working with the community, both on a provincial basis and a national basis, is we want to ensure that the standards are there and that people are following the standards and that they operate their water plants as they should be operated. And often when SERM is called in, when we do an inspection of the water system, we list some of the challenges that the water system may face. If there's infrastructure needs, we certainly identify that as well, and if there is some operational problems, we work to identify that as part of the ongoing support to the communities.

What I do want to point out though is that in terms of the

additional 10 people that we've hired, we are directing our staff, as a minister we're telling the staff that if there is a problem in the community upon investigation and testing of some problems with the quality of water, we want to send people in there to not only look at their site, but to advise the people through collaboration with Public Health that there's a problem here.

And I've mentioned time and time again that if there is a problem we will issue a boil-water advisory or a boil-water order alongside of the Health.

So I think the first thing we want to do is to not put the people's health at risk and this is why the boil-water and the immediate SWAT team approach is necessary. What we also want to do is to promote ownership and the responsibility that the community also has to ensure safe quality water to their residents.

So we want to tell the community as well that as part of the support team that we're affording this whole exercise, that the community has a role. They certainly own and operate the water systems and the waterworks, so we recognize that they have a role to play and we want to collaborate with them. Certainly this exercise is not about pointing fingers; this exercise is reducing significantly the threat to public health.

So we got the community's role, you have SERM's standards, SERM's viewing of the operations, and certainly a report of what challenges the water system has. And on a provincial basis we're also collaborating with the Municipal Affairs branch to make sure that if there is an ongoing problem with a specific community, that we tell them infrastructure wise, we need some dollars here folks, and of course that work is continuing.

Between Sask Water and SERM and the Municipal Affairs portfolio, we are doing a study to determine exactly what level of problem we're dealing with and where we need to put some of those resources as soon as possible.

Health — again the water analysis and the health risk problem areas — they are primarily the ones that take the lead on that. And the Sask Water Corporation in terms of the source water supplies and some of the infrastructure identification needs, that's also a role that they would play.

But clearly from SERM's perspective, if we're called into a community we go in there. We look at the site and if there's some problems we identify those sites and we share the information with the owner, which is the community. And we tell them of the standards that they have to follow. And we come back here and say we need to afford as much support as we can to that community as quickly as we can to address some of those supplies . . . or some of those problems.

And in the meantime we don't lift any orders unless we're absolutely sure that the water is safe, and we will not do that. If there's a problem and that problem continues on for 10 months or a year and a half, we'll continue issuing that boil-water order because it's very important that people know we're doing this to protect their interests as well.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. So what you're basically saying is when you're called in and there's a problem arising with water quality, and the question that I would really like to

know, Mr. Minister, is when you're looking at the water quality, then do the officials from SERM actually look at the facilities, look at the equipment? Do they start . . . if they suspect that part of the problem is the fact that there's aging equipment and there's going to need be a . . . major upgrade needed in this facility, is . . . are those some of the things that your department would look at and then make recommendations as to the . . . to the community . . . as to what needs to be done to address the quality of the water, including maybe getting . . . replacing aged equipment, so that the quality of the water is maintained in the future?

(15:45)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. To answer the question, when looking at the water quality, do we look at infrastructure? And the answer is yes. And what we do is we work with the Saskatchewan Water Corporation as they are the infrastructure . . . or they are the experts in the infrastructure area.

And of course, as I mentioned earlier, we also work with Sask Health to ensure that if there is a problem in that particular area of water quality, that we continue putting the boil-water advisory or boil-water order in place to make sure that that is no public health at risk.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, having said that, would your department as well then, when a community realizes that they're probably dealing with a fairly major capital cost expenditure to address the facilities that are wearing down and actually that have lost their usefulness — and you mentioned about dealing with Sask Water and addressing quality problems and municipal government in regarding funding for some of the infrastructure that's out there — does your department inform communities of what is available in funding? Not only municipal but federal. I believe in the last two years we've had some substantial dollars available on the federal size to address some of the problems and municipal infrastructure regarding pumping stations and what have you.

And I just want clarification there, Mr. Minister, that when your department is identifying the problems and, as well, pointing out areas where the changes need to be made whether it's upgrading of equipment, realizing that this is a cost to community just to, for example, Mr. Minister, that you are as well saying, okay, here's what needs to be done and we believe that this equipment is just obsolete and needs to be totally replaced. We realize there's a substantial cost here.

But there are some programs through other departments, and certainly with the federal government, that are available and if applications need to be sent in immediately, what I'm asking, Mr. Minister, is that type of communication also passed on to a community so that they're not then . . . after you've set your orders in place, then they're struggling to . . . coming to us as MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) in many cases asking us what's available to help us address this problem.

And I just want a clarification, Mr. Minister, that your department as well is doing everything it can and has the ability to assist communities by pointing out areas where they can maybe source funding for capital reconstruction or upgrade of

their infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Certainly that's some of the work that has been ongoing.

We of course work with the various portfolios in the government. Municipal Affairs and Housing, we approached them to help them set priorities for some of the infrastructure funding.

And yes, we also make the communities aware of some of the potential funding sources, which also includes the Sask Water Corporation.

And that's why I mentioned earlier, between Sask Water, MAH (Municipal Affairs and Housing) and SERM and working with a number of other ministers, that we are taking a very thorough assessment of what the challenges are out there. And SERM is certainly making the other portfolios in government aware of some of the challenges that we have in some of these smaller centres and some of the other communities as well, when it talks about compromising water quality to their local folks.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I listened very intently when my hon. colleague from Wood River talked about who you approach first in regards to health when you have water problems — whether you approach Health or SERM or Sask Water or Municipal Government. And I listened very intently and I don't think you answered that question, sir.

I would like to know which branch does a small community like Kincaid, or any small community in rural Saskatchewan, go to, to get an answer? We feel rural Saskatchewan, small communities like that, get really frustrated when they don't know where to go and who to approach.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Okay. Just to clarify the point. If you have some challenges with water quality, your first contact would be SERM. And one of the things we would do is we'd go and work with you to see where the problems are and to collaborate some of the other challenges that you may face.

Now in assuming some of the lead on this particular challenging file, I also want to clarify that we have what I would envision as a SWAT team approach to this particular challenge. And one of them, first of all, is the responsibility that must also be incorporated in the overall management plan by the communities. We appreciate that the communities own and operate these water sites and water systems. And that we also appreciate that in terms of doing the water analysis in the public health of a particular community, that we would also have Health involved.

So clearly SERM would be your first contact if there is a challenge with your water quality in the community. And we'll go in there and we will work with Sask Water and Sask Health to see what kind of solution that we're able to find out.

So quite frankly in terms of setting standards and the initial contact with the community, SERM would certainly be that particular portfolio that you would approach. And then SERM would then turn around and say okay, well we better make sure we collaborate with Health.

If there is a threat to the water quality problems and we're certain that it's from the distribution system of the water system, then we've got to put a boil-water advisory or a boil-water order depending on how soon we can make certain of that.

And secondly is we've got to make sure that we keep that boil-water in effect to ensure that there is no threat to public safety.

And then we turn around and we collaborate with MAH and we collaborate with the Sask Water Corporation to say we have an infrastructure problem here; what can we do?

So while we are the initial contacts on water quality, there are a host of other ministers that we want to make sure that we stay in direct contact with. If there's a health-related issue that has to be addressed and as the Minister of SERM I can't do that. So clearly the responsibility certainly lies with other ministers as well.

So it is something that we're trying to show some strong leadership on. There is no question that we can't stick our head in the sand and pretend that the water quality is not a problem in the province. We can't stick our head in the sand saying that we don't have an aging infrastructure. But we can't stick our head in the sand as well by saying that we have all the resources to fix the problem overnight.

Clearly, as I mentioned before, our primary goal is to be the initial contact along with Health to make sure there's no threat to public health, and to issue those protective measures such as boil water, or boil-water orders, to ensure that the public's health is not compromised.

And the other thing as well is very, very important, is the municipalities own these water systems, the waterworks — they own them. So we want to make sure that we're not coming down hard on them and pointing the finger at them and saying it's all your fault. This thing is about collaboration and co-operation.

So we want to certainly show leadership on this and we want to make sure that we do a number of things. But the most important thing is to make sure that the public health is not put at risk. And that has a lot of implications for a number of departments. And the second thing, of course, is to find a solution to ensure a long-term supply of safe water to all residents of Saskatchewan's communities.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just have a follow-up, a couple of questions for the minister relating to Kincaid.

It was some time — and I'm going to just make a guess here, it was either in January or February — the urgency of this issue was front and centre, so I had done it verbally rather than in written form and asked for some assistance and have somebody from the department get in touch with Kincaid.

One learns very quickly that phone calls don't work. But I thought the urgency of this was such that it would be a little quicker. I received correspondence from Kincaid on March 28

saying we've absolutely heard nothing from anybody of the names that I had given, which prompted my letter. And that's why I took a small leave to go and retrieve this letter.

And in my letter, which I have not received an answer to as yet, and it was dated April 11, I have asked if anybody in the department has contacted Kincaid or if anybody has taken the lead in this issue.

And I gather now the minister has said that SERM is the lead agency. So my initial question is: has anybody contacted officials at Kincaid since January?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for the questions. In terms of the boil-water advisory, the officials from Kincaid would have been contacted on the boil-water issue. There's no question that you cannot issue a boil-water advisory without telling the officials from Kincaid that they have to be.

And I sincerely apologize for the length of time in which I responded to your correspondence. I think that letter is in my office for a signature, and I look through all the letters that I sign.

And I guess very briefly, if I can explain to you, is that what the letter . . . when I get a letter in my office, we often refer to a department person that looks at all the history of the issues that are brought up in that particular correspondence. And then the letter comes back to me for my signature, and sometimes that process takes a week to two weeks, and sometimes it may take three weeks. But I understand that letter is in my office for my signature. I'll have a look at it and get it to you as quickly to you as I can.

But as I mentioned before, that we will forward to you a complete list of what we have done in terms of contact with Kincaid, and the correspondence that we have received from Kincaid, in trying to resolve some of their problems.

And as I mentioned to you before, our role is to not simply issue a boil-water advisory and walk away. We want to continue working with those 37 communities that have challenges. And as I mentioned, it's certainly going to take us some time.

But what we're not going to do is put anybody's health at risk by lifting an order before putting the solutions in place to ensure the delivery of safe water.

And I think that you agree that the citizens of Kincaid should not consume water if it's not safe, and that's one of the reasons why we put in the boil-water, and that's one of the reasons why it'll stay until we're convinced that it is no longer needed.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Maybe this is a double-barrelled question, Mr. Chair. You answered that SERM is the lead agency. Does the minister sit with the other agencies within government such as the ones I've suggested, as Sask Water, Health, Municipal Affairs? Do you actually sit as a group and discuss some of these issues?

And I'd like to repeat my last question to the minister is, has anyone since January contacted people in Kincaid? I understand

the boil-water advisory. It's been there for 10 months. Everybody understands that. My question, more specific: has anybody since January contacted anybody in Kincaid reference the water problem?

(16:00)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — The answer to your first question is yes, the collaboration is there. There's no question, from our perspective, when I mentioned SERM being . . . having the initial contact is that when calls come in, we go out and we send some of the 10 new staff and other staff that we have to help with the water-testing problems that may show some significant challenge to public health.

Health does that through the provincial lab, does all the testing; and so we continue working with MAH to ensure that the housing aspect, the municipal challenges in terms of trying to find some money for them, we also collaborate with the various portfolios involved.

And the answer to your question is, again I don't have the specifics of what contact that we have had with Kincaid. As I mentioned earlier, I will get you a letter that indicates the historical involvement that we have had with the community of Kincaid since the boil-water advisory has been put in place.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I move the committee report progress on the Department of the Environment and Resource Management.

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

Mr. Chair: — First of all I'd invite the Minister of Social Services to introduce his officials present with us in the Assembly this afternoon.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated beside me is Bonnie Durnford, the deputy minister; seated to her right is Bob Wihlidal, the acting assistant deputy minister; and seated behind her is Shelley Hoover, another acting assistant deputy minister. Seated behind me is Richard Hazel, the executive director of family and youth; and seated behind him is Darcy Smycniuk, the acting executive director of financial management; and seated behind Ms. Hoover is Phil Walsh, the executive director of income support. And behind the rail are Dorothea Warren, the associate executive director of family and youth; Deborah Bryck, the director of child day care; and Larry Moffatt, the executive director of community living.

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to welcome the minister and his staff here this afternoon. Mr. Minister, I have a situation in my constituency that is very concerning both to me and to the parents . . . the parent of a young individual, a young male who is mentally challenged, lives in Kelliher, and during the winter months went into some homes in the community. As

a result, this home invasion ended up in the court system.

This young individual apparently, certainly as I mentioned, is mentally challenged. He was incarcerated for a period of time. I understand now that he's in an approved home in Yorkton, awaiting his court appearance in May 15, I'm told.

The mother of this young individual has contacted my office on a number of occasions. I've spoken to her and she is very concerned that it appears that in Saskatchewan we really have no programs that can deal with this young person. He requires some help that she feels is not currently available and she's very concerned that if he ends up in jail it's really not going to help him.

And I was just wondering what programs do exist in your department? This person has some . . . I believe the charges are of a sexual nature although it wasn't involving another individual, but it's a combination of him being mentally challenged and these other problems. And he's, as I've mentioned, he's currently in an approved home in Yorkton.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, without knowing all of the details or particulars of the case in question — and neither are we in a position I guess to really get into that kind of case finding on the floor of the Assembly — what I can say is that I would encourage the mother of the young boy in question to contact the nearest regional office of my department. I guess in this case it might be Yorkton. And to bring this matter to the attention of the regional director.

We will have the appropriate staff in my department work with whatever other agencies or departments may be affected — whether it's Justice in this case, or mental health officials and the health district in the Department of Health — and to define what the boy's needs are, and to develop some integrated case plan that is unique to his situation in making use of all of the resources that we have in Saskatchewan. That is how we propose that we are to proceed in a case such as this.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, the mother has been in touch with your department — this young person I'm talking about is 20 years of age — she was told or was made aware that a staff member of your department, Mr. Reddekopp, is running or is in charge of a pilot program that started in late 2000 and is to run until 2001. And she understands that the services offered by this pilot program may be very useful to her son, but she was also told that there is no space for her son in that program.

I wonder if the minister could perhaps explain what this program is about and if there is any possibility of her son being placed in the program. Her greatest fear is that once her son moves through the justice system that there may be no other place for him other than the correctional facility and so on. And she really feels that this would do more harm than good.

And I wonder if the minister could perhaps bring us up-to-date as to if this program exists and is it available to people?

(16:15)

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, the program that the member asked about is a pilot project for young sex-offending

individuals that is taking place in Regina. It's a pilot program which at this point includes seven individuals. There is no additional capacity in the pilot project to take on additional people.

We have not done any evaluation as to the outcomes of this project to see what lessons can be learned from it, and how we might provide better programming of this nature in the province of Saskatchewan.

So the only thing that we can advise in this particular case is that the mother contact the regional director. We will have staff sit down with her and the young man to develop a case-specific plan to make use of all other resources in the province of Saskatchewan. This is how we have done things typically in cases of this nature and we will do so again.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, the mother has done a fair bit of research into this area. As I had indicated, she is very, very concerned about the future, her son's future, and she was made aware of a program that is being operated in Winnipeg. It's called Opportunities for Independence and the purpose of this program, from some of their information that I have, is . . . it deals with disabled youth who are in conflict with the criminal justice system. She feels her son . . . that it describes her son, and she feels that this program would be of immense benefit to her son but she doesn't know whether . . . she herself would not be able to look after the financial requirements if . . . I'm not sure if there . . . I would imagine there would be financial requirements if her son was to go to Winnipeg and become enrolled in that program.

Does your . . . does the Department of Social Services, do you help individuals with out-of-province programs, and particularly this Opportunities for Independence in Winnipeg?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, the Regina pilot is in large part based on the Winnipeg program that the member talks about. But I would point out that the program that we're dealing with is not a residential treatment program that is geared to take people from other communities.

What we're trying to develop is a more effective response to help people in their home communities to begin to deal more effectively with the sex-offending behaviours that they have, as an alternative to the court system, based on the knowledge that sending people away to treatment facilities does not necessarily help them to develop that capacity, and that they're better able to obtain treatment while residing in their home communities.

The Regina project, as an example, is for people who live in Regina, who in addition to working with the individuals will work with the families, as I understand it, to ensure that the right kind of support is there all around to help them deal with the problem that they have.

Again the suggestion that we would make is that the people in question contact the regional director, and we will sit down with the family to develop a specific plan to make use of the resources that we have to help that individual, that family, deal with this particular problem. That's how we've done it in the past.

We hope through pilot projects such as this to enhance our understanding and to enhance our ability to help people with these particular problems. But we have had responses in the past. We are prepared to work with this individual and his family to develop a case-specific plan for that individual.

Mr. Hart: — I guess, Mr. Chair, I would have to comment to the minister that certainly we realize that those type of services cannot be offered in every small community in rural Saskatchewan, so therefore to say that the services are provided on a residency basis and so on, as in the larger centres such as Regina where this pilot project is taking place now, that means . . . (inaudible) . . . citizens of Regina and those people who require those services know very well.

So what do the people in small-town Saskatchewan do where they don't have those services? I would urge the minister to look at providing those type of services and if we can't do them within the province and if there are . . . I mean in this case, this individual won't be able to receive those type of services in the town and the village of Kelliher, so he's going to have to leave his home. If there is a service available to him in Manitoba, in Winnipeg, I would urge the minister to look very strongly at providing those services to the individual.

Would the minister care to comment on that?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, we have other instances in Saskatchewan where we've been able to work with the mental health people in the health districts and with the Department of Justice to develop specific therapeutic case plans for individuals to help them with treatment in their own home communities, small communities in Saskatchewan.

Again, the Winnipeg program that the member talks about is not a residential treatment facility. They don't have bedrooms for their participants to stay in. These are people that live ordinarily in the city of Winnipeg.

But we do and can sit down with families, develop case-specific plan to make use of strengths that we have in Saskatchewan — in the areas of mental health, in the areas of justice, my own department — to focus those on the needs of individuals and to help them with their treatment of their particular offending behaviours.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, I would say to the minister then that I will continue to work with the concerned parent and have her . . . As I stated, she already has contacted the minister's department.

I would ask the minister to seriously consider looking at the Winnipeg alternative if those services can not be provided for this individual in his home community.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would turn the questioning over to my colleague from Arm River.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Chair, I just want to make it clear that the Winnipeg so-called program that the member talks about is not a program that would receive individuals from outside of Winnipeg. This is not some facility that can put people up for an extended period of time and deal

with them in-house. This is an outreach program in the city of Winnipeg that attempts to help people in the community of Winnipeg and to work with their families and the individuals involved.

So the alternative here is not to take people out of their communities, to send them away and then magically get treated somewhere, and then come back kind of all fixed up. It doesn't really work that way.

What we need to do is to work with individuals and their families in their own communities. And there are resources in Saskatchewan that can be focused on the needs of individuals to do just that, as an alternative to having these individuals go through the justice system. Which I think we all agree that they ought not to be involved in that system.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, and officials. Good afternoon. Kind of a follow-up question that my fellow member brought up. I'll follow that a little bit.

A lot of the people you deal with unfortunately are afflicted with many problems, you know — drug, alcohol, gambling, sex abuse, mental stress. Can you handle all of this in Saskatchewan or do you send people out of province to other programs throughout Canada, if there's a particular program out there that Saskatchewan maybe hasn't or isn't set up for?

(16:30)

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Chair, as with the previous questions, our direction is to support individuals who are experiencing social problems to come to grips with those problems in the context of their family and in their own community as opposed to removing people from the everyday life in which they find themselves; to remove them to some other place where they might be treated and cured, if you like, and then to reintroduce them into their family and into their community.

Some of the problems that the member speaks about are problems that are better solved with the support of loving, caring family. Problems that are better dealt with while the individual tries to maintain some normal routine. Because at the end of the day that person will have to go back to that routine and has to come to grips with those issues in the course of their normal lives. So generally speaking, that's our direction.

And when we do that, we then work with health districts, school boards, community-based organizations, whoever may be in a position to help individuals with the specific issues that they have. We have, I think, 22 offices across Saskatchewan and we think we're in a position to work with people to help people in their home communities. That's why we're as widely dispersed as we are. And that's the approach that we take.

There may be instances of where our understanding of the behaviour of a person defies our ability or the ability of people at the regional level to fully comprehend/understand what problems the person may be experiencing or the child may be experiencing.

So we have in Regina and also in Saskatoon what we call

stabilization and assessment centres. Here it's Dales House; in Saskatoon, it's the Saskatoon Children's Shelter — where we take children whose behaviour cannot be readily comprehended by people at the regional level in their home communities, by the professionals there; where we do have these facilities, where over a period of time we have professionals work with the children to try to understand what the behaviours really mean in terms of underlying problems, and then get some advice from those professionals as to how we might be better able to deal or to help that child in their home communities and in the context of their families.

So generally speaking, that's the approach we take.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I wholeheartedly agree with that. That's the way it should be done. But I asked, in your last fiscal year, have you sent any other people outside of Saskatchewan for treatment . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I did.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I think, Mr. Chair, that my officials are only aware of, that in the last fiscal year there may have been two or three young people who are assisted by my department to attend specific treatment facilities outside of Saskatchewan on account of the gravity of their behaviour defying our immediate ability to deal with that and to find, in the case of the Poundmaker's Lodge in Edmonton, some culturally appropriate way of helping those young people come to understand the destructiveness of their behaviour so that they can begin a healing process back home in their communities.

But we can undertake to provide the members with the numbers involved — although not the names, of course, of the individuals — but we'll certainly undertake to provide him that but it's a very small number.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, thank you. Mr. Minister, yes, if you could provide me with as much details of cost of how many people for the last year.

And I guess the first question, I guess maybe I rambled on a little too much, but I wholeheartedly agree that they should be treated here in Saskatchewan at their homes as much as possible. That's what I was getting at.

I have a Cedar Lodge in my constituency who does, I believe they call it, the mission for the wounded and the weary, they call it. Do you look at expanding, sending people to . . . They've already I guess, people referred to them from Social Services, from caseworkers.

They're also interested in . . . The costs have been going up. They've been privately funded, but with natural gas costs, I think they said their last winter's bill was — not this winter but the winter before — was 12,000. I believe this one is getting close to 50,000 just on natural gas.

They are looking at trying to get some money from the government for the services they provide there. I was just wondering, have you been approached by them or do you look at private lodges like that?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, we're not aware of

having been approached by this particular organization. But typically I would think that they would contact the Department of Health who has more of a departmental responsibility for treatment facilities in the province, and addiction issues and so on. And to the extent to which this happens, these are delegated to health districts for treatment programming for individuals in their districts.

We do make referrals for highly specialized treatment issues, but I think these are almost all to Ranch Ehrlo in Saskatchewan and would be no more than about 60 young people, I think, at any time. But again it would be highly specialized treatment where behaviours defy our ability to deal with those young people in their communities.

But we would not, I think, normally make referrals to the organization that the member talks about, although the Department of Health might do that. I don't know. You would have to ask them that.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess, yes, that's the next question I was going to ask. What steps if they wanted to be involved, I guess, in one of your programs, do they approach you or the Department of Health? And then, I guess, are they investigated, looked at?

If you could even provide me with some of them details, because I think they're kind of looking for the steps of how to get involved into helping more people. I think they've been operating for four years. I've heard good things about them.

With that, if you can provide that with me not maybe at this time, or . . . at your convenience. With that, Mr. Chairman, I will turn it over to my colleague from Moosomin. Thank you.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, there's a number of areas I want to talk about, but first of all I want to go to a situation that we've got headlined in the *Regina Leader-Post* on Tuesday, May 1, "Child's apprehension criticized." I want to deal a little bit with it in a general sense to how Social Services deals with situations of this nature.

And just a couple of quotes from the article that basically says:

A two-year-old boy, a ward of Social Services who had been in the care of Busy Bee owner (day care program) . . . for the last nine months, was awakened and removed from the home.

"He was yelling 'Mommy, Mommy' and reaching his arms to come to me," said . . . (the manager) who took the boy into her and her husband's home last July upon the request of the boy's aunt — his permanent caregiver at the time.

She says:

"He grabbed my neck, wanting to come to me and they (two Social Service workers) grabbed him right out of my arms, ran out of the door and took off. (Didn't even take) . . . his shoes, his jacket, or his blanket."

And other parents mentioned, who had their children in the facility at the time, they . . . basically comments were, I think

the Social Services could have, the workers could have picked a different way of working, dealing with the situation. And the comment was:

" . . . Aren't they supposed to be protecting the well-being of all children?"

And then the parents went on to say

. . . their children were distraught by both the presence of the police officers and by the fact the two-year-old boy was whisked off without any warning or goodbyes.

Mr. Minister, this is not the only time I've heard of situations and actions such as of this nature. And while I'm not totally aware of . . . I've done a bit of follow-up, Mr. Minister. And whether or not the department had a legitimate right or feeling that they needed to act in this matter, it seems to me, Mr. Minister, that we could find a better way of dealing with situations of this nature in regards to how the child was removed from the situation.

And the facts as you look at this, and as you hear the other parents, all of a sudden we have police officers. And they're involved only because they're required to, by law, to go with workers, social workers if an order has been given, to appear. And it just leaves the wrong impression, certainly for the children that were in the daycare at the time, the way the child was removed from the facility and from the care of the person that was entrusted with the individual.

And Mr. Minister, I'd like to know exactly what the policy is, and if indeed we can't find a better means of dealing with these types of situations. And while the comment I believe, later on in the article, says this situation maybe happens once in a while, not all that often. But it's still a very traumatic circumstance for everyone involved.

And I'd like to have you comment, Mr. Minister, as to policy, and what requirements are there of social workers in dealing with these types of situations so you don't create a, if you will, a bad situation . . . a bad situation, just making it that much worse.

And certainly from what I've been able to gather, even for this young child, for the last nine months, I believe, was in the care of a family, and then to be all of a sudden pulled away and left with the impression that . . . Well that was a home environment that that child was certainly becoming very accustomed to and used to, and I gather that the mother decided that maybe they wanted the child back.

(15:45)

I think, Mr. Minister, we've talked about this before, the suggestions that maybe if there's a situation where a young . . . And I don't understand, don't know the situation here. But, for example, if a young woman has a child and doesn't feel that they are qualified or quite capable of looking after that child and rather than just the department putting that child in a foster home, maybe working with family members to provide care for that child until they can determine whether or not that mother really wants to become the mother and provide the actual care

for the child.

So, Mr. Minister, if you could respond and let me know exactly how department officials are supposed to deal with certain circumstances, and why would this type of action actually have happened in this particular circumstance?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, one, I'm not in a position to comment on the circumstances of the individual case that the member raises.

And as I understand it, there is in fact a publication ban in this matter, and publication bans are typically ordered by the courts to protect the identity of children, recognizing that these are children in very difficult circumstances. And to subject those children in whatever situations it might be, in schools or in daycares, to have others know their identity going through situations which are widely reported in the media, can put further stresses on children involved. So that's why we seek these bans.

Also there may be innocent parties involved here, that it's not acceptable that we would have people, who through no fault of their own, would then also be subjected to community scrutiny for situations which are not of their making.

Having said that, I was very interested to hear the other day, the member's colleague — I think it was the member for Humboldt — make a statement to the House. And in that statement the member said:

I cannot think of a more worthwhile cause than to reunite children with their families.

We agree in the department and I think all of society agrees with that statement, that it is worthwhile, it's desirable to have children grow up in their own families as opposed to grow up in other homes; and to try and make that happen wherever we can make that happen, as opposed to raising children in an environment removed from their own immediate family.

So as a matter of principle that's what motivates us. That's what motivates our workers. Indeed it's more than motivation. That's what the laws provide for.

With respect to the involvement of police or RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), might I say that that is a very rare, unusual occurrence. We do not seek the involvement of the RCMP or police very often.

And I might say that matters will not be reported on by the media if it was just normal circumstances but these are unusual circumstances, and we do so primarily for two reasons. One is to protect the individual or the children involved. And secondly, to protect the safety of the worker involved. As you can appreciate, child care workers, child welfare workers enter into situations which are . . . can be at times extremely volatile — extremely volatile. And there are sometimes concerns for the safety of the workers given the volatility of the families.

Where we think there may be just an absolute lack of co-operation as well, by people, where it's made clear that there will be no co-operation in carrying forward a plan that might

have been ordered by the courts, or that the department deems to be in the best interest of the child, then it may be necessary to engage the services of the police.

Wherever possible in communities, we look to involve police officers from the community and who may be known to the parties involved as . . . in order to not interject brand new people into the situation.

Having said that, to ensure accountability the department reviews all cases with police involvement so that we can be assured and we can learn from each case as to whether the police was used appropriately, and how we might better able provide child welfare services in these extremely difficult circumstances.

But to reiterate, we are motivated by an interest in reuniting children with their families. I think, as the member himself is expressing, these can be extremely emotional circumstances. And where we get a sense that there will not be co-operation and where there's concern for safety, then we seek to involve the police. But again, the circumstances are extremely rare where we would do that.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister. The . . . well I understand you've indicated there's a publication ban and I'm not sure if that's from your department or if that's come from a court system. I'm not exactly sure and I'm not really all that interested.

But I do understand that there actually was a meeting just a couple of days prior. The real concern that's been raised, and I think you can just see from the article as well, there's no . . . the criticism all centres around how the action was taken, why it was taken in a daycare.

And whether it's a daycare or whether it's another circumstance in a public facility, outside of this article, Mr. Minister, I firmly agree, and I've always said this, that we need to work with family members. And we need to really deal and assist family members.

And the committee, the all-party committee that's trying to deal with and come up with some suggestions in regards to the children on the streets, have heard from many people talking about the fact that they were ripped from their homes by Social Services. They were deprived from the ability . . . even though the home may not have been what the department or what maybe you and I might consider to be a worthy home, and yet that was still home. That was still their parents. And I think . . . I've always felt we need to start working with families rather than against.

However when we have placed . . . if for some reason a child is placed with a family for a while, and I'm not sure about the . . . We won't deal specifically with this circumstance, but where they've been placed in the care of some other caregivers with the understanding that if the situation does improve where the family, whether the mother or the other family members, feel that they can then provide the care, it would seem to me anyone providing that type of care isn't going to be refusing the ability then to release that child back into the hands of a family member.

And I think the actions that we see portrayed here . . . and as I've indicated, this is not the first time something similar has been brought to my attention over the number of years that I've been involved as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I think we need to look as well at how we respond to these circumstances.

And I think, Mr. Minister, not knowing it totally, I'm not saying that action may not have been needed in responding. But I believe that if indeed there was communication and a process was being worked out to put the child back into the home atmosphere, then that should have been, that should have been continued to be worked on over the period of time that might have been there.

But to walk into a daycare centre with a number of other children that were involved, it seems to me, Mr. Minister, it almost looks . . . basically that looks heavy-handed. It looks like overkill. And we get the wrong impression.

And I would suggest, Mr. Minister, that your department . . . and certainly dealing with the workers involved . . . I'm not going to pick on the workers involved. But it would seem to me that many times I would like to know at the end of the day exactly what comes out of this, how the review took place.

Last night for example we happened to see on the news about a situation in Ottawa with a police officer. And the comment was made about the fact that the police basically said, we have our review process. And the comment on the news, talking to a couple individuals a little later, was yes, but I'd like to have something independent removed from the police to see if indeed the proper review of the matter took place.

Because if it's just the police reviewing their own processes, sometimes you begin to ask yourself indeed how well they reviewed it, or are they more just covering up some of the actions that may have taken place even though they were not happy with how their officers reacted.

And the same case in Social Services. A review by the department, Mr. Minister, I think indicating down the road when everything is complete and sort of indicating this is what happened and the matter is resolved and we've got the child, whatever comes about, Mr. Minister, I think it's going to be important for people . . . certainly in the community that we're talking about here, many people were very aware of the situation. They're going to want to know exactly what happened at the end of the day and if indeed the child was treated fairly and the family involved were treated fairly.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Chair, I can assure the member that to ensure accountability, the department reviews all cases with police involvement. I would also point out to the member that if anyone has concerns about how the Department of Social Services deals with specific cases, people can take those situations and report them to the Children's Advocate, or the Ombudsman for that matter. And we will co-operate with them fully.

We try to conduct our affairs in an open, transparent manner. And that can be reviewed by external authorities such as the Children's Advocate. Again in summing up though, I just want

to point out that it is an extremely rare situation in which we would involve the RCMP.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, just before I adjourn, I want to, on behalf of all of the members of the Assembly, express a thank you to those that are working in *Hansard*, diligently recording every word very accurately, every word that every member in here says.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:02.