

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to present petitions on behalf of concerned citizens of the Cudworth, Prud'homme, St. Benedict area —citizens concerned about the loss of their community-based ambulance services. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

And as I've mentioned, Mr. Speaker, the signators on the petition are from the communities of Cudworth, St. Benedict, and Prud'homme, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition regarding the two government's Crown corporations, SaskPower and SaskEnergy both recently announcing rate increases for residential and business customers. The prayer reads:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of Biggar and Saskatoon, and I'm pleased to present the petition on their behalf.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present today from people who are concerned about the EMS (emergency medical services) report and the effect the ambulance services cutback would have on rural Saskatchewan.

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Naicam, Spalding, and Archerwill.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the possible conversion of some 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 Balgonie, Moose Jaw, and Caronport.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I again rise today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens deeply 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 this petition is signed by folks from Wadena and Kelvington.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people from Swift Current and area concerned with the state of the hospital in Swift Current. 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, today the petition is signed by residents of the city of Swift Current, of Gull Lake, and of Shaunavon, and Eston.

I so present.

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

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

And the petition is signed by the residents of Radville.

I so present.

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

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

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Wynyard, Quinton, and Mozart.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding citizens that are unhappy with the energy rates.

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

And as duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Spiritwood, Leoville, Chitek Lake and Rapid Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Mr. Speaker, I rise 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 come from the communities of Assiniboia, Limerick, Ferland, Kincaid, Lafleche, Mossbank and Regina.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly:

To overrule the Parkland Health Board's decision with regard to the Blaine Lake Medical Clinic;

And other petitions that were addendums to sessional

papers nos. 3, 4, 5, 10, 58, and 121.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 35 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Northern Affairs: which non-profit and community-based organizations received funding from the office of Northern Affairs in the 2000-2001 fiscal year; and how much did each of these organizations receive?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 35 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Northern Affairs: which non-profit and community-based organizations will receive funding from the office of Northern Affairs in the 2001-2002 fiscal year; and how much will each of these organizations receive?

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice I shall on day no. 35 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Sask Water: did Sask Water provide any consulting services outside of Saskatchewan in the 2000-2001 fiscal year; and what are the details of those services in terms of clients.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 35 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: which municipal drinking water supplies failed to meet with provincial standards in 2000-2001; and what are the compliance rates of all municipalities required to provide water samples for testing?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have with us today a number of safety patrollers from around the province. And as we did last year, I would like to beg the indulgence of the House as we introduce these safety patrollers and try and get them familiar with who their particular members are.

So what I will do is I will ask a particular group from a community to stand, or from a couple of communities to stand, and I would also ask their member to stand as well.

The safety patrollers, we had a statement earlier in the week, Mr. Speaker, talking about their work. And we're very grateful for the work that they do in helping keep their communities safe for other children and for themselves.

So, Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to introduce to you and to this Assembly those students from Carrot River, Hudson Bay, and Nipawin. And I would ask the member for Carrot River Valley to please stand and greet them. I would ask those

safety patrollers from Carrot River, Hudson Bay, and Nipawin to stand please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. And safety patrollers from Estevan and the member from Estevan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you. Safety patrollers from Gravelbourg and their member from Thunder Creek please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And safety patrollers from Kindersley, Lanigan, Nokomis, and Watrous. And I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to please stand and greet those folks.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — From Maidstone and Turtleford; the member from Lloydminster please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And from Martensville and Warman; the member from Rosthern please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And from Moose Jaw, the member from Moose Jaw North, please stand and greet them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And I would like to welcome, on behalf of the House, those from North Battleford. Would you please stand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And those from Prince Albert.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Those of you from Prince Albert, the member from Prince Albert Northcote stood and welcomed you, but I would also like to note that our Speaker is also a member from Prince Albert.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And those safety patrollers from Regina, and I would ask the members from Regina to please stand and join in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And safety patrollers from Rosetown. And again I would ask the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Rosetown-Biggar.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And students from St. Walburg, safety patrollers from there.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And the member from Meadow Lake. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — From Saskatoon. And would all the members from Saskatoon please stand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And from Unity. And would the member who represents Unity please stand and welcome Unity.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — And safety patroller students from Weyburn, and their teachers, and would the member from Weyburn please greet them. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Well again, welcome to the legislature. We know that you're here for the weekend; we hope you have a wonderful time. And we hope that you learn something in your time at this Assembly. Welcome from all of us.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you to the rest of the Assembly, I too would like to welcome and congratulate all the safety patrollers that are filling the galleries here today.

I made a member's statement a couple of days ago on the fine work that you do on helping your fellow students get to and from school safely.

(10:15)

I think if you sit through the rest of the proceedings here today, and as we go through question period, perhaps if you brought some of your paddles and whistles, the Speaker may use those as we work our way through question period. So I hope you enjoy the proceedings and have a good time in the city as you're here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce two people who are in your gallery today. Carmelle Beasley who is married to my cousin and Roberta MacKinnon. They're both from Manitoba and both of them's husbands were killed in work-related accidents and they're here to discuss workers' compensation problems. So please welcome them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I too want to welcome all of the students that are here today, and I want to mention that there's nothing that politicians like better than for somebody to applaud them. However, for the rest of the proceeding I would appreciate it if you would observe the custom of this House and that is that people in the gallery would observe only and refrain from any bells and whistles and paddles.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Women of Distinction Awards

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I had the honour and privilege of attending the 20th annual YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) Women of Distinction Awards Dinner here in Regina. Mr. Speaker, this awards dinner honours those women who have made a commitment to happier, healthier, and more productive communities. Surely our lives are better because of them.

There was an impressive list of nominees at last night's banquet and our congratulations go out to all of those nominated. On behalf of the official opposition, I would like wish each of the winners in the various categories sincere congratulations and best wishes for the future.

In the health and wellness category, Donna Brunskill; business, labour, and professions, Sandra Greenough; arts and culture, Kathryn Laurin; community and humanitarian service, Judy Kobsar; lifetime achievement, Elsie May Quick; science and technology, Jennifer Beriault; sports and recreation, Christine Stapleton; contribution to a rural community, Lilliane Sabiston; and the Young Women of Distinction Award went to Anita Smith.

Once again, our warmest congratulations from all members on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also recognize the annual YWCA Women of Distinction Awards held last night to honour the many women who contribute greatly to the well-being of our communities, both at home and at work.

And community spirit is very evident during these awards. There's a very special feeling in the air. It's the kind of electricity that accompanies any kind of awards ceremony.

And there's also the pride of family and friends and the acknowledgement of the work done by the nominees and recipients. And many of the past recipients as well take time out to honour those who are coming after them.

You've heard the names, Mr. Speaker, but you may wonder what makes someone a Woman of Distinction. Here's just some of the hallmarks of a Woman of Distinction — vision, significance of contribution, sustained contribution over time, risk takers, innovators, people who challenge the community to look at things differently, people who are courageous,

inspirational, committed to excellence.

These are very high standards, Mr. Speaker, and last night you may not be aware that one of these special nominees was Dr. Lynda Haverstock who was awarded an Honorary Woman of Distinction award. And I'm sure all the members would join me in congratulating her on receiving that award.

The awards also offer a fundraising opportunity for the YWCA to carry on its many important and worthwhile projects for children and women and men in need. So we thank the sponsors and the YWCA, and encourage people to celebrate all of our citizens' good work and to support the YWCA. And congratulations on another good year of awards. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Estevan Youth to Compete in Great Canadian Geography Challenge 2001

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Toby Henneberg will be representing Saskatchewan at the national level of the Great Canadian Geography Challenge 2001. Toby flies to Ottawa over the long weekend in May for the competition. Toby is a grade 8 student and attends Estevan Junior High where he qualified for the challenge. He went on to the provincials held in Moose Jaw where he placed in the top 10 of the semi-finals, then in the top 5 of the finals, and then on to win the provincial challenge.

Toby's father, Carl Henneberg is the owner of Blacksmith Resources and is also chairman of the Canadian Committee for the Canadian Petroleum Association of Canada. Toby's mother Lynn is owner of Century 21 Border Real Estate Service in Estevan. Both are great constituents and assets in our community.

I would like my colleagues to join me and the constituents of Estevan in wishing Toby the very best of luck in the Great Canadian Geography Challenge 2001. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Supports International Labour Organization Convention C-29

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has a moral responsibility to support efforts to eliminate the practice of forced labour. In 1999, we were one of the first provinces to support federal ratification of the International Labour Organization treaty banning the worst forms of child labour.

Today I'm proud to say Saskatchewan is supporting federal ratification of another ILO (International Labour Organization) treaty, and the Minister of Labour will be informing the federal government of our support.

Mr. Speaker, Convention C-29 is part of the ILO global campaign against forced labour. The ratification of C-29 puts in place international standards requiring ILO member nations to eliminate forced labour.

Mr. Speaker, forced labour denies a worker's basic human rights. Supporting the federal government's ratification of C-29 demonstrates Saskatchewan's strong support for ILO objectives that promote core labour standards in the elimination of forced labour.

Saskatchewan supports fairness for working people. The Labour Standards Act, The Trade Union Act, and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code all reject practices like forced labour.

Mr. Speaker, today we reaffirm our support for the work done by the United Nations, through the International Labour Organization to free all people everywhere from the scourge of forced labour.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tribute to Dr. Ahab Spence

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today in the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to pay tribute to a highly esteemed and respected member of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, the late Dr. Ahab Spence.

Dr. Spence was born in 1911 at Split Lake, Manitoba, and throughout his 90 years he made numerous contributions to the social, cultural, spiritual, and educational lives of many Indian and non-Indian people in not only Saskatchewan and Manitoba but Canada as well.

The late Dr. Spence had many careers. He was an Anglican priest, a teacher, an instructor, a liaison worker, a counsellor, a mentor, a husband, father, and grandfather.

He came to SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) in 1980 where he began his third career at the age of 69. He was determined to see that First Nations languages would not be lost, and for many he was the head of the Indian language department at SIFC.

Dr. Spence was truly a respected individual in all of society. In 1967 he received the Canadian Centennial Medal, which is awarded to people providing outstanding service to government and local communities.

In 1982 he was awarded the Order of Canada, which honours and pays tribute to those who exemplify the highest qualities of citizenship, and whose contributions enrich the lives of their contemporaries.

In 1995 Dr. Spence received an Aboriginal Achievement Award in recognition of his service and devotion to enhance the cultural, linguistic, and spiritual education of Indian people.

I ask members of this Assembly to join in paying tribute to the late Dr. Ahab Spence for his contribution to the lives of Saskatchewan people, and indeed to the lives of all Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Students at the Canada-Wide Science Fair

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to report that 60 young scientists from across the province have been selected from their regional science fairs to represent Saskatchewan at the Canada-Wide Science Fair.

Saskatoon, my hometown, will be sending five students to the competition. They are: Jeffrey Kulyk, James Zheng, Christine Rendall, Constance Chan, and Matthew Gruza, who's a constituent of mine who developed the project, 800 Minutes and Counting . . . a Long-Distance Timer.

This project, Mr. Speaker, came as a result of his sister's experience while studying in Ontario. She signed up for a long-distance package that limited her to 800 minutes per month and her brother Matthew developed a computer program that used a voice modem and her personal computer to keep track of her monthly long-distance usage.

Matthew's project earned him the gold medal and a travel award sponsored by SaskEnergy.

I'd like to congratulate everyone who participated in Saskatchewan's science fairs and wish good luck to all of our young scientists at the Canada-Wide Science Fair in Kingston.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Melfort Food Bank Gets New Home

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people from my constituency have demonstrated once again how citizens of Saskatchewan co-operate to accomplish a task.

The building that the Melfort Food Bank was located in is no longer usable and they have to relocate. The decision was made to raise money to build a new building and within a very short period commitments were made by local community organizations, businesses, and private citizens that are very close to their goal. The old building has been torn down and the new building is going up with the help of a volunteer labour force. Projected completion date is June 30 of this year.

This was a major undertaking for a community of our size but there was a need and when community organizations, businesses, and residents were asked they came through without faltering.

I would ask the Assembly to join me in taking off our hats to the people of Melfort for first understanding the need, then determining a solution, and quickly taking action to solve the problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SunBridge Wind Power Project

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand before the Assembly to say that construction is scheduled to start this month on the wind power project planned for the Gull Lake area.

This will be Saskatchewan's first major supply of green power. The 17 wind turbines in this \$20 million project will be built 5 kilometres southeast of Gull Lake. Suncor and Enbridge submitted the winning bid to construct and operate the wind power facility and SaskPower will then purchase the electricity.

The power will be used to supply federal government buildings in Saskatchewan and other Saskatchewan customers starting in 2002. Added to this, Mr. Speaker, our Saskatchewan government will purchase a minimum of 10 gigawatt hours of wind power each year for 10 years, and this will represent approximately 15 per cent of executive government's power needs.

Construction of the SunBridge Wind Power Project is expected to be completed in June of 2002, Mr. Speaker. This project is a major step forward in developing a viable and cost-effective green power industry in Saskatchewan.

And I might say, Mr. Speaker, that this project, when it's completed, will mean that Saskatchewan has the third-largest capacity in terms of wind-power development in the entire country. A capacity, Mr. Speaker, that sends us in a positive, new direction and helps us to fight climate change. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Contamination of Water Supply in North Battleford

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning my question is for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party official opposition would like to extend our deepest condolences to the families of three Battleford area residents whose deaths may have been a result of the outbreak of cryptosporidium in the water supply.

But, Mr. Speaker, we also have some questions to ask about the government's handling of the situation. There are now 26 confirmed cases and at least 150 people exhibiting symptoms related to this parasite, yet the first boil-water advisory was not issued until about a week after the first confirmed case.

Mr. Speaker, the question is: exactly when did the local medical health officer and the provincial government first become aware of this very serious problem?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I would also like to confirm what my Acting Minister of Health said last night about condolences for the families.

We are obviously working very closely with the North Battleford officials, both at the city level and with district health, also with some federal health officials and then our provincial health officials.

In this particular situation, I know many of the officials have provided much of the information to the public. But the specific question that the member asks opposite, there was one case of cryptosporidium that was identified approximately a week

before the boil-water advisory.

Cryptosporidium does show up relatively often and obviously results in diarrhea and some other problems. After that initial one, there was some concern that there were some other things going on and basically the boil-water advisory was issued, but that's when the officials started knowing about it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:30)

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the local medical health officer is saying the first case was confirmed about a week before the boil-water advisory was issued, and the minister just confirmed that.

But local residents are saying that there was clearly a problem well before that. The owner of Canadian Tire said that most of his staff fell ill around March 21. That's over a month before the boil-water advisory was issued. He said and I quote:

Everyone knew then that we had a problem.

Mr. Speaker, clearly something went terribly wrong with the government's water-quality monitoring system. Why was the system so slow to react? Why did it take so long to notify people of the Battlefords that their water was unsafe?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, when a particular health issue arises within a district the local health officials start monitoring and trying to figure out what's happening. And in this particular case they obviously were getting reports into the hospital.

We don't know the full extent of the timelines around this but this is why Sask health officials, federal health officials, and the local health officials are doing what's called an epidemiological study which is let's study how this broke, broke out so that you can look at it.

What we do know is that when the first case was confirmed of cryptosporidium then people were watching and they obviously made some other cases. When the medical health officer had confirmation there was a problem with the water — before that they weren't sure where this was — then that's when the boil-water advisory was issued and all of the appropriate steps were taken.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, when dozens and dozens of people are falling ill, you would think that the first suspicion would be that there may be something in the water.

Many people are wondering why did it take so long to issue the first boil-water advisory? Clearly there was some kind of a breakdown in the system and that has resulted in dozens and possibly hundreds of people becoming ill and actually may have resulted in the death of three people.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the question again: why did the system for maintaining water quality fail in the Battlefords?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the local health district and the medical health officer would be getting the information from their officials in the local area — the staff, the people. They were concerned. They knew that some people were ill. They did the appropriate testing, confirmed that cryptosporidium was there in one case. And then when there . . . one case doesn't make a whole outbreak, but when they then found well, there's some more, then they went right to the boil-water advisory. And within . . . the officials then went to a sort of a mandatory boil-water after confirmation a few days later.

The whole process and how this works is something where you end up having to make sure you have the appropriate information. It's not always very clear that it was the water, or was it food poisoning, or some of these other kinds of things.

And so what we know is that they followed the appropriate procedures; they acted very quickly. Often they were working all day and all night to try to find out what this was, and they worked with it.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, of course the tragic occurrence in Walkerton, Ontario, should have given us all a heads-up that we have to be very vigilant.

About a year ago the Saskatchewan Party asked the government about its procedure to test and maintain water quality in Saskatchewan. The Associate Minister of Health told us that Saskatchewan has a very good tracking and follow-up system. Municipalities submit their water to SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) for testing. If the results have a higher than acceptable levels of contamination, repeat testing is done then as soon as possible.

SERM notifies the municipality and the local health officer, and I'm now quoting the former minister:

. . . appropriate action is initiated immediately, such as a boiling water advisory to the communities.

Mr. Speaker, in this case, for some reason, it didn't work. Either there was a breakdown in the system, or the system itself is not designed to act quickly enough with regard to problems of this nature.

Mr. Speaker, I ask again: why did the system fail? Why did it take so long to issue that first boil-water advisory?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the appropriate officials were working together and making sure that the steps that were taken appropriately.

What happened in this particular case was that they knew that there was some illness there; they weren't sure what the cause was. They confirmed cryptosporidium. Within later . . . within a week, they ended up then confirming another case and they started suspecting something with the water. Boil-water advisory was issued. Then a mandatory boil-water advisory or order issued, and all of the officials were . . . stepped in immediately to work on this particular case.

What we're now doing with the various Saskatchewan health

officials, federal health officials, epidemiologists, is trying to identify how that happened. But also the city is working very carefully with the engineering firm to fix the problem.

I advise all members of the public in the North Battleford area to continue to boil the water until they hear a clear from their local city.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I think members on both sides of the House know that obviously something has gone horribly wrong. Dozens — perhaps hundreds — of people are ill due to unsafe drinking water, and in fact three people may be dead.

Today we're learning the problem is with the parasite that may have been in the water system over a month before the first warning was issued. The Minister of Health has not yet told the House whether in fact water samples were taken for that period of about a month; whether or not the problem was identified or overlooked; and where exactly the problem was. Is the system flawed? Was there a breakdown in the system?

Obviously something went wrong and I would ask the minister again: can he tell this House and the people of Saskatchewan what went wrong with the system that this problem was not identified sooner and the boil-water advisory issued sooner?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The answer to a number of these questions can be answered in more detail by the actual officials involved. But what we do know is that diarrhea isn't a reportable disease when it comes into the hospital. What we do know is that on average, over the last five years, there are about five cases of cryptosporidium that are reported in, I think, that particular area. So when there's one case reported it doesn't necessarily trigger all of these things that happened.

It was when there was more than one case and there were still people that were feeling ill that they wanted to do some more checking. The officials did that and they took the appropriate steps when they had the suspicions confirmed.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, we are told by the experts in this area that the cryptosporidium problem may be more prevalent, particularly at this time of the year.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen where the water testing of the Battlefords area failed and certainly did not identify the problem quickly enough. That certainly does not make people in other communities in Saskatchewan feel very confident about the way the government does monitor our water quality system because protocol failed in the case of the Battlefords.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Premier or the minister what specific steps is the government taking to figure out what went wrong in the Battlefords and what are you doing? What is the government doing today to make sure that the other residents of other communities in Saskatchewan could be assured that their drinking water is safe?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the purpose of bringing in federal health experts, Saskatchewan health experts, to work with the local Battlefords Health District and do an epidemiological study is exactly to answer the question that the

member opposite has asked, which is, how did this happen; are there things that need to be done to make sure it doesn't happen in other places? We are waiting for the results of that study and they are still trying to confirm a number of the suspicions around this.

What we have done in the province is we have very strong water quality standards; we have methods of monitoring. And all of those kinds of information are added into and become part of how the public response takes place — local medical health officer works together with the city; it's reported into Environment and Resource Management and to Saskatchewan Health; and then all the appropriate following steps take place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposed SaskEnergy Rate Increase

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the minister responsible for SaskEnergy.

Well, Mr. Speaker, another week in NDP (New Democratic Party) Saskatchewan and another utility rate increase. Today's *Leader-Post* headline confirms what many in the province have known for some time — SaskEnergy rates are going up again.

However this time, Mr. Speaker, the president of SaskEnergy, Mr. Clark, has confirmed that the increase could be as much as 50 per cent. That's on top of the 27 per cent increase that Saskatchewan residents endured this winter that saw many bills, especially those that aren't equalized, doubled, Mr. Speaker, during the winter months.

And it's also on top of the 6 per cent power increase that was approved this spring.

To the minister: Mr. Speaker, what advice does the minister have for Saskatchewan families struggling with skyrocketing utility rate hikes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member was talking about what we know. Well we do know, Mr. Speaker, that SaskEnergy has provided the lowest energy costs in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker — the lowest energy rates in all of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that over the last 18 months, SaskEnergy has saved the people of Saskatchewan over \$125 million, Mr. Speaker, because they've kept the prices low, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that SaskEnergy has not applied through the winter months when people consume the most of their energy.

But we do know, Mr. Speaker, that they've waited to now to make an application, and we need to wait to see what the rate review panel will say over this application, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy is increasing its rates because of soaring natural gas prices around the world — the same soaring prices however that are generating \$500 million in windfall revenue for this NDP government.

But instead of using some of that massive windfall profit to help offset these rate increases, the government up till now has preferred to sit on their election slush fund. We also know, Mr. Speaker, that according to the annual reports, Crown Investments Corporation has about \$185 million in their bank account.

Now to his credit, the Minister of Finance has said he likes the idea of using some of these windfall revenues to offset some of SaskEnergy's short-term losses and avoid another massive utility rate hike.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: is the government considering that suggestion from the Minister of Finance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, again I want to talk about what SaskEnergy has done. Mr. Speaker, we have been selling, we've been selling gas, Mr. Speaker, at \$4.52 per unit, or per gigajoule, is the term; and we've been buying today I am told, at \$7.50.

It's no secret, Mr. Speaker, that when you're providing gas at this price, Mr. Speaker, that you can't continue to do that. And I'm told that today the gas variance account sits at something in excess of \$60 million, Mr. Speaker.

So he's saying, spend the money, Mr. Speaker. How can you do that, Mr. Speaker; there's a deficit sitting there right now as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk as well about . . . they like to quote people from Alberta frequently. Peter Linder, who is an energy analyst, oil and gas, with Research Capital Corporation in Calgary, here's what he says, Mr. Speaker. He says:

I want to congratulate SaskEnergy first for their astute hedging program in using the storage facilities to offset these high gas prices. I would suggest the people of Saskatchewan are extremely lucky to be paying \$4.52 a gigajoule when the price here in Alberta is a lot higher. It is basically twice as much as in Saskatchewan (Mr. Speaker).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we're asking very important questions — questions about a suggestion from one of his cabinet colleagues that could provide relief for Saskatchewan people. But we get no answers, Mr. Speaker. There is no candid answers over there. There is no innovation over there, no ideas over there, and very soon there will be no NDP over there either, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:45)

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy is saying that without a massive 50 per cent increase they could lose as much as \$120 million this year. At the same time the NDP government's sitting on \$500 million in windfall oil and gas revenue because of those same rising rates.

Mr. Speaker, the difference is we understand that's the taxpayers' money. The government seems to believe it's theirs.

However, the Minister of Finance has made a very interesting and positive suggestion. He talked about the possibility of using these windfall revenues or Crown profits to cover SaskEnergy's short-term losses and avoid or limit a massive rate hike.

Why hasn't the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) acted on those suggestions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, the member wants to talk about litigation before the process is even completed, Mr. Speaker. I think that's irresponsible, Mr. Speaker.

We live in a largely deregulated environment which those members lobbied for, Mr. Speaker. Those members lobbied for an independent rate review panel. We've got the panel, Mr. Speaker. I say let the panel do its work. We'll wait to see what the panel has to say, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, we are trying to save the work of the panel and save the cost of another panel review if, if the government is indeed . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, order. The member from Swift Current will continue.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, if the government is already looking at a suggestion that would eliminate this process and provide relief to Saskatchewan families, why wouldn't they just do that.

Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat again. The Minister of Finance has said he likes the idea . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has said he likes the idea of using some of the windfall revenue the government has, and the excessive Crown profits, to covering the short-term losses at SaskEnergy to enable the limiting, or maybe the elimination of this need to request a massive rate hike.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here's the question. If that's the case and if that's what the government's thinking about, why are you putting SaskEnergy and the rate review panel through the expensive of rate increase application? Why are you putting Saskatchewan people through this process? Why doesn't the minister just make the announcement? Why is the minister playing politics with Saskatchewan families?

Mr. Speaker, will the minister call off this charade and

announce today that the government will use their slush fund to help SaskEnergy to avoid another rate hike?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well déjà vu all over again, Mr. Speaker. Do you remember in the 1980s when there was an independent rate review panel, Mr. Speaker? Do you know who killed it? Right over there — that's who killed it, Mr. Speaker, right over there. And now he's saying circumvent the process, get rid of the panel, Mr. Speaker — get rid of the panel. Don't let them report to the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, we will hear what the panel has to say. The government will make a decision after the panel reports, not before the panel reports.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Investment Guidelines for Crown Corporations

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for CIC as well. Yesterday the government released to the media the investment guidelines for Crown corporations. The date on this document is August 25, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, two months later the Channel Lake report was released on October 15, 1998, and it made many recommendations designed to strengthen the procedures and guidelines that government Crown corporations and their subsidiaries should follow when conducting due diligence.

Now it appears based on the government's released document yesterday, that the recommendations of the Channel Lake report have been completely ignored. Mr. Speaker, I spent a great deal of time in the Channel Lake committee and I want to know why the due diligence recommendations have not been updated given the fact that the Channel Lake report reported very distinctly about these issues?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is just completely inaccurate in what he says, Mr. Speaker. There were many recommendations . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order, order. Order. I'm sure every member would love to have his turn or her turn at the mike, but it will only work if you let one member go at a time.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well what the member says is just completely inaccurate, Mr. Speaker. There were recommendations that flowed out of the committee, Mr. Speaker, and those recommendations have been implemented, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, obviously CIC is keeping the minister out of the loop as well because he hasn't even seen this document dated August 25, 1998. Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the committee of the Crown Corporations, Don Ching was asked if

SaskTel had provided quarterly reports to CIC on Clickabid as recommended in the Channel Lake report. The answer was no. In fact, Mr. Ching said CIC doesn't require quarterly reports of any of SaskTel's business ventures, even if this was a specific recommendation of the Channel Lake report.

Mr. Speaker, maybe if someone had been reviewing Clickabid's financial statements quarterly, they would have seen it was bleeding red ink and it could have been stopped before it lost nearly \$2 million of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister and CIC ignoring the Channel Lake committee recommendations? Why are Crown businesses like Clickabid allowed to go on unchecked by CIC?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, the member is completely inaccurate. He should quote correctly first of all, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main recommendations that came out of that report was that subsidiaries of subsidiaries should be treated exactly the same as the subsidiary, Mr. Speaker. That's largely what is happening, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the recommendations from that committee and that report have been implemented, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, obviously the minister should be talking to some of his officials in Crown corporations. Because last week Mr. Ron Clark was asked if he had received any direction from the government to follow the recommendations of the Channel Lake report when reviewing any existing or potential business ventures of SaskPower or its subsidiaries.

His answer was that while the SaskPower Board had certainly had the Channel Lake recommendations referred to them, he said, and I quote:

Certainly I never got any directive to do anything.

Mr. Speaker, did the government not learn anything from the Channel Lake experience? Have they not learned anything about that dreadful experience?

Mr. Speaker, when is the government going to listen to some of the recommendations instead of just letting them gather dust?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very important question: have we not learned anything from that? Of course we've learned from that, Mr. Speaker, of course we have. Recommendations flowed from the committee, Mr. Speaker, and those recommendations have been implemented, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 22 — The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 22, The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 23 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 23, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 24 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 24, The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 25 — The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 25, The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order. Order. Order.

Members of the Assembly, pursuant to section 286 of The Election Act, I have received and I am now tabling the report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the by-election held in Athabasca, October 26, 1998; for Cypress Hills, held June 28, 1999; for Regina Dewdney, held June 28, 1999; for Saskatoon Eastview, held June 24, 1998; for Saskatoon Fairview, held June 28, 1999.

TABLING OF COMMUNICATION

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly . . . order, please. Order. Pursuant to section 68.7 of The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, I hereby table correspondence, dated February 4, February 15 and April 25, 2001, from the Lieutenant Governor reporting the membership of the Board of Internal Economy.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government, I'm very pleased to stand and table responses to questions number 148 and 149 today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The responses to questions 148 and 149 are tabled.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Elhard: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

(11:00)

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't ordinarily interrupt the proceedings of the House, but these guests are very important people in my life. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the House, Glen and Laura Barreth, who are sitting in the east gallery.

They're Saskatchewan expatriates. They fled the province many years ago and now live in Alberta. I'm saying that a bit of a facetiously because they do enjoy coming back to Saskatchewan. They both have family in the southern part and the central part of the province. And I don't see them frequently enough, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like the members of the House to welcome them to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Eagles: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, I would also like to welcome Glen and Laura Barreth here. Glen went to school with my husband, Vic Eagles in Macoun many years ago. And I know that he will be thrilled when he learns that you were here today.

So I ask all members to also join me in welcoming you. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Agriculture and Food
Vote 1**

Subvote (AG01)

The Chair: — I'd invite the minister to please introduce his officials with us in the Assembly this morning.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This morning I have with me the officials. Seated on my right, Mr. Ernie Spencer is the assistant deputy minister of Agriculture and Food. To my further right is Mr. Doug Mathis, who is the general manager of Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation. To my immediate left is Mr. Hal Cushon, who is the director of policy and program development branch; and directly behind me is Mr. Jack Zepp, who is the administrative services branch. And Mr. Russ Johnson, just beside Mr. Zepp, is the operational services manager, administrative services branch.

Those are my officials, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, Mr. Minister. I want to welcome your officials here this morning.

This morning, in fact the last committee, Mr. Minister, the question had come up when will the forms be out for CSAP (Canada-Saskatchewan Adjustment Program) Two, and I believe at that time you said that within the next couple of weeks the forms should be out.

Can you update us on that and actually whether the forms are really out there right now? And by that I mean the written forms, not just the ones you can take off the Internet.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. The forms will be out within the next two weeks. What we needed is some additional information on the NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) accounts that were . . . We have those coming in to us now, so we say within the next couple of weeks those forms will be out.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well I guess then that puts the timeline for any cheques going out to farmers actually back. Can you give the farmers an idea today, how soon the earliest cheques would start to move out for this program?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — My officials, Mr. Member, Mr. Chair, say that late May, early June is when farmers will start to receive their cheques.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, this week an interesting thing came up with the numbers from each of the provinces — Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. And I was just wondering if you would comment on Alberta — 10.29 per cultivated acre, compared to Saskatchewan.

Could you maybe enlighten us on what actually, what it would work out to per acre in Saskatchewan. If I understand right, Manitoba is higher than Saskatchewan. Alberta, if my numbers are right, are actually double or higher than they're going to be in Saskatchewan.

Can you maybe comment on that Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. The member identifies correctly that the government of . . . that Alberta producers will get more than Saskatchewan producers will receive in terms of this payout. But what the member should also appreciate is that the Alberta government has added additional revenues over and above what the federal contribution has been.

It looks like the Saskatchewan contribution, if we were to award . . . or the Saskatchewan allocation, if we were to correlate it on the same basis as Alberta's, the Saskatchewan farmer would receive somewhere in the neighbourhood of 4.25 to \$4.30 an acre.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you maybe then update us? Do you have an idea of what Manitoba's will work out? We know what Alberta is because they topped their own program up with provincial money. But where's . . . do we have an idea where Manitoba is?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, it looks like Manitoba's contribution is going to be about \$7.36 an acre or 7.35. What we have not calculated into Saskatchewan's portion here is that we have other allocations of monies that we make available to farmers in the amounts of the property tax rebate, which is not included in our figure here. Manitoba doesn't have the property tax rebate.

We also have in Saskatchewan, as you know, the gas tax rebate that we provide of which isn't provided in the . . . neither Manitoba or in Alberta. So this amount is strictly the cash return that farmers are receiving as it relates to cash receipts.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess though if what you're doing is actually penalizing our farmers because you came out with the education tax rebate, the fuel rebate program you're talking about. So to a degree, because we've had these programs in place, our farmers are going to receive now far less money than the Manitoba farmers and extremely smaller amount of money than the Alberta farmers.

So what you've actually done is said, well the problem's the same here. And I would say, Mr. Minister, the problem is even worse here than it is in the other provinces because of the amount of acres that we have, which are actually deducting these other programs that you had talked about so much before and deducting it back to 4.25 an acre. That's an extreme difference, Mr. Minister, between 4.25 an acre and 7.35 an acre. On a 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 acre farm, that cheque will have a tremendous difference, Mr. Minister.

Wouldn't it have been even fairer — I mean we're so comparable to Manitoba when it comes to agriculture — to find a way to get ours up to at least a 7.35, which is far less than we need and far inadequate of what the problems should be addressed out there with. Wouldn't that have been more fair, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think I want to say, Mr. Chair, to the member, that throughout the course of the past couple of years what we've been doing in Saskatchewan of course is . . . Because we have such a large agricultural community here particularly in the grains and oilseeds side and you, sir, and us

on this side of the House have been on many occasions talking about how it is that the funding formula today doesn't recognize the huge imbalance that grain and oilseed producers today in Saskatchewan don't have access to, and because the lesser share of the federal money of course flows to our province today based on the cash receipts issue.

And so what we've tried to do in Saskatchewan over the last year or two is to mitigate some of that in our way. And so as a result of that you've seen the new programs in both the property tax rebate . . . which I know that you as well have been a strong proponent of as we travelled the province for a couple of months talking about the importance of the property tax rebate. We were able to achieve that, looking for ways of course to try and find some additional cash flow that we might be able to, at least, retain in the pockets of farmers across the province. So from that came the property tax rebate.

Last year as well there was I think a good argument made on behalf of members of this Legislative Assembly and producers across the province that we wanted to see something done on the gas rebate side, and accordingly have been able to do that.

So we're looking for solutions that try and mitigate the problems that we're experiencing today with the formula. Now this is a debate that will be ongoing. We raised this issue again with our federal government partners, just on this last round of CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program). And that's part of the reason why we didn't get into the program as quickly as . . . we were often criticized I think on some fronts, because we wanted to see a change to the formula.

And when you look at the numbers as you've identified today, clearly on the face of it Saskatchewan farmers, on the formula that's in place today, receive less. Now can we change that into the future? Our hope is that we can. And we're going to have this discussion again over the next couple of months as we prepare for the next rounds of discussions — both in June and then again in the fall.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I think one area that we certainly are on the same footing and agree with when it comes to the federal government, I notice and I'm sure you did too, Mr. Minister, I think it was yesterday or the day before, the federal government came out with another 500, I believe, \$550 million for the arts. And that's fine.

It wasn't long ago that we heard the Prime Minister announce \$500 . . . or \$500 million to upgrade the waterfront in Toronto. All these dollars that they seem to be able to find and dig up for other areas in need doesn't seem to cause them any problem at all. But when it comes to agriculture, Mr. Vanclief, and our Saskatchewan MP (Member of Parliament) here don't seem to really get into the cabinet's mind there that just how serious the problem is in agriculture, just how serious the problem is here in Saskatchewan.

Because I find Mr. Goodale especially very silent on many of these issues. If he had any clout with his cabinet colleagues down there, surely that they could realize that agriculture is far more . . . in a far more serious problem than some of these other entities that they seem to have put this money into. And I'm not saying that that money isn't justified, Mr. Speaker. What I'm

saying is that if these . . . Toronto waterfront for example needs \$500 million, I would suggest agriculture across this country would need 1.5 billion at a minimum. And I think you would probably agree with me, Mr. Minister, on that fact. I don't think they're coming anywhere as near to fulfilling the needs of agriculture, especially in the Western provinces and especially in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, there was a little bit of confusing write-ups this week, and I'd like you to maybe clarify this for me. April 28, and they're quoting you, Mr. Minister, and this may be right, it may not be right:

Saskatchewan's Agriculture minister and several provincial counterparts had given up their fight for 500 million in additional, emergency farm aid from Ottawa.

Could you comment on that, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. Just first to acknowledge his earlier comments as it relates to whether or not we have sufficient dollars in Saskatchewan today in terms of remuneration to our farmers. And he and I both will agree, having rural representatives on . . . the rural seats that we both represent.

The reality is that there is, I think, a bit of a vacuum in Ottawa in understanding the kinds of pressure that are . . . particularly grain and oil seed producers are facing in Western Canada.

(11:15)

Now will some of that change when the federal task force makes its way across the country in the next several months, I hope? I'm hoping that that will be the case and we'll be preparing submissions for the task force so in fact we will be able to hopefully influence their thinking in a different fashion.

Clearly the most recent announcement, I think just in today's paper, where we read that the Canadian Transportation Agency just increased the freight rates by another 3.5 per cent. At the same time, although we're seeing some increases in the PROs . . . of the PRO (projection), the reality is is that when there is a slight increase in the prices of grain, it gets taken up as we'll see today . . . as we read today in the increased freight rates.

So our lobby with the federal government, I think, needs to continue, and it shouldn't be misconstrued in any fashion that where this week we said we were going to . . . I think the headline reads that we abandon our efforts for emergency aid. It's not so much that we abandon them because we're not giving up and looking to ensure that into the future you continue to have, we think, some kind of an envelope that'll address itself to emergency aid for farmers that we think should be, by and large, carried by the federal government.

But collectively when we talk about what we've achieved to date with the federal government through the farm organizations and the producer groups across Canada, and in particular the five large agricultural producing provinces, when we look at our track record and see that already we've been able to achieve the 500 million and we continue to lobby for an additional 500 million — and we can't seem to move anybody

on that issue — we then said collectively that maybe we then need to put our resources into another area, our energies of which I think — not I think, I know — that my farm leaders and organizations have now said we should be.

We know that there's a new envelope that the federal government has established. It's to do with the whole environmental side, the safe and quality food piece, the transition and adjustment because it looks like there's going to be additional revenues that the federal government is prepared to put into that envelope, and are gradually moving away, in my view, from putting continued emergency aid money into that envelope where we accessed the 500 million from this year.

So when we say collectively that we're going to lessen our intensity on the envelope that talks about emergency aid, we haven't given up on ensuring that the federal government understands that we may need some for the future.

But for this period of time, over the next five or six months, we're saying we're going to concentrate on trying to get a larger chunk of that 500 or 600 million — whatever that number might be — on that environmental stewardship side that the federal government is talking about putting some additional revenues in.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair. I guess where the confusion came in this week, Mr. Minister, was we had read this comment in the paper that I'd talked about before, and then . . . that was dated April 28. And May 1, 2001 news release out of the Manitoba government:

Agriculture and Food Minister Rosann Wowchuk today asked . . . the Standing Committee on Agriculture . . . the House of Commons (to) travel to Manitoba and allow producers and rural residents the opportunity to provide valuable input on the farm crisis . . .

It goes on to say — and I'm sure you've probably seen this release, Mr. Minister, and your officials have seen it — that the motion called for, that they'd talked about in their House, 500 million more in federal assistance. So they're actually, they're continuing the fight for that.

Then I see that there was a release out of your department on May 2, I believe the date was, and really very close to what the Manitoba release was.

So I think that's where the confusion was. On one hand I think people thought maybe we'd dropped that whole issue and then they saw this. So that's why I needed the clarification.

A couple of different areas before I pass to some of my counterparts, Mr. Minister. I'm not sure how familiar you are with the cattle co-op feeder situation in Spy Hill. We've had a tremendous problem out there and there's been a number of farm . . . livestock farmers out there that have been hurt very badly by the situation that happened out at Spy Hill-Rocanville area.

I was just wondering, Mr. Minister, if your officials were up to date on this, if you could give us some kind of an update as to where we are with that right now. Because as you know how

that works, Mr. Minister, a number of farmers had equity built up in that program, had bought feeders or bought cattle through that program, and really in some cases I believe it's pretty near putting farmers under out there right now.

And I think it's a problem we have to look at because the cattle feeder co-ops that are out there right now, I think are a tremendously good program. They're a program that we have to look after and guard, that things like that happened at Spy Hill will never happen again.

I guess my question, Mr. Minister, though is where are we with the problem that actually happened out at Spy Hill and what have we done to try and help the farmers out there that were caught in the middle of this thing through no fault of their own?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. I should first say to you that the officials from the Department of Agriculture and Food have been working very, very closely with this entire issue.

As you may or may not know, this issue is continuing to be under the investigation of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) because of the kinds of concerns and losses that have been experienced there.

I agree with you that the cattle feeder co-op program has been very successful in the province. We continue to support it.

I recently met with the producer organizations who are responsible for overseeing this whole piece. And what they said to me is that we need to be careful that we don't paint a dim picture of what this program is about on the basis that you have one or two situations from time to time where you find yourself . . . where individuals are losing . . . where they have a loss and clearly this is one that you are identifying in the Spy Hill area.

Just to report further, that the RCMP, as I've said, are involved in that investigation. Our officials have been closely tied to it. I think there are two individuals who have now . . . where the issue has been resolved. I think there are two others that are still outstanding and then the other matter as it relates to the RCMP investigation is ongoing.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I realize this is a very touchy situation out there and I guess our concerns are probably very similar because many of these people that were hurt out there are my constituents. And we even had a situation where a constituent phoned that she had had I believe five head of cattle confiscated because they were going to use that as security. It took a while and actually the cattle were returned later, Mr. Minister, but it certainly gives people a bad taste in their mouth when they see things like that happening.

And I guess my biggest concern is that what it does to the cattle feeder purchase situation and livestock and bred cows, all those sorts of things. These programs are very crucial to what's going on in livestock right now. I think we both agree that we want to expand. The hog industry's expanding. We want to get into feeder cattle in a big way; we'd like bred cows right now, our numbers to expand. I think we all agree on that especially, Mr. Minister, on our side of the province where I think we can only benefit by increasing our livestock numbers.

Mr. Minister, we'll let that one sit for now because I realize that the RCMP are involved and we really can't go much further with that.

The other issue I'd like to bring up this morning, Mr. Minister, and I've talked to you before. I talked to your predecessor, Mr. Lingenfelter, about it is The Farm Land Security Act Bill. We've presented a private members' Bill the last three years or so and actually were promised by your predecessor that it would be looked at and probably something would be done. Are we getting anywhere with a new Bill and that's for The Farm Land Security Act?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, just a final comment on the earlier issue that you raised around the cattle feeder program.

I very much appreciate your comments as it relates to . . . particularly on our side of the province where we need to see a significant transition — we think, and I think you would agree — from much of the grain farming industry today and try to grow the livestock industry to a larger way.

It's often somewhat discouraging to see not only our background in livestock prepared to the levels that they are today and then loaded up on semi-trailer tractors and hauled across the border for finishing.

And then following the livestock of course is our grains. You know, you have the B-trains, with the barley and the oats on them are flowing right behind them. And we need to change that.

And cattle feeder programs are extremely important to that entire process in growing the bred cow industry . . . or the area, as well as the intensive livestock are critical for us. And we want to make sure that when we have situations like the one we talked about earlier that we try to dispel them quickly so that they don't interfere with the good work that producers are doing across the province.

In respect to The Farm Land Security Act, we've had a considerable amount of dialogue across the province with a number of folks about how it is that we might be able to bring this to some kind of resolution, or where we have a better appreciation for changing the legislation that we have in place.

And from time to time we hear that it does in fact inhibit the growth of the industry on some fronts across the province. And we may be able to make a case as well where that's happening.

I want to say to you that we have not made a decision as to whether or not we'll be introducing this piece of legislation yet during the session. Because part of the reason is that our consultations continue to be in place.

As you can well understand, this is a very, very sensitive issue with many folks. And the more dialogue and discussion that you have, the more you find that the issue remains almost in . . . where there's not a clear definitive area that you can go to to satisfy people, that it remains somewhat at a deadlock.

What we are doing however is looking very closely at what the

Manitoba legislation is and looking very closely at what the Alberta legislation is and are going to try and find within that purview something that works for all three of us.

And there should be some, in my view, some consistency about what's happening across the three Prairie provinces, because you have producers that are moving back and forth that are farming in both provinces. In some cases we may have people actually farming in all three. And so we're looking at how we might be able to blend that in a more palatable fashion for Saskatchewan people, and will accommodate the growth in the industry as well.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well I appreciate that, Mr. Minister, because I believe — I'm not sure; I think this was probably for the year 2000 — that the numbers we got back from your department was that it was actually six of the applications received, six refusals, 158 approvals or exemptions.

And I guess my thinking is that if we're going to make all these exemptions, why don't we just get to the point where we change the law and get with the new century.

And I think you would agree with me, Mr. Minister, that one of the things that we're lacking in this province is venture capital investment into such things like this. In my own area, we've had the luxury of having a person from Alberta, a farmer from Alberta come into our area and buy land and is expanding a cattle operation there where there was actually no cattle before. And it's only a win-win for each area when we get these kind of people coming in.

And should be, may be remiss if I didn't touch on one thing you said there. You said that there is a lot of pros and cons to this and nobody knows that better than I do by pushing my private member's Bill. I've got some very hot calls over the situation.

The problem I have with some of the people that are so dead against this though is that we have so many farmers out there at the age right now where they're so close to retiring or actually past the age where they wanted to retire and there's no market. And again, I don't want to keep harping on the east side of the province, but the problem seems to be worse there. There's not a fair market for their land so they end up taking what the market right now will bear out there.

And I think, if we could open it up at least the first step to, as you said, maybe make it comparable to Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan. But people from across this country could come in here and invest their money in Saskatchewan. I think it's only a win-win for us.

I'm almost to the mindset that maybe we should even be looking already, the minute we do that, one step further. Because in our area we've had Swiss farmers come in, I believe we've had people from Germany come in. And again I would say, Mr. Minister, that this is a win-win for us. Number one, they bring fresh money into this province. But number two, they bring some fresh ideas and some new ways of doing things that I think are very timely right now and we can only benefit from this.

So, Mr. Minister, I'm probably at the end of the questions I had

for you and I want to thank you and your officials this morning for answering those questions.

But with The Farm Land Security Act, I would certainly urge or please ask you to try and, as expeditiously as you can, bring something in and let's get some fresh money into this province. I think it can only help our situation. So thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I just want to maybe reiterate just a little further on the comments that the member from Saltcoats makes, Mr. Chair, because we're not on a different page on this issue for sure.

I should say though that if people are interested — and they are, because not only in your area, but I know some farmers that have now come into the area of the member from Canora whom I've had an opportunity to speak with directly, who have come here from other parts of the world — and if you move here and start up a farming operation here, then of course The Farm Land Securities Act doesn't impact them in any way. This is about owning property in Saskatchewan and then having it farmed by someone else.

(11:30)

And I should say to you that this issue has come up in our discussions at the ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) committee and we've had some very, very good discussion around this. And I know that the subcommittee that's responsible for this kind of legislation has been out there consulting with people. And it was interesting — they just reported very recently to me that, you know, that it's really difficult to try to find the centrepiece on this, as you've nicely identified in your private member's Bill. We're pleased that most of those phone calls were going to you, sir, as opposed to over here. But we heard from some of those as well.

And clearly, your comment about there being, I think, six rejections in 158 exemptions last year tells you that the Farmland Security Board is already doing some things in policy that maybe we should have in regulation. And clearly, that's the route that we're going to be going down and trying to blend that with our Manitoba-Alberta friends to see if we could find some solutions there.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I have some questions for the minister and his officials regarding the Meyronne community pasture catastrophe, I guess I can call it, which occurred last August where 69 head of cattle were found dead and it was determined they died because they lacked water.

The information that's public information that the cattle actually went 16 days without being checked for water, I would like to ask the minister how this could have possibly happened.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to the member. This was a very serious issue, as the member has identified, as it relates to the Meyronne situation and any time that you have a loss of livestock and it occurs in the fashion in which, I think, it's now been recognized it has occurred, we need to act on it, clearly.

And what's sort of transpired from this particular incident of course is that we engaged in a community pasture study, not only on this particular issue but across the piece, so that we have a better appreciation and understanding for the future. And some of our policies and regulations . . . or some of our policy may need to change in order to ensure that we have maybe better accountability at the level at which the process occurs.

I mean, today we have supervisors of community pastures, and then of course you have people who work within that environment who oversee the livestock that are in the pastures.

And the question of course that came out of here was the accountability, what kind of reporting is in place today to ensure that there is good, solid pasture management and that when producers are putting their livestock into the community pastures, that they can be assured that they're being well maintained and they're being well managed and observed, which is a very important question I think that you raise and we have concurrence with.

So what we undertook, as I said earlier, is a review of the entire community pasture program that we have in place. This report is almost ready to come to me. I should have this within the next very short while, of which then we'll want to clearly make it public so that the cattle producers and the organizations can see what in fact we'll be changing or trying to do to enrich that.

And I think in the report, though I haven't seen it yet, we'll likely see some stronger recommendations as it addresses itself to accountability, which I think is one of the areas that one could easily ask the question here about whether or not there was that kind of due diligence. And we recognize that as well and that's why we have the report coming to me.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'm very pleased to see there's a report coming out to identify some of the concerns and issues. We're getting close to the time now where community pastures will be occupied with numbers of heads of cattle and we sure wouldn't want to have that kind of an incident happen again this summer. So I'm pleased to see that it's being worked on to ensure this does not happen again and I'd be very interested in seeing a copy of your document as soon as it's available.

Mr. Deputy Chair, to the minister again: could he please tell me what the final resolution was of this incident.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member. There were a couple of sort of immediate actions that we undertook outside of the report. One is that we recognized that there needed to be compensation to the producers, so compensation to the producers was made. We realized that there needed to be an investigation and so engaged the work of the RCMP and the RCMP have been involved in that process.

We also realized that, from our perspective, there was some negligence here as we viewed it, and of course there was the change of duties of some of our employees and that investigation is still ongoing. And there may be additional, there may be still additional actions or reprimand that will occur that as it relates to some of the employees of that particular pasture.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I want to carry on with that a little bit more; the disposition of the workers. It appears that there was gross negligence involved and in fact the RCMP had wondered about criminal charges and it's my understanding that it almost seems like one of the workers has been rewarded rather than being chastised for this negligence in this particular instance.

And I would like, I would like to ask the minister what the disposition of the two workers was or is? Where they are now?

And it does seem like an awful long time, from August to now, to still have an investigation going on and I'd like the minister to let us know what the status of that investigation is. It's not cut and dried obviously. But when we see that the cattle actually died of dehydration, I'm not certain how, what investigation . . . why it would take months and months and months. And if the minister could — it's kind of a couple of questions in there — but the disposition of the workers and why the investigation is taking so long, reference the workers.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. To the member, just to say first that we concur with your analysis that this was a very serious incident. And that is the reason for why we engaged the RCMP in the process. There are some things of course that we believe that we could do ourselves immediately and some of that occurred with our employees.

But once you turn a matter of this nature — and provided compensation I should say as well to those producers whose livestock had been lost — but I should also say that when you take a matter of this nature and you turn it over to the RCMP, which we did, we then are at sort of their peril and their expedience in the decision-making process. And I can say to you that the committee has been working very closely with this issue and I think with the RCMP as well.

And I'm expecting that there's going to be yet a further recommendation, not only by the committee, but I expect that there'll be a further recommendation by the police force.

And so as much as I would like to express what else might happen here, having no full knowledge of it but some sense of what may further occur, I think it would be inappropriate for me to do that today. But to say to you that, because the RCMP are engaged in this, this was a very serious issue and they are proceeding under the legislation for cruelty to animals which brings with it some very severe consequences to people who in fact may find themselves in a situation where they may be at fault here.

I should say to you there may be other repercussions here that we'll need to act upon. And we'll assure you that we'll do that in the same fashion that we have in the past to ensure that these kinds of incidents not only don't happen in this particular pasture, but I think what we'd want to do is send the signal across the community pasture structure that this kind of process we don't tolerate and that we will want to see a stronger process to ensure that incidents of this nature don't happen into the future.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I totally agree. We cannot tolerate conduct such as this. Again I want to put my

question to you. The disposition of the two workers, where they are now and what they're doing at this date?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I just want to say, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, that the rider whom was working at that pasture was relieved of his duties. The pasture manager was placed in a different environment of which he then would have a different kind of a supervisory and supervised role.

I am . . . as I said earlier in my comments, and I may be a bit guarded in the way in which I'm answering this question only on the basis that the work of the RCMP has yet not been completed. And I'm expecting that I will hear that in short order and you may . . . we'll be happy to provide for you the outcome of the work of the RCMP and the associated decisions that will be made in accordance to the recommendations that the RCMP make.

But I'm not able to go to that place yet today because the investigation is still completing. But I'd be happy to provide that to you immediately upon our receipt of it.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As I mentioned before I'm looking forward to receiving any information that I can on this.

Again I have a comment and a bit of a question, Mr. Deputy Chair. You've already indicated we want to send a very strong signal, and I totally agree. And yet we've taken the supervisor of the pasture and given him another job someplace else.

That to me is not sending a very strong signal. And it's my understanding — and I don't have the data, but I've received numerous phone calls and letters on this particular issue — and I understand that the pasture manager was moved to another community pasture. And I would suggest, Mr. Minister, that this is not sending a strong signal.

Can you confirm that in fact the supervisor is a manager or at least in another community pasture, which again to me is not sending a strong signal. It's almost like rewarding the individual if in fact this is the case. Could you comment on that please?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, sometimes when you have situations where you believe that there has been some injustices or harm that's come about — and clearly, there's no question that there's harm here when you see the number of livestock that in fact were lost — it then becomes necessary to engage a couple of processes, which we believe we have.

We established the Pasture Review Committee, whose task it was to then examine what's happened in this individual situation, and the RCMP. And we believed at the department that clearly one of the individuals needed to be relieved from his duties and, accordingly, one of the riders was relieved of his duties.

The pasture manager was placed on a different pasture of which you're familiar with, and now has a reporting to a different kind of a process or to a different individual.

But it's exactly this area of which we know that there has been some other work that's been done by the authorities. And the authorities are continuing to examine that piece, and I expect that I will have — not expect, but will have — in short order some response that I might be able to make on this, which may shed some more appreciative light in terms of a final decision here.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I don't want to belabour the point, but I just don't see it as sending a strong signal. There's obviously an indication from officials that the pasture manager did something wrong or else he wouldn't have been moved.

And if he did do nothing wrong, then why was he moved? And if he did do something wrong and was moved, why was he moved to another pasture?

(11:45)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, the member, you know, having worked in a fairly large organized structure as you have, and as I have over my lifetime, sometimes when you need to make decisions that are of significant magnitude that may require sending a signal that there is a process that you need to follow. And clearly, this is what we're doing here.

We have an individual who we had some concern about and we relieved him of his duties. I would think it would be safe to say that we had concern, too, about the pasture manager. And when you're proceeding down this path, you need to be sure that you do due diligence on this work and, accordingly, we think we have.

We've established the review committee, engaged the RCMP, and took that particular individual who we're referring to and placed him in a different venue, of whom he would be responsible to report to a different individual as well.

And accordingly, it will be that information that will help us to determine what, in fact, will occur at the end of the day with this person. And it's, I think, that kind of review that's being undertaken today that we're waiting for response on primarily because we think it's a very delicate issue with a very senior employee.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess we could debate about the due diligence on it, but I guess my last question would be is any of your officials or yourself been in touch with the RCMP? I know we can't press them for a precise time that their investigation would be finished, but if this drags on for months longer and into the years, it's going to be left sort of as a dangling issue. Something like this, I believe, has to come to some sort of finality as soon as practicable.

Could you let us know if there's any indication from the RCMP when this will be finalized?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I can say two things here. One is that our official has been in regular communication with the RCMP and that we expect, in very short order, we will have a response from the pasture review committee, and then we'll be making a recommendation of

which I undertake to provide to you when that decision is made.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'd like to pursue this matter a bit more so that I have an understanding of how this situation came about.

I understand, I mean the cattle died because they didn't have access to water. But I guess to understand why that actually happened I would like to know, first of all, what is the carrying capacity of this particular pasture? What type of staff did you have to look after the animals?

I understand that, if my information is correct or at least I've been told, that there was only a rider that was there on a day-to-day basis and that the manager actually resided at another pasture some distance away. I'd like to know how often that manager actually came over to the Meyronne pasture to check on and supervise the rider? What type of experience that rider had?

And I think we'll just leave it there. And if the minister could answer those questions and we'll carry on from there.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, what I think might be more appropriate is for me to provide for you sort of a written context of all of the issues that you've asked in terms of how long the rider has been an employee. I think it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of a couple of years. How long has the manager been there? I think somewhere in the neighbourhood of 18 years.

So I think it would be of total service . . . I think it would be important for us to provide that for you. The various different responsibilities that each of them carry we should highlight for you so that you have that full appreciation.

I think the pasture has about 900 cows that it was serving. So we can provide you with that kind of information which, I think then, would be more helpful rather than me trying to take you through that on a piece-by-piece basis.

Mr. Hart: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, I have agreed to have the minister provide me with a written statement or written answers to those questions.

I guess my next question would then deal with . . . I've been looking at the organizational chart of your department and I see that there is a Saskatchewan pastures program headed up by a director, and then within that there are regional managers. And this particular pasture would fall under the responsibilities, I assume of the south regional manager, I understand. Is that correct? That that's the way the administration is set up?

I guess my questions have to do with the responsibilities of the south regional manager. How often does . . . I would assume that this person would be directly responsible for the operations of the pastures in the southern area, and therefore would be the supervisor of the community pasture managers.

My question would be how closely does the regional manager supervise the pasture managers? How often does the regional manager go out to the community pastures and actually drive out into the fields? And as I said, how hands-on is this regional

manager in the operations of the community pastures?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member. First to say that my officials tell me that there is a significant amount of contact that goes on between the regional manager and the managers of the pasture.

And in your case, the southwest regional manager, I think, would have under his purview about 20 different pasture managers who would be responsible to him, and that there is likely not as much hands-on as what we might appreciate or might want to see.

And I expect that when we see the report that the Pasture Review Committee has put together, they'll be asking or responding to the issue about what kind of supervisory responsibilities are there and how much contact in fact is there between the regional managers and the managers themselves.

My officials tell me that in the discussions that they've had with some of the members of the review committee that it appears as though they may be changing the structure a bit where some of those 20 pasture managers, they may be elevating two or three positions, or one or two positions, to a more senior level of the pasture manager who then could help the regional manager himself or herself oversee some of those other pastures.

So I think what you're going to see in this review is the greater responsibility that will be assigned to some of the more senior pasture managers or maybe some of the more able people to help with the supervisory responsibilities that are necessary around running the pastures and ensuring that there's a more regular contact maybe with the producers who have their livestock in the pastures. But that I expect I'll see in the report in the next short little while.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the minister. I have had some considerable experience in this area in my years of being a civil servant both in the provincial and federal governments. I had some direct hands-on experience in this area and I found that, from my experience, that it was necessary as a manager or a supervisor to actually go out, not only to the pasture headquarters but occasionally just to drive through the pasture. I think the pasture managers appreciated it, and I think it also was a safeguard against situations such as the one we are discussing here today.

And I guess my question . . . And I think in your review, I think it would be imperative to know if in fact your regional manager did visit the pasture, and if so, when was the last time? If I'm led to believe that this particular pasture, as I'd indicated earlier, was if the day-to-day supervision and well-being of the livestock in that pasture was the sole responsibility of a rider who didn't have a whole lot of experience, and if that in fact was the case, I think it was incumbent upon the department staff to perhaps more closely supervise that area.

So it'll be interesting to . . . I look forward to your report and the review of the situation, and I think that once you receive this report that you should look very, very carefully and implement changes so that we can safeguard against this incidence happening again.

I would just like to ask a couple more questions, more general questions about the community pasture program. About your fee structure — is your fee structure determined . . . Do the pastures operate on a cost recovery basis? Is that how your pasture fees are set up?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The community pastures, as you probably know, are managed through what we call a revolving fund. And of course, the fees, of course, are reflective usually to what the animal raising units are throughout the given year and the price of livestock is. So that's how in fact, the pastures are operating today.

Mr. Hart: — Then, Mr. Minister, I take it from that that the costs of the operation of the pasture are recovered through the fee structure. I guess that would lead me to another question then. I understand that the compensation paid to the producers who lost livestock . . . I don't recall the figures exactly, but I believe they were in excess of \$100,000, is that correct? And if so, will that be . . . will that compensation be part of the cost of operating the community pastures and, thereby, then passed on to the producers who are utilizing your pastures this year?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Just to the, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, that the compensation was made out of the revolving fund which is the way in which we've managed that. But the revolving fund will be reimbursed by the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Hart: — So then I take it, Mr. Minister, there'll be no net cost to the revolving fund, and, thereby, then the producers utilizing the services of the community pastures will not be incurring additional fees to pay for that compensation. And I'm happy to hear that.

If I could just for a moment turn to another topic. I noted in your response to the member from Saltcoats, to one of his questions having to do with additional federal funding for farm programs and so on, and I'm looking at a newspaper article in which you're quoting as saying that:

Programs offering technology and environmental tax credit for land conversion could also open up Ottawa's purse strings . . .

Mr. Deputy Chair, could the minister expand on that, what type of programs that he envisions that'll maybe bring more federal dollars to the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I want to say this, that in the last several months, one of the things that I've realized in our discussions at the federal table with our federal friends is that there appears to be a significant change in mind in terms of how we're going to fund agriculture for the future. And I define this or describe this as sort of three envelopes.

In the past we've had one envelope that's really been about emergency aid or one-time funding, of which the federal government and the provinces across Canada continue to put resources into agriculture because it's an emergency for producers. In that envelope today we got an additional \$500 million, which is the one-time aid.

Then I describe sort of a second venue or second envelope that is safety nets, which is the crop insurance and the NISA and now the Canada Farm Income Program, which is sort of the centre envelope.

And then of course the other envelope, which is the new one that the federal government has been talking about, is the one that addresses itself to the transition adjustment, environmental stewardship, and safe food.

And what the federal government has said, I think in two very important fronts, in their Throne Speech . . . there was a paragraph in their Throne Speech that said we're going to move away from making funds available for producers today that is crisis management — which I view as the emergency fund envelope — and that we want to start providing more money on a long-term basis; a little more to safety nets maybe but we're already putting \$2.6 billion in there so you should be happy with the crop insurance and the CFIP and the NISA programs. So that's where we've committed our money, but we're also now keen and interested in looking at what we might be able to do on the third envelope.

(12:00)

And so in my comments to the newspaper article you're referring to, it's that area that I'm speaking about. How much resources is the federal government prepared to put into that envelope? Have they in fact abandoned the emergency aid envelope completely? Because if we have a year similar to what we had last year in Saskatchewan again this year, does it mean that the federal government is saying there's no more money in the emergency aid envelope, and that all of our resources now are going to have to travel through the new envelope which they're talking about, which is about environmental stewardship.

Now we know that there has been a fair bit of discussion about taking land out of production, growing more of our forage crops, talking about carbon sequestration, how farmers might in fact start to get credit for some of the carbon sequestration by taking land out.

There's people in our province today for some time who've been talking about land set aside and using the environmental envelope as being the way that we might be able to flow money to farmers.

And the large issue here of course is one around trade. Because the minute that we start to provide a direct compensation to farmers, which might look like subsidy, then of course we're in countervail.

And what the federal government, I think, is attempting to do is to try to find some new avenues of which we might be able to flow money into the pockets of producers, using possibly environment as that tool, but at the same time I think asking producers to look at different ways in which they might try and use their land.

Because clearly in Saskatchewan today, we have a very large land base. We have a huge oilseed and grain industry which continues to be on a slide. And when you look at what the

world markets are predicting for the future we need to find a different way of compensation.

And so it's from that context that I talk about trying to find some rationale or reason as to how we're going to fund it into the future and what pool of money might be available to us, and then to have that money travel to producers through that new venue.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chair, I move the committee report progress on the Department of Agriculture and Food.

**General Revenue Fund
Highways and Transportation
Vote 16**

(Subvote HI01)

The Chair: — I'd invite the minister to introduce the officials with her in the Assembly this morning.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. To my right is Ron Styles, the deputy minister in the department. To my left is Barry Martin, assistant deputy minister in charge of operations. Immediately behind me is Carl Negggers, assistant deputy minister in charge of policy and planning, and beside him is Don Wincherauk, assistant deputy minister in charge of corporate services.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon to the minister and her officials again today. This is getting to be a habit, Friday afternoons, and we'll see how many more Fridays we can accomplish with Highways and Transportation.

One of the areas that I am getting a number of inquiries on, from members of my own caucus and from people involved in the construction industry, is the issue of the spring tendering schedule. And I understand that the government through written questions and responses to those written questions, I understand that there's been some delay because of government — at the federal level — government promises of money that have not yet arrived. So there's been some delay.

But also I've noticed in the written response to the earlier questions I submitted, the minister did indicate that some projects are already being undertaken, projects that require or are concerned only with provincial funding.

Would the minister be able to detail some of those primary projects for us today?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can send you a list, if that would be helpful.

But we have tendered on Highway 4 the supply and erection of structural steel over the Battlefords bridge. As well we are doing some resurfacing into Echo Valley Provincial Park. As well, as I said, the construction of the Battlefords bridge, North Battleford. As well we are grading Highway No. 1. As well we are doing some spot overlay on Highway 4 between Kyle to Rosetown. We are grading and widening sections on the Shoal Lake to Red Earth access, which is Highway 55.

Highway 4, we're doing some grading at the North Saskatchewan River crossing. As well we're doing some grading and paving on Highway 11 around the Grasswood Road going into Saskatoon. We're doing some resurfacing on Highway No. 22, which is Cupar, west. And we are doing some grading again on Highway No. 1, a 3-kilometre section. And then there are various other projects.

What I can tell the member is that we are waiting federal government approval and it has not yet happened, in terms of prairie roads initiative. And we are contemplating the possibility of issuing a tentative schedule in order to get things underway in terms of that agreement that has been signed between the federal and provincial ministers but has not yet received federal cabinet approval.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Through the Chair to the minister, last winter you introduced what was claimed to be the largest winter tender schedule ever. I'm wondering how much of that schedule has been impeded by the lack of agreement, or the lack of monies, forthcoming from the federal government?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — None of it.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, given the issue of roads and so forth, do you feel that you have gained enough advantage from the early tender schedule through the winter to actually get the work accomplished this summer that you had originally intended?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, we do.

Mr. Elhard: — Madam Minister, we've had a number of individuals approach us about their concerns with not knowing where they stand on the works that might be available to them this year.

Can you give me a rough ratio — I don't need something real specific but a rough ratio — of the number of jobs the department will undertake under provincial funding alone as opposed to the jobs that would involve federal funding as well?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay. It's approximately 50/50 split between the feds and the province on the \$30 million program for prairie grain roads. On top of that, we have an additional \$110 million worth of construction. So a total of \$140 million construction.

Mr. Elhard: — Madam Minister, is the total ... Of the 100-and-some million you mentioned, is that the provincial portion alone or is that part of the federal program as well?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I indicated that. Of the 140 million, about \$15 million is federal money.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, to the minister, you alluded to some repairs on Highway 22 and the member to my left is quite curious about that. I think he has some questions he'd like to ask.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I heard the minister, in response to an earlier question from my colleague;

indicate that there would be some resurfacing on Highway 22 west of Cupar.

I wonder if the minister could provide me with more details as to what actually will be done on that stretch of highway and how many kilometres would be covered by the resurfacing?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes. It's Highway No. 22. It's west of Cupar. It's approximately 7.2 kilometres. It's a resurface project and the approximate cost to the project is \$862,000.

Mr. Hart: — So I take it then, from the minister's answer, that the resurfacing will not cover the entire distance from the town of Cupar to Junction No. 6. It will be somewhere within that area, part of it will be done.

That particular section of highway has been, I guess, of some concern to the town of Cupar in the rural municipality. And there's been correspondence and meetings with your department in the past over that particular section of highway. And it has to do with the whole issue of the number of kilometres that primary weights can be hauled off of a primary highway onto a secondary highway.

And the issue is that under the current regulations, I believe it is 15 kilometres that primary weights can be hauled on a secondary highway. And that would bring . . . that distance would be — I'm going to use the old metric or the imperial measurement because I'm more familiar with it and that's how our land is surveyed — it would bring that distance that truckers could haul primary weights off of No. 6 Highway on No. 22 to a distance within 3 miles of Cupar.

And what the RM (rural municipality) . . . the town have asked for some time is that that exemption or that distance would be expanded to the town of Cupar therefore making commerce much more realistic and more feasible. And I understand in conversations with the former minister of Highways that there was a . . . the department had a meeting last fall to discuss and review this whole issue.

And I wonder if the minister could provide me with an update as to whether she's looking at changes in that particular regulation and what is the thinking of the department on that matter?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As I said to the member, the Highway critic, last week, it's an ongoing issue about primary weights on structural pavements and also thin membrane surfaces. And it's my plan to have an external review done to look at the whole issue of weights on our roads that are not up to primary . . . they're not primary surfaces. And we anticipate that we'll be launching that review shortly.

We need to link, obviously, economic development with our physical infrastructure. And the comment has been certainly made to me that while we're upgrading our roads, we're not upgrading all of our roads to primary weight strength. And that is a . . . we're upgrading some of the TMSs (thin membrane surface) to structural pavement. But it still creates some difficulties in terms of having particular weights go over those surfaces.

So we have to figure out how we balance economic development with our fiscal capacity to fix the roads in the province of Saskatchewan.

(12:15)

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I certainly agree with the minister when she says that you have to look at economic development. And that in fact is the case in this particular situation where United Grain Growers has invested some 3 or \$4 million in the new grain handling facility and the purpose of that facility is to take grain off the roads and put it onto the railway, to the railways.

And so if this issue of primary weights could be resolved and some common sense could be brought to this situation, it would facilitate taking grain off of the highways and putting it onto the railroads which would then, thereby, help extend the lifetime of our highways.

So I would urge . . . I mean I'm getting the same answer as I did a year ago: that we're going to look at it. And I was told about a year ago that I should wait until, and that area, that community should wait until this August or October meeting — I just forget when that meeting took place — and now the minister is telling the community that they have to wait for an external review.

I would urge the minister to look at some of these situations. And I realize there's probably other situations throughout the province where this same sort of situation exists. And if there's some common sense decisions that need to be made, make those in the interim and then when you have an overall plan, then you can re-look at them.

But in the meantime you're hindering commerce, you're frustrating truckers and farmers, and people are just constantly saying to me it just doesn't make any sense. I can haul primary weights to within three miles of the town of Cupar and then I have to go secondary weights. And it's the same highway, Madam Minister — it's exactly the same highway.

So therefore, as I said, I would urge the minister to look at these isolated situations and perhaps make some interim decisions.

I would like to turn my attention now to the No. 22 Highway east of Cupar, which is a different structure of a highway. It's certainly not capable of carrying primary weights.

But there is a section between the towns of Cupar and Dysart that is . . . last year was one of those sections of highways that the department, I guess, really didn't know what they were going to do with. In fact the former minister said they really didn't know what they were going to be doing with it. And it's still in that situation where we have short chunks of gravel and then some dust-free surfaces that are breaking up.

The department attempts to maintain these areas, but grading them once a week is certainly not adequate. My office constantly receives complaints about the condition of this highway.

We had a number of matters passed on to your department last summer that evolved because of the condition of that highway.

And the people in the area really can't understand why this short section of highway — I think it's about seven miles — is left in that condition when last year there was a part of the highway from Dysart, in fact the whole section pretty well from Dysart to Lipton was resurfaced and redone.

And the people are quite happy with that and would be very pleased if the department would just finish the job. And they're saying look, you started the job, why don't you just finish it?

And, Madam Minister, I have quite a number of petitions here that I've been waiting to table dealing with that precise situation.

And I wonder, could the minister tell me if you have any plans for that particular section of highway in this year's program?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is we do have more money in this year's budget and we're hopeful that we'll be able to keep it in better shape.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Deputy Chair, so I take it from the minister's answer that there's no plan to complete the resurfacing of that highway.

So if that in fact is the case, I would like the minister to explain to the citizens of that area of the province why they just wouldn't finish the job. I mean, it's a section of highway . . . you have a decent section on one end of it and a decent section on another end of it, and the people that live in the centre have to put up with this poor section of highway.

I mean, why don't you just finish the job, Madam Minister? Do you not like the people of Dysart?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — My understanding from the officials is that the east end is where there is more truck traffic. We wanted to get that section of the road done and we did. On the other side there is truck traffic as well. It's just a matter of how much money that we have in this year's budget.

As you know there's been a lot of lobbying in your area to deal with the Cupar situation where there's . . . you know going into the inland terminal, and we only have so much money and there's a tremendous amount of pressure.

And what we're trying to do is deal with the pressures in terms of where the truck traffic is, and we've got a three-year rolling budget. And there is so many requests, member, which I know you will understand, and there's only so much money. And this is the largest amount of money that we've ever had in the province to spend on fixing our road surfaces in the province. And we made the decision to fix the road surfaces where we have some of the greatest problems with the truck traffic that's increased dramatically since the elimination of the Crow benefit and the restructuring of the grain handling and transportation industry.

Mr. Hart: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I would have one final comment for today to the Minister, and that is I spoke to the contractor who worked on that section of highway late last fall and he indicated to me, if I understood him correctly, that he felt that if he could . . . would have some assurance that that

remaining section of highway was to be done this year, that he, you know, he could see cost savings by some forward planning and just going into an area and completing a section.

So now what we have is the contractor has left the area. If you would have . . . if there'd been some assurances that this area would have been finished and the tendering would have been done over the winter, the contractor could have left his equipment in place; he wouldn't have had those additional costs of moving. I'm sure he could have done the work for substantially less than now, sometime in the future doing the work and bringing a new contractor on site and you incur all those moving costs.

I think we need to have some rationalization. Instead of doing a little chunk here and a little chunk there, take a section of highway, complete it, and then move on.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What the constituents of your riding should know is that last year 63 kilometres of roads were resurfaced, strengthened, and paved at a cost of close to \$3.6 million. And that was significant, member.

This year you will have further construction occur in your constituency at a cost of close to \$1.4 million. We take the money we have with the urgency that's in the province, and there's been a 900 per cent increase in the amount of truck traffic on our roads in this province, and we have the largest numbers of kilometres of any province in this country relative to our geographic space. And we are doing what we can with the money that we have.

And I know that you have constituents that are putting pressure on you and calling my office as well. This is all over the province — all over the province this is going on.

And we need to have an integrated road and rail system because of the branch lines and the impacts of some of the changes of UGG (United Grain Growers Limited) consolidation, the Wheat Pool consolidation, and so on and so forth. This has put tremendous pressure on our roads. And we do the best we can with the money we have.

The other point I'd like to make is that everyone has an opinion on this, about how we could save money here and save money there and so on and so forth. But one of the things that I've come to observe is that it costs a lot of money per kilometre to either strengthen the road, resurface the road, or pave the road. It costs a lot of money.

This is not an inexpensive endeavour. It's a costly endeavour in terms of capital construction.

Mr. Hart: — Sorry, Mr. Chair, I feel I have to make one more comment. We all realize that it costs money to fix highways and we certainly aren't going to argue with the minister on that point. It's the efficient and effective use of the money and the manner in which highways are repaired and upgraded.

I liken the current government's plan of fixing highways to what used to happen in rural municipalities a number of years ago, at least in my own municipality, where each councillor was allocated a certain number of dollars to spend for road

improvements in his division.

And so what we saw under that plan was a section of road in a period of 10 years rebuilt in part and some minor improvements made. And basically what it amounted to is the ratepayers of the municipality still didn't have a decent road because the job wasn't done properly the first time. Short sections of road were improved and it didn't lead anywhere.

This is exactly what's happening in the Department of Highways today. Instead of taking a section and completing it, like in this situation where it's a matter of 7 miles and it's not a high-cost improvement, and we have the contractor move out and then we'll pay another contractor some time down the road to come in. In the meantime people who cross that section of highway are sustaining damage to their vehicles, accidents have happened, and those sorts of things.

I would urge the department to look at the way they do business and perhaps . . . I'm sure we could do things a lot better.

I mean the rural municipalities realized the shortcomings of their system of operation quite a number of years ago and adopted a unified budget for the whole RM, and as a result by and large, we have a pretty good system of rural roads. And I think our Department of Highways could learn a lot from our rural councillors.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, the department advises me that the reason that the pavement was done the way it was done is because we have some north-south grids going into Dysart and Cupar, and that is where the truck traffic is. They come on to the Highway No. 22 and then they go into Dysart and they go into Cupar because that's where the truck volume is.

There isn't as much truck traffic, as I understand it, between Dysart and Cupar as there is on the other parts of the road. And so what they're trying to do is repair and improve the roads where the truck traffic is presently going.

(12:30)

So that is the public policy argument. When you only have so much money, you look at your volumes of truck traffic and you try and repair the roads or strengthen the roads where the trucks are going. And my understanding, in terms of truck traffic, there isn't as much volume between Dysart and Cupar as there is in other parts of the province. We're trying to do this incrementally. It's not about giving each RM X numbers of dollars because politically that's what you're trying to do.

This is about trying to match the money that we have in our budgets — last year, the year before, this year — with the kind of truck volume that we're presently facing coming off of our grid roads onto our secondary roads. Does the member understand that? Oh, you don't understand that.

Mr. Hart: — I understand. In fact, Mr. Chair, the minister is only partly informed. The situation is not quite the way the minister described it. True, the grid road coming . . . the 640 grid road coming down to Highway 22 does carry a lot of truck traffic. And that section of highway west, it's quite acceptable.

The 639 coming down to Dysart comes down to Highway 22. Dysart no longer has grain-handling facilities. Now if those trucks coming off of 639 want to go east over to terminal 22 at Balcarres or wherever to hook up with the Highway 35, your plan, your work last year, you left about a kilometre of unfinished highway. Why didn't you then finish it right to where the 639 meets Highway 22? That's what the residents of the area are asking. They can't understand why would you just leave that section there? I mean not alone the section between Cupar and Dysart.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There is a carry-over and it's going to be finished this year.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, with the persistence of my colleague from Last Mountain-Touchwood, you know, I think that you finally gave him the answer he was wanting. But in your description of the process and the fact that you alluded earlier to a rolling three-year budget, there are efficiencies that come out of that type of rolling budget scenario.

It would be precisely these kinds of examples I think that would benefit from that rolling three-year budget. You could say we're going to do so many kilometres this year, so many kilometres the next year, we'll finish it. Not only will you have the project finished, you will have removed one of those many dozens of irritants that you talked about earlier. When the job is done, the people will no longer be calling your office or the office of the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly).

And I think that's one of the main advantages of the three-year rolling budget scenario. I hope, if I understood a document I saw written by the deputy minister, I hope that that kind of specific job scheduling will be worked into the department's future planning. Do you have that in mind, as a matter of fact, given the three-year rolling budgeting?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Can you tell me what document you saw from the deputy minister? I'm not sure; we're not sure which document you're talking about.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, and to the minister, it's a document that I believe the deputy minister sent out to a number of staff people in the department, referring to changes in philosophy and emphasis within the department, and how the money would be spent on an ongoing basis.

I think the deputy minister in that memo also talked about having greater emphasis on larger portions of road.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell you is that we do plan on tabling a three-year capital plan that will indicate what our plans are. Because of the delay from the federal government, I suspect that that will not be tabled, year two and three, until June.

It's going to illustrate our plans for transportation improvement in the province, which is going to help us.

I know the member is new to the Assembly, but one of the problems that all governments have, and our government has, is that you don't necessarily know what your revenues are going

to be like in the out years. So we don't know what they're necessarily going to be like in year 2002-03, 2003-2004.

Now because we had excess oil and gas revenues in the last fiscal year, the Government of Saskatchewan decided that we were going to spend an additional \$150 million on capital construction in Highways for the fiscal years 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04.

Some of that money, of the 150 million, is contained in this year's budget. The rest of the money is in the fiscal stabilization plan, which some of your members have called upon us to spend. That's where we're keeping the money for the following two years. And this is what's going to allow us to roll out our multi-year plan.

And we are the only department in government that has a multi-year capital construction plan. And that's because of the decision by the government to take those excess revenues from oil and gas and put it into a Highways capital construction budget. And the money we're not spending this year is presently in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which some of your members have indicated we should spend now.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, you know, I understand that. But you have, in your own budget this year, committed to spending so many dollars per year for the next three years and I think that that's the real advantage to a rolling budget. Now you can't tell me, on one hand, that you're committed to spending so many dollars per year but, on the other hand, saying you're not sure what revenues are going to be year '02 or '03.

So you know, what is it? Are you going to have \$300 million-plus a year for the next three years or are you not?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No. What I'm talking about is the big picture. I'm not just talking about my department. I'm talking about government.

Government does not necessarily know what sorts of revenues will happen in the out years. We don't know that. You forecast it.

But in the case of the Department of Highways and Transportation, this government has made a commitment to take the excess revenues that we obtained in the last fiscal year and spend \$150 million of those revenues on Highways and Transportation in the province of . . . or province of Saskatchewan over the next three years, including this present fiscal year.

Where we keep our money to allow us to have a rolling budget is in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund which some of your members — and I'm not saying you have — but some of your members have called for the government to spend today. And that's what's allowing us, that's what's allowing us to have this three-year-rolling plan.

Mr. Elhard: — I think the Road Builders Association in this province and other people interested in the issue have called for this type of rolling budgeting and I think, frankly, there's a lot of merit in that argument. I would like to see that type of

budgeting have been done much earlier. And I think that having you admit, or indicate, that you're going to be doing that in the future is a step forward.

I think that there are real efficiencies to be gained by taking that approach to departments, especially like Highways, where you can, in fact, save money in the construction costs by being able to say to the contractors who tender, these are the projects we're planning to do over the next three years, we're going to tender it in this kind of a schedule, and if you think you can underbid or reduce your bid because you know what's happening, the department and the people of this province ultimately are the benefactors of that type of a way of handling the budgeting for the department.

So I'm not criticizing what you're doing, Madam Minister. I am suggesting that there are efficiencies there that will benefit everybody but will also remove some of the irritants that you talked about.

The people of this province that I have talked to on an individual basis, time and time again, have said, we know the department is limited, we know the resources are not as adequate as maybe we would like to accomplish everything, but give us a plan, tell us what you're going to do this year, next year, and the year after. A lot of people in this province are prepared to wait if they know what the schedule will be.

Having made that . . . would you like to respond to that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think we know that, and that's why we responded the way we responded. And in the budget documents submitted by the Minister of Finance, we have indicated that in this fiscal year, we will be spending \$311.7 million. In the next fiscal year, 2002-3, 314.9 million; and 2003-4, \$321.9 million. So we have made a commitment, the money is there, and it will happen.

Now in terms of the three-year rolling plan, as I indicated, it is our intention to release, as soon as we get approval of this federal money, our year '02-03 schedule which will be released in, we believe, June of this year. And what it will do is allow the road-building industry to plan their long-term manpower or human resource needs as well as their equipment utilization, effectively.

The thing that is difficult is that we'll lay out our plan, but I'm sure that there'll be people who will be not happy that their particular section of road is not in our three-year plan. And they will try and ask us why isn't our road in the plan. And what I have to say to them, and to all MLAs that represent citizens who will want their road in the plan, is that we are trying to respond to truck volume, where truck volume is going, and where we have the greatest urgency in terms of roads that are under tremendous pressure.

And we know that there will be roads that we won't be able to get to next year or the year after or the year after. And that's why in some cases where we're trying to preserve as much thin-membrane surface road in the province, we may want to, dependent upon the rural municipalities, we may want to enter into alternate truck agreements . . . truck route agreements, in

order that we can keep as many dust-free surfaces in the province as possible so that citizens can go over dust-free surfaces.

So I guess the point I'm trying to make is we will release our plan, there will be people who will not like the plan because their particular section of road is not in the plan. Their road is under tremendous pressure. They want a dust-free surface. And in order to help us maintain those dust-free surfaces, citizens may want to think about entering into alternate truck arrangements to keep their roads as dust free as possible.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and to the Chairman. I think it's human nature to resent or disapprove of plans that don't meet your standards of convenience or don't benefit you immediately. So I understand that failing of human nature quite well.

You have alluded on several occasions now to the inputting of funds specifically where truck traffic was of most concern — the major criteria. However, I need to know, are there other criteria that you are using to determine where you allocate funds?

(12:45)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, it's a very complicated set of circumstances. But what I can tell you is we look at the condition of the road — is it rutting, is it falling apart, does it need to be widened because of the truck traffic that's going down that road — and then we look at the truck volume. So it's a matter of two things: what is the condition of the road in terms of all of the engineering problems that might be associated with that road; and then we look at truck volumes going over that road.

But we can get you that information, in terms of the actual criteria that we use.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman. I assume the asset allocation process is part of the factoring when you make those decisions. Is that assumption correct?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Can you give us a definition of what you describe as asset allocation?

Mr. Elhard: — I understand, Madam Minister, that the Department of Highways bought into a program, developed in Australia, that looks at the infrastructure and the state of the infrastructure, and that regular information is put into the program and information is returned from that program that would tell you how best to salvage or update or improve that infrastructure.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The member's correct.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, to the minister. Earlier you alluded to an external study that you were going to commission on the issue of weights. Would you be good enough to detail for us the terms of reference for that study, when you expect it to begin, and when you expect it to be completed?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It has not yet been determined. What I

can tell the member is that there are so many varied opinions on this subject, as the member probably knows, that we had at the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention a resolution saying that nothing over 80,000 kilograms should be going over our TMSs.

We have various opinions about whether primary weights can go down some of our structural pavements. There are so many different opinions on this subject that I want to get some people externally to give us some advice on this.

We have not yet set the terms and conditions, the mandate, or anything, but we're in the process of doing that.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman. I believe a study like that is not just important, I think it's long overdue. If I remember correctly, I was told that when the thin membrane surfaces were put into place in this province, there was a weight limitation using the imperial measurement of about 72,000 pounds. And now I understand that we're at weight limits that can approach 120,000 pounds.

Could the minister detail for me the ever-increasing weights? Can you give me a little history on how that happened and over what time frame it happened?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — One of the officials has been in the department a long time and he remembers about 80 per cent of the history. But what we will do is we will get that, we will get that for you in writing.

But there has been a variety of changes to regulations, to policies, and so on. And it became very clear to me shortly after I was appointed as minister that we have so many different weights and different agreements with trucking companies and so on and so forth, that it's time that we had an external review of this whole issue because of the pressures that are coming from communities, the trucking industry, and just the pressures in terms of trying to keep our roads as, you know, in good condition as possible. And with the increased truck volumes, I think it's time to take an external look at this issue.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Chairman, in my understanding of the trucking business, weights have moved up on a fairly consistent and regular basis as pressure was brought to bear on the department, not by individual farmers or individual trucking operators, as much as corporate interests in this province.

And I guess when you tell me that weight is one of the most serious debilitating impacts on the road system here and yet we've had ever-increasing weight limitations. Restrictions have been removed considerably on a consistent basis as the pressures were brought to bear.

Doing a study now on the impact of weights is a little late . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay well if it's not on the impact, what other purpose is there to study the weights? You know if we're going to study weights now it's a little like closing the barn door after the horse is gone.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It's not just about impacts. It's about public policy consistency and that's what's . . . from my point

of view as a cabinet minister, one of the things that you try and do is have consistent public policy.

You will know from the Vanguard people what struck me when we were having that discussion about weights on their thin membrane surface, was that there were some trucks that had a partnership agreement with the province that were still on that road, where other trucks weren't on that road. To me that's an inconsistency of public policy. We need to have consistent public policy on our various surfaces if it's possible.

And that's why I want to take a look at all of the various weights that we have on different roads to see if it's possible to begin to move toward some consistent public policy when it comes to weights on our various roads in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, once again I find myself in the rare position of agreeing with the minister. Because I think that that's been something that's been lacking. And I couldn't agree more that I think it is fundamentally unfair that some companies, because they're larger and maybe have more room for persuasion, would get special privileges even though it's a partnership program and it is costing them something, whereas other independent and smaller operators weren't eligible for that.

So I think that that's probably in my mind, at least on the surface of it, is a move in the right direction. And I would appreciate being made aware of the results of that study as soon as it's available to the minister herself.

Having reached this time of day, and I know many of my colleagues are anxious to leave for the weekend, I think that I will thank the minister. It's premature I know, but I think I'll thank the minister and her officials for her attendance here today.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:56.