

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the EMS report was released late last year, it struck fear and consternation into many of the communities that I represent in the extreme southwest. One of the communities in particular is the town of Richmond, which would have a 50-mile call for an ambulance to respond. And as a consequence, they have signed this petition in large numbers. The petition reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by residents of Fox Valley, Richmond, Leader, and Sceptre, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of people in the Bruno telephone exchange area who would like to become part of the Humboldt telephone exchange. 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 allow Bruno to be part of the Humboldt telephone exchange.

And the signatures on this petition are from the communities of Humboldt, Nokomis, Bruno, and Carmel, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present today from people in my constituency who are concerned about the recommendations of the Fyke report.

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena, Elfros, and Kuroki.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people from across the southwest part of Saskatchewan who are

concerned with the state of the hospital in Swift Current. And the prayer of their petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by residents of the city of Swift Current, Rush Lake, Stewart Valley, Sceptre, Hodgeville, Kyle, Mankota, Shaunavon, and Tompkins. I so present.

Mr. Harper: — I have a petition here from some concerned Saskatchewan citizens expressing interest in funding of school divisions. And the prayer goes:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to ask the Government of Saskatchewan to continue with its foresight and vision of increasing the foundation operating grants to school divisions by \$40.8 million for the fiscal year of 2001-2002, the largest increase in 15 years.

And this petition is signed by the good citizens of Fort Qu'Appelle and Regina.

I so submit.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about retaining their current ambulance system. 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 residents of Ceylon, Radville, and Buchanan, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

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

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Pilot Butte, Davidson, Regina, and Elrose.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from citizens concerned about their ambulance service. And the prayer reads:

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

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

And the petitioners are from the good community of Leroy.

I so present.

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

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Spiritwood, Medstead, Glaslyn, and Leoville.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition of concerned citizens of Saskatchewan. And the prayer reads:

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.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed from folks from Assiniboia, Lafleche, McCord, Willow Bunch.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again 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 signators on this come from 12 different

communities ranging from Coronach to Crane Valley.

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.

These are addendums to petitions presented as sessional papers no. 3, no. 5, no. 57, no. 58, no. 121, and no. 136.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Chair of the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills, the standing committee presented the fourth report of the said committee which is as follows:

Your committee has considered the following Bills and has agreed to report the same without amendment:

Bill No. 301 - The International Bible College Amendment Act, 2001

Bill No. 302 - The Our Lady of the Prairies Foundation Act, 2001

Bill No. 304 - The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Amendment Act, 2001

Bill No. 305 - The St. Anthony's Home Repeal Act

Your committee has considered the following Bills and has agreed to report the same with amendment:

Bill No. 303 - The Providence Hospital, Moose Jaw Repeal Act

Bill No. 306 - The St. Thomas More College Act, 2001

And further:

That the fees respecting Bills 301, 302, 303, 305, and 306 be remitted to the petitioners less the cost of printing.

That is moved by myself, and seconded by the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow:

That the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and present the first report of the second session of the twentieth-fourth legislature to the members in the House.

And, Mr. Speaker, before I move the concurrence motion that

will be seconded by the Vice-Chair, the member for Northeast, I'd like to indicate that the deliberations of the Public Accounts Committee have been many. We began our first meeting back on February 19, 2000, and since then, we've had the opportunity to meet well over a dozen times, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to indicate to the members that we had many, many issues to look at and to deliberate over. We had the Finance minister's Special Audit Committee that had presented a report based on its recommendations about the changes necessary to The Provincial Auditor Act. We also had a report from the Provincial Auditor himself about recommendations. In our deliberations, we also enlisted the assistance of the Law Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Ring.

So after many, many meetings, we have come together to present the recommendations that you see in the report that I just tabled.

Mr. Speaker:

I move, seconded by the member for Regina Northeast, that the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 39 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for Liquor and Gaming: what is the total number of days allotted for the horse racing season this year; is this number less than in other years; are there projected losses for the horse racing season; and, if so, what is that projected amount?

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of my colleagues, sitting in the west gallery, 45 students from grade 8 St. Thomas Elementary School in Eastview, my riding in Saskatoon.

With them are their teachers Gisele Jean-Bundgaard, Laureen Goulet, and Kelli Boklaschuk and their chaperone Sharon Chicoine.

I'd like to welcome all of them and ask my colleagues to join me in that welcome and I look forward to meeting them later on in the day.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to welcome here to this Assembly and through you, Mr. Speaker, and to my colleagues and to the people that are here, I want to welcome, sitting in your gallery, a young lady that served this Assembly well during the last session, Ms. Charla Borowski,

who has just returned from a five and a half month trip to Europe and will be proceeding on to Oregon to take on chiropractic studies, I understand, the medical chiropractic study.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure everyone here will remember the yeoman duties that this young lady performed in this Assembly and to welcome her back and wish her well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the second consecutive day I'd like to rise and introduce a group of students from the constituency of Cypress Hills. It's not very often that this long trip is made on two successive days. But in your . . . I'm sorry, in the east gallery we have 16 students from the grade 5 class of Fox Valley and we'd like to offer them our special welcome today, because that is a long trip in a school bus.

And with them are travelling Nicole Stein, Perry Anton, Charlotte Anton, Lori Ries, Colleen Schmitz, Roxanne Ternes, and Laura Lodoen. And we'd like to welcome all of them here today. And I appreciate this opportunity to introduce those students to you, Mr. Speaker, and to my colleagues.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, some very important people in my life — my wife Loretta, along with our youngest daughter, Jo Anne; our son, Stacey, and his wife, Chantel Perrin. And as well is with them my son-in-law, Darcy Furber.

Welcome to the legislature and I hope you enjoy the proceedings, and I hope the opposition isn't too tough on me today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you an old friend of this legislature who is sitting behind the bar, Mr. Clint White, who was a member in the southern part of Regina during the Blakeney government.

And he's a person who lives in my constituency and has provided me with very good advice over a lot of years. And I'd like to say thank you to him publicly and also welcome him here to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Legacy of Milton Fair

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all the members on this side of the House, I would like to send our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Milton Fair who passed away in Edmonton a few days ago.

As we all know, Mr. Fair was the chief executive officer of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, serving in that capacity from 1982 until his retirement in 1994.

As testament to his commitment to the agricultural community, Mr. Speaker, Milt spent nearly 30 years serving the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and its clients. He was well respected in the community, not only for his business savvy but also for his management style.

During his tenure as Pool CEO (chief executive officer), Milt was responsible for leading the company through some challenging times and was credited with spearheading the Pool's progress during that period.

He was a strong supporter of innovative agriculture and made the company a leader in specialty crop production and value-added processing — one of the many initiatives that were implemented to try to aid our troubled agricultural economy.

Milt and I served on many industry task force committees and agriculture related initiatives and in so doing became a very close personal friend.

So once again, our sincere condolences go out to Milt's family and friends of his . . . and his friends on his untimely passing. And we wish them much comfort and strength in the days ahead.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SRNA Nursing Excellence Awards

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I was pleased to announce to the Assembly that this week is National Nursing Week. One of the points I made in recognizing the 12,000 Saskatchewan health professionals who are registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, and licensed practical nurses, is that the variety of work they perform is far more extensive than is commonly known.

Last night in Saskatoon an awards ceremony was held which gives concrete evidence of this fact. The local chapter of the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association announced its annual Nursing Excellence Awards in five categories, and each category is but one example of how nurses serve.

Primarily of course, the Excellence in Nursing Awards ceremony provides an opportunity for nurses to honour their colleagues for their contributions to the nursing profession. I want to announce the award recipients.

The nursing practice award went to Janine Koroluk, who nurses at the Kinsmen Children's Centre. The excellence in nursing education award was given to Patti Simonar from the Royal University Hospital emergency department. Carleen Sutherland from Royal University Hospital was recognized for her work in professional nursing administration; while Monica Beavis of the Saskatchewan Health Care Corporation received the corporate nursing administration award. Finally, to recognize the nurses of tomorrow, the student leadership award went to Grant Fraser in the nursing education program.

My congratulations to these five, and again, during Nursing Week, to all Saskatchewan nurses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Former Minister Resides at Hotel Saskatchewan

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noted with interest a story that appeared on the front page of this morning's newspaper. It seems, Mr. Speaker, that the cozy relationship between at least some of the members opposite and the labour leaders may be coming a little frayed.

The member from Saskatoon Idylwyld, former minister of Finance, Economic Development, CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan), has grown so attached to the luxurious surroundings of the Hotel Saskatchewan, her home away from home as it were, that she cannot bear to leave. Even though continuing to stay there means crossing a picket line on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, the current strike at the hotel caused the Prince of Wales to change his accommodations when he visited our city a couple of years ago however this former queen of the NDP (New Democratic Party) will not be deterred. But the union members walking the picket line can take heart. That member says she only uses the hotel for accommodations and does not visit the bar or use the restaurant. She does, however, avail herself of the hotel steam room.

It's only too bad the member doesn't have a better relationship with the folks over at CIC and the Crowns. If that was the case she could probably use Ron Clark's steam bath without turning her back on her union brothers and sisters.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Math Competition

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to share with the Assembly the recent success of several grade 6 students at Greystone Heights School in my constituency.

A group of five students are enjoying the national spotlight after placing first in a math competition against 568 schools from across Canada. The 40-question, timed exam was coordinated by the University of Windsor math department. Students from across the country wrote it the same day and the top five scores from each school were considered in the national ranking.

Greystone Heights School placed first, achieving a mark of 178 — one mark higher than the Academy for Gifted Children in Richmond Hill, Ontario. The scores were also used to identify the top individuals in Canada and in each province. The Greystone Heights students took the top five individual placements in our province.

The five students and their scores out of 40 were: Bobby Xiao, who scored 39 points; David Wang with 38 points; Yi Song with 35 points; Hope Huang with 33 points; and WuDi Wu with

33 points.

Bobby Xiao and David Wang placed second and fifth respectively in Canada, with Yi Song placing tenth.

This is an outstanding achievement by the students and their school and their teachers, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to formally congratulate the fine efforts of these students and their teacher, Susan Kargut, and their principal, Dr. Neal Garvie, and all other students who took part in this competition throughout our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Special Olympics Plaza Dedication

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had the distinct pleasure to attend an extremely important event that took place on Saturday last, May 5. On this day at the Gateway Mall in Prince Albert an impressive event was held to dedicate the plaza adjacent to the said mall.

Mr. Speaker, a large crowd was gathered to witness the dedication of the Special Olympics Plaza in recognition of the 2002 Canadian Special Olympic Games to be hosted by the city of Prince Albert.

The host for this event was Mr. Phil Fredette who has the privilege of chairing the Special Olympics Games Committee in Prince Albert. But extra recognition must be given to Greg Dionne, the manager of Gateway Mall, for donating the plaza for renaming during this run-up to and during the games.

The Special Olympics Games host committee also introduced their mascot, Mr. Speaker. Oly the Eagle made his first appearance of which will be many public appearances I'm sure.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that Jaymee Longclaws from Christopher Lake in my constituency was presented with a bicycle for coming up with the mascot's name. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to please join me in congratulating Jaymee Longclaws, Oly the Eagle, Greg Dionne, and Phil Fredette for the extra-special dedication.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chili for Children Fundraiser Banquet

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the good fortune of being able to attend a wonderful event on Friday night, the Chili for Children banquet that was held at the Centre of the Arts.

Many artists from the Aboriginal community donated pieces of art and those pieces of art brought significant return for Chili for Children. It was an excellent fundraiser.

Chili for Children, as most of you will know, helps in the daily struggle to feed young children in our community. The physical benefits Chili for Children brings to students is very obvious but what receives less attention are the broader benefits that it

brings not only to the children but to the community; those who are able to volunteer their time and learn about working together in community.

It's a tremendous organization that has done tremendous work, Mr. Speaker.

Friday night's gala fundraiser featured four student speakers who had researched, written, and then delivered four very moving and powerful speeches about racism, unity of cultures, peer support in relationships, and the value of community. The four dynamic speakers are: Melissa Barnhart, Kelly Anne Cyr, Denise Uhryn, and Nicki Smith. The speeches were very moving, very powerful.

During the evening, Mr. Speaker, we ate well, we received a wonderful program, and we all enjoyed the opportunity to help Chili for Children, a wonderful organization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope all will thank them for their work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mental Health Week 50th Anniversary

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak on the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Mental Health Week in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Mental Health Association has spent the past five decades devoting to . . . devoted to educating the public about mental illness and mental-health issues. In partnership with many organizations, the Canadian Mental Health Association has increased public awareness and understanding about mental health.

While we know that there are significant advancements and progress over the years, we also know that there's much work remaining to be done. There is still so much that is not known about mental illness. Many individuals still daily deal with the social stigma and isolation and uncertain future. We must all make a commitment to work to increase public awareness and understanding. Governments must ensure that there's adequate funding to cover the costs associated with mental illness.

It is not just the individuals who suffer, Mr. Speaker, but families and communities as well. Mr. Speaker, our mental health must never be taken for granted. We must strive to ensure that mental health is given the same priority as the needs of physical health patients in this province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Cabinet Review of Drinking Water Quality Strategy

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

Prior to the current crisis in North Battleford, was cabinet ever warned that there is a high potential for a Walkerton-type crisis here in Saskatchewan? And was cabinet ever given a specific action plan to prevent this from happening in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan Party has obtained a cabinet decision item, dated September 22, 2000. This decision item was prepared by SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), Saskatchewan Health, and Sask Water, and it contains grim warnings about the safety of Saskatchewan's water supply. It says, and I quote:

... several key problems pose an elevated safety risk and threaten the security of Saskatchewan's drinking water supplies to the degree that the potential for a "Walkerton" type situation exists within the province.

Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker:

... the potential for a "Walkerton" type situation exists within the province.

Mr. Speaker, on September 22 of last year, the departments of Health, Environment, and Sask Water warned cabinet of the potential for a Walkerton-type crisis right here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP ignore these warnings?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all cabinet takes its job very seriously. There is no question that I've stood up in this House on a number of occasions talking about some of the proactive work that we have done.

Mr. Speaker, we have put money into infrastructure programs. Mr. Speaker, we have done a number of other initiatives that's very, very important.

And what I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition is to do one thing, is to not speculate and not fearmonger. His party and his leadership have been doing that to Saskatchewan for a number of months, and enough of that fearmongering and speculation, I say to that member, Mr. Speaker.

(14:00)

And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, that entire caucus along with that leader, Mr. Speaker, they got up and they voted against the budget that called for 10 more additional people to help with water quality — 10 more, Mr. Speaker. What did they do? They have the audacity to get up today and say what are you guys doing? And not more than several weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, they got up and they voted against that budget, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the cabinet decision item goes on to say:

In the aftermath of events in Walkerton, Ontario, an assessment of water supply systems and the related

monitoring and protection programming . . . was conducted.

Mr. Speaker, will the government release that assessment?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, first of all, as soon as that information becomes available, it will be released. We are doing all that we can to make sure that we're able to eliminate and to make sure we're able to alleviate some of the challenges with water quality standards across this province and, hopefully, eventually lead the whole nation.

And again I go back to my earlier statement, Mr. Speaker. We have been open and honest and accountable on all fronts of this particular challenge — on all fronts, Mr. Speaker. And what I'll go back to tell the Saskatchewan people we are going to do that during the inquiry, we're going to tell people exactly what went wrong, where and when. And if we can learn from this, Mr. Speaker, we will certainly learn.

But the bottom line here and the questions I received from the Leader of the Opposition and from that caucus, Mr. Speaker, is all of a sudden now they're getting up and saying, oh, what's going on, why aren't you helping Saskatchewan more with their water quality problem. And not more than two or three weeks ago they voted against a budget that increased the staff to help with monitoring water quality across the province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's rather odd that the minister knows so little about this issue since his name was on the cabinet decision item document. Mr. Speaker, did the water quality assessment discussed in the cabinet decision item specifically look at the water treatment system in North Battleford? And will the government release those findings?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, we looked across a wide variety of Saskatchewan communities and that work is going to continue. We're going to work very closely with Health, with the Municipal Affairs portfolio, and with SERM, and with Sask Water as well, Mr. Speaker. We're not taking this job very lightly at all.

And one of the most important things, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to work with all the communities in making sure that we understand the roles and the responsibilities associated with providing all citizens of Saskatchewan with safe drinking water.

And there's no question that I stood in this House and I talked about the fact that it's going to be a challenge. It's going to continue being a challenge not only for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, but for the whole country, Mr. Speaker.

And once again I go back to my earlier statement, Mr. Speaker. Whether they want to admit it or not, now they get up and they say oh, you guys should not have hired those kind of additional people. On this side of the House our act is together, Mr. Speaker.

We have done a lot of proactive work and we are prepared to

show off that work in the future, Mr. Speaker, and to make sure that we don't politicize this process. And above all else, we don't speculate and go back on our word.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're asking some very important questions of the minister about a cabinet decision item, and up to this point he hasn't responded. Perhaps this one, which is very important, he will respond to.

I quote again from the document. It says:

At present . . . (121) Saskatchewan communities . . . have drinking water treatment deficiencies . . .

One hundred and twenty-one communities — that's an alarming number.

Will the government release a complete list of the 120 communities in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we will do, as we mentioned, is we'll be open, honest, and accountable. That's what we said we would do, Mr. Speaker.

And one of the things that we done last year as a result of some of the action — there's been a lot of work being done — and one of the things that we done was we increased the staff.

What did we increase the staff for, Mr. Speaker? For the lab — to make sure we are able to respond to some of the tests that are submitted to the lab for water quality challenges of all the communities.

What are some of the other things done, Mr. Speaker? We increased some of the support staff in Sask Water. And what are some of the other things we've done, Mr. Speaker? We've increased the staff support for SERM, Mr. Speaker. All that is designed to help with water quality challenges across the province and to make sure we address the problem.

So what you have is you have increases in four direct staff, Mr. Speaker, in four direct areas to help with water quality challenges in this province.

We voted for it, Mr. Speaker, and they voted against that, Mr. Speaker. So you tell me who is not doing their job in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've asked the government five questions and given them five opportunities to make the public aware of the quality of water in Saskatchewan.

The cabinet decision item talks about the need to — and again I quote, Mr. Speaker — “raise public awareness and education for protection from unseen perils.”

I'm sure most Saskatchewan people would be unaware that there are 121 communities with drinking water treatment deficiencies.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, and ask through you to the minister: if he truly wants to raise public awareness, if he really meant what he wrote in that document, will he release the list to the people of this province?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again for the 15th or 20th time, as the Minister of SERM, we will release all the information that we have in a timely fashion so that the press and certainly the public of Saskatchewan and the opposition can get as much information as they want. We are going to be honest, open, and accountable on some of these fronts.

And in saying that, as well, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the Leader of the Opposition to table that CDI (cabinet decision item) today. I want to have a look at that CDI and see exactly what note he's making a point on.

But as I mentioned before — I'm going to say this time and time again — the hypocrisy that's associated with the opposition is just amazing, Mr. Speaker.

First of all they vote against a support system for all people in Saskatchewan that would help with water quality guidelines and to make sure that we're able to make absolutely sure that a SWAT (special weapons and tactics) team's in place to make sure that the people of the province can have a support team in place. We voted for that, Mr. Speaker, and all 26 of them across the way, Mr. Speaker, they voted against that.

So what is up with that particular challenge, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the minister understands the gravity of the situation. This document paints a grim picture about the safety of Saskatchewan's water supply. It talks about 121 communities with deficient treatment systems. It talks about Saskatchewan people facing a high degree of risk. It actually talks about the possibility of a Walkerton-type situation here in Saskatchewan.

But then you get to the communication strategy. And what does it say, Mr. Speaker? The government's key communications message should be that the systems currently in place are effective. That's what we've been hearing from this government; they're following their communications strategy. This document clearly outlines the water quality crisis in Saskatchewan, but the government's key message is everything's fine.

Mr. Speaker, how can we believe anything this government ever tells us again, if they won't even tell us the truth about the safety of our water?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — . . . the opposition to table that document. I want to have a copy of that document. So I'd challenge the minister . . . that member to table that document.

And what I will say, Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that the

water quality challenges across Saskatchewan and across this province is something that people have to be aware. It's an incredible challenge, Mr. Speaker, incredible challenge.

And on this side of the House, we were proactive. We wanted to make sure we weren't sitting on our hands saying, oh we have water quality problems, what can you do about it, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we put a budget in place that talks about infrastructure. We put a budget in place that talks about increasing funding for a number of different staff members out there, Mr. Speaker. A budget in which they all voted against that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps we can refresh the minister's memory a little by reading directly from his own document, the cabinet decision item document that he is unaware of, supposedly:

Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management (SERM), Sask Health, and the Saskatchewan Water Corporation . . . are requesting approval of a recommended drinking water quality strategy to reduce the current high degree of risk found in water supplies in the province (of Saskatchewan).

. . . several key problems remain that pose an elevated safety risk and threaten the security of Saskatchewan's drinking water supplies to the degree that the potential for a "Walkerton" type situation exists within the province.

Is the minister denying the very statement that his own department is making?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Once again, I'm going to tell the opposition that we take that role very seriously on this side, that we have identified that there are challenges with water quality problems across the province and across the country, Mr. Speaker. There is nobody immune to that challenge.

And what I will say to the member is exactly what I've said time and time again. We've done a document. We identified some of the challenges and some of the problems. And we're addressing them. We're being very proactive. We're not going to sit on our hands and say gee, this problem is going to go away on its own.

We had to stand up and take a very strong leadership role as the government. And that's exactly what we done, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the fact that 26 of them on the opposite benches voted against the budget that helped address some of these challenges, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, the minister couldn't even answer questions around routine policy and procedures of his own department. Today, he's denying the

existence of a CDI with his own signature on it.

Mr. Speaker, this cabinet decision item contains a number of recommendations that could have prevented the current problems in North Battleford. It says, and I quote:

SERM and public health officials have requested enhanced monitoring capabilities including microbiological testing (for) . . . pathogenic bacteria, giardia, (and) cryptosporidia.

Mr. Speaker, last fall SERM and Saskatchewan Health wanted to start testing for cryptosporidia. Why was this request ignored by cabinet?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, what I want to point out once again to the opposition, is very clear. We take our role seriously on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. And that document that they're making reference to, Mr. Speaker, who initiated that document? This government, Mr. Speaker. This government initiated that document because we knew that there was challenges across the province, if not across the country, Mr. Speaker.

And furthermore, not only did we work on that document, Mr. Speaker, but . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only did we put our name to that document, Mr. Speaker, and this is a government strategy, but we also worked very, very hard to try and accomplish some of the objectives associated with that document. And we're not saying that this is an overnight solution, that every problem is going to be solved overnight, Mr. Speaker.

But what I will say is that there is two points I'll make. Number one is that we initiated the document. And number two is, what would we have done in Saskatchewan had we taken their advice and fired those 10 extra people that we hired for water quality monitoring, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cabinet document goes on to say:

At present there is no way for SERM and health districts to have immediate access to each other's databases. Decisions may be delayed as to the proper action to be taken due to the lack of an integrated system. This can subject the public to unnecessary risks.

Mr. Speaker, this is incredible. Back in September the government was told that a lack of communications between departments could lead to slow decisions and unnecessary risks to the public. And isn't that exactly what happened in North Battleford.

Mr. Speaker, why didn't the minister listen to these warnings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, as I've said time and time again, we initiated the document because we could not stick our head in the sand and pretend that this challenge did not exist in the province of Saskatchewan. As a government, we wanted to find out exactly what challenges that we were facing. And we're prepared to put that particular challenge on paper, Mr. Speaker. And it makes reference to the CDI that he speaks about.

And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, is this government did take a proactive stance — we did, Mr. Speaker. Look at the infrastructure dollars that we're spending, Mr. Speaker. Look at some of the increases in Saskatchewan Health with the provincial lab, in terms of trying to get the tests done in a timely fashion.

(14:15)

And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we're putting ten and a half full-time positions, Mr. Speaker, in place to help the communities with their water quality challenges, Mr. Speaker.

So I say to those members across the way, Mr. Speaker, we put that CDI in place. We're going to act on it. We have acted on it. We have a lot more work to do. But we are not going to stick our heads in the sand and pretend this challenge does not exist for this government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This cabinet document also identifies huge potential liability for the government — something that that minister and this government have also denied. It says that Saskatchewan Justice has reviewed the current legislation and has found that the provincial government could be exposed to potential claims for injury or loss stemming from SERM's failure to regulate in its assigned areas.

So not only is the government exposing the people of Saskatchewan to serious health risk, they are exposing Saskatchewan taxpayers to a multi-million-dollar liability risk. Once again, these predictions have come true. A class action suit is being launched and Saskatchewan Justice is saying the province is liable.

Mr. Speaker, why didn't that minister and this government listen to these warnings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this government takes her role very seriously when it comes to water quality.

We are going to work very hard to work alongside the municipalities, with the city, with a number of other organizations to make sure water quality standards are followed and to make sure that we're able to provide safe water to all the residents of Saskatchewan as a whole.

Now what did this government do, Mr. Speaker? Well we responded with a CDI. We said, we've got to look at this. And this is exactly what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. What did this government do? We also increased our funding for infrastructure, Mr. Speaker.

What did this government do? We also increased our staff to SERM, to Health, and to Sask Water, and to a number of other areas to make sure that we're able to have the team in place to respond to some of these challenges, Mr. Speaker.

And what's more amazing, Mr. Speaker, to me, is that we have certainly put that document into place. We want to make sure that we're proactive and we continue moving along in that direction. And if there's improvements to be made, we'll make them.

But what's most amazing, Mr. Speaker, is they voted against the budget to make a good, sound effort to try and resolve this particular issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This cabinet document also clearly shows the NDP was warned about the severity of this problem back in September. They knew that over 100 Saskatchewan communities had deficiencies in their water systems.

They knew that they should have been testing for cryptosporidia. They knew they needed better communications between departments. They knew that a lack of communications could lead to delays and they put the public at risk. They knew the provincial government could be exposed to damage claims as a result of contaminated water.

They knew all of this back in September. And what did they do? Nothing. Well, they went off to have their leadership convention and they put public safety at risk.

Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP ignore the warnings that they themselves issued last September?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, nobody ignored any document, Mr. Speaker, that the cabinet puts in front of all the ministers.

Mr. Speaker, we're . . . it's very important, as I mentioned time and time again. We want to make sure that we take our roles very seriously on this side. In case there's a problem out there, we want to find out about it, Mr. Speaker, and that's why the CDI was designed — to do exactly that. Now we're on our way to making a lot of different efforts to make sure that we alleviate this particular problem.

But what I will say again to the people of Saskatchewan is that in the inquiry that's being planned for the Battlefords area, we have said we welcome the inquiry. As the Minister of SERM, we welcome that because the inquiry will certainly point out a lot of deficiencies in this system. Whether these deficiencies need to be improved through policy improvements, all that particular challenge is in front of us, and we're going to look at that.

But what I will say again, Mr. Speaker, is as the Minister of SERM I'm proud of this government's effort to try and resolve the water quality problems across this province. And I will say again, you voted against that budget; we voted for it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, part of the cabinet decision item required that Saskatchewan Health was to have submitted a report by March 2001 as to the status of progress on these recommendations, and that Sask Water was supposed to have provided a report by March 2001.

Mr. Speaker, has the minister and has the government received either of those two reports?

And while I'm on my feet, I will be more than pleased to table the cabinet document identified as no. 1170-01/CDI.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And once again, as the Minister of SERM, I'm very pleased to stand here and defend this government's efforts towards helping resolve the issue of water quality problems across the province, and certainly trying to help across the nation.

And some of the progress we've made, Mr. Speaker, is 10 additional staff within SERM to help with standards and with testing of water across the province — nothing wrong with that, Mr. Speaker. And I also have here a list of some of the communities that had boil-water advisories last year that are now being improved . . . or being approved for infrastructure funding to help with water quality standards.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial health lab now has an additional four and a half people to help with testing, so testing is able to be done faster, Mr. Speaker. And above all else, Mr. Speaker, we have gone throughout the province and staying on top of the issue and working with a lot of communities to make sure we're able to stay on top of the challenges facing water quality.

And once again, Mr. Speaker, that's progress. They voted against that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for North Battleford

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government refused an emergency debate into the North Battleford water situation. Today the people of North Battleford were shocked when the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced there was no funding for North Battleford. Why don't they accept there is a problem?

Four days ago the federal Liberal government allowed an emergency debate and voted for an opposition motion. The Saskatchewan NDP refused an opposition request for an emergency debate because, in the words of the Government House Leader, it was important the NDP show it couldn't be pushed around. Besides, of course, there's so much important and crucial legislation before us, such as the Bill proclaiming needle-and-thread grass the provincial emblem.

Why the slap in the face?

My question for the Premier. Will he stand in his place and formally overrule his Minister of Municipal Affairs in saying there is nothing for North Battleford? Will he stand in his place and overrule the decision yesterday and follow the example of the federal Liberals in allowing an opposition motion, and vote for it, as he should?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure where that recommendation for no funding came from. Perhaps it was from the former minister of Municipal Affairs. Because, Mr. Speaker, when we met with the people from the community of North Battleford — my hometown, Mr. Speaker — we assured them, the Premier assured them, that we would look at any aspect of any program where we might be able to assist them, sooner rather than later.

We looked into the provincial disaster assistance program and when I was asked by someone whether or not there was money available to that community under that program, I did say no, Mr. Speaker. There wasn't under that program, because the criteria did not apply.

But I did assure the people, as did the Premier, and we will live up to that commitment to do everything we possibly can to resource monies to help that community and help the citizens — not only that community, but throughout the province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on Points of Order

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, before orders of the day I would just like to make a statement with respect to some proceedings yesterday.

Yesterday while the Assembly was considering a motion under rule 46, two points of order were raised. I've had the opportunity to review the record and I'm prepared to rule on both matters.

The first point of order was raised by the Government House Leader concerning the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in seeking leave under rule 46 for this motion. Rule 46 does not require notice but does permit the mover to explain the "urgent and pressing necessity" of his or her motion.

This has been consistently interpreted by the Speaker as a very brief and concise statement indicating why the mover believes the matter is of an urgent and pressing nature to warrant the setting aside of the normal business of the House, along with the reading of the motion itself.

In reviewing the words of the Leader of the Opposition, I find that his comments stretched beyond the normally accepted boundaries. I draw members' attention to a statement by the Speaker on March 16, 1999 wherein it was held that a mover

might not introduce material that is more in the nature of the debate itself when seeking leave under rule 46.

Therefore I find that the point of order is well taken.

A second point of order was raised by the Opposition House Leader in regards to the comments made by the Government House Leader in denying leave under rule 46. The Opposition House Leader then sought to have these comments expunged from the official record.

I wish to point out to members that Speakers in this Assembly have never been authorized to strike matters from the official record. This is the prerogative of the Assembly itself. The request of the Opposition Leader can therefore not be granted.

I do wish to make one further observation on the proceedings of yesterday. The approach taken by the Government House Leader to voice his thoughts were not in order. There is no formal process provided to respond to a request under rule 46 other than a yes or a no.

The Government House Leader could have sought leave to make his explanation. It may seem unfair for the mover of an emergency motion to be able to articulate why he or she believes the matter is of urgent or pressing nature, but for those of opposing views to be precluded from voicing their reasons for denying leave.

However, this is not a matter that the Speaker is authorized to change. Rather I would encourage any member who would like to see a change in the current practice to raise the matter with the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day I ask for leave to introduce a number of motions with respect to changes to committees.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Appointment of Deputy Chair of Committees

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana, that by leave:

Mr. Ron Harper, member for the constituency of Regina Northeast, be appointed to preside as Deputy Chair of Committees of this Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Member on Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I also move, by leave:

That the name of Mr. Warren McCall be substituted for the name of Mr. Lindy Kasperski on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

Motion agreed to.

(14:30)

Substitution of Member on Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I also move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Mr. Warren McCall be substituted for that of Mr. Lindy Kasperski on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Member on Continuing Select Committee

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I also move . . . or Mr. Speaker, I also move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Deb Higgins be substituted for that of Mr. Lindy Kasperski on a list of members comprising the Continuing Select Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Member on Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I also move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Deb Higgins be substituted for that of Mr. Lindy Kasperski on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Member on Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — And finally, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Carolyn Jones be substituted for that of Mr. Lindy Kasperski on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Motion agreed to.

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

Mr. Hermanson: — To ask leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46.

The Speaker: — Would the member kindly read the motion into the record and briefly state the nature of the motion.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think by now all members know the nature of the motion. I will be brief and concise. It calls upon the federal government to work with provinces to put in place a water quality infrastructure program. We've informed the Government House Leader of our intention to move this motion, though we are under no obligation to do so under rule 46.

I understand that in the spirit of co-operation the Premier will second the motion. This is a very serious issue that should be debated by this Assembly without further delay.

So once again I ask for leave to introduce the following motion:

That this Assembly urge the federal government in consultation with provincial governments to develop and fund a national water quality infrastructure program, and that this initiative be added to the agenda of the western Premiers' conference, the annual Premiers' conference, and the next first ministers' meeting.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

National Water Quality Infrastructure Program

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Premier, the member for Saskatoon Riversdale:

That this Assembly urge the federal government in consultation with provincial governments to develop and fund a national water quality infrastructure program, and that this initiative be added to the agenda of the western Premiers' conference, the annual Premiers' conference, and the next first ministers' meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the government for the agreement to this emergency debate and thank them for their co-operation. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, just recently in the federal parliament, the issue of water quality and standards for water was debated in our national parliament. And there was a rather broad consensus, both on the opposition side and the government side, in our federal parliament that there needed to be national standards set for water quality.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the light of that willingness of our federal government to become more involved in the assurance that we have good quality water — which is something that all Canadians expect, certainly all people in Saskatchewan expect — I think that the motion that we are debating today is very, very appropriate; and it gives an opportunity for us at the provincial level, both on the government side and the opposition, to agree to take this a step farther and ask the federal government to show that they will put their money where their mouth is and participate in a national water quality infrastructure program.

And it of course would be funded by municipalities, as now currently happens, by the province, as now currently happens, but also, and more importantly, by the federal government. We

do know that the existing programs are not sufficient to deal with the water quality problems that we have here in Saskatchewan, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, we believe we should strike while the iron is hot.

But furthermore, Mr. Speaker, in light of the leaked cabinet decision item no. 1170-01/CDI, we recognize how badly needed a national water infrastructure program is here in the province of Saskatchewan. We recognize from this document that there are 121 communities in our province that have deficiencies in their water treatment facilities.

Mr. Speaker, people in Saskatchewan are beginning to realize that they cannot trust the glass of water they drink, and we know how much of a basic staple good drinking water is for the people of our province.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan cannot be trusted, as proven by this document, to deal with this issue alone. And again, we need to welcome the federal government to become more involved in ensuring that we have good safe water to drink in our province.

Mr. Speaker, funding is required. I was rather dismayed yesterday as I saw the Minister for Municipal Affairs get up time and time again from his seat and basically say the funding is in place, the situation is being dealt with satisfactorily. Mr. Speaker, the cabinet decision item makes it clear that this is not the case — 121 communities where the water treatment deficiency, not enough money to rectify the problem.

Mr. Speaker, the document indicates that the province has off-loaded on municipalities. Mr. Speaker, we know that municipalities feel like they have been abandoned by this provincial government. We just have to think about the recent budget that this government introduced by the Minister of Finance, one that did not increase revenue-sharing grants with the municipalities after years and years of reduction.

Mr. Speaker, the province has been a participant in creating the water crisis that many communities are experiencing today in this province.

Mr. Speaker, in North Battleford not just a few people have been sick; not a few dozen people have been sick but actually hundreds of people have been sick as a result of drinking the water from that system. Mr. Speaker, there are people in Regina who passed through North Battleford and had a drink of water and they have become sick. There are people in other provinces who have passed through North Battleford and become sick drinking the water.

Mr. Speaker, because of the situation in North Battleford, the focus of not only our province but of the whole country and even beyond the borders of Canada is on the community of North Battleford and wondering why the water system and the treatment of drinking water in that province could have gone so terribly wrong.

Mr. Speaker, not only are the people of North Battleford plagued with unsafe drinking water, but there are 37 boil-water advisories currently in the province of Saskatchewan. Thirty-one communities who do not have safe drinking water and have to boil the water that comes out of the tap before they

can drink it.

And now we learn from this leaked cabinet document that there are 121 communities that have drinking water deficiencies. Mr. Speaker, that is shocking, that is disturbing, and it indicates that we do need a national water infrastructure program funded by three levels of government to deal with the situation.

Mr. Speaker, many existing water treatment works and distribution systems are nearing or have exceeded their operational life. This is again part of the leaked document that the official opposition tabled in the House this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, if you have facilities that have reached or exceeded their operational life, obviously those facilities need to be replaced. And that again requires immediate action. And we are calling on all three levels of government to deal quickly and efficiently in solving this problem.

Mr. Speaker, we find out today that the cabinet of our Government of Saskatchewan knew back on September 22, of last year, that they had a big problem — they had a huge problem.

Mr. Speaker, why is it that a half a year later, more than half a year later, it's the opposition that has to raise this issue in the legislature? Why isn't that government standing up for the people of Saskatchewan? Why haven't they been calling for a national water quality infrastructure program?

Because they knew back in September of last year that they had big, big problems. Why was their strategy, their communication strategy, to say let's just assure everybody that everything is okay and let's pretend that it's not a serious problem.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government needs to improve its infrastructure itself when it comes to dealing with water quality. Not only can we point the finger at municipalities, our cities, towns, and villages, and rural water systems, and farm water supplies and say that there's real concern about the quality of the water and the way that the water is treated, but we recognize from this leaked cabinet document that the Government of Saskatchewan's own infrastructure in dealing with water quality is lax and insufficient.

We read from this document, Mr. Speaker, that the provincial lab is not accredited. And the document expressed real concern that the provincial laboratory itself did not meet national standards.

That, Mr. Speaker, is a horrible revelation of inadequate management by the government. Mr. Speaker, the provincial laboratory that tests our water samples is not an accredited facility. Mr. Speaker. The document that we tabled in the House today goes on to say that, as a province, we are unable to monitor for cryptosporidia among other impurities in our water system.

Mr. Speaker, we're unable to deal with the problem that has contaminated the water of one of our major cities, the city of North Battleford.

Mr. Speaker, the document goes on in an indictment of this

government and says that the database that they use to handle the dealing of . . . the handling of information with regards to water quality is outdated. We have a database system that isn't doing the job, isn't providing adequate service to the people of Saskatchewan.

And then, Mr. Speaker, and something that again became obvious because of the North Battleford crisis, the document back in September of last year indicates that there is no good way to communicate between SERM and Sask Health. You imagine the two departments that the people of Saskatchewan have to trust — have to trust their very lives with, Mr. Speaker, that that water that they're drinking out of their taps is safe — don't even know how to communicate, don't even know how to pass data back and forth between them.

And the document points out that there could be a real time lag after a problem occurs before it's identified and dealt with properly. Mr. Speaker, the government itself has a deficit in infrastructure when it comes to the treatment of water.

Mr. Speaker, we need this issue raised amongst first ministers in light of the irresponsible actions of the NDP government across the way.

The cabinet document item presented . . . was presented by several people, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure the people of Saskatchewan will hold them accountable for their inaction in this regard of not dealing with the quality of Saskatchewan water and ensuring people that their water was safe.

Mr. Speaker, the minister for SERM is a presenter of this document. No wonder he doesn't want to discuss blame, Mr. Speaker. He knew, and he admits in the document that we were susceptible to a Walkerton type of crisis.

Mr. Speaker, it was in the document last September, even though today in question period, he denied that that was the case. In fact, his own document revealed that over half a year ago we were vulnerable, long before the North Battleford issue rose to the surface.

Not only was the minister responsible for SERM aware of what was going on and responsible, Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for Sask Water was also a presenter of this cabinet document. Mr. Speaker, he's still the minister responsible for Sask Water. He knew and did not stand up and warn the people of Saskatchewan that we had serious problems ensuring that we had safe drinking water in our province.

Mr. Speaker, another person's name who was on the document was the associate minister of Health — no longer in cabinet but in the cabinet at that time — and, Mr. Speaker, the associate minister of Health last year in this House assured the people of Saskatchewan, and I read from *Hansard*, May 25, 2000, that:

Saskatchewan has a very good tracking system and a follow-up system.

(14:45)

Mr. Speaker, that's in direct contradiction to the evidence provided in the cabinet document. And, Mr. Speaker, as she

goes on to say that:

If the results have higher than acceptable levels of contamination, repeat testing is done as soon as possible . . . And an appropriate action is initiated immediately, such as a boiling water advisory to the communities.

Mr. Speaker, she was asked a similar question by the member from Indian Head-Milestone. She kept repeating assurances that our drinking water was safe and that the monitoring was efficiently handled. And finally at the end of the questioning she said:

What I have said is that Saskatchewan has a very good tracking system and follow-up.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, as the cabinet document revealed, our own infrastructure in the provincial government, the departments of SERM and Health, are insufficient to allow her to make that kind of a commitment to the people of Saskatchewan.

Not only was the minister for SERM aware of this document, not only was the minister responsible for Sask Water aware of this document, not only was the associate minister of Health aware of this document but, Mr. Speaker, the member from North Battleford was a member of that cabinet. He sat at the cabinet table when that document was discussed. He knew that drinking water was not safe in Saskatchewan. He knew that there was 121 communities that had insufficient water treatment facilities and he did not raise his voice.

I do not know why the member from North Battleford was silent for these many, many months, Mr. Speaker, but he chose not to raise the issue and warn the people of Saskatchewan that we need a national quality infrastructure program in this country. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that his constituents in North Battleford will have a lot of questions for him after it's revealed today that he sat at the cabinet table, saw this document, and did not raise the alarm bells and warn the people of Saskatchewan.

Also the Minister of Education sat at that table and was aware of that document, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education is a medical doctor. He knew what cryptosporidia was. He knew what some of the problems could be if this situation was not dealt with. And the member for Saskatoon Northwest, the Minister of Education, sat silent and didn't warn the people of Saskatchewan about the impending danger and the sickness that could result from not warning the people of Saskatchewan about the inability that we have as a province to ensure that our drinking water is safe.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I could also mention the current Minister of Health who was a minister in that cabinet that sat around the table. The former premier obviously was aware of the problem. And possibly, Mr. Speaker, the current Premier was aware of the problem because at the time he was an employee of Executive Council and adviser to the premier, and we believe very, very aware of what was going on around the cabinet table.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are many, many people that have a lot of answers to provide to the people of Saskatchewan about why

our water is not safe.

Mr. Speaker, we need more, and we need better water quality infrastructure. Much of it is worn out. We are prone to Walkerton type of crisis.

SERM, we understand, Mr. Speaker, is liable, is legally liable for any damage suits that may be brought against it because of its inability to ensure that our water is safe. The testing of our water is not meeting the requirements that SERM has set forward. There is not compliance to the degree that compliance is supposed to occur. And that means that SERM, according to the Saskatchewan Department of Justice, is legally liable for damages and harm caused by impure water.

Mr. Speaker, water quality is of importance and is of prime concern to all Canadians, no less so here in Saskatchewan. I'm encouraged that our federal counterparts are concerned about water. And I wish, Mr. Speaker, that our government here in Saskatchewan, the NDP, would show the same concern and would show some respect for the people of Saskatchewan by dealing honestly with them and straightforwardly with them with regard to the quality of water and the lack of the ability of this province to ensure that our water is safe.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the Premier has agreed to second the motion today, because in seconding this motion the Premier has provided himself an opportunity to very immediately address this problem. He can come clean with the people of Saskatchewan. He has the opportunity to say that the government has made mistakes, and he has the opportunity to talk about how he will rectify the problem. But you can't fix a problem, Mr. Speaker, until you recognize there is a problem and that you're responsible for it.

Mr. Speaker, this cabinet . . . the leaked cabinet document shows without a shadow of a doubt that this government is responsible for the quality of water. It shows that they were aware of the lack of ensuring that our water quality was good. Without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, this government was aware, we know that clearly. They were aware of the entire situation. They recognized that Saskatchewan's water was like a ticking bomb ready to explode. Well one blew up in North Battleford, Mr. Speaker, and others may blow up in the near future, given the evidence from this document.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Premier has agreed to second this motion, and I call on him to address the concerns of the people of Saskatchewan, to address the concern that was raised in his very own cabinet document that we have discussed today.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move, seconded by the Premier, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale:

That this Assembly urge the federal government, in consultation with provincial governments, to develop and fund a national water quality infrastructure program; and that this initiative be added to the agenda of the Western Premiers' conference, the annual Premiers' conference, and the next first ministers' meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is . . . I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to second the motion that has been moved by the Leader of the Opposition calling upon the federal government to develop — as the motion reads — a national water quality infrastructure program applicable to communities across Canada, and also that discussion about these issues be included on the agenda of the Western Premiers' conference, the annual Premiers' conference, and the next first ministers' meeting.

Mr. Speaker, I want to express a word of appreciation to the Leader of the Opposition, and particularly to the House Leader who forwarded notice of this proposal to my office by way of a copy of a letter to the House Leader yesterday at four in the afternoon. That was much appreciated. It gave us a change to look at the motion that would be made today, an opportunity we did not have yesterday, Mr. Speaker. And I much appreciated to have the opportunity to look at the motion and therefore to be able to make some decision about my own view of the motion and what we might do as a government and a caucus in light of that motion.

I may say also, Mr. Speaker, that I think this process has worked well because when the motion was initially brought to us it proposed reference of this issue, not to the Western Premiers' conference. And I was pleased that I could suggest through my House Leader to the House Leader opposite and the members of the opposition that it seemed to me, particularly as I had this opportunity to chair the Western Premiers' conference later this month, that this too would be an important venue for this discussion to occur and opposition has agreed. And we were able to, I think, strengthen the motion as a result of a conversation and a dialogue.

And so I think what will come today from our legislature . . . I am confident will come as a motion from this legislature calling upon our national government to establish the infrastructure program that the motion proposes, and that we would seek to have these issues discussed at the various conferences we've talked about.

I may say, Mr. Speaker, I will have some ability, I hope, as Chair of the Western Premiers, to bring this issue to that table.

The planning for the Premier's conference will occur in August when the agendas will be set and we'll be working with my colleagues across country for the Premier's conference. But if I may say just to inform the House that when it comes to the agenda of the first ministers' meeting, that agenda is set by the Prime Minister. We will certainly be sure that our voice is heard but that is his agenda and he will set it. But hopefully, it will include this important issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Leader of the Opposition and his comments to this resolution. I appreciate, of course, the genuine call that we're all making for a national infrastructure program around water issues. Much of his remarks this afternoon focused on discussion of the document that was identified in question period and I expect there will be further discussion, both in the media and in this House, about this document.

But let me say this just in general principle, Mr. Speaker. It appears to me, having not seen this document, it appears to me that officials in this government, at a variety of levels, were identifying issues and problems as early as last fall — as early as last fall. I would not want to lead a government that did not have officials who were identifying for the elected sitting in the cabinet room the issues that are present in the province.

From those identification of issues, Mr. Speaker, whether it's through the document or this draft document or whether it's a document at all, but obviously through the identification of issues around water in our province that sets some of the foundation for legislative program and budget planning.

And I think it's entirely fair to say — and I'm sure even the Leader of the Opposition would agree with me — that in this current budget under debate in this legislature, there is evidence of this government taking steps to deal with some of the identified issues.

Now are the steps complete? Are they totally sufficient? Likely not, Mr. Speaker. But surely no one can say that having had a problem identified, there has not been action taken.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And in regard to that action, Mr. Speaker, while I and members of the legislature and members of the public have heard almost on a daily basis since the Minister of Finance introduced the budget — almost on a daily basis — particularly the member from Saltcoats stand in his seat and tell us, and tell us, that we should not be putting in place new public servants in the province of Saskatchewan; that we should not be putting in place the new social workers called for by the member from Humboldt; that we should not be putting in place the new Highways workers called for by the member from Cypress Hills; and not putting in place therefore the new lab people to deal with water quality.

So I ask members of the opposition, is it your view today — the view that you've held all through the budget debate — that we should in fact not put these people in place to deal with water quality in the province? I think that question deserves an answer from members of the opposition who at least until today have taken the position they should not be put in place.

Now that said, Mr. Speaker, I had opportunity this week to spend a short period of time with the mayor, council, city administration, and other citizens — both formally and informally — in the community of North Battleford.

I want to say to the member from Battleford who stood in his place today and picked up on the misinformation that is in the press today. I want to make it very clear, in our conversations with the mayor and city council of North Battleford, we had discussed a wide number of issues including if I may say, Mr. Speaker, the mayor and the city council's appreciation that we have put in place a judicial inquiry to discover the facts of the matter here. I'm told not supported by the member from Battleford but clearly supported by the mayor and the city council.

In that discussion, in that discussion, Mr. Speaker, the mayor

and city council . . . we talked about a number of potential, potential solutions to the infrastructure problem in North Battleford. The mayor and council asked a very, very specific question of our minister of Municipal Government. The question being very specific: could the community of North Battleford receive benefit under the provincial disaster assistance program? A very narrowly focused but existing program.

It was a fair question. The minister said he would, with his officials, check the program and see if this was an opportunity that could help. In fact, the provisions of that specific program does not apply in this circumstance and the minister of Municipal Government reported that yesterday.

This has been misinterpreted by the press and I fear by the member from Battleford today in the House. That he said, Mr. Speaker, as the member chirps from his seat . . . Didn't say a word about this problem, I notice, for a week in this House, not a week, didn't say a word. Now he wants to speak from his seat.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is under that specific program, funding cannot be available for this purpose. And that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well he can speak all he wants. It's about time.

Does that mean that no funding is available? Not at all, Mr. Speaker. And even as we speak, our officials, officials in the city of North Battleford, our minister, the mayor and council are in conversation about potential opportunities that we might have.

(15:00)

Now it is a circumstance like North Battleford that raises attention, not just provincially, but nationally. And this morning I think many of us heard reports on the radio about the number of boiled-water advisories in the province of Newfoundland. I'm told well over 200 in the province of Newfoundland. It is not just a problem for Saskatchewan communities, as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, it is a problem for communities across the nation.

And, Mr. Speaker, therefore it is, I believe, appropriate that we from this legislature call upon our national government to put in place a national infrastructure program to assist communities across the nation in dealing with this circumstance.

I think we all realize, Mr. Speaker, that water is not confined by our human boundaries in this land. That those particularly of us who draw our water from surface waters, know that that water crosses borders and boundaries — flows interprovincially. And therefore, I think, another good argument for a national infrastructure program to deal with water quality.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased that in many ways Saskatchewan has led the way. The first, I am told, the first province to commit to infrastructure through the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program. The first province to commit to infrastructure to our communities to deal with water quality issues. And we're going to hear more about that later this week. The minister has talked about it. I'm pleased that we've taken some leadership here.

I am pleased today to be joining with the Leader of the Opposition in seconding this motion and would be pleased to vote for it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join into this debate.

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

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, with leave for the introduction of guests please.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the member for North Battleford for yielding.

I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all members of the Assembly three gentlemen that are seated in the Speaker's gallery: Mr. Glen Burns, Mr. Bill Woods, and Mr. Rob Lobdell.

These gentlemen represent the West Central Road & Rail group out of the west central area of Saskatchewan where myself and the Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition reside. And they have done a great deal to assist in the whole difficult question of grain transportation in that area.

And I would want all members of the Assembly to welcome them here this afternoon. And also to pay a little bit of tribute to the ongoing work, unpaid work, that they have been doing on behalf of producers in west central Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I want to join with my colleague, the member from Kindersley, in welcoming our guests to the legislature. I know that the Premier and myself will be meeting with them later this afternoon and we're looking forward to a very productive meeting.

So I join with my colleague, on behalf of the government, in welcoming our guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

National Water Quality Infrastructure Program (continued)

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to

members who have kindly allowed me to participate early in this debate. As I think most members are aware, there is a public meeting in North Battleford this evening that I'm anxious to attend.

I also want to say that I appreciate the fact that the Premier and some of the ministers have visited North Battleford this week. And it was appreciated. But I have to say that it is not a good mark for this province that the federal government and the federal parliament, the Parliament of Canada, was so much quicker to respond than was this legislature.

I'm pleased that this debate is proceeding today. But in Ottawa the federal government set an example for us by allowing an emergency debate sponsored by the opposition to proceed, and what's more, the government voted for that emergency motion.

Now it's taken us four days longer than the federal government to catch up. I don't think that speaks well for us, but nonetheless, I am pleased that we now too recognize as a body — not as political parties, but as elected representatives — the seriousness of this issue and the importance we deal with it for all the people of Saskatchewan and all the people of Canada. And certainly although I represent a community particularly under the spotlight now and having particular needs, I think we all know that the entire of Canada is going to be facing similar issues and we need to deal with our infrastructure now.

It is an irony that Canada has more fresh water than any other nation in the world. We have over 20 per cent of the world's fresh water. One of the defining characteristics and qualities of our great nation are the mighty rivers and the huge lakes that dot our entire landscape.

Yet in spite of that fact, we now find that we are increasingly unable to guarantee to Canadians, especially those who do not live in the larger cities, the birthright of a safe, clean, water system supply.

Well I am pleased that this debate is proceeding today, and I am pleased that we are endorsing the concept of national standards. Mr. Speaker, one-half of the communities in Canada which are facing boil-water orders are in the province of Newfoundland. I point out that fact because I think it makes it clear that without national standards the smaller, poorer provinces will inevitably be left behind. Safe, clean water should be a birthright of all Canadians and should not be dependent on the wealth of the province in which we happen to live.

So we in Saskatchewan should be very anxious to have the federal government come in. Members of the government have mentioned the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program. Now that is some \$187 million over the next five years. Most of it is going to go to water and waste-water programs. I was pleased to be a signatory of that program. Certainly it's important. But I think we know that that program alone is simply not going to be able to address the full magnitude of the problem.

For example, Mr. Speaker, replacement of the sewage treatment plant in North Battleford alone is \$13 million. Now that's just the sewage treatment plant. That isn't the water treatment plant. And of course North Battleford is just one smaller city in this

country so that gives us some idea of the magnitude that is going to be required if we're going to address this for the whole of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we in North Battleford have been through a lot and from all reports I'm receiving we are probably going to be boiling water and buying water for at least another month. We appreciate the support we have received from other communities and from corporations which have brought water to North Battleford. And we don't want any other community in this province to have to face both the difficulties and the negative publicity with which we are now having to deal with. We hope that no other community in this province will have to face the crisis that we have faced.

One of the things I would like to see instituted immediately is cryptosporidium testing, mandatory and regular, throughout the province. The government has announced a judicial inquiry. That is appropriate as I said in this House on Monday. But we do not need a judicial inquiry to tell us that there is a gap in our testing because we are not testing for cryptosporidium. We know that it is now necessary that all public water systems be tested for crypto.

And I asked the Department of the Environment to immediately add crypto testing as mandatory and regular throughout the province of Saskatchewan. I call on the provincial government to put that into place immediately.

And I think that is one thing that will be essential if we are to avoid other problems in this province similar to the one my community is now facing.

Mr. Speaker, the issue was raised by the Premier about special grants for North Battleford. The Minister of Municipal Affairs was asked today if there was any funding for North Battleford, and he said no. Today, in the House, he said well that was only referring to one program, disaster assistance; and that the provincial government will look at other possible areas in which they can provide assistance for North Battleford.

And, Mr. Speaker, I take the minister at his word and we in North Battleford will be looking for positive response. I was trying to get hold of the Minister of Municipal Affairs this morning for some clarification of his words. When they came over the radio, I wanted some clarification. I wasn't able to get through to him. And I appreciate him now saying that it's only disaster assistance funding that has been denied, that he will look elsewhere for funding.

I hold him at his word. I hold the Premier at his word. And we will expect positive response for funding for North Battleford upgrades to water treatment and sewage treatment.

Some members here have been wondering why I have not been louder about the North Battleford water issue. Some people have gone so far as to suggest the fact I have not spoken more about it is out of character for me. I must say that in North Battleford there has not been the same surprise.

In my community, Mr. Speaker, the residents of North Battleford are dealing with two separate issues. One, they are dealing with the water and the problems of gastroenteritis which

come from the water; they're dealing with the fact that so many of us had family from home for the Easter holiday and then went back and, to our embarrassment, were sick. So we're dealing with the issues of contaminated water.

But quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we are also dealing with the negative publicity which is also a source of upset to our community.

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that on almost every news report on the water issue the name of North Battleford has been linked to that of Walkerton. In point of fact, Mr. Speaker, there is no comparison.

In the case of Walkerton it was an outbreak of E. coli which is potentially, and was in the case of Walkerton, fatal in some cases. We have been dealing with cryptosporidium which I can personally say is uncomfortable, but it is not fatal. And now I am very pleased that the authorities have confirmed there have been no deaths in North Battleford from the water situation.

So it's distressing to us though that media reports have linked North Battleford with Walkerton. And we are aware that long after the all-clear signal has been given on our water, we will still have to deal with the negative publicity attached to the name of North Battleford. And we want to assure the people of Saskatchewan, the people of Canada, our American friends who travel on the Yellowhead to Alaska, that the Battlefords is a great place to visit and a safe place to visit.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents believe that hysteria has been fomented in some of the media reports. And I know that they would not want to do that.

Mr. Speaker, one of the frustrations of life that North Battleford residents now deal with is that to line up at a water depot to get water also involves being asked to conduct a media interview and having a microphone and a TV camera shoved in one's face.

Now I'm in public life. Doing media interviews is part of the career I have chosen. But most of my constituents are private people dealing with a crisis and quite frankly, they find it upsetting when they go to get water for their families that being asked questions about the water, being potentially on the national news and their frustration laid out there for all the world to see. This is not the life they have chosen. They simply want our community back. They want the safe, quiet, happy community they chose to live in when they settled in the Battlefords.

(15:15)

So I say to all members of this House, I appreciate the support you are giving the Battlefords today. I also say to all members of this House, we must recognize that the best guarantee of safe, clean water for the people of Saskatchewan is if the federal government does acknowledge this is a birthright of all Canadians.

And I also assure the people of this House that while we deeply appreciate the support we have received from people across this province and this nation, it is not our wish that the residents of

any other community in Saskatchewan or Canada will have to deal with what we are presently dealing with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I too welcome the opportunity to enter into this debate. And the hon. member from North Battleford said he was talking about his community; he's also talking about my community. It's our community that has caused the reason for us to come to this debate and has created a great deal of concern.

It's also an opportunity, in getting into a debate, to clarify. And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this does happen. Why would I, coming from a community that I have deep concern for, where some of my roots still are, to say that no, unequivocally I refuse to do anything to help that community. I would not say that.

And as we all know, Mr. Speaker, there are words that are spoken by members opposite who might take advantage of a situation to create a situation making it appear much worse than it is, or try to destroy credibility when there is a question of credibility perhaps, throughout other areas as well.

Mr. Speaker, there have been programs in place to address these situations. This province two years ago . . . and these are some of the facts that people opposite and some people will refuse to accept the fact that there has been a proactive approach taken.

Can I . . . would you like me to . . . You know, in 1999-2000, in 1999-2000, it was the province that put up \$20 million for infrastructure programs, not the federal government. The federal government didn't do it. The province had already recognized the need for infrastructure program. This happened.

Guess what, Mr. Speaker. That was the funding that primed the pump to attract the federal government to enter into perhaps a larger program which we now have today and that people from all over this province have access to and have accessed for green programs, for programs where there have been concerns raised about their infrastructure, their water. Mr. Speaker, this has been in place, and communities have taken advantage of it.

Tomorrow there will be an announcement with the federal minister on the massive projects that have been underway in this province and will continue to occur, monies that have already been invested, those communities throughout the province — and I have lists of those communities — that have applied for those programs and were given high priority if in fact they fell into the boil-water advisory or precautionary measure program.

I mean those are facts. And I know that there are people there that have benefited from those programs and that have accessed that funding, that appreciate it and recognize that there has been an effort by the province.

This program was successfully negotiated with the federal government to have this in place — that's a proactive move. Provincial support for this particular program, Mr. Speaker, over the next five years, will be \$56.7 million. That's not small

change. So that's something that will help work, will help assist these green infrastructure, including water and wastewater. And that is the first priority of this total program. They will receive at least, at a minimum, 50 per cent available funding under that particular program, Mr. Speaker.

North Battleford had applied for and had received approval to enhance its water supply with two wells. That project being approved, North Battleford now has the option of changing its application to upgrade the sewage treatment plant. And that would be considered and any future applications under this program would be supported.

There are four more years of this program, Mr. Speaker, that are still available. And North Battleford would have access to funding under that particular program.

As I mentioned just a little earlier, tomorrow the province and the federal government will announce projects. To date, under that particular CSIP (Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program) program, and without scooping that particular announcement, Mr. Speaker, I can say that 75 per cent of the federal and provincial funding approved to date will support water and waste water projects throughout Saskatchewan and a number of communities.

People forget as well, Mr. Speaker, that in 2000-2001 the province also committed the municipal component of the Centenary Fund, Mr. Speaker, which provides \$5 million per year over a four-year period, once again to support municipal infrastructure programs.

Between 1994, Mr. Speaker, and 1998, the federal government and the provincial governments, in total, in a tri-part infrastructure program, invested \$167 million over the life of that particular program.

In the recent budget, there was an announcement of over a million dollars of new spending to improve the laboratory facilities at Sask Health. That will offer more comprehensive sampling for municipalities and increase the resources for SERM's drinking water program so they can increase inspections, more effectively monitor the compliance results of municipalities, and respond to drinking water problems. Something that the opposition, for reasons I cannot understand, did not support.

Sask Water, in co-operation with Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management and Health, is continuing to consult with municipalities. This will result in a cost estimate to improve the ability of more than 500 municipal water treatment systems in the province to produce safe drinking water. Sask Water, as well, is working very closely with Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities in undertaking this assessment.

And, Mr. Speaker, we've been talking primarily about the commitment of monies to these various programs. Well money is only a part of it. It's the resource people. It's people that need to be present to undertake these programs, to react and respond and assist communities where they need assistance.

As part of the responsibilities for Sask Water, they sent a

detailed survey, Mr. Speaker, to all municipalities that operate drinking water to learn about what kind of systems they do have in place, how it is operated and maintained, and what kinds of problems they encounter. This is a proactive measure, Mr. Speaker, that has already been implemented.

Sask Water is also very active, Mr. Speaker, with helping rural residents with understanding the quality of their drinking water and what they can do about it. Sask Water has, for the past three years, offered a program where, for a fee of \$100, private residents can have a water technician come to the site, take a water sample, and have it analyzed on their behalf for private wells.

When the results of the analysis are known, Sask Water writes a letter to the client describing the quality of their water and provides them with . . . and advises them on how they can treat it to meet provincial drinking water guidelines. They also provide comments about how their source can be protected from surface water contamination. This is all part of a proactive program that has been in place, Mr. Speaker.

We have new initiatives in place for testing municipal water systems and we have programs in place to provide advice to rural residents and Saskatchewan communities on their water needs, Mr. Speaker.

We now have a new Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program that places emphasis on water and waste water treatment projects. And you will learn more about these approved projects that were approved under this program, and that will be tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

We are already working with the federal government; we are already funding high priority water and waste water projects in Saskatchewan. The quality of water and health of the Saskatchewan public is an extremely high priority. And I support, Mr. Speaker, an active approach to ensure that it remains so.

Mr. Speaker, earlier there was an additional expenditure of \$720,000 committed, including the 10.5 full-time people to work in this area of determining quality and ensuring that our citizens had safe drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, programs of that nature and others, on a proactive — and I say proactive — action that has been taken by the province to work with all the communities that have a concern has been recognized by the federal government in this province. The federal government recognized that money was needed for infrastructure; they signed an agreement with Saskatchewan.

Now they recognize that the quality of water is an issue that needs to be addressed nationally — not only in Saskatchewan, not only in North Battleford, not only in Ituna, not only in Hubbard, or Grayson, or Neudorf or Killaly, but throughout the country and other provinces as well, Mr. Speaker. And it's something that the federal government is recognizing and we're going to work with them.

And, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion that's been brought before this House, and I will be supporting it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Before I recognize the member for Arm River, why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I'm asking leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for graciously delaying his speech for a few seconds.

In the west gallery, Mr. Speaker, is a friend of ours, a young lady, Kaitlyn Stocks, who graces this Assembly with her presence from time to time when she's not in school. I'm delighted to introduce her today, and to share that she has a keen interest in governance issues of the province. And is always watching and learning, and even offering up suggestions for how we can do things better. I ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming Kaitlyn Stocks.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

National Water Quality Infrastructure Program (continued)

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today as a Sask Water critic to address one of the most serious situations that has occurred in Saskatchewan in recent memory.

The affected water in North Battleford represents a serious threat throughout being a resident in that city and around the province. So I strongly support the motion made by the member from Rosetown-Biggar, and seconded by the Premier, and believe that the federal government with support from the provincial government develop a national water quality infrastructure program.

Residents of Saskatchewan deserve the utmost attention in light of this serious situation. This infected water situation is not isolated. There are other communities in Saskatchewan which also have boil-water advisories as a result of contaminated drinking water, and as we're informed now, that there is 121 communities that have unsafe drinking water.

We now have to look at the entire province and its water treatment infrastructure. There are scores of communities around the province whose water treatment plants are inaccurate, are aging, and will require replacement very soon. And we will need help from all aspects. We will need help from the federal government, from the provincial government, to begin the process of replacing these old systems. And, Mr. Speaker, this will clearly run into tens of millions of dollars.

Clearly the time has run out for mere dialogue to begin to address this issue. Ask the residents in North Battleford if discussion will solve their current crisis, would offer . . . these

residents simply demand action by their elected officials, whether it be the local, provincial, or federal.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Walkerton, Ontario know full well the worry that the residents in this present situation are feeling. I quote the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* from the issue of Saturday, May 5, the caption:

'What lessons have we learned?'

'News of a Sask. tragedy sends chills through the residents of Walkerton.'

This article goes on to quote people from Walkerton who are clearly upset by this latest water situation. You know:

"(Walkerton) was a big wake-up call but nobody seems to have done a lot about it," (quotes) Bruce Davidson, who speaks for the group Concerned Walkerton Citizens.

"Are people still viewing (Walkerton) as an isolated incident, a tragic one-time event?"

"It was almost exactly a year ago that seven people died and 2,300 fell ill in this mid-western Ontario town."

I asked them what has been done since that tragedy to safeguard the drinking water across this province. The federal government seems to think it's provincial responsibility, while the provincial government indicates it's a municipal government responsibility.

Indeed the infected water problem in North Battleford has raised so many questions as to who is responsible. The rumours have flourished over who knew what, when, and what was done about it.

(15:30)

Yesterday a radio report suggested some residents in this case have begun the legal process against both the local and provincial levels of government. This is an indicator of the level of frustration the people in this city are feeling presently.

Currently it is a small step in the right direction that the federal government passed a resolution a couple of days ago calling for national water quality standards. But this does little to address the concern of the cost of renewing a water treatment plant infrastructure across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, to even suggest for a moment that local municipalities be completely responsible for the cost and maintenance of new water treatment facilities is absurd. This provincial government has been off-loading to local government for so long that there is simply no money left. Funding since 1991 has been cut by over 56 per cent to municipal funding.

This government would rather spend millions of dollars to create government jobs rather than help municipal governments save lives. You might remember that we made a motion to cancel 570 new positions and give the municipalities this money to assist them. But no, Mr. Speaker, this motion was

defeated by the government. And ask the residents of North Battleford which is more important to them, more government jobs or good water quality?

Municipalities are even further under pressure as the result of the rising energy costs for which there seems to be no relief from this provincial government. It is possible that due to lack of funding from the provincial government, local governments have little money left in which to train staff in this very important duty of maintaining existing water treatment plants.

In the case of small villages, local volunteers . . . in many cases of small villages, local volunteers such as village councillors or mayors have to look after these very important duties, despite the fact that they lack the proper qualifications. Local governments simply cannot afford to always hire a fully trained technician for the most important residential safety concern, Mr. Speaker.

It is with all this in mind, the local governments cannot begin to entertain the thought of spending thousands and thousands of dollars to spend . . . to improve or replace their important water treatment facilities. Because, Mr. Speaker, the money is simply not there.

I must speculate that this issue is much larger than it could appear to be. Many of the residents in my constituency have been discussing this situation among themselves. Some are beginning to say that what has previously been assumed to be a simple case of flu virus passing through a community could possibly be at times a drop in water quality due to changing circumstances in the water treatment plant. How many times did we hear all over Saskatchewan, people are saying, I hear there's a vicious flu bug going around? Mr. Speaker, that could be, is it really the flu or the beginning of a time bomb ready to go off?

In my capacity as Sask Water critic, I must carefully look that the taxpayers' dollars are spent in the critical area of water quality, water management, and overall water concerns. When we look at this issue, such as serious as contaminated drinking water, we must also look at how Sask Water has spent millions of dollars in the past.

I would suggest to this House that millions and millions of dollars, which could have gone in towards rebuilding our water treatment facilities, have been spent on foolish investments and completely failed business ventures such as SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) — millions of dollars lost. And now with the Sask Valley Potato Corp., more money being spent on new equipment, rented land, and the list goes on, of which of course is taxpayer money.

It's something I would like to mention, what the mandate . . . when Sask Water was first brought in, in 1984, the mandate of the corporation is to ensure adequate, reliable, and safe water resources for the benefit of the people of Saskatchewan now and in the future.

So I suggest that Sask Water has their hands full just filling that mandate and not going into side ventures. And if this government insists on going into potato ventures, they should hand it over to CIC or Agriculture, and just do what their

mandate is — and that is ensure that the people have safe, reliable drinking water.

You know, Mr. Speaker, water is the very essence of life. Indeed without it, life cannot exist, you know. And the government seems, unfortunately . . . and I can also mention other things like IQ&A, and Clickabid, and all the other countless ventures this government seems so intent on investing. We must focus this money on issues such as water quality immediately.

People across Saskatchewan are scared. My constituents are talking about these days, they will, you know, it's being asked now: will my town be next? This is where the government should be taking its first priority.

You know the citizens of North Battleford are bravely, bravely weathering this current serious situation. The community has pulled together and is helping one another to get through this crisis. I honour the citizens and applaud the efforts of various businesses in bringing in bottled water to assist the many people who need it so desperately.

These people need all the help that we can give them as their elected officials. In addition to the obvious serious health concerns here, this tragedy is also impacting on the economy of this community in a big way. Highway traffic and tourists are going straight through the city and not stopping to spend their money on meals and other activities which support the economy.

I urge this government to take the steps that are necessary to pressure the federal government on the many serious issues that have risen out of this serious situation. I would ask that the Premier himself should be going to Ottawa immediately to discuss this important issue with the Prime Minister. Anything less than this would indicate to the people of Saskatchewan this government does not rate drinking water quality as number one priority, Mr. Speaker.

Going across many of the stuff I keep as Sask Water critic, I came across something that over two centuries ago Benjamin Franklin made a quote. He said:

We do not know the true value of water until the well runs dry.

Well he could almost change that quote as to we do not know the true value of water until it is unsafe to drink, Mr. Speaker.

I also would like to comment on Monday I was not in the House, as some members might have noticed. I was in Saskatoon at a safe drinking water production in rural areas. And there was a couple of speakers there that were very interesting. One was a Susan Watson from Environment Canada, and another one was a Dr. Shay Fout from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

They were talking about toxic compounds in water and plus viruses in surface and groundwater, Mr. Speaker, and they were raising quite a few issues and concerns, especially Dr. Shay. And all we have to do is think back to, I think it was, Milwaukee when there was hundreds of lives lost there in a

breakout there.

But talking about some of the testing that's being done and out in rural Saskatchewan, even though there is not very much testing being done, they feel that 40 per cent, 40 per cent of water being used is groundwater and possibly 20 per cent of the wells out there right now are unsafe to drink, Mr. Speaker.

You know, when a person looks at the water —and we have abundance of good, clear water as the member for North Battleford mentions — you look at it and you think it's clear and clean. But right now even in this water that has gone through the Regina treatment plant, the doctors have said that there's virus and toxins in this water, although most of them do not affect humans. But it is a little scary when you don't know exactly what's in the water out there.

There's one other issue. When the Premier had mentioned there about the document we had, if we . . . he seemed to indicate that these officials shouldn't be doing what they were doing. And I applaud them for what they were doing. My concern is though, when they presented this to cabinet, did the cabinet look at this? This is what we're questioning, this document on it. Did they act on it?

One of the recommendations in it was Sask Water was supposed to evaluate the current state of infrastructure for all municipalities and communal private systems to determine upgrade requirements to meet safe drinking water objectives. Sask Water Corporation provide leadership in this and will report back to the government. Now I ask the Premier, did he . . . (inaudible) . . . one of the things Sask Water is doing? That's one of the things I think we need to be looking at out there right now, to find out how much money is needed to upgrade these facilities in each of these communities so they meet safe drinking water standards. That is a very important issue and it's an issue that's going to keep coming up.

And I hope Sask Water will follow this recommendation in this report. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will support the motion.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And certainly is a pleasure for me to enter into the debate with regard to how we can form partnerships between municipal, provincial, and federal governments in providing safe quality water to the people of Saskatchewan.

When we look at the issues of water quality and the history of water quality and how municipalities and indeed civilizations have developed safe sources of water for their communities, I like to look back to one of my professors in epidemiology when he related the story of the classic, the classic example of how they discovered the source of contaminated water, which almost was the highlight in terms in creating some of the epidemiology used by public health systems today.

And he talked about a certain well in a particular area, a borough of London at the time. We're talking several hundred years ago. And what they found was that a community, that part of London, became contaminated with an infection. That infection produced diarrhea, multiple deaths, and what it was related to was cholera, Mr. Speaker.

And what they found was that when they started putting little dots on a map to see where the incident and index cases were located, they found that all of those people shared one thing in common — they all got their water from the same well in London. And this, Mr. Speaker, was the beginning of epidemiology in public health that we see today. It created the ingredients that we look at. And it's not much different than how we look at situations today in determining where and what the causes are for particular illnesses in the public health sector.

Now when we look at the particular case of North Battleford with the initial incident of some diarrhea in the community, a case of crypto analyzed, diagnosed by a laboratory, and then subsequent cases to show that perhaps there was a contamination of the water source. And then all of the things that pointed to that — the timing of the advisories on boiling water, the timing of the alerts on making sure that it was a requirement to boil your water and all of that information that was subsequently provided, show how some of the checks and balances, though not perfect, were working to a certain extent within North Battleford.

When we look at the situation in Saskatchewan today, Mr. Speaker, we have multiple sources of water used by communities throughout this great province. We have water that comes from rivers, from lakes, from well waters. We're looking at sources where there can be contamination from surface water. There can be contamination from animals that carry many different parasites and bacteria in their bowels, and potential contamination for lots of people in the province who potentially could drink this contaminated water.

So municipalities in this province have been charged with the task of making sure that they do provide safe quality water to the people of Saskatchewan.

And we have a diverse, diverse municipal structure. If we look at our large municipalities like Saskatoon and Regina, they have really state-of-the-art municipal waterworks. In fact I can remember not that long ago where people like to criticize Regina water, and they actually had a situation where they were doing water quality testing and tasting in a North American environment with water sources provided from municipal waterworks and others throughout North America.

And I seem to recall that Regina placed in the top 10 in that competition in terms of the quality and taste of its water. And this was surprising to many people in Saskatchewan, but it wasn't surprising to the people who work at the municipal waterworks in Regina.

Saskatoon has excellent water quality as well. And for most parts, our large municipalities are well served by the waterworks that provide safe quality water.

So when we look at how this water comes into the system, the processes that are involved with settling tanks, with the agglutination, with chemicals that coagulate smaller particles into large particles so that it can settle out, the chlorination and the oxidation that is required to kill bacteria — when we look at the multiple pathogens that could potentially produce disease like cholera, like typhoid, that are there in third countries — we don't have these problems here in Saskatchewan.

We do have problems though in terms of some of these areas where we do get some contamination at times. And it is imperative that the water, that is going into the pipe that is going into that household, is tested on a regular basis. And that is where the provincial government responsibility comes in.

Municipalities provide those samples; they're tested by the provincial government; and as soon as there's an alert or there's an indication that there might be a problem, then those municipalities are notified, Mr. Speaker. So in general the system works quite well.

We do have aging infrastructure in this province, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that that infrastructure needs to be replaced and needs to be upgraded on an ongoing basis. And I'll talk about some of the things this provincial government is doing in just a minute.

But what I want to talk about now, Mr. Speaker, is what the Saskatchewan Party, the official opposition, said in its platform leading up to the last election. And you know what they highlighted, Mr. Speaker? You know what they highlighted, Mr. Speaker, in their *Way Up* program?

They talked about easing the tax burden. They talked about decreasing the provincial income tax. They talked about cutting PST (provincial sales tax).

They talked about some increased funding for roads and highways. They talked about an environment for creating jobs. They made demands on the federal Liberal government in terms of money they would like to see with regard to health care. They talked about a value-for-money audit of the health care system. And they talked about the welfare system and a work-first plan.

They talked about an independent utility rate watchdog. And they talked about patronage. And they talked about courts and police groups.

But in this 20-page document, Mr. Speaker, they did not mention once the word water — not once they did not talk about water quality. And when they had an opportunity, when they had an opportunity, when they had an opportunity to vote for adding 10 full-time equivalents to test water quality, they voted against it, Mr. Speaker.

So again, we look at their program and they did not talk once about enhancing water quality in the province of Saskatchewan. And in fact, they've recently argued that this provincial government should have been providing better standards and more intervention in terms of making sure municipalities were providing quality water. And what did they say? They said, and I quote:

Amending legislation and regulations to give municipalities the freedom to deliver local services with a minimum of provincial government interference.

So they called our testing of water government interference of municipalities, Mr. Speaker.

Now when we talk about their program and we talk about the

program that we have on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, well let me tell you what we're doing over here.

This year alone, this year alone the provincial government has increased its contribution to the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program by 115 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Our program increasing money for infrastructure, 115 per cent.

And let me just highlight what this provincial government has done from 1994 and will do into the future. Canada-Saskatchewan infrastructure works program 1994 to 1998, the federal contribution was \$69 million; the provincial contribution was \$98 million; total for those years of 167 million.

In the provincial municipal infrastructure program 1999-2001, provincial contribution, \$20 million.

Our Centenary Capital Fund 2001 to 2004, provincial infrastructure contribution, another \$20 million, Mr. Speaker.

And Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program, 2001 to 2006: federal contribution, 56,710,000; provincial contribution, 56,710,000, for a total of 113 million, Mr. Speaker.

So the grand total in terms of municipal infrastructure for those years, Mr. Speaker: provincial contribution, 195 million; federal contribution, 125 million, for over \$320 million going specifically for municipal infrastructure.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have challenges facing water quality. These are challenges that have been highlighted by recent events across Canada. And this provincial government and our Department of SERM and our Department of Health has recognized these challenges and are working in partnership with municipalities and the federal government to provide the solutions for safe quality drinking water for the people of Saskatchewan for now and long into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to have the opportunity to rise today in support of the motion by the member for Rosetown and the Premier seconding it.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the main causes of what we see happening in North Battleford and what we may see in a number of communities in this province comes down to one thing, plain and simple: dollars. You can't for a minute think that North Battleford would have had this problem there had we of been helping them out with revenue sharing dollars to the degree we should have been in this province rather than the priorities this government has put in place and forgot to replace any of the money they've cut.

I'd like to go over for a minute and express my concern what's happened to the community of North Battleford, Mr. Speaker. And I want to talk about the revenue sharing that's gone on from 1991 compared to what happened in 2001.

The revenue-sharing dollars, Mr. Speaker, in 1991 for the city of North Battleford was \$1.199 million, just about \$1.2 million for the city of North Battleford.

The numbers slowly start to drop off after the NDP were elected, Mr. Speaker. 1992 we're already under a million dollars, 999 million some-odd dollars. Then we go on to '93, we drop again \$930 million. 1994, another drop. In fact a whole drop of a hundred million dollars . . . a million dollars, 833. Then we go down \$856,000; 1996 holds at 856,000. Whoops, 1997 we go down to \$453,000. And then, Mr. Speaker, what we see is that amount is froze — no increase — is froze at that level.

So we've gone, Mr. Speaker, from 1991, at 1.2 million, down to 2001 to 453,000. How are communities like North Battleford supposed to keep their infrastructure up to speed with funding cuts from this government like that?

Mr. Speaker, we would have thought that Walkerton would have been a wake-up call for both the federal and provincial governments — the Saskatchewan government in this case — and it doesn't seem to have hit home at all.

We find out today that they actually knew since September that problems were out there. And instead of addressing it, they were out busy with the leadership convention and the whole process of government in this province, Mr. Speaker, came to a standstill.

And from what we see, and what we saw happen in North Battleford, and what may happen in other communities, we've seen problems arise that could hurt the safety of Saskatchewan people, and have actually, at this point, made Saskatchewan people sick.

I'd like to touch on, for a minute, Mr. Speaker, our lone MP (Member of Parliament) in the federal government, Mr. Goodale. We never hear a thing out of Mr. Goodale when something like this happens, we only hear of him when he comes out to announce some program from the federal government. But when we need action in this province, whether it's health care, whether it's agriculture, or whether it's a situation like we have in North Battleford, Mr. Goodale is nowhere to be found.

And when you look at the money, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government takes out of the province of Saskatchewan, whether it be income tax, gas tax, GST (goods and services tax), fees, permits, whatever it is, and the pittance that they put back into this province when it comes down to our infrastructures such as roads, and water, and sewer.

And I know the member for Melville was bragging about how much infrastructure money goes in, Mr. Speaker, but it's a small amount when you look at the volume of dollars they drain out of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to touch on the priorities of the provincial government once again and we've talked about this before. Think about what the city of North Battleford could have done with the amount of money that is going to be used to hire the 570 new government employees. And I know the Minister for

SERM, the minister for Municipal Government has been trying to ridicule the opposition for saying we shouldn't be hiring these people, we should be putting the money towards municipal government.

Well right now, I'll bet you to the people of North Battleford, those dollars that it's going to take to hire those 570 people would look awfully good to the water system in North Battleford right now if they had their share of those dollars to spend, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, why can't this government get it through their head that instead of going out and hiring people every time they need some people in a new area, why don't they do like business does in this province? They find a way to restructure. They even have to downsize at times to pay the high taxes in this province, but they find a way to take people from one area, move them to another area, Mr. Speaker. An example that this province could take a lesson from is business in this province and they don't seem to get it.

The Environment department alone. We had the digging up of gas tanks in this province, Mr. Speaker. That went on for two or three years here. They must have had within the Environment department a large number of bureaucrats working in that area.

Well now that's calmed down. Why can't we take people from that area, put them under another division of SERM, without hiring a hundred and some new people — especially again, the 10 that they're talking about? I'm not saying we don't need those 10 people. In fact, from what we see happening, we certainly probably do need those people.

Why can't we downsize, restructure, become more efficient and find people in another area that could have gone into that area and alleviated the dollars that they're spending on all those new government workers and put that money into where were really need it — into infrastructure and roads for municipalities all over this province.

Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about today is the safety of Saskatchewan people. And by the priorities of the government, we're putting that safety at risk. And the reason I believe, Mr. Speaker, why we're seeing this is because what do we have on that side of the House right now? Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a tired, incompetent, arrogant leaderless, out-of-touch, on-the-way-out government, Mr. Speaker. I rest my case.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to join this debate with my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I do very much appreciate the co-operation of the member from Rosthern today as we tried to put an agreement together with respect to the wording of this motion and with respect to the support for allowing this legislature, the people of this province through their legislature, the opportunity to forward our desire to see the federal government involved in infrastructure funding that would help governments across this country work towards safer and cleaner water.

Mr. Speaker, I think over the past few months it's become very

clear that we in this country have the opportunity to review the way we manage our drinking water and the way we manage our community sewage systems.

And I think it's fair to say that, although we're very disappointed that this unfortunate circumstance has happened in North Battleford, that it will allow us to review the way we've been doing things, to improve on the deficiencies that we may find as the result of the judicial inquiry that the Premier has announced just a few hours ago. And so I think we should view this, and we on this side of the House do very much view this, as an opportunity to do things better.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make, before I conclude my remarks which will be very brief, I want to speak to a couple of issues that were raised by the member opposite in his recent speech. And I think the people of Saskatchewan do know and I think they have the right to know and we all need to be reminded that this government has recently announced \$720,000 of incremental expenditure including ten and a half full-time employees to be working on quality drinking water.

Now as I said, Mr. Speaker, I think that there is no doubt that we will find that we can do things better as a result of this process. And we always need to take lessons and learn from our mistakes, but I want to say, Mr. Speaker, we should not overplay really what is happening here.

This government is very serious — very serious — and wants to respond to the circumstance in North Battleford, and we have. Our Premier has attended that community. A number of ministers have been there. We've had officials from the different departments who were involved in water quality there and we, I think, are really trying to support the municipal government in that community go through some very difficult and trying times.

The employees of the city of North Battleford, I'm sure, have in the past done their utmost, done their level best to ensure that the job that they have is done to the best of their abilities. And I really believe that. I have no reason to believe other than that. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm quite confident that the inquiry will put a lot of people's minds to rest with respect to this issue.

(16:00)

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, in his last remarks, was indicating that revenue sharing was a difficult circumstance for that community. And he was in essence laying blame for the fact that revenue-sharing grants have changed since the 1980s, since the early 1990s. And I think it's fair to say that he's right.

There has been a fairly dramatic change in the amount of revenue-sharing grants that have gone to municipal governments. And I don't think anyone on this side of the House would not want to see more, but we have to deal with the realities of our fiscal circumstance here in Saskatchewan. And we will do that.

Mr. Speaker, no one wants to see deficit budgeting and we know that we have limited revenues. We've seen our economy grow in some areas: oil, gas, potash. These are all areas that have treated this province very well in the last few years in

terms of that activity. We've seen a growth in manufacturing and processing.

But in spite of that, Mr. Speaker, we've had a fairly difficult time, a difficult circumstance with respect to our agricultural community, and that has created some weight on what we're able to do in terms of revenue-sharing grants and other initiatives.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one wouldn't want to go back too far in history . . . one wouldn't have to go back too far in history to be reminded of the years when expenditures far exceeded what we were able to generate in revenues from resources and from taxes. And I think, Mr. Speaker, to be fair, the revenue-sharing grants have changed and they've come down considerably.

But what that member didn't indicate and doesn't talk about is that there are other areas of funding that go to those communities. There's grants in lieu of taxes. There's transit for the disabled. There is money that comes from the Centenary Fund. And there's the CSIP program. And all of these are benefits for the communities, and they shouldn't be denied and they shouldn't be ignored.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make those few brief remarks because I think it was important that people understand that the member opposite wasn't telling the whole picture when he was talking about transfer payments to communities, including the city of North Battleford.

And so I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I will be supporting the resolution that was jointly agreed to by the member from Rosthern and his caucus and myself this morning.

I must say in closing that I'm somewhat disappointed that the Opposition House Leader didn't take the opportunity to have us join with them yesterday in supporting the motion that we ultimately supported today, because that would have been our wish, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to say that I'm very much hopeful that we can return to a civil way of doing business, such as we did today with the member from Rosthern. And I again want to say to him that I very much appreciated the way he responded to my request that we work on this motion jointly, and that we jointly forward this to the House of Commons so that our counterparts in the national seat of government can understand our concern.

So I want to conclude by saying, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to *nemine contradicente*.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I'd ask for leave to move a motion to have this transcript sent on to the federal government, and seconded by the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the

member from Indian Head-Milestone:

That by leave of the Assembly, the Speaker, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, transmit copies and verbatim transcripts of the rule 46 motion and debate concerning the emergency debate regarding the development of a national water quality infrastructure program to Prime Minister Chrétien, to Minister Goodale, to Minister Anderson, and to all opposition party leaders.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table the response to question 157.

The Speaker: — Question 157 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to table a response to question no. 158.

The Speaker: — Response to 158 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — Question no. 159 has been converted to orders for return (debatable).

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — Convert.

Mr. Yates: — I'm pleased to table the response to question 161.

The Speaker: — The response to 161 is tabled.

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — 162 is converted.

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — 163 is converted.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and table the answers from 164 to 170 inclusive.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip has tabled responses for questions 164 to 170 inclusive.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Labour Vote 20

(Subvote LA01)

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure again to re-introduce officials who were here last on April 30 when we did this previously. To my left is Deputy Minister Sandra Morgan. Directly behind me is the associate deputy minister, Cheryl Hanson.

Behind Cheryl is Dawn McKibben, who is the director of human resources and administration in the Department of Labour. Behind Ms. Morgan is John Boyd, the executive director of planning and policy in the Department of Labour.

Seated at the back is Dr. Fayek Kelada, who is the director of occupational health and safety services; Eric Greene, the acting executive director of labour services. Joining them is Peter Federko, the chief executive officer of the Workers' Compensation Board; and Gail Kruger, the vice-president, budget and finance over at the Workers' Compensation Board.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [CORRECT] and I'd like to welcome the minister and your officials here today. I'm going to start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by asking the minister some questions which we did cover last time we met, and I'm hoping that some decisions have been made by cabinet, by the government caucus concerning these issues.

The first one I'd like to ask the minister concerning bringing intensive livestock operations under The Labour Standards Act. Has any decision been made on that particular area?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can report to the members opposite, nothing has changed since the last time we spoke.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. Also on another topic we discussed, I'd like to ask, Mr. Minister, do you have any plans or has cabinet made any plans concerning proclaiming the most available hours provisions in this session?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing has changed in this issue either. I believe that I shared that it's not on agenda this session.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Another area which of course you're very aware of is the Dorsey report. I've had many people since our last session together, a week ago Monday, contact my office and my constituency office and the caucus office, and they're very, very concerned about the delay in the Dorsey report being made public. And I was wondering if the minister at this time could give us a date when the Dorsey report will be released.

(16:15)

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm delighted to say it's going to be very soon. No, I cannot give you a date at this time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to go on to another issue that I have been dealing with for quite some time and I'm sure the minister has been aware of.

It's concerning the disenfranchised widows of Saskatchewan, and I understand that they accepted a one-time lump sum

payment of \$80,000 to compensate for the loss of their husbands in work-related accidents prior to 1985. It seems that these widows received less than half of what their counterparts in BC (British Columbia) and Ontario did, and they were assured that this payment was tax-free. And they were surprised when they filed a 1999 income tax that the federal government took a clawback of nearly \$5,000 plus their supplement which leaves them with \$75,000.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, has he done, has he contacted the federal government to try to rectify this situation?

My understanding is that these widows were not informed fully of the implications of receiving this money, that it was going to affect their OAS (old age security), and it appears, Mr. Minister, that other provinces did notify their widows of the implications of receiving this money.

And I understand the minister will be meeting with representatives of the disenfranchised widows. And I was wondering if you could tell the legislature today, what are you doing concerning this issue.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you. Respecting the issue of disenfranchised widows, I want to make one thing perfectly clear. The \$80,000 that was paid to these disenfranchised widows was tax-free. It has never been taxed, never has been taxed. I want to be perfectly, perfectly clear about that.

What happened is that the federal government considered it as income, and then it triggered a clawback of the old age security. That's most regrettable. That was something that, when our officials contacted the feds in advance, they did not share that unfortunate happening.

We have, on a number of occasions, but twice ministers of Labour have contacted federal government asking for a remission order. The federal government . . . be perfectly clear on this, when we asked we said we wanted a lump sum, one-time \$80,000 tax-free payment to the disenfranchised widows, recognizing there was extreme hardship in some cases, less hardship in others, but we wanted to get some immediate cash in the hands of some Workers' Compensation disenfranchised widows.

For compassionate reasons, a decision was made that we were going to get \$80,000 tax-free in their hands. We did that — we did that. The federal government let those very same widows down, by implementing the clawback according to their rules.

What they could have done, and have admitted as much to us — although let me share, there's probably things that, if we could do it all over again, there's probably things that would have been done different all the way around — but the federal government has admitted to us that they had several occasions, several opportunities, where they could have informed us of the clawback, and that would of course have generated some different discussion.

Perhaps we could have structured the payments differently. Perhaps there was other options. I don't know. What I know is we're dealing with this situation, and we're doing everything

we can to get the federal government to issue a remission order. We're active on this file, but unable to report that we've been able to achieve any success with the federal government as yet.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. It seems that someone in the provincial government at that time didn't do their homework. I agree that the \$80,000 was not taxed.

But at any point did the Department of Labour discuss this issue with the Department of Finance about the total implications of receiving this money in one lump sum? Because if the money could have been paid out over a two- or three-year period, it would have helped these disenfranchised widows considerably concerning their old age security.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer is yes, officials did speak, and our Department of Finance was the contact with the federal government. Officials continue to speak back and forth. We're actively trying to seek the proper solution to this file.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I accept that answer. The problem is that every other jurisdiction in Canada, the provincial government notify their widows of the implications of receiving the money, and all the other provinces told their disenfranchised widows that their old age security would be clawed back. It's only Saskatchewan that they were not informed.

And I'd like to know what the government is going to do about that issue, considering that they did not fully inform the widows of the implications of the clawback and, I might add, were given a very short time to sign a release where they could not sue or could not carry on any other concerns with the government once they accepted the money.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should add something to the last answer . . . previous answer. My officials have just shared with me that the advice that we provided to the disenfranchised widows was that they should seek some financial counselling and advice independent of Workers' Comp, or government, if you like. So that was done at the time that we were dealing with them.

The member for Redberry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, says that all other jurisdictions have treated disenfranchised widows well. Let me assure everybody, everybody, that widows in Saskatchewan, though there are some problems around this federal government clawback in an amount that we estimate is about \$5,000 for up to close to a hundred of them — \$5,000 each, that's what we understand the problem is — but let me share, widows in Saskatchewan got \$80,000 tax-free. Widows, disenfranchised widows in Nova Scotia in exactly the same position as widows in Saskatchewan were, got nickel zero — nickel zero.

And in fact what happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is there was a court case in Nova Scotia. The courts ruled that there was no legal obligation to pay Nova Scotia disenfranchised widows any money because the law had been followed. So in Nova Scotia, zero; Saskatchewan, \$80,000 tax-free.

And now we're dealing with an unfortunate circumstance that is

estimated to be roughly \$5,000 per disenfranchised widow, up to close to 100 of them, that the federal government has clawed back. That's the circumstance we're dealing with right now.

We're in agreement. I think the hon. member for Redberry is saying gee, we should find a way of making that right. We're in agreement. We're active on the file. We're working on it. If we could just get the federal government to honour their commitment right up front, if we can get that, we're home free. That's what we're working for actively.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, I agree that widows were given the advice to get legal advice concerning this whole issue.

But I think the point has to be made that these widows who are 65 years and older . . . many of them are in their 80's, I believe even some are in their 90's. And considering the release form that they had to sign in order to get this lump sum, it was not a long time. Not everyone is up to date on the legal matters in this world. And especially the elderly aren't quite aware of all their rights and they were relying on the government, the provincial government, to look after them in this case.

And I believe it's the provincial government's responsibility concerning this clawback and they just didn't have the time or maybe the wherewithal to get legal advice or proper legal advice concerning this issue. And it's really a tax matter that they had to deal with and they just accepted the minister at the time, her word, that it was not taxable. And even though the \$80,000 was not taxable, the effect it had on their old age security.

And I'm just wondering, if the federal government does not rectify this situation, what is the provincial government going to do for the widows?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, first and foremost again, this is not an income tax issue. The hon. member comes back to it's an income tax issue in his question. This is not an income tax issue. The disenfranchised widows received \$80,000 tax-free. Not taxable. The issue is it has been clawed back by the federal government through the old age security system. That's why we want and need a remission order from the federal government.

If we do as the member were to suggest and pay it again — pay some further monies again — well guess what? We still have a clawback issue with the federal government. How many times must we pay it? We have to get a remission order from the federal government. We have to get a remission order from the federal government so that we can end this and get that money to those disenfranchised widows as quickly as we possibly can. That's what we have to do.

With respect to the other issue you raised earlier in your question. You said, well some of these widows are in their 70's, some in their 80's, some in their 90's. And you said that the time limit they were given from the time they found out about it until they had to sign off to get the \$80,000 was very short.

Well these widows, these disenfranchised widows, particularly those in their 80's and 90's, we tried to get them cash quickly

— \$80,000 tax-free as quickly as we could. So there was some urgency to that. As quickly as we got their signed waiver — very, very quickly after that they got the cash. That's point one.

Point two is that they had two years — not two months or two weeks or two days — they had two years to seek whatever independent legal advice, financial advice, whatever they wanted. Two years. And that's not long enough?

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to ask one more question to the minister concerning this issue. My sources say that the federal government sent a letter to all the provinces concerning this clawback of old age security. I understand your government and your department received this letter. Is it possible that you could make that letter public?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Perhaps I missed the first part of that question, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can the member repeat this again? I'm not sure what letter he's referring to. That's the question.

Mr. Weekes: — Well I've been told that all the provincial governments received a letter from the federal Finance department or the Revenue department concerning this issue around this clawback and effect on the widows over 65. And I'm wondering if you're aware of this letter, and if you could make that public.

(16:30)

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've not . . . I have no knowledge of the letter you're referring to. I have not . . . I have not seen the letter, nor have my department officials, I'm told.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to move on to another issue concerning pay equity. The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour has called upon your government to pass pay equity legislation that would apply to not only the public sector but also to the private sector. Is this something that the government is contemplating this spring?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the issue of pay equity, I'm going to preface my remarks and I'll try and answer the question. But I want to preface my remarks by sharing this is not in the purview of the Department of Labour. This issue falls under the Women's Secretariat, and the hon. member for Regina Wascana Plains is the minister . . . the appropriate minister responsible.

Now to try and address briefly the hon. member's question about pay equity. We have long held the view that what we have to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to do everything we can to make sure that our own house is in order, to which we have been systematically going through government contracts if I can describe it that way, different . . . department by department, as negotiations take place. We've been advancing the cause of pay equity; we've been putting money into it. We went that route. We went through the Crown corporations, and we have . . . I don't know whether to describe it as starting or well into the non-government organizations — probably I could say well into it fairly safely, although there is much work to be done until we finally achieve the final pay equity that we all desire in Saskatchewan.

We're moving, and we're determined that the steps we take are going to be long lasting as opposed to if we were to simply introduce a piece of legislation that the next ... some subsequent government might simply reverse. So we want to build a solid, real pay-equity system throughout the province.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. I was wondering if I'd like to ... I would like to ask a few more questions around this issue. If your department has been looking into that area, I was wondering if you'd give a kind of a outline of how much this would cost and what effect pay equity would have on overall employment in this province.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — I sincerely thank the hon. member for Redberry for his interest in this, and I can assure you it's an interest I share. The problem is it's totally inappropriate for me to answer questions that are the responsibility of another ministry in terms of costs and that sort of thing. So I simply would ask that the hon. member ask those in the appropriate estimates.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Minister, is your government contemplating bringing in either additional paid or unpaid family leave?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the question is around maternity leave, paternity leave, or parental leave, the answer is yes. If the question is around family leave in general, the answer is no.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. Even though you've said you're not contemplating bringing in unpaid family leave, has your department done any studies into the cost of business extending such unscheduled additional leaves whether it be paid or unpaid?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, no.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. I'd like to move on to another topic. The issue of employer rate deductions at Workers' Compensation Board. For obvious reasons it makes good business sense to keep these rates as low as possible. Last fall I understand that WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) proposed lower average rates for its next fiscal year to \$1.70 per 100 in payroll, down from \$1.73 per \$100 in payroll.

Could you confirm that this has in fact been implemented, and if so when did it come into effect?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer is yes, January 1, 2001.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What was the WCB's operating surplus in fiscal year 2000-2001?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, that annual report has yet to be tabled, and as quickly as it's tabled the answer will be in the report.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. Does the department have a prediction of the operating surplus for those years?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's inappropriate for

me to comment on any financial statements in a report that's yet to be tabled in the House.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been employer rebates in the past. Are there any plans to rebate a portion of any operating surplus back to the Saskatchewan employers?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, this might be helpful. I'm assured that before this department comes before this committee again we will have the annual report tabled. The answer to that question is in the annual report yet to be tabled, and I'd just ask the member to wait until the tabling of the document.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, has the WCB done any testing to improve its assessment or billing system?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to report that the answer is yes, the Compensation Board has run a pilot project, and that several employers have signed up for this alternate method of payment. And they're always looking for ways to be ever more efficient and in tune with not only business but of course the other part of the operation, which is looking after injured workers.

Mr. Weekes: — My question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to those ... to the pilot project. When was this testing done, what kinds of tests were conducted, what were the results of these tests, and what recommendations were made? And have any of these recommendations been implemented?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes, the pilot started January 1, 2001 as I reported in a previous answer. It's going to run for the full 12 months, is the plan. There are approximately 50 employers that signed up to be part of this pilot project.

The plan is that about September there will be an evaluation done of how well it's working and how it might be improved, and then the decisions that will flow from that will take place presumably October, November, and possibly December.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been some concerns brought up regarding an increase in administration expenses at WCB, the fact that salaries and employee benefits were up nearly 13 per cent last year. Last fall's rate-setting meeting, your former chairman, Mr. Stan Cameron, assured stakeholders that the WCB was committed to holding the line on its administrative budgets in the next fiscal year.

Could you please confirm for us today that the number of employees at WCB has not changed from the last fiscal year? If there has been any increase, which departments were affected and why were more staff people required?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the administration costs will be in the annual report. With respect to the number of employees, though I suspect it might be in the annual report, I'm going to share — about 420 employees; it's very, very close. We think no change from last year.

I will undertake to share if there is change, with the member

opposite. I'm offering up 420, trying to be helpful, but appreciate you may want some finer detail on that. We'll make sure that you get that.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been some concern expressed by small-business owners that the WCB has been planning a half a million dollar public relations campaign this next fiscal year. Are there still plans for this campaign to go ahead?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, there certainly was plans that were cancelled a year ago.

Mr. Weekes: — So it was cancelled. So are there any plans for future years as far as a campaign?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, who can predict future years. There's no current plans. That's the best I can offer up.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you. Fifty-eight per cent of employers felt that WCB was not being run efficiently. That's not exactly a crowning endorsement of the board's success. Mr. Minister, what steps are you planning to take to improve in this area? Have you met with key stakeholders for discussion in this area, and what were some of the recommendations?

(16:45)

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I report to the member opposite that the Dorsey report was to deal . . . is to deal with administration at the Workers' Compensation Board some of the issues that the member was just raising.

And as I've said earlier this day, the Dorsey report is going to be released very shortly and that will make it fairly apparent, I think, some of the direction that . . . some of the steps that we're going to take to improve some of the administration concerns at the board.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, and to your staff. Mr. Minister, last week I had an opportunity to introduce you to someone who had been a constituent, and I was very grateful that you took the opportunity to meet with her.

Her concern was regarding the widows' pension and the fact that after five years someone who had children whose spouse was killed, had their widows either cut off depending on how much money they made, or there'd be a rollback or an actual subtraction of the amount of money that they made, was taken away from their pension that they received as a result of their spousal benefit.

Mr. Minister, maybe you could give us an update on what WCB's policy is to date, telling me what happens when someone loses their spouse and widows receive a pension.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — I thank the hon. member for the question. The way the system works is for, in the case of a death at work covered by the Compensation Board, there is five years of wage loss unconditional. If there are children involved, there is a dependant's allowance, again unconditional.

After five years, if the surviving spouse is employed, the employment income is deducted from the wage loss of the deceased person but it would be topped up assuming that the surviving spouse is earning less. So there would be wage top-up, but there's an expectation that after five years the spouse would be working.

With respect to the dependant's allowance, that continues until the youngest child attains the age of 16 or — or — that extends if the child is attending a post-secondary education institute, university, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), that sort of thing. In a nutshell, that's the way it's worked . . . it works.

I suspect you may have some other questions and I welcome them.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the minister: how was the number of years, five years, picked? It seems like it's an arbitrary number. Why would that . . . that would be the number that would be determined that the spouse would no longer receive any benefits or partial benefits from WCB?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer to the question is this is provided for in the Workers' Compensation legislation. It's provided in the legislation.

And this is a year of a Committee of Review, as a further supplementary answer. This is a year of Committee of Review, and the member opposite or anyone is certainly entitled to raise that matter with the Committee of Review and I would encourage you or widows to raise that issue.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I understand that it's part of the legislation. My question was how was this arrived at, because any number could have been picked as part of the legislation.

And also wondering, Saskatchewan is one of, I believe, only three provinces that still keeps this five years in their legislation. A lot of provinces continue it to the age 65. Is there any thoughts about changing this legislation before this Committee of Review?

And just so you know, I'll have questions on the Committee of Review as well.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member for Wadena raises some interesting and good points, and certainly that should be considered by the Committee of Review. And it's my hope that the Committee of Review can consider it and make a recommendation on that area.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:56.