

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I present a petition on behalf of the residents of the small community of Consul, in the extreme southwest of the province. It's a community that enjoys the benefits of an ambulance service, but they're concerned about the possible loss of that service if the recommendations of the EMS (emergency medical services) report are put in place. And so I read the prayer as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from citizens of Saskatchewan regarding the *Saskatchewan EMS Development Project*, which calls for provincially run and centrally operated ambulance services. The prayer reads:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from Elrose, Beechy, and Demaine.

And I am pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition. The prayer of relief reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on the provincial and federal governments to provide immediate financial assistance to the city of North Battleford in order to facilitate necessary improvements to the North Battleford water treatment plant.

Your petitioners come from North Battleford and Cando.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people in Swift Current and area who are concerned about the state of their hospital and so they've presented me with the

petition. And the prayer of this petition reads as follows:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition today is signed by residents of the city of Swift Current, of Pennant, Saskatchewan, of Gull Lake, of Cadillac, Waldeck, Hazlet, and Neville.

I so present.

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

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

And this petition is signed by residents of Weyburn, Radville, Ceylon, Gladmar.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition on behalf of citizens . . . to present on behalf of citizens of the province regarding the EMS service. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people in the Alida, Redvers, and Manor area.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

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

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the Redvers, Manor, Alida, and Bellegarde areas.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to present a petition from citizens concerned about cellular coverage in their area. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide reliable cellular telephone service in the districts of Rabbit Lake, Hafford, Blaine Lake, Leask, Radisson, Borden, Perdue, Maymont, Mistawasis, and Muskeg Lake.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Perdue, Saskatoon, and Asquith.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here of citizens concerned about the rate SaskPower and SaskEnergy are charging:

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 citizens from Davidson, Kenaston, Compton, New York, and Birch Hills.

I so present.

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

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition come from the communities of Wynyard, Yorkton, Raymore, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding concerned citizens with 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 the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Leoville, Spiritwood, and Mildred.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the service at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia. 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.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Willow Bunch.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again with a petition from concerned citizens — in fact the concerns are getting more and more increased — with reference to the cuts at the Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that, at 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, this petition is signed by good folks in Assiniboia.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly:

To provide reliable cellular service in a variety of 10 northern districts; and

To ensure health care services in the Kamsack Hospital are maintained.

And addendums to sessional papers for previous petitions. And these are sessional papers nos. 3, 4, 10, 58, 121, 149, and 151.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Economic Development: how many forestry jobs have been created in northern Saskatchewan since April 1, 2000; and what are the actual figures for the number of forestry jobs in northern Saskatchewan on that date and the actual number currently?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of SERM: how many forest firefighting positions have been created in northern Saskatchewan since April 1, 2000; and provide in actual figures for the date and current figures.

And I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of SERM: how much money has your department spent to date in 2001-2002 battling forest fires and grass fires?

Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of CIC: since, and including 1996, how many SaskPower employees have been dismissed without cause; how much total severance has been paid to these dismissed employees; how many severance agreements were accompanied by a gag order?

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following questions:

To the minister responsible for Social Services: for the year 1999, what was the total number of children's deaths that occurred while they were receiving services from the Department of Social Services and were in the care of the Minister of Social Services when they died; of those deaths, how many deaths were the result of natural causes, suicide, drowning, homicide, accidents, SIDS, and undetermined injuries?

I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Social Services: for the year 1999, what was the total number of children's death that occurred while they were receiving services from the Department of Social Services but they were not in the care of the Minister of Social Services when they died; of those deaths, how many deaths were the result of natural causes, suicide, drowning, homicide, accident, SIDS, and undetermined injuries?

And I ask the same questions, Mr. Speaker, for the year 2000.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 43 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management: regarding the discharge of raw sewage into a water body that occurred on February 27, 2001, in which community did this take place; into which water body did this discharge occur; and how much discharge occurred; and what action was taken by Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Members of the Legislative Assembly, we have several guests with us today and I want to start by introducing an officer of the legislature to you. With us in the Speaker's gallery on the west side is the Children's Advocate, Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen. And with her is her deputy children's advocate, Glenda Cooney; and advocate, Roxane Schury; and also communications and public education coordinator, Sharon Chapman; and I believe also her son, Trent.

I ask the Assembly to extend a warm welcome to our Children's Advocate and her office.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I also, hon. members, would like to draw your attention, a number of special guests also seated in the Speaker's gallery that are representatives of the l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. The Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie is an international association of French-speaking parliamentarians.

The aims of the APF (l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie) have broadened over the years to include promoting democracy and human rights within the French-speaking community, inter-parliamentary co-operation, and encouraging the use and development of French culture and language.

Our guests are meeting with a number of our members today to explain the role of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie and how our Assembly might benefit from joining. They will also be meeting with representatives of the Saskatchewan francophone community.

J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à nos distingués invités et aussi une bonne réunion et un séjour agréable en Saskatchewan. Bienvenue.

(Translation: I would like to extend my welcome to our distinguished guests and wish them a prosperous meeting and a pleasant stay here in Saskatchewan. Welcome.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Or as I might say in my mother language, Schero vitayehmo vas.

(13:45)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Merci, M. le Président. I will also try to follow your sterling example, if I may.

M. le Président, je suis heureuse de présenter les représentants

de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

(Translation: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present the representatives of l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.)

These MPs (Member of Parliament), MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly), and officials come from across Canada. They are here in force, so I would ask you to hold your applause until the end.

De la Région Amérique; from the Americas Region: Monsieur Jean-François Simard, député de l'Assemblée nationale et chargé de mission, et Madame Marie Tanguay, secrétaire administrative régionale.

De la section canadienne; from the Canada section: Monsieur Bernard Patry, député, président de la section, and a former colleague of the current Leader of the Opposition; Madame Guyanne Desforges, secrétaire administrative; et Monsieur Marc Toupin, secrétaire administratif.

De l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard; from Prince Edward Island: Monsieur Wilfred Arseneault, député, président de la section et Monsieur Donald DesRoches, secrétaire administratif.

De la Nouvelle-Écosse; from Nova Scotia: Monsieur Michel Samson, député, membre de la section; and a former cabinet minister.

Du Nouveau-Brunswick; from New Brunswick: Monsieur Louis-Philippe McGraw, député, président de la section; et Madame Phyllis LeBlanc, secrétaire administrative.

Du la belle province Québec; from Québec: Madame Monique Gagnon-Tremblay, députée, vice-présidente de la section; et Madame Solange Charest, députée, membre de la section; et aussi, Madame Françoise Leu, conseillère en relations interparlementaires et internationales.

De l'Ontario, et merci pour la plume: Monsieur Jean-Marc Lalonde, député, président de la section; et Monsieur Katch Koch, secrétaire administratif.

Et finalement, de l'Alberta: Monsieur Denis Ducharme, député, président de la section.

Veuillez vous joindre à moi en souhaitant la bienvenue à ces invité distingués. Please join with me in welcoming these distinguished guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Merci, M. le Président. Bienvenue, to the delegation from the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. Like Mr. Speaker, my français est très pauvre, but welcome to Saskatchewan anyways.

We had the privilege of having lunch with the delegation a short time ago and we had a discourse on the work that the association does, and the provinces in Canada and countries around the world where the Assembly is active.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out — and they're all very special people — but I would like to point out four people, for special reasons.

First of all, Mr. Jean-François Simard, who is the chargé de mission, who we had the privilege of meeting. And I believe he's sort of the leader of the delegation, although there are many leaders in the group.

Also, Mr. Bernard Patry, a Member of Parliament for Pierrefond-Dollard. Mr. Patry and I had the privilege of serving in Parliament together and it's good to see him in Saskatchewan.

Also, Mr. Marc Toupin. Mr. Toupin was the secretary of the Standing Committee on Agriculture when I had the privilege of being in Ottawa and he provided excellent service to our committee. And welcome to you, Marc, as well.

And finally, to Mr. Donald DesRoches from Prince Edward Island section, administrative secretary. While the French presentations were being made, Donald whispered in my ear so I knew what was going on and that was particularly appreciated.

Welcome to Saskatchewan. Enjoy your time here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — And, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I also have another delegation that I'm pleased to introduce to the Legislative Assembly. In the east gallery there is a group of grade 8 students from Rosetown Central High School. We're glad to see them make the long journey from Rosetown to the capital city of Regina and hoping that they enjoy the many activities that they will undertake.

Teachers who have accompanied the group are Richard Berezowski, Craig Oman, Jana Clark, Nicole Summach, and Terry Gowan. And chaperones — only one needed, Mr. Speaker — Ross Gregory.

I know all members of the Legislative Assembly will welcome this fine group of students from the community of Rosetown, Saskatchewan. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of students and their teacher who are visiting us. This is a group of grade 12 students from the tutorial program at Balfour Collegiate. They're accompanied here today by their teacher Karen Scherle.

I must say that Ms. Scherle makes a special effort to make sure that her class attends here on an annual basis and that we appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to meeting with this group after. And I would ask all members to extend them a warm welcome. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatoon Achievement in Business Excellence Awards

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to recognize the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce for another very successful SABEX (Saskatoon Achievement in Business Excellence) award presentation last evening in Saskatoon. I was pleased to be able to be in attendance.

As we are aware, this is Saskatoon's opportunity to celebrate the success of that city's business community and to specifically recognize business excellence with these prestigious SABEX awards.

Mr. Harry Day, a long-time business and community leader, was inducted into the SABEX Hall of Fame. As well, Shelly Brown was awarded the ATHENA award — a recognition of leadership and opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

Business of the Year was presented to Kocsis Transportation Ltd. — a two-time winner in this year's awards.

Congratulations to all winners.

Mr. Speaker, in fitting with this government's Saskatchewan dream awareness initiative of successful businesses in the province, I would have thought it would have been an ideal opportunity for this government to show support for award-winning businesses in Saskatoon.

The question was asked why there was none of the 11 NDP (New Democratic Party) Saskatoon MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) in attendance to show their support and offer congratulations. And why wasn't the Minister of Economic Development able to attend such a prestigious event in person, but chose rather to send official greetings from his department's deputy minister?

Congratulations to the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce for their recognition of business initiative and excellence. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Advanced Technology Association

Ms. Jones: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan continues to move toward a knowledge-based economy as the province's advanced technology sector matures and expands. Yes, Mr. Speaker, this means more good news for Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Advanced Technology Association is an organization dedicated to encouraging, promoting, and stimulating the development and growth of industry and employment in the province through the commercialization and application of advanced technologies.

SATA (Saskatchewan Advanced Technology Association) held its kick-off meeting in June of 2000. This spring, SATA found itself a home in Innovation Place in Saskatoon. Larry Cooper, SATA's president, said:

Innovation Place was a natural choice for SATA's new office. The research park has a strong core of technology-based companies, many of whom are SATA members.

Mr. Speaker, SATA represents over 100 companies in the advanced technology sector. SATA provides everything from business development to training programs for its members, helping them stay in Saskatchewan and thrive. There are applications for advanced technology in every sector of the province's economy — the resource sector, agriculture, health care sector just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank SATA and all others who make it a priority to help improve the business environment in Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Honey Bee Manufacturing Ltd. Expansion

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with my colleagues in this Assembly a success story in my home constituency of Cypress Hills. And with all apologies due to veteran broadcaster, Paul Harvey — *The Rest of the Story*.

Mr. Speaker, Honey Bee Manufacturing is a manufacturing business located in the town of Frontier. They're in the process of expanding their operation, including 9,720 square feet for a heated warehouse, 1,000 square feet for a parts and shipping office, and close to 20,000 square feet of manufacturing space, a total cost of which will be over \$1 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is encouraging, not only for the business itself and the community of Frontier, but for the province as a whole. But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to add to this what Paul Harvey calls *The Rest of the Story*.

Mr. Speaker, this project is being financed with absolutely no provincial government assistance and — according to business ownership — in spite of provincial government policies, in spite of the bureaucracy and red tape ownership had to go through to even begin this expansion, and in spite of the state of the highways that serve that community. This considerable investment is taking place at a time when we have an NDP (New Democratic Party) government intent on abandoning rural Saskatchewan and private business.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know now what the good news is but you also know the rest of the story.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to tell the Assembly of a remarkable story from a special place in one of the many communities in my constituency of Regina Wascana Plains.

It has been said that Connie Buchanan's classroom at White

City School is unique. Aside from the colourful posters, displays, and decorations that adorn the walls, there is also a roomful of smiling students. Mr. Speaker, these smiles are likely due to Ms. Buchanan's different approach to teaching.

Ms. Buchanan was recently recognized for her teaching style by receiving the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. Ms. Buchanan had the distinction of receiving the award from the Prime Minister himself in Ottawa last Thursday.

Nominated by her principal and vice-principal, Ms. Buchanan was one of only 15 teachers from across the country to receive the prestigious award. Her award application showed how Ms. Buchanan likes to have fun with learning and uses theme-ing as a tool to educate her students. An example of theme-ing is dressing all of her pupils up in early costumes and re-enacting the lives of many of the passengers on the fated ship, the Titanic. Students wrote journals through the eyes of those characters, produced a newspaper of the tragedy at sea, and acted out the fateful night of the sinking.

I'm sure you will agree Mr. Speaker that Ms. Buchanan and the White City School are well deserving of the prestigious award.

Congratulations to Connie Buchanan on your tremendous achievement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberal Momentum in Canada

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is a red tide rising. Last year it was the Yukon voters who swept out the NDP (New Democratic Party) in favour of the Liberals. Today it is British Columbia's turn and if pundits are correct, when the Liberals finish with the NDP, BC (British Columbia) will be red from Fort Nelson to Victoria, with a surging red tide washing against the very gates of Fortress, Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are on the move. Can Saskatchewan be far behind?

It may seem a bold prediction right now, Mr. Speaker, but with Liberal momentum building the way it is, when we get finished mauling the NDP in the next election here, I predict they will need dental records to identify the remains.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite may laugh now, but as they watch the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, isn't it bad enough I have to deal with cryptosporidium without having to deal with the member from Regina South as well?

The Speaker: — I would just like to remind members that this is a time for member statements, not member debate. The member for North Battleford has got another 10 seconds.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, members opposite may laugh now, but as they watch the red tide rushing in tonight, they'll be running for the lifeboats.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Canora Credit Union Sod-Turning

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have more good news for the province and rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, a sod-turning ceremony took place on May 7, marking the construction of the 2.5 million Canora Credit Union building. Excavation of the site actually began on May 2, Mr. Speaker, with the project expected to take 34 weeks to complete.

The construction and site development will cost around \$2.1 million. Once architect's fees and furnishings, which also include a new ATM (automated teller machine), are included the total project will approach the \$2.5 million mark.

This new facility will provide a positive atmosphere for members and employees, and allow for the development and expansion of financial services to Canora and surrounding communities.

Since the present building was constructed in 1973, the credit union has simply outgrown it. Since 1973 assets have grown from less than 10 million to over 120 million. It was clear that a new facility would better meet the long-term needs of the credit union and its members. A Saskatoon architect, Henry Klypak, was retained and the building was designed. As well, Mr. Speaker, a Yorkton-based company, Logan Stevens, began construction on the project.

This project, Mr. Speaker, represents the spirit of Saskatchewan — Saskatchewan people working for and with Saskatchewan people and enhance the well-being of the province. Our congratulations to the Canora Credit Union and its members.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Possible Pioneer Lodge Closure in Assiniboia

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a letter here that I'd like to share excerpts of it with the Assembly, and it's over the continuing and deepening concern of the Pioneer Lodge. And this is a letter from an individual that is nearly 84 years old and he's worried about what's happening to it and what's going to happen to himself.

And I'd like to just quote. He's worried about if it closes, where he has to go, or if there's even be a place for him to go. And he says, quote:

Stop and think about it. If I was sent to one of the places and my wife left in Assiniboia, what kind of ending is that for a couple who have spent most of their lives together? Can't anyone see through that?

And, Mr. Speaker, he goes on in his letter and he talks about the numbers of elderly people in the community of Assiniboia alone, not the rest of southern Saskatchewan that this place would service. And he came up with a list of 143. He says that's

not all-inclusive, that's just people that he knows.

And now what is the Pioneer Lodge doing? Closing the doors and changing it from the current number of beds into 12 or 8 as the senior population increases.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the individual comments. He says:

Maybe some of the people who are helping make these decisions can't quite see things the way we older people do. If they are lucky and get old themselves someday, they may be glad there's a place like Pioneer Lodge to spend the last days of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table this letter. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Deaths of Children in the Care of Social Services

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Social Services. The minister has just received an extremely disturbing report from the Child Advocate.

She identifies a dramatic increase in the number of Saskatchewan children who are dying while under the care of the Department of Social Services. This number increased from 4 deaths in the last half of 1996 to 25 deaths in 1997 to 33 deaths in 1998. That's 62 children in two and one-half years who died while in the care of Social Services.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is this number increasing so dramatically and why are so many children dying while in the care of Social Services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to thank the member for her question and for focusing attention on the issues that beset children in our society. I appreciate the concern that the member expresses about what she says are increasing numbers of children that are receiving services or in the care of the Minister of Social Services and die, Mr. Speaker.

But in fact she points out partial statistics for one year. I should point out that this review commenced in August of 1996 so that the number of deaths during the course of that year would not be representative of a full year; and therefore, Mr. Speaker, I question as to whether she's presenting the facts in a fair way.

I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Department of Social Services has led the rest of Canada in asking an independent agency to review the deaths of children. We do that because we want to be open and transparent, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in all fairness I do think that I have my facts right because from four deaths in the last half of 1996 — which is what I stated — 25

deaths in 1997 and up, up to 33 in 1998. So 33 is up from 25.

Mr. Speaker, this report divides these tragic deaths into two categories, children who are receiving services from Social Services and in the care of the minister. These are the children like Karen Quill who are taken out of their home and placed in the legal care of the minister. The number of deaths in this category increased even more dramatically from zero in 1996, to three in 1997, up to ten in 1998. Mr. Speaker, these children were taken from their homes and placed in the care of the minister for their own protection.

Why are so many children dying while in the care of the Minister of Social Services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again I appreciate the question. May I just make one correction and point out to the House that in fact the Department of Social Services has changed the reporting of the deaths that would be referred to the Children's Advocate, which may account for some of the increases that the member talks about but did not disclose to the House.

Mr. Speaker, I should point out to the House that most of the children who die while in the care of the Department of Social Services are children who are medically fragile, have multiple medical problems, are not expected to live, Mr. Speaker. And in fact, the Children's Advocate commends the department and the caregivers, foster parents in Saskatchewan, for doing an excellent job to extend the lives of these children, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, of the 13 children that were in the care of the minister, 7 were medically fragile — that leaves 6 that weren't.

Mr. Speaker, this report reveals an extremely disturbing trend. From 1996 to 1998 the number of children who died while in the care of Social Services increased dramatically. The number of children who died while under the care of the minister increased even more dramatically. However we don't know if the government is now doing a better job of protecting children or whether this trend is continuing.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister release figures for 1999 and 2000 regarding the number of children who died while under the care of Social Services?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I'd like to thank the member for her question, Mr. Speaker. I note that earlier she asked specific questions about what has occurred during the years 1999 and 2000, and we will undertake to provide the answers, Mr. Speaker.

I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Children's Advocate report refers to a period of history ending in December of 1998. The Department of Social Services has made a number of improvements, both in our practices and our training for our staff, and I might say that we've also added significant

resources, Mr. Speaker, in the way of additional staff included in this year's budget. And, Mr. Speaker, I find it so sad that that opposition party would vote against that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I anxiously await those figures to see if it does have a positive effect.

Mr. Speaker, this report contains many extremely disturbing findings, but it is impossible to understand why anyone would want to hurt a child. But from 1996 to 1998, seven children in the care of Social Services died as a direct result of assault, mainly by family members. These include a 26-month-old boy and a 5-year-old girl. Another 11 of the children who died have suffered from family violence during their short lives.

Mr. Speaker, the report talks about the numerous agencies and government departments who deal with these children. Yet somehow many still fall through the cracks. The report says, and I quote:

It is clear that a collaborative approach with all the child-serving agencies is needed.

Mr. Speaker, what is the government doing to ensure better communication between departments to better protect these children?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, again I thank the member for her question. Mr. Speaker, again I would point out to the Assembly that the period of time we're talking about was up until December of 1998. Since that time there have been a number of efforts, I know by the Department of Health for example, to find additional services for health districts to help deal with young people who are harming themselves. And in terms of suicide prevention, the Children's Advocate has made a recommendation that there be a better coordination of services between my department and health districts and we agree. And we will work to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in a number of areas we have worked with departments, and I think significantly too. In the area of prevention programming we've made an announcement some weeks ago to provide better intervention services, better prevention services for children so as to reduce the incidents of violence and death that we see, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Child Advocate also found that in over half of these tragic deaths, case management concerns were raised with the Department of Social Services. The Child Advocate says and I quote:

In these 32 files that standards and policies that were in place to provide services to children were not adhered to consistently.

Mr. Speaker, this may be the most disturbing finding of this whole report. In 32 deaths the government's own policies, policies designed to protect children, were not followed.

Mr. Speaker, how does the minister explain this?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I thank the member for her question, but point out that the advocate did not conclude that any of the so-called non-compliance resulted in any deaths. Let's make that very clear, Mr. Speaker.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, again we're referring to a period of events leading up until 1998. Since that time we have made great strides in terms of training, improving our practices, ensuring that there is compliance at all times. We have added significant resources in child protection area, Mr. Speaker. We've done additional investments in prevention so that we are able to respond better when issues are raised with us, Mr. Speaker.

Again, my question is: why is it that one day when we say we need the additional staff in areas such as child protection to help protect the needs of children in society, they say no we won't support that. But now they say it's a concern, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP must take responsibility for its own policies and procedures. They have been in government for 10 years and this is getting worse, not better.

The report says that from August 1996 to December 1998, 62 children died while under the care of Social Services. In 33 of these cases, including Karen Quill, the government's own standard and policies were not adhered to consistently.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government has been in power for several years at the time of these deaths. Why were they not following their own standards and procedures and why were they not doing a better job of protecting these children?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, again I thank the member for her question.

Mr. Speaker, may I point out to the Assembly that prior to 1992, there was no Children's Advocate to independently investigate and review these issues in Saskatchewan. That prior to 1992, there was no independent review of deaths and there was no policy by the Department of Social Services to review these matters, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we all recognize as a society, as communities, that we have these challenges. The question remains, Mr. Speaker, is the government committed to using its resources, the public's resources, to make improvements in this area? I think the record speaks for itself — yes, we do, and they don't, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Cogeneration Project

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SaskPower.

Internal SaskPower documents obtained by the CBC (Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation) have exposed yet another bad NDP business deal. SaskPower International and ATCO Power, a private Alberta company, have formed a partnership to build a \$228 million cogeneration project. The 230 megawatt cogeneration project is located at the Cory Potash Mine near Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, the potash mine will buy the steam and SaskPower is going to buy the electricity. The only problem is that the power purchase agreement SaskPower forced its own negotiating team to accept is so bad that the negotiating team filed a disclaimer stating the deal did not serve the best interests of SaskPower.

To the minister, Mr. Speaker, why did SaskPower agree to sign on to a multimillion-dollar power purchase agreement that its own negotiating team said was bad for SaskPower and bad for the people of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say emphatically that this is a good deal for the people of Saskatchewan. It's a good deal, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — It will help ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we have an adequate power supply — a safe, reliable power supply, Mr. Speaker, where there will not be power shortages and exorbitant power rates as exist in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in an economy that is growing, Mr. Speaker, where there is higher demand for electricity, Mr. Speaker, this is a very good deal for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure everyone feels much better now because the minister thinks it's a good deal. The man in the government that thought Clickabid was a good deal; that IQ&A was a good deal; that ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan) has been a good deal — these are the people that are endorsing this project, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't leave much room for hope, frankly.

Mr. Speaker, SaskPower's negotiating team was so concerned about this multi-million-dollar power purchase agreement that they actually filed this disclaimer. Here's what they said. Mr. Speaker, this is important:

The SaskPower negotiating team has been the recipient of pressures to conclude negotiations and finalize the power purchase agreement within a time frame considered . . . to be restrictive.

It goes on to say:

Using its best efforts, the SaskPower negotiating team was unable to conclude the negotiations within these time frames without compromising its responsibility to conduct the negotiations in good faith and with due diligence (Mr. Speaker).

Mr. Speaker, the question to the minister is this. Why did the

minister push through a deal risking \$220 million in taxpayers' money when his negotiating team was telling him that the necessary due diligence had not been done?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, he says the minister thinks it's a good deal. You bet the minister thinks it's a good deal. And do you know who else thinks it's a good deal, Mr. Speaker? Who else? On May 25, 2000, out of *Hansard*, the member from Rosthern says the following:

I think the concept of cogen has become more popular. I think it is something that everyone should be looking at. It's just highly unfortunate (in criticism of our government, he says) it's highly unfortunate that it's taken this government this long to come up with (these announcements, Mr. Speaker) . . .

I go on. And he says:

So the cogeneration concept is a great concept (Mr. Speaker). This government is to be commended that they finally decided to take a step (Mr. Speaker).

Well they think it's a good deal too.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we all agree with the member for Rosthern. The concept is great. But as those that negotiated the deal point out, the concept is great; your deal stinks. That's the problem, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the negotiators were not the only ones, by the way, concerned about the financial viability of this NDP \$228 million cogen project. According to documents released to the media this morning and posted to the Internet, SaskPower board members — SaskPower board members — and other senior SaskPower executives were all very worried about the restrictive timelines, the lack of good faith bargaining, and the inadequate due diligence, Mr. Speaker.

If almost everyone involved in this \$228 million deal, from SaskPower's negotiating team all the way up to the board of directors and senior staff were concerned, why did the NDP government approve the deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that member criticized us for not working enough with the private sector, Mr. Speaker — not enough. Today we have a deal, Mr. Speaker, that partners with the private sector. What do they do? They're critical of that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear, this is not about due diligence, Mr. Speaker. Due diligence was done on this, Mr. Speaker. The issue is about negotiating, Mr. Speaker, negotiating a fair price, Mr. Speaker. And in my estimation, Mr. Speaker, I trust my SaskPower officials. They have a good deal for the people of

Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that will provide safe, reliable electricity for the people in Saskatchewan for years to come.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, on one hand he says he trusts his SaskPower officials, and on the other he says that due diligence has been done on this project. He can't have it both ways, because here's what his SaskPower officials said about the project. They said, and I quote:

These time frames were too restrictive. They were there without compromising its responsibility to conduct negotiations in good faith and with due diligence.

Mr. Speaker, that's what his own officials are telling him. It appears there was some other interest the NDP had in mind.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Member for Swift Current — 30 seconds.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, it appears that the NDP agreed to this deal and risked millions of taxpayers' dollars when almost everyone close to the deal, the ones that negotiated it, were concerned. And why was it a bad deal, Mr. Speaker? Well according to confidential SaskPower documents, the NDP imposed restrictive timelines and shared information that compromised its bargaining position and therefore made it impossible to do due diligence.

Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP government push through a bad deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Saskatchewan people told us, Mr. Speaker, the Crown review told us, Mr. Speaker, and on some days those members tell us, Mr. Speaker, that ministers should not be involved and nor should the government be involved in negotiating deals, Mr. Speaker. They should be approving policy, Mr. Speaker. That's what we've done, Mr. Speaker. And today they say, get involved. It makes no sense.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good deal for the people of Saskatchewan. It will provide safe, reliable power and electricity at the lowest possible price.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising we still aren't getting any straight answers as it relates to this project. But luckily, the reasons, the real reasons, which is what we've been going after today, the real reasons for the NDP pushing through this latest bad business deal were also outlined in the internal SaskPower documents uncovered by CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation).

They come in a memo from the acting CEO (chief executive officer) of SaskPower International, Mr. Mitchel. According to Mr. Mitchel, if the NDP, Mr. Speaker, if the NDP didn't push through this deal against the recommendation of its own negotiating team, and I quote, "CIC and cabinet would be

subject to extreme questioning and criticism." That's the real reason, Mr. Speaker. That's the reason he didn't listen to his officials. He didn't want to suffer the criticism.

Will the minister stand in his place today and admit that that is the real reason you shoved through this deal and risked 228 million taxpayer dollars?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I say this is a good deal for the people in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite said, as I quoted from the member from Rosthern, hurry up and make the deal, Mr. Speaker. They said we should have done it years ago, Mr. Speaker.

This is an environmentally friendly cogeneration of electricity. This is the . . . (inaudible) . . . of jobs; this is working with the private sector, Mr. Speaker. This is everything that they asked for, Mr. Speaker, and rightfully so that they should ask for that, Mr. Speaker.

This is a good deal for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I would just point out again that the minister has not answered our question as to what the reasons are for this government ignoring the advice of those that knew this deal better than anyone else, why did the government ignore the advice. There is other hints in the internal documents uncovered by CBC, and I'll share another one with you, Mr. Speaker.

We've already heard that SaskPower was worried that CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) and cabinet would, and I quote, "be subject to extreme questioning and criticism." But he also went on to say that if this deal was canned in the interest of taxpayers, "no one would be immune from the project collapse fallout."

Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm that those are the real reasons that this NDP government wouldn't listen to its SaskPower officials? You were more worried about saving face; more worried about your own public perception than the interests of the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, that member wants this minister and this government to be negotiating the prices of electricity, Mr. Speaker. That is absolutely ridiculous.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, and I say to the people of Saskatchewan, that member wants one thing, Mr. Speaker, and he wants, if he ever had the opportunity, to privatize our Crown corporations. That's his involvement with SaskPower, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — For weeks, for weeks we've been raising example after example of the misadventures of this government as it

relates to Crown corporation investments in questionable businesses. And every single time, Mr. Speaker, the minister stands up and talks about due diligence. That's what he says. He talks about the due diligence of the government.

Let me again quote from what his own officials told him about this project:

SaskPower's negotiating team was unable to conclude the negotiations within these time frames without compromising . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Once again I'd just ask members to allow the member who is putting the question, and putting the answers, to be heard. Just a little quieter, please. Order. order.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, he's been talking about due diligence for two weeks as it relates to Crown misadventures with taxpayers' money. Here's what his own officials said about this project:

SaskPower's negotiating team was unable to conclude the negotiations within these time frames without compromising its responsibility to conduct the negotiations in good faith and with due diligence.

Why was that advice ignored?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that that member questions the credibility of PCS (Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan Inc.) and ATCO, Mr. Speaker — two very reliable companies, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely incredible.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, I want to say to the people of Saskatchewan that while we . . . and as long as we are in government, Mr. Speaker, all the Crown corporations will see more than just the bottom line, Mr. Speaker. They will ensure that we have and provide environmentally friendly, Mr. Speaker, energy to the people of Saskatchewan. And that we will provide guaranteed sustainable energy for the people of Saskatchewan — not as occurs in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

If those members ever took charge of this government, Mr. Speaker, it would be only the bottom line and it would be selling SaskPower, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, one thing that we on this side of the House are completely confident about is that ATCO did do their due diligence. We're convinced of that. We think PCS (Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan Inc.) Cory division did their due diligence. They'll make out okay. But it looks like the big losers in this deal once again will be the taxpayers of the province of Saskatchewan. That's who will lose on this deal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Now, Mr. Speaker, we'll give the minister one more chance to answer a very important question, a very

important question. You got some solid advice and serious concerns raised with him by his officials. Why did he ignore that advice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I am going to say emphatically that this is a good deal for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This is not about due diligence, Mr. Speaker. You can disagree with the price if you want but this is not about due diligence, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, those members opposite . . . and I will quote again, Mr. Speaker. They said we should hurry up and make this deal, Mr. Speaker. The member from Rosthern says again and I quote, he says:

I think the people of Saskatchewan are going to be pleased to know that there is going to be a larger supply of locally produced electricity in our province, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I agree with him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

(14:30)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 222 — The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2001 (Set Election Dates)

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move first reading of Bill No. 222, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2001.

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

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, order please. Order please. Members of the Assembly, for the record I just would like to record that earlier today I tabled two documents.

One is the annual report . . . 2000 annual report from the Saskatchewan Children's Advocate and the second one was the *Summary of Child Death Reviews: August 1996 to December 1998*, also from the office of the Children's Advocate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to stand up on behalf of the government and table responses to questions 183 through 186 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to 183 through to 186 are tabled.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Standing Committee on Health Care

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of my brief remarks, I will be making a motion seconded by the member from Saskatoon Northwest to establish a Standing Committee on Health.

Mr. Speaker, I think all members of this Assembly will agree that health care is one of the highest priorities of Saskatchewan citizens and one of the most important issues that we deal with as elected officials. It is a subject that affects every one of us personally no matter what we do, where we live, or how old we are. Saskatchewan people want to know what they can do to stay healthy and they want to know what the health care system will . . . that the health care system will be there when they or a loved one falls ill.

Here in Saskatchewan I believe we have developed a unique interest in health care as a result of the leadership role we have assumed in developing and improving the medicare system in Canada.

Over the years public opinion surveys have consistently found health care to be the most important public policy issue in the province and across the country. From time to time other important issues will eclipse health care in the arena of public opinion, but eventually, inevitably, health care will re-emerge as the public's highest priority.

As legislators we are called upon to make many important decisions concerning the health care system and the overall health of our citizens. Through the passage of legislation and the annual health budget, this legislature establishes the legal and financial parameters for our health care system.

This year our government will spend over \$2.2 billion on health care services, representing nearly 40 per cent of the government's operating expenditures. The decisions we make can have a significant effect on the health care services provided to the public.

But as legislators, while we are involved in the policy developments leading up to these important decisions, we seldom have the opportunity to engage in a focused discussion with those who are directly affected by health policy options.

Over the years this legislature has established a number of standing committees where legislators can enter a more detailed discussion about specific areas of public policy. Currently there are 12 standing committees of this legislator. We have separate standing committees on agriculture, budgetary estimates, communication, constitutional affairs, Crown corporations, education, the environment, municipal law, non-controversial Bills, private members' Bills, privileges and elections, and public accounts.

Mr. Speaker, these are important subjects. These committees have served a vital role in examining legislation and government policies. However, I believe health care is every bit as important as these other issues and I believe the absence of a standing committee should be addressed.

Through a standing committee on health, legislators will have

an opportunity to examine critical issues in the health care field and to conduct hearings where members can hear from health providers, health groups, and the general public on matters of great importance.

The release of the Fyke Commission report is one occasion where a standing committee on health could serve an important role in gathering feedback on the report from the public and the health care community.

The Fyke Commission has proposed a significant shift in the way health care is organized and delivered in Saskatchewan. The recommendations would affect people and communities across Saskatchewan.

As legislators, we must ensure that the views of the public, the views of health care providers, and the views of other interested groups are brought forward and taken into consideration before making decisions about the implementation of the suggestions in this report. A standing committee on health would allow elected members to perform this important function at a critical stage in the evolution of our medicare system.

However, the formation of a standing committee on health is not simply a response to the Fyke Commission. In the years ahead, this committee will have an opportunity to examine different studies and different aspects of our health care system.

In the fall of 2001, the national Commission on the Future of Health Care that is being chaired by our former premier, Mr. Roy Romanow, will issue a report that addresses challenges facing health care right across the country. He'll be making reports throughout, with the final report in the fall of 2002.

That commission has just begun its work and it is much too soon to speculate on the outcome. But these recommendations will no doubt be of great interest to the public, to health providers, and to this legislature. A standing committee on health could be convened to study the report and its implications for health care delivery in this province.

The standing committee could delve into many other broad health policy topics. Just as a Special Committee on Tobacco Control has performed a valuable public service, I believe a standing committee could make a further contribution in the development of public health policy.

Mr. Speaker, the health system has experienced continual change over the past 50 years and we are always looking for ways to improve the system. All across Canada, provinces are looking for ideas about how to improve the way primary health services are delivered to the public.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at ways to improve early childhood development programs to ensure that children receive the support they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

We are also looking at ways to ensure that we have a sufficient number of doctors, nurses, therapists, technicians, and other health care providers.

And as health information technology develops, we will be looking for guidance from the public and the legislature on the

potential uses for this technology.

Mr. Speaker, there will always be a role for elected members to play as new challenges arise and new solutions come forward. I believe a standing committee on health is needed today and will be needed in the future. Through the strength of its members, the committee has the potential to perform a valuable public service.

I think all of us in this Assembly recognize the importance of health care to our constituents. I think we also recognize the important work that can be done by MLAs at the committee level. A standing committee on health will provide members with a permanent forum to debate and develop policy in an area of great public importance.

Mr. Speaker, today the coalition government is proposing a motion to create a standing committee on health. This situation should be addressed by our Assembly today, Mr. Speaker. I encourage all members to support the motion before the Assembly to establish the standing committee on health.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Northeast or Northwest that:

A Standing Committee on Health Care be appointed and empowered to examine and inquire into all such matters and things as may be referred to it by this Assembly, and to report from time to time their observations, thereon; with the power to send for persons, papers, and records, to examine witnesses under oath; and that Rule 94(1) of the Rules and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan be amended by adding the said committee to the list of standing committees of this Assembly; and that the membership of the said committee be established by order of this Assembly and continue from session to session within a legislature, and that all subsequent changes to membership be made pursuant to Rule 94(3).

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today to second the motion made by the Hon. Minister of Health to create a standing all-party committee on health.

Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe that Saskatchewan, the home of medicare and other major health care initiatives in Canadian history, has not had an all-party standing committee to deliberate and consider important matters of health that affect all of us until now. A move that both coalition partners feel is in the best interests of all Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, not only do I as a physician have a professional interest in the future of health care in this province, as Liberal leader I am proud our caucus has taken it as its duty to ensure that progressive views of Saskatchewan people have been heard in debates in this Assembly over the last few years.

Having come through earlier incarnations of health care reform, we have learned that before decisions are made and plans

started we need to provide the appropriate time to allow for the understanding of recommendations and feedback from those most affected.

Many of those who presented views to the Fyke Commission did so from the vantage point of their respective groups and presented viewpoints without seeing the whole of the Fyke report. Now the report is released, it is only fair to allow those who spoke out earlier to talk about the whole of the report.

Mr. Speaker, this coalition government believes that issues surrounding health care in our province are so important to Saskatchewan people; we have no other choice but to raise the discussion above the purely partisan that often takes place with regards to issues on health care.

The people of the province elected us all to look after health care. The future of health care must be the responsibility of all elected members. We are faced with issues that we must make informed decisions on, and we can only make those decisions based on knowledge and wisdom provided by the health care stakeholders, providers, and people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this type of committee is not new to the Canadian experience. Other jurisdictions have this type of committee in place where members of all political parties representing all political views can make their contributions and make sure all voices are heard when it comes to the important issue of health care.

Mr. Speaker, this type of committee is profoundly democratic because everyone's voice will be heard. The members opposite, in their own literature, call for more standing committees to allow MLAs a greater voice on the issues affecting this Assembly. For a party that claims to be profoundly interested in greater democracy for elected members and to give these members a greater say in the issues of the day, I cannot see why they would not . . . would even consider not allowing such a committee dealing with the biggest issue concerning people today not to be formed.

Mr. Speaker, this committee will give other voices a chance to be heard. Voices like Sinclair Harrison of SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), who says about the Fyke report and I quote:

His recommendations are going to have to be given serious thought. However before any of his recommendations are acted on, they will have to receive the okay from Saskatchewan residents.

(14:45)

Mr. Speaker, those voices will be heard by this committee. Mr. Speaker, there are other voices out there that need to be heard by this committee as well. The Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations has issued a statement calling on the Premier to put a consultation process in place where stakeholders can discuss and determine guidelines and processes for any changes in the delivery of health care.

Mr. Speaker, SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health

Organizations) has also called for a process for meaningful community involvement that is necessary to ensure the proper decisions are made for health care and for our communities. Mr. Speaker, SAHO is calling out for this process with the formation of this committee.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Rosalee Longmore, president of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses said of the Fyke report, to move forward there must be wide consultation with all sectors in the health care field, as well as the people of Saskatchewan to make sure the health care needs of communities are met under such a plan.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan nurses want this committee and they want this consultation. Saskatchewan nurses, front-line health care providers, have a right to be heard and woe-betide anyone who tries to keep their voices from being heard.

Mr. Speaker, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan has said it will be prepared to work collaboratively with all agencies that have the capacity and inclination to implement the Fyke Commission recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Medical Association at its recent representative assembly has empowered its executive to formulate a response to the Fyke report. Our doctors are more than prepared to work with this committee to improve our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that no one is suggesting that we deny doctors or other front-line health care workers the right to be heard and the right to work with this committee, as they have already indicated.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party claims to represent the interests of rural Saskatchewan. But what are the people of rural Saskatchewan actually saying. We see in the April 18 editorial of *The Estevan Mercury* advice given we hope that the Saskatchewan Party will take to heart.

Among the recommendations put forward by *The Mercury* editorial is to have all politicians get involved in the assessment process that is open to all. *The Mercury* editorial also recommends the Saskatchewan Party become an active participant in the process. *The Mercury* says, and I quote:

If the Saskatchewan Party chooses not to participate, they will lose credibility, and the opportunity to show the public their own political will, courage, and leadership capabilities in a public forum. This is their golden opportunity to shine and show us what they have in the areas of ideas and vision for health care in this province. It would be far too easy for them to sit back in a cushioned position to hurl barbs and criticisms without having to put their own concepts on the line.

The Mercury editorial goes on to say this, and I quote:

A big opportunity for the Saskatchewan Party to give the public some fresh ideas outside of their nebulous statements regarding the need to audit health care, create a patient bill of rights, and appoint a health care auditor.

The Mercury editorial states plainly, and I quote:

The public needs to see this party contribute.

The May 2 editorial, the *Weyburn Review* said, and I quote:

If they, the Saskatchewan Party, don't at least take part in the committee hearings, they can't expect to have any voice in what follows. The issues at hand are too important for partisan politicking.

The *Weyburn Review* editorial goes on to say:

The opposition has always claimed there are enough health care dollars in the system already. They just need to be spent better, more wisely, with less emphasis on administration and more in front-line care.

If they truly believe this, Mr. Speaker, they need to take part in the process, and find out the views of health professionals and the public at large, particularly from the rural areas they represent, and make sure those views are brought forward, Mr. Speaker.

Lin Orosz, and his Melville *Advance* column of May 18, asked if politics can be set aside when it comes to the Fyke report. And he states:

The greatest challenge for the Saskatchewan Party will be to rise above its petty political considerations. How refreshing it would be to see an opposition party actually do what's best for the common good, instead of basing its action on a lust for power.

Mr. Speaker, at the Saskatchewan Party's 1998 convention, it passed several resolutions to enhance legislative reform. Among them was that members of the public will be invited to make their views known at the committee level.

Mr. Speaker, this is what this motion is intended to do, to create a fair and democratic forum for people to make their views known on the full Fyke report, and now that they have an opportunity to study it, and for all of us to see what their opinions are. This is something that the Saskatchewan Party has said it supports in the past. And unless they have changed their mind regarding public input, there was no reason that I can see for them refusing to deny that input now.

Mr. Speaker, sitting across the floor are former members of the Liberal caucus who have in the past demonstrated their concern and their support for real changes to our health care system. Although our paths have diverged since then, Mr. Speaker, I hope their commitment to improve our health care system, and for public involvement in that improvement, still remains strong.

The people of Saskatchewan are counting on that commitment from all of us, all members of this Assembly, and are looking at these procedures with anticipation and perhaps a little trepidation at what path the House will take.

The Liberal caucus has always taken the position that the public and health care providers and stakeholders must be fully

consulted before changes are implemented.

Mr. Speaker, this motion sets these wheels in motion and that is why I am proud to second the motion made by the Minister of Health, our coalition partner. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased to join in the debate today on a very important motion put forward by the Minister of Health.

And I want to speak about this in a number of ways. First of all, the idea of a standing committee on Health as a concept is an idea that's sound. No one can argue of the relative importance of health and the Department of Health and the issues surrounding health care in this province are not significant enough to warrant a standing committee to deal with those kinds of issues over time.

Mr. Speaker, as you're aware, and the minister pointed out, there are a number of standing committees of this legislature. Some of them function on a regular basis. Committees like Public Accounts and Crown Corporations meet on a routine and a regular basis and have a very clear set of guidelines and a clear direction established over our parliamentary tradition. And they certainly have, by and large, proved useful to the members of this Assembly and the people of this province.

Other committees, and I can think of Agriculture for example, had not met for years up until last fall when we used that as the vehicle to invite members from the Agriculture Committee to make presentations to this legislature.

But prior to that, I believe it was maybe in the '30s that this committee had actually functioned and met before that time. Standing Committee on Education, I am not aware of when they've last met.

So that by the fact that we have a standing committee of this legislature, of and by itself, doesn't mean a whole lot if you're not going to use the opportunity of these committees in an appropriate way and a well thought out way.

Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding as well that there is a Special Committee on Rules and Procedures that has been doing some significant amount of work in terms of looking at other parliamentary jurisdictions, both in this country and abroad in the British parliamentary system, who are looking at the whole issue of the role and function of our committees — the standing committees, special committees, legislative committees, what the role and mandate should be of these committees.

And I understand as well, members on both sides of the House are participating in this investigation study to look at how does the committee assist and function and how could it best function in our provincial legislature. And I think that, as well, is a very important initiative that is ongoing by our legislature.

And certainly, from my perspective, I think that there may be some real significant changes happen in the role and responsibilities of not only committees but individual members

in opposition, in Executive Council, and backbenchers.

All of these issues, I believe, are being considered under the terms of reference of this Special Committee on Rules and Procedures. And, Mr. Speaker, I certainly look forward to what that committee is going to recommend in terms of the long-term reorganization, I hope, of the structure of how we actually conduct our affairs in this legislature on behalf of the people of this province. And I think that that is also important.

Mr. Speaker, in this process, I think it is important to highlight the fact that health care is a very significant issue in the provincial scene. Health care occupies almost 40 per cent of the provincial department budgets, and so a \$2 billion expenditure each and every year is a very significant portion of our fiscal responsibility as a province and as a legislature.

But more important, I think, even than that, is the whole issue of how important the health care system is to people. It's not just a monetary issue that talks about 40 per cent of the provincial budget or so much per cent of the GDP (gross domestic product) and is this number sustainable or not. The question is, how does the system respond to the day-to-day needs and concerns of Saskatchewan people?

Every day there are tens of thousands perhaps of people who are accessing, in one way or another, the health care system. If it is something that is very routine and predictable, something that is dealing with healthy lifestyles or outcomes or people who are involved in leadership and governance issues with the health care system or people that are actually experiencing a very significant event that might not be all that happy and might be a trauma or an accident or a sudden illness or a catastrophic problem, thousands of people across this province, on a daily basis, are accessing the health care system.

And statistically, people tell me that the health care system is something that isn't in your top-of-mind awareness until you need to access that system, and then it goes from zero interest to right to the top of the issue when something happens to yourself or one of your loved ones.

And so it is much more than a fiscal issue, although the whole fiscal sustainability of the system is an important issue to deal with. But more importantly in my mind, Mr. Speaker, is health care is a people issue and it's an issue that is something that is very near and dear to people over time.

Mr. Speaker, in this motion to set up a standing committee, in principle I think that there is nothing particularly of concern in doing that, and even more importantly, the concept of elevating the issue of health care to the level of a standing committee I think is important in the long term. But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise just some cautions.

First of all, I am concerned in terms of how this is going to fit into the whole reorganization of the committee structure that is being undertaken. And I don't have a problem about putting this committee on the floor at this stage in a similar fashion, and from my understanding of the proposed legislation, it would be very similar in structure and organization to what existing committees are. And so it is not sort of being set up in a special way in isolation from other committees.

And so I understand that following recommendations of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, that the whole relationship of this committee may change, as well as other committees may change as well following those recommendations and on the deliberations of this Assembly in terms of what a new organizational structure may look like.

So I understand that. But I do raise it as a concern because what I fear is happening is that this committee is being struck just to deal with the Fyke Commission report, and I have a concern about that of course. I want to make sure that people understand that the idea of a special committee on health, in principle, is a good idea, but I want to make sure it's done in the bigger picture context and not just as a knee-jerk reaction to a report that has come before the Assembly.

There have been all kinds of opportunities in the past when this government, expressing their so-called concern about consultation and all the rest of it, could have struck a special committee or a standing committee on health care, and they didn't choose to do that. They've been government for the last decade, and this is a good idea.

(15:00)

And so why all of a sudden when the Fyke report is now on the table is the great need for having this happen all of a sudden, before the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures have given their deliberations in their report. So I'm concerned about the motivation.

The second thing that I'm concerned about is that I don't pretend to be the most experienced parliamentarian in this Assembly but I have been around a little while now, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly have been here as a member of other standing committees in the past. I've had the pleasure not only to serve on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I've had the pleasure and the opportunity to chair it in the past, and I understand something about the committee process.

I've also had the opportunity to participate in the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations and I also understood how that worked.

And part of the problem that I had is out of the past experiences that I've had on actual committees in this House . . . the member, the seconder of the motion, the member from Saskatoon Northwest can stand up and talk with all these great platitudes about how non-political it's going to be. Everything he does is political. Unfortunately he does it wrong almost every time that he ever enters into anything.

And so I get real nervous when that member thinks it's a good idea because it almost surely might not given that member's track record.

Mr. Speaker, in the past I sat on both Public Accounts, as I mentioned, and Standing Committee on Crown Corporations, and I'd like to tell you a little bit of the experience.

We tried very hard — and the member from Meadow Lake was the Deputy Chair when I was the Chair of Public Accounts — and we made a deliberate effort to not politicize that committee

and to deal with the business before Public Accounts. And it worked as long as it was sort of non-political. As long as there was nothing involved and it was just very benign and you could just sort of neutralize things, well it wasn't a problem.

But as soon as there was anything at all that happened in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that had the least little bit of ramifications for the government, you could just see them lining up and saying, forget about this great utopian issue about how well this committee is going to work and how non-partisan it is. It became partisan instantly.

And the NDP staffer that sat behind the members on that side of the committee room made sure that the members knew exactly what was involved. They were very well briefed about the political ramifications of the committee work and decisions were either yeahed or nayed on the basis of a political imperative every time it became political, Mr. Speaker.

So the actions of my experience in the Committee on Public Accounts simply was not borne out in reality.

Mr. Speaker, the second committee I participated on, as I said, was the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations, and the reason I was involved with that committee was because I was at the time the critic for the Crown Investments Corporation and the Channel Lake inquiry was referred to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, again there was an NDP member that chaired the committee, the member from Saskatoon Southeast, I believe. And there were all kinds of lawyers and testimony and television cameras, and the whole thing went on. And it was, again, a great show.

The Minister of Economic Development in charge of CIC at the time, Mr. Lingenfelter — I believe I can use the name of a past member — got up in this House and he said how concerned they were about what had happened in Channel Lake and how they wanted to have us all come and join in this great effort to get to the bottom of it and so that we could strike a non-partisan vein in this whole affair. And at the end of the day we would make meaningful recommendations that were going to be listened to because this was such an important issue.

I've heard the good words before. They weren't uttered from the member from Saskatoon Northwest; they were muttered by the Deputy Premier. And we again said, well let's give it a chance. Let's participate in the process. Let's give it a chance. And we went through the whole exercise.

We participated, we read the documents, we studied all the issues. We participated in the investigation, we asked questions, we tried to get to the bottom of the thing. And when we got near to the time when we finally were coming to a conclusion, you know what? Brian Topp from the Premier's office wrote the recommendations, released them to the media, and we hadn't even seen them.

So thank you very much for the great involvement and the great sort of process about what was going on. Thank you very much for this non-partisan committee that was going to have meaningful input from us, that was going to have a meaningful

process, when the NDP staffers wrote the final report and they didn't even have the courtesy to show it to us who were supposedly important members of this whole process.

So, Mr. Speaker, please excuse me if I'm just a little bit cynical about all the kind words that come from the other side of the House about how this process is going to work.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know that there's many people in this province that would sit there and put up with the kind of abuse and process that we have by these members that we have entered into in good faith and then have been turned around and treated with absolute disgust and disdain. And there would be no people in this province that are going to sit there and come back to that table again. We just can't trust these people to do anything that isn't political.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly also think it is important for the people of this province to say what they feel about the Fyke report. I think that's true; I think it's important. And I will bet you long dollars that the Minister of Health is currently getting a lot more letters than I'm getting from people explaining what they think. I also know that I bet you that the Minister of Health is getting representation from all of the groups that presented to Fyke — from the nurses and the doctors and the psychiatrists and the health districts. And all of these people are expressing their focus on this whole issue of Fyke. Because they're saying it to me, so I'm sure they're saying it even more forcefully to the minister.

So no one can say that the people of this province don't have an opportunity. They can pick up the phone. They can write a letter. They can send a fax. They can send an e-mail. And they actually do get to visit with the opposition about these issues. All of these things are open, as they should be on every issue.

But, Mr. Speaker, the people of this province are not going to appreciate having another committee be manipulated by this non-political government as they have promised to do and their record says just simply will not happen.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that it is important that people have involvement in the future direction of health care in this province. It's absolutely critical. But we have a government that has been at the reins of authority in this province for the last 10 years, and where have they taken the health care system in this province? They've gotten themselves from one crisis to the next until finally they, in desperation, not knowing where to go because the mess was getting out of control, they end up with a Fyke Commission.

Two million dollars later, how thoughtful is this report? Did the report study what was happening in other countries, or what has happened, according to a lot of people in the professional health care business are saying, this report is more about ideology than it is about pure, good research that would look at what's happening in Denmark, in Sweden, in Germany, in New Zealand, or England, or the United States, or across the world.

Where are things happening that are solid and good? We spent \$2 million and they still don't have any suggestions other than a

continuation of closures and the wellness theory that has got us into the problem we are right now, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have to do is say to this government, we all have to live up to our responsibilities. As the official opposition, we asked ourselves that question very honestly early on in the Fyke Commission report. And we said, is it our responsibility to present to Mr. Fyke or not? As a member of the opposition, should we listen to Fyke and then make our presentation after the fact?

And we said no, Mr. Speaker, it is time that we came forward before the Fyke report was released and said what we thought were the concerns and the issues of health care in Saskatchewan. And on February 15, I believe, we made that submission to Mr. Fyke, we released it to the public, and I took an hour in my speech on the Speech from the Throne reply to talk about all of those issues and they're a matter of the record in *Hansard* and I passed out copies of our report to members opposite.

We did that upfront and it's now still posted on our Internet site and anybody in this province is not only open to view it and comment on it, it's there for all to see. And we're very proud of it.

Now does that mean it's a definitive paper? Absolutely not. But we believe it is a solid guideline of how we would approach the issues of health care and how we would deal with some issues that just simply are begging for decisions.

While the Fyke Commission was being constituted, the minister of the day said, oh, we can't make a possible decision of any kind because we've got to wait for Fyke. And so we've sat here now about 18 months with absolutely no decisions being made and all of the concerns and issues and problems piling up. And so it's getting to a time that we're very, very concerned about some very critical issues that need to be addressed and dealt with.

And certainly one that is very topical and current is the situation of the health sciences at the University of Saskatchewan. The president of the University, Dr. MacKinnon has explained the concern that he has about the lack of commitment of this government to the educational system at the university in general, but in particular, but in particular of the health sciences college.

Mr. Speaker, there was headlines in the paper as of yesterday that are still . . . or this morning concerned about the College of Medicine and the fact that the dean of Medicine, the search for the dean has been postponed because quite frankly nobody wants to come to a college whose future has very much been placed in doubt by this government.

And this government should know that. The Minister of Post-Secondary Education should know that and the Minister of Health should know that.

And there has been some constant erosion of funding and commitment to the point there are people that are leaving the College of Medicine and going to other jurisdictions. There are people whose bags are packed and are currently negotiating

with other jurisdictions. And this government wants to study some more.

Mr. Speaker, the accreditation of this college is coming up for review in the very short future and if we don't meet the minimum standards, we've got a big problem, Mr. Speaker. And in the meantime these guys sit here and say, oh, we're not going to play politics this time, just trust us this one last time and it will somehow go better.

Mr. Speaker, there's not only a responsibility for the official opposition to come up with a position on what we feel should be happening in this province, there is a greater responsibility of the government of the day to say what should be happening.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — They're the people that are supposed to be knowing what's going on, Mr. Speaker, and this government has not only created the mess, they now don't know what to do about it and they are sitting here trying to stall as long as possible about any kind of direction at all and in the meantime, the health care system is at risk.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly think that I . . . I certainly know that I have no problem philosophically with a standing committee on health. I have a big problem with the way this government will manipulate it and will manipulate the people into thinking that they're going to be involved in something meaningful; in the meantime, a staffer in the backroom is already writing the decisions that they're going to make, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to say that certainly I do not object to the concept of a standing committee on a subject, which after all is overwhelmingly the largest single item on the province's budget. However I do have some concern, as the member for Melfort-Tisdale has explained, that this might be nothing more than a stall tactic.

Certainly to consult with the people of Saskatchewan is always of value, especially in a matter as crucial as health.

Now specifically I want to talk about the response to the Fyke committee. Now more than a decade ago and under a different administration, we had the Murray Commission. And the Murray Commission said that the optimum number of major acute care regional hospitals for this province would be 12 to 15. Now that was under the Conservatives over a decade ago. What happened with the Murray Commission? Nothing.

(15:15)

Now we come back after many years of health reform, a lot of water under the bridge, many changes, and this present administration has the Fyke Commission. And what do they say? They say that 12 to 15 major acute care regional hospitals is the optimum number for this province . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I do. The Liberals have campaigned on it in 1995 and 1999.

But the interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is we had the Murray Commission in the late '80s; we have the Fyke Commission

report in 2000-2001. All those years separate, we get exactly the same recommendation. And I fear that we're going to do with the Fyke Commission what we did with the Murray Commission, and in another 10 years no doubt another commission will again recommend what Murray recommended and Fyke recommended. We have heard from the experts and they have told us the same thing now over a period of many years.

We also heard Mr. Fyke in this Chamber talk about the cost of inaction. And he said that the cost of inaction is one of three or a combination of all three. If we do not act, we will see longer waiting lists and a further deterioration in services. Or, two, we will see de-insured services. We've already had a lot of de-insured services in our province, especially by virtue of the drug plan simply not keeping pace with new drugs coming on the market. And three, user fees.

Those are all three very unattractive possibilities. And I think all members of this House would be unanimous in saying none of those possibilities are ones we want to see happen in this province.

However what Fyke told us very clearly is the present system is not sustainable. We have double-digit increases in our health budget on an annual basis and we have increases in our health budget which are two, three, and four times the increase in our economy, the increase in the GDP. And that is what he means when he says this is not sustainable. And if we do not act, the decision not to act is a decision to have a continually faltering system.

Well consultation with the stakeholders is important. But may I say, Mr. Speaker, that if the government would have the courage to issue at least a preliminary response to Fyke, that would allow the citizens of this province, and especially the special interest groups and stakeholders, to respond to the government's position. It would give them something to react to.

But in the absence of any response from the government, I would suggest to you that there is nothing for the Saskatchewan Medical Association or the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses or the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, there is nothing more for them to do than repeat what they have already said to Fyke. And as the member for Melfort-Tisdale just said, the Saskatchewan Party has already presented its paper to the Fyke Commission.

Presumably if the Saskatchewan Party went before the review of the review, about all they could do is repeat the paper they've already presented. And I respectfully submit that SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses), SAHO, and the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association) will also have nothing more they can do than repeat the positions they have already put forward.

Whereas if the government would have the courage to tell us in what direction their thinking is moving, and how they would like to respond to Fyke, then that would allow the stakeholder groups and the citizens of this province generally to respond to that and say how they think Fyke should be implemented, as opposed to, as I say, merely repeating positions and papers

which are already given and already there.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that we have a rapidly increasing health budget which does not appear to be dealing with the underlying problems. I as an MLA, and I'm sure all of my colleagues on both sides of this House, a major part of my work now is listening to people who have been on waiting lists for months and months and months, and phoning to the client representative of the various health districts to see what could be done to get people through. That's now a major part of an MLA's job.

And may I say, I find it unfortunate that even doctors are now recommending to their patients who can't get service, that they should talk to their MLA. Now there's something just faintly bizarre about the fact that we have created in this province a system where if you have a health problem, you talk to your MLA. But that is in point of fact now a major part of my work. I assume it's a major part of every other member's work in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to give another example of where I do not think we need further review for the government to act. And that is in the example of standard ambulance charges. The Fyke Commission said very clearly that ambulance charges based on mileage discriminate against rural residents. In point of fact, it's two-tier medicine, the sort of two-tier medicine the NDP tell us they are opposed to. That is a very strong example of two-tier medicine.

And if we look . . . and Fyke did a good job of this. The Saskatchewan Health Review Commission that they had before that did the same thing. And it pointed out, it pointed out, Mr. Speaker, that the costs of ambulance services in this province depend on what health district you live in, depend on the number of kilometres you have to travel, and even of course the issue of inter-facility transfer. In some health districts there is no charge for that; in other districts there is.

Well frankly, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to be non-partisan — and I sense that maybe my friends opposite are slipping away from their non-partisan role right now — if we're going to be non-partisan, then we should be united in saying the rights to ambulance service should not vary according to what community one lives in. We should all have the same rights to ambulance service, and we simply don't. I happen to live in a community where our basic ambulance charges are among the highest.

And so if we believe in one-tier health care, then the Fyke Commission's recommendation of standard ambulance charges that are not distance-based is something all of the experts agree on; I think all of the members here could agree on. I don't sense that anyone here would say that's a bad policy. I don't think any member here is going to rise in his or her place and say, I think distance-based charges for ambulance services are fair. I think people who live in a small community or on the farms should have to pay more than someone who lives in Saskatoon or Regina. I don't sense any member's going to do that.

And we've had a commission from Sask Health that reported the same thing. We've had the Fyke Commission that reported the same thing. We had the SEMSA (Saskatchewan Emergency

Medical Services Association) response that reported the same thing. So all of the experts agree that we should have standard ambulance charges. We should not have distance-based charges.

So I say to my NDP colleagues, if we're going to be non-partisan, here's a part of the Fyke report that can clearly be implemented right now. There's no disagreement from anybody. So if we're really involved in a non-partisan process, here's something that can be moved on immediately and we do not have to wait.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said there's certainly nothing the matter with having a standing committee on health. I've also said there's obviously nothing the matter with consulting with the people of Saskatchewan as to how to design health care for a new century.

But I do have concern that the consultation might be an excuse for inaction. I am concerned that this is a government which has lost its nerve, lost its courage. I hope I'm wrong.

But may I close with this: governing is about making the tough decisions. And I sense that this is a government which has lost its courage to make the tough decisions, and for that reason appointing a committee to consult is an excuse for inaction.

If this committee is going to consult and then bring back recommendations which the government will implement, then I think it will be a valuable process and I support it. If this committee is simply a smokescreen by which the government can hide its inaction, then I think it is unfortunate. And as Fyke correctly and strongly pointed out to us, there is a very heavy price to be paid for inaction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an interesting debate today. This is only the second time since I have been elected that this type of debate has taken place — the establishment of a standing committee.

Unfortunately though, this particular case, Mr. Speaker, is just another cynical government move by a government that has run cynical politics in this province since 1991. And fact is, Mr. Speaker, this is a government opposite that has done everything it can to avoid any responsibility. They continually blame somebody else for everything that happens. They refuse to make a decision, and when a decision is forced on them they blame somebody else for it. This is simply another attempt, Mr. Speaker, to do this.

The other time a standing committee was appointed by this legislature since I've been elected, Mr. Speaker, happened in 1992. That was the Standing Committee on the Environment — another very worthwhile sector that needs to be looked at, Mr. Speaker, another very worthwhile committee.

There was a reference made to that committee because standing committees, Mr. Speaker, can only receive references from this

legislature. It's only what the majority in the House decides that a committee will look at, that they are allowed to do a review on.

Well the Standing Committee on the Environment had a Bill referred to it, Mr. Speaker. And the committee did its due diligence, went out around the province — there are a number of members still here that were on that committee, Mr. Speaker — and the committee came back and made its report.

And what happened after that, Mr. Speaker, with the Standing Committee on the Environment? It did the job the government wanted to do in 1992, and has never sat again, Mr. Speaker.

Oh it was a very important committee when the minister for the Environment stood up and moved a new Standing Committee on the Environment. It was the best thing since sliced bread. And was never heard of again, Mr. Speaker.

The move, Mr. Speaker, by the Minister of Health, to establish a new standing committee on health, on the surface, Mr. Speaker, is a very good idea. Unfortunately it's simply being used for cynical politics.

And the letters we have received, Mr. Speaker, from the Premier, states that the committee will be struck to review the Commission on Health, the Fyke report, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't talk about all of the aspects of health care, Mr. Speaker, that might need to be reviewed in this province. It doesn't talk about specific doctors or nurses or any of those other issues that need to be dealt with. Ambulances. No, Mr. Speaker, the letter says the committee will deal with the Fyke report.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we've already stated our opinion on holding more committee hearings on the Fyke report. We believe, Mr. Speaker, that what needs to be done is some action taken now, not a year later.

Mr. Speaker, some of the members opposite are saying take a look at the outline of the motion, on what it refers to. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty ambiguous. So was the outline for the Environment Committee, Mr. Speaker, but it still never sits.

Just like the Standing Committee on Education. I've been here since October of 1991, Mr. Speaker, and the Standing Committee on Education has not met even once. Not even once. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, they have not even met to appoint a chairman.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture met last year for the very first time since 1953. That's how much these members opposite believe in standing committees, Mr. Speaker. They don't.

(15:30)

The standing committee on municipal government, Mr. Speaker, held one set of hearings in the last 10 years. These people do not use standing committees, Mr. Speaker, to carry on the normal business of the House. They use them for strictly political purposes.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, I heard the other day the Government

House Leader make a comment on some results coming out of a Crown Corporation Committee meeting, where he stood in the House here and insinuated that the government had somehow paid the legal bills of a member of the committee.

Well when he was questioned outside though, Mr. Speaker, oh, no, no, we didn't spend government money on the member's legal bills, but rather on a legal bill related to the case. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's simply politics on behalf of the government.

Mr. Speaker, I am part of a special committee that has been struck, the Committee on Rules and Procedures. The purpose of this committee, Mr. Speaker, is to look at how committees are used in this legislature. Because obviously, Mr. Speaker, if the committees never meet, they're not being used — Agriculture, Education, Municipal Law, Constitution, Environment, Mr. Speaker. And now this government wants to strike another one.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have thought, since there's a committee, an all-party committee in place looking at how to use committees, that the government would wait — would wait and see what kind of a report came from the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures, Mr. Speaker, before they struck any new committees.

To take a look at what recommendations might come from that committee's deliberations and the structures they have looked at across Canada, Mr. Speaker, and in other jurisdictions to determine what would be of value to Saskatchewan, what would work in Saskatchewan, rather than simply using the establishment of another standing committee for cynical political purposes, Mr. Speaker, which is what this exercise is all about.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the health community, communities themselves, had the opportunity, even individuals, Mr. Speaker, had opportunities to make presentations to the Fyke Commission. The only ones who did not do so were the NDP government, Mr. Speaker. Everybody else had a chance to have input.

Now they may not agree with what Mr. Fyke is reporting, and I certainly don't agree with what Mr. Fyke is reporting, but people had that opportunity to have input. And I can certainly understand them wanting to have a say further to air their grievances.

The Minister of Health, the member from Saskatoon Northwest read a number of quotes from *The Estevan Mercury* and the *Weyburn Review* but he failed to read the quotes from the *Redvers New Optimist*, Mr. Speaker, that held a . . . In that community there was a public meeting after the Fyke Commission reported, when people had an opportunity to see what was in that document, Mr. Speaker. Over 500 people turned out, and none of them liked the Fyke report, Mr. Speaker.

And in fact, the message that I received — because I was at that meeting, Mr. Speaker — was to not support this Fyke report and not to be a part of their sham committee, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Health was not there; nor were any other government members, either NDP or Liberal, Mr. Speaker.

They were noticeable in their absence but they had been invited, Mr. Speaker. And fact is the chairman of the meeting read out a nice reply from the Premier saying: sorry, I can't be there nor can anybody else from this government.

So it wasn't that they hadn't been notified, Mr. Speaker. They certainly had been. They just chose not to hear. They had an opportunity there, Mr. Speaker, to hear the concerns of 500 people, and yet they turned it down. Now they want to strike a committee to let people have a say.

Well, from the information we have received, Mr. Speaker, from the members opposite, the initial thoughts on holding committee hearings would be held in Regina only, Mr. Speaker, would be held with invited groups, not individuals, Mr. Speaker. So there was going to be the small select group that were invited to come to the Legislative Building in Regina to tell a committee what they thought.

It wasn't going to be open to the general public. It wasn't going to be open to communities or groups or individuals that were not on the government's invitation list, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague from Melfort talked about the hijacking of other committees, Mr. Speaker. And Crown Corporations is the prime example, Mr. Speaker, where the committee was hijacked on the Channel Lake report where the government . . . Executive Council staffer wrote the report and presented it as the final report to the media, Mr. Speaker, even though the individual members on the committee had not even seen it.

Since that date, Mr. Speaker, Crown Corporations Committee seems to be most reluctant to meet, even though, Mr. Speaker, in the past, it has been one of the more active committees. There seems to be a great deal of reticence on calling that meeting to order since the Channel Lake report, Mr. Speaker, and you have to wonder why that is when the government claims to be so open and accountable and desirous to hear what people have to say.

We had an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, we had an opportunity to actually ask questions of Mr. Fyke on the floor of the Assembly here, Mr. Speaker, and we took advantage of that because we felt it was important, Mr. Speaker, to listen to what Fyke had to say and that he have an opportunity to answer our questions.

Unfortunately though, Mr. Speaker, once the questions started to get a little more difficult and Mr. Fyke didn't want to answer them, what happened? Well the Committee of the Whole hearings, hearing Mr. Fyke, was immediately shut down by the government, Mr. Speaker. They didn't really want to hear what people had to say. It was just another show trial, Mr. Speaker, to bamboozle the public and to really not answer any of the questions.

Mr. Speaker, there is value in standing committees. There is value in all-party committees, Mr. Speaker, but not the way this government has run them. If they're used for their proper purposes, Mr. Speaker, they can do good work. They do good work in other jurisdictions. They have done good work in this province in the past.

But not with the cynical way that this government has tried to

manipulate the committee structure, Mr. Speaker. They do not do good work for the people of Saskatchewan. So, Mr. Speaker, while the idea of a standing committee is certainly worthwhile and valid, the purposes to which this government puts standing committees or any committee is a sham.

We have a select committee, Mr. Speaker, out there right now studying the child sex trade. It was established over a year ago and has yet to report, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have been holding up the meetings. They wouldn't meet in December and they wouldn't meet in January because it was their own leadership campaigns — Mr. Speaker, we couldn't possibly be involved in government business at that time.

So, Mr. Speaker, the committee, any standing committee, is a good idea, but it should wait though, Mr. Speaker, until the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures reports and makes recommendations to this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Finance Vote 18

Subvote (FI01)

The Chair: — I call on the Minister of Finance to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated to my left is Dr. Paul Boothe, the deputy minister of Finance. And to his left is Mr. Terry Paton, the Provincial Comptroller. To my right is Mr. Len Rog, who is the assistant deputy minister of the revenue division of the Department of Finance. Behind Mr. Rog is Mr. Kirk McGregor, who is the assistant deputy minister of taxation and intergovernmental affairs.

Behind me is Mr. Glen Veikle, the assistant deputy minister of the treasury board branch. Behind Dr. Boothe is Mr. Bill Van Sickle, the executive director of the corporate services division. And behind Mr. Paton is Ms. Joanne Brockman, the executive director of the economic and fiscal policy branch of the Department of Finance.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Minister, welcome, and welcome to your officials for the period of time we have this afternoon.

Mr. Minister, I was reviewing the information that you provided the last time we were in Committee of Finance with your department. And we had I think an open discussion on pensions and where we're headed with liabilities and that entire aspect.

Mr. Minister, one of the concerns that has been raised by the Saskatchewan Government Superannuates Association, the people that have worked for various departments, one of their concerns is all around a declining pension and a declining value and the loss of health benefits.

And I know, Mr. Minister, that in our debate last week when we were talking about pensions and we were talking about the kinds of ramifications that pensions do have on individuals, I had the opportunity to raise some of their concerns.

And I know, Mr. Minister, that you've met with them and you've had the opportunity to discuss loss of health benefits, because that occurs each and every time someone retires; that the benefits that they have when they are employed by a various agency or a Crown entity, those benefits usually end.

(15:45)

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you would share your explanation. I found it interesting in listening to the chairperson of the SGSA (Saskatchewan Government Superannuates Association) when he talked about the various pension plans that are contained within, I believe, vote (FI09) when we talked about pensions and benefits. Would you explain how many different pension plans are involved in that section, and how each one may be similar or different?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chair, under (FI09) there are five pension plans listed there, as well as the Canada Pension Plan. But in terms of the provincial plans, there are five.

The first four listed — the Public Service Superannuation Plan, the MLA (Members of Legislative Assembly) Superannuation Plan, the Judges' Superannuation Plan, the Municipal Employees' Pension Plan — these are defined benefit plans. The Public Employees' Pension Plan is a defined contribution plan.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for that explanation, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, under the old plans that I believe existed prior to 1977, if I have that date right, the plans that were in place, many of the superannuates that belonged to those pension plans indicate that the benefits being provided by people who belong to those plans are different. Is that true, and if so, how does your department deal with negotiations with each of those departments?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I should say, Mr. Chair, in addition to what I said in my last answer, the MLA superannuation plan, I said was a defined benefit plan. Of course, for anyone elected after, I believe, it's 1978, it is a defined contribution plan. So that the member from the opposition and myself, for example, are in a defined contribution plan.

These plans are statutory. I'm not sure what the member means when he refers to negotiations with departments. These are statutory plans. The old plans have a defined benefit set out by statute; the new plan is a defined contribution plan. And I'm not quite sure what the member means when he talks about negotiations concerning that.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, maybe I wasn't clear enough. What I'm asking is that the old plans that existed . . . Each and every year inflation takes a role, or plays a role in the amount of money that's being . . . that people are receiving. Do all of the old plans have an indexing involved, or is that the role that the government plays in changing the amount of indexing that is granted to each of the plans?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In answer to that question, Mr. Chair, with respect to the defined benefit plans, they are defined benefit plans. So by definition, the benefit that the member is entitled to once the member retires, that is the member of the Public Service once he or she retires, is as defined in the plan by statute.

There is no guaranteed indexing whatsoever. The member is entitled to get what is defined as the benefit.

Having said that, in most years the Government of Saskatchewan has provided an ad hoc increase to supplement the defined benefit. And I can tell the member that ad hoc increases were provided in 1986-87, '88-89, '89-90, '90-91, '93-94, '95-96, '97-98, '98-99, '99-2000, and 2000-2001.

So in most years an increase has been provided. It's not set out in the statute. It's not part of the defined benefit. It is simply a decision made year after year by the government according to the finances of the province.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, through the minister, the membership of the SGSA, the Saskatchewan Government Superannuates Association, contains many people that have worked for various departments, various agencies, Crown corporations. The one agency that jumps to mind, Mr. Speaker, is the Saskatchewan Power Corporation.

I'm wondering if the people who have previously worked for the, you know, Saskatchewan government in various other departments, when you've explained how the indexing has taken place at different years, is that a statute within the Power Corporation plan or is the same procedure followed that you just explained?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes. It is the same procedure with respect to the old SaskPower superannuates plan.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, I recognize that you have had presentation to you from members of the Superannuates group regarding their concern about health benefits. And I'm wondering, have your officials in the pension benefits area, have they done an actuarial study to see what the costs might be for providing a single coverage for health benefits, a dental coverage? Has any study been done on the number of people?

And while I'm asking that question regarding whether or not there is a study, could you indicate how many people are involved in the pension . . . Saskatchewan Government Superannuates Association?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — We do not know, Mr. Chair, how many members the Saskatchewan Government Superannuates Association has. In terms of the number that could be members,

there are 7,000 superannuates. So we know that. How many are involved in the association would be another question.

In terms of the question respecting is there an actuarial study with respect to the cost of health benefits for retired public servants, the answer is no, there is no actuarial study.

We do know from talking to the industry and the superannuates themselves that it's a very expensive proposition because, as you can appreciate, if you're putting together a group plan for retired people the cost tends to be quite high because the health care costs for retired people are higher than the general population. And that's a problem that the superannuates association has found in trying to contract for health benefits. And I think they're finding that really all of the carriers of this kind of insurance want to charge them more than people are generally prepared to pay.

So it seems like if there is a solution to continued health care benefits for superannuates, it probably would be to try to include them as part of a larger group as opposed to having a group of the superannuates themselves. Because they have been trying that and the experience thus far is not all that good because the price that the insurance companies want is very, very high and, unfortunately, going up more and more.

So we sympathize very much with the desire of the superannuates to have health coverage. It's a very expensive proposition, and so the solution to the problem does not seem all that easy.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And while we recognize, and I think the retired public servants recognize, that there indeed will be a cost, I believe that they will continue to lobby to deal with that because most people, as they retire, experience the majority of their health costs in their latter years. And this has been a tremendous burden on a lot of individuals as they've looked at the health costs, as they've looked at the drug plan.

Mr. Speaker, your government has introduced a deductible — \$850 semi-annually, so we're looking at a \$1,700 deductible. Many of these people are finding that as soon as they retire they've lost the benefit, that health benefit. If it was a drug plan, they've lost that.

And now they move into the retired public servants area and there are no health benefits, there are no dental benefits. There's a tremendous burden now on the salaries. And as you've indicated — you didn't indicate the percentage of increase — but you indicated that there was some indexing that has taken place sporadically throughout the last 10 years. They have found that their net money has continued to be eroded and, as a result, they're finding themselves in severe financial difficulty.

So while I understand what you're saying, I think we have to explore possibilities, whether they be cost shared, whether they be looked at as joint kind of things. I know that the Group Medical Services made a proposal to the superannuates. And as you've indicated, I think there are around 7,000 retired public servants and individual . . . I think the premium that was suggested to them was going to be somewhere in the area of \$600 per individual — single.

So that, Mr. Minister, if you take that on mathematical terms, 7,000 times 600 is about \$4.2 million. I think that's the cost that was looked at for that particular study. Now whether or not you're even exploring that, I think until we do the analysis, until we look at those proposals, there's all kinds of suggestions that are being made. And I'm wondering if your department has any interest in pursuing a study and looking at what might be a plan to alleviate some of the financial burden on the retired people?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Chair, it's fine for the member opposite to get up and do what opposition politicians do, which is to try to be all things to all people. But let's be very clear about what the member opposite is saying.

We have a general population of retired persons in Saskatchewan, which would be tens of thousands of people, and we very much appreciate the role that the public servants have played. But what the member opposite is saying is that if you're a public servant, as distinct from somebody who wasn't a public servant and may not even have a pension, that the government should take \$600 or some other figure per year to buy extended health coverage for that individual.

And my view is, Mr. Chair, that we have to be fair to all of the people of the province. And it's fine for the member opposite to get up and say that, you know, he's the friend of everyone, and if you're a retired public servant, you're going to have extended health coverage over and above medicare. But it's very costly.

And what we're trying to do, Mr. Chair, is to say this: that medicare will be a system that will cover everybody in the province. And the member refers to the Saskatchewan drug plan. There is, Mr. Chair, a program of special support available for people who are low income and who have high drug costs.

And what I would suggest to the member and I would suggest to the House is that we in government — and the members opposite should join us — should have a program like that to support anyone in the province who is low income with high drug costs, we should help them with their drug costs. We should not have one system for retired public servants who have pensions under the pension plans, and another less generous system for everybody else.

Some people who perhaps worked at minimum wage all their lives do not have a public sector pension and do not have extended health coverage. Everyone is covered by the medicare system; everyone is covered by the drug plan. There are costs that sometimes are onerous for seniors.

(16:00)

That member can get up on behalf of the retired public servants and say that, in addition to their public sector pensions, they should have superadded coverage that other people don't have. In my view what we should do is when it comes to drugs is try to have special support under the drug plan for everyone.

And as I tried to say to the member in the first answer to the question on this, if we're going to help people, we should try to include them in a larger group to keep the cost down. If the member's position is that retired public servants should have superadded protection that the rest of the general public doesn't

have, it's not necessarily the view of the government.

Our view is we should try to spend our money in a way that is fair to all the taxpayers, and indeed, if there are retired public servants who need assistance with their drug purchases, let's help them. But let's help everybody, not just the public superannuates.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Minister, I think that for, not for the first time, but I can definitely agree with you that we are suggesting that there be fairness and there be equality.

And that's why, Mr. Minister, my final question in this area would be are there taxpayer dollars that are currently expended for any health benefits or any pension plan benefits for any of the plans in the Crown sector, or in specific government agencies, where right now the government is actually using taxpayers' dollars to provide the benefits that I've just talked about? Are there any such expenditures currently being made?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — There are some plans that allow employees who retire before normal retirement age to continue their benefits until normal retirement age. I am advised that there are no plans that, generally speaking, would continue health care coverage for superannuates once they are at the normal retirement age and, in fact, superannuated.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, on page 66, the vote that we've just been talking about, the (FI09), could you indicate . . . You commented about the statutory requirements for the four different pension plans, could you indicate why we see a \$4 million decrease in the very first one, the Public Service Superannuation Plan?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chair, it has to do with mortality rates. There are more people who are passing away in the upcoming year than are retiring.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, as I indicated last time, I received the document that you sent over, or your officials sent over, regarding the components of the various taxes.

And, Mr. Minister, under the revenue you indicate that the components of other taxes are about \$65 million. I note that that's up very little . . . very slightly. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, when you talk about the \$65 million, why you see an increase on the premium of . . . the insurance premium side as far as the source of revenue?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, Mr. Chair. The increase with respect to insurance premium tax is simply due to the fact that we expect more insurance policies to be written in the province this year. In other words, an increase in business.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, one of my colleagues, I think, submitted a written question to your department regarding contributions that are made directly to fire . . . fire safety and firefighting in the province. And as I understand it, this money that is obtained from the various percentages on insurance premiums is used to offset that.

Your budget contains a \$65 million revenue. What will be the expenditures that you anticipate being sent specifically to the firefighting sector?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chair, it is the policy of the government that no government revenues are earmarked specifically for specific government programs. That is consistent with the rules set out by the Gass Commission, which studied the finances of the province in the early '90s.

And the policy we follow is that all revenues are paid to the General Revenue Fund and then the allocation of the revenue is according to the estimates as approved by the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, looking at another component of revenue for the budget, I note that your estimate contains a number for the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority, a net income of \$312.7 million, and you project . . . your officials project that that number is going to be down significantly — \$6 million down.

Could you indicate why your officials indicate that we will actually have less revenue from Liquor and Gaming?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, Mr. Chair. It has to do with the timing of expenses as opposed to different levels of use or activity of the products. Some expenses are being undertaken in this fiscal year with respect to the activities in that area.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, the *Report of the Provincial Auditor; Understanding the Finances of Government* contains a graph that shows the income from the Liquor and Gaming over the last seven years, I guess, is the chart. Shows a substantial increase each and every year.

And I note that in your projections last year, in your mid-term report, your budget document of March 31, 2000 or year end of March 31, 2000 was changed in your mid-year report by showing that it was increasing.

And while we've heard some expenditures that you have indicated will be a one-time expenditure for this fiscal year, I'm wondering why you see such a dramatic change in the income levels from Liquor and Gaming.

We've seen over the last years at least 10, 12, \$15 million increases each and every year. Now if that same increase takes place this year, are you forecasting a large amount of additional expenditure, one-time expenditure for this year?

We've seen the report on television and in the newspapers, I believe, that the VLT (video lottery terminal) machines are going to be replaced over a period of time, and there is a substantial cost there, if I recall the media release. But the numbers don't seem to indicate that we're going to see that much of a drop. And I'm wondering why you're forecasting that kind of a drop?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well as the member has identified there is replacement of VLTs going on this year and that's a \$6.1 million expenditure for replacement. And the revenue is dropping according to this by some 5.4, I believe, million

dollars. So most of it has to do with VLT replacement.

And we don't anticipate that the amount of liquor consumption in the province or the amount of VLT usage is going to be going up. We think it's going to be levelling off and our projections are based upon those assumptions.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, a significant amount of revenue is received from non-renewable resources, specifically natural gas and oil. And your budget documents indicate that you see a drop of about \$400 million in revenue from the forecasted amount for last year versus your estimated revenue source. And I recall in the legislature you commented on the price per . . . for measurement, and I forgot what that measurement was of natural gas, but you made reference to that.

Mr. Minister, I was reviewing the Crown Corporations Committee minutes that took place, and it's interesting that a question was raised to SaskEnergy President Ron Clark, and his belief is that the projections are very, very low. In fact he was . . . he almost, I think, he made a comment that he'd love to be purchasing gas at the rate that your officials were using in the projections of revenue.

Now, Mr. Minister, when the president of SaskEnergy seems to think that your projections are low, when we see people in the oil and gas sector, the response by a few of them is that if we lose \$400 million worth of revenue that we had last year, basically the whole sector will have gone into the tank.

I note that you had made a comment about your projections. And I'm wondering if you can review again how you arrived at the numbers, and if you did any consultation with people in SaskEnergy to actually arrive at those numbers?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chair, I would point out that our projections for the price of oil and gas are actually higher than what the province of Alberta has projected. For example, I can't speak for the president of SaskEnergy, other than to say that they tend to want to lock themselves in at a certain price so that there's some stability.

But in answer to the question where do we get these numbers from, our department, the Department of Finance, consults with the Department of Energy and Mines and they tell us what they project the prices to be. They in turn consult with all of the private sector — the oil companies, the gas companies, the investment bankers, and so on, the Government of Alberta — and try to come up with a reasonable projection. So that's how we arrive at the numbers.

Our numbers, I would point out to the member, Mr. Chair, are consistent with what other governments would be projecting. They're consistent with what the private sector would project. On the oil and gas side, these are always estimates. We don't claim to be clairvoyant, and it's quite possible that we will be incorrect in some way. But our estimates are not out of line with estimates from players in the industry or the Government of Alberta, for example.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I guess we will know when your officials have had a chance to reassess this

come November, when you do your mid-term . . . mid-year report, I should say. And I hope that indeed the revenue will be much greater, because at that time we will maybe be able to have a windfall again as we did back in November of 2000.

Mr. Minister, would you explain and clarify — I've looked for information on this and I'd like to get an explanation — about the revenue sources from the Government of Canada. And your information that you've shared with the House on the Canada Health and Social Transfer and the equalization payments was excellent, and it explained those two numbers very well.

Mr. Minister, the other section, the third section indicates that there's about 136 million coming in the section of other. Could you have your officials explain, or yourself explain, what is contained or what numbers make up 136 million and what are the different areas that the money comes from.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, this relates to other federal/provincial programs where we have agreements with the federal government to co-operate in terms of delivering programs.

For example, the Medical Equipment trust, that is a revenue gain of \$33.3 million. Programs administered under the Canada/Saskatchewan Agri-Infrastructure Program, CAIP, and other cost-sharing programs in the Department of Highways and Transportation where we work together — I think the grain roads, for example.

Athabasca/Fort Qu'Appelle health facilities where the federal government is assisting with capital costs because those are located on First Nations land. Forest fire activity compensated by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada under the Forest Fire Suppression and Primrose Air Weapons agreements. An increase in the allocation for special opportunity grants in the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training. And a variety of other programs.

And I would be pleased, Mr. Chair, if the member wishes — and in fact, I'll just offer to do it anyway — to provide a detailed list of how the \$136 million figure is arrived at. And I can send that over to the member tomorrow.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, and I thank you for sharing that information. Mr. Minister, one of the other questions I think — I'm not sure whether it's contained in the category of other — is the money that is received for agricultural programs.

I note that the auditor has indicated in his report that various funding is provided by the federal government, and of course the Government of Saskatchewan collects premiums from producers. And I'm wondering if in the revenue section, if your document contains the money that the federal government transfers to Saskatchewan for agricultural programs, and/or does the revenue received from producers, is it contained in the revenue section?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — With respect to the crop insurance premiums, Mr. Chair, that money is not included in our statement of revenue. That goes into a separate account for the purpose of crop insurance.

And for the CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) and CSAP (Canada-Saskatchewan Adjustment Program) which are two programs where money comes from the federal government, that money does not come into our revenue; that money goes directly to the producers.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So then, Mr. Minister, if I can now move that explanation into the expenditure side, and if I see on page 13 of your document that for Agriculture and Food you're estimating \$337 million worth of expenditure, that the revenue needed to meet that cost of \$337 million expenditure would not . . . there would be no federal money, or there would be no producer money that would be needed to offset that expenditure of 337 million for the agriculture programs in your budget.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In general terms, Mr. Chair, the \$337 million we would expend would not include crop insurance premiums from producers. We've established that. It would not include money for crop insurance from the federal government, except perhaps in some small degree. There may be some small amount that they compensate us for administration of the program which we may get from them, but no premium money, if I can put it that way. And then it does not include the CFIP and CSAP money.

So that generally speaking, the monies that we receive as premiums, or from the federal government, do not go into our expenditure of \$337 million.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you for clarifying that, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, a couple of questions directly connected with vote 18 in the Finance department.

Mr. Minister, I note that two of the subvotes have significant increases in terms of the amount of cost, one of them being the Provincial Comptroller's office. I note that the amount of estimated expenditure has doubled.

Could you indicate how you . . . or what you see happening in that department as to why you have such a significant increase from 5 million to 10.8 million? And what kinds of things will we see happening differently this year in that department than we saw last year?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — The reason is a one-time expenditure to install a new payroll system for the Government of Saskatchewan, that is the information technology to issue the cheques.

And it's believed that the establishment of that system, which I'm told is long overdue, will in fact save money across government by preventing individual departments and agencies from having to invest in information technology for their own systems. In other words, the expenses are being borne by the Department of Finance to put in the new information technology for a new payroll system.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, and I recognize that that department must do literally thousands and thousands of cheques. Have you had . . . has anyone done a study as to the actual cost of producing a cheque? That is through this system, under the old system, and now as you've

indicated, we will have a new information technology system, do you expect that the cost of producing that cheque, the actual cost, will decrease?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — It's difficult to analyze savings in terms of per cheque basis because part of the reason for the change is to move more and more into electronic transfer of funds and electronic deposit. And it's very difficult to compare any old system with a new system in the sense that instead of issuing cheques, to a much greater degree monies are being deposited directly into people's accounts.

But I am told by department officials that because the Department of Finance will install a system that can be used by the entire government, the savings across government as opposed to having each department put in their own system are expected to be in the range of \$28 million one-time costs for payroll systems; that the implementation of the system in the Department of Finance this year, and I think there will be some more expense next year, will mean that overall we will save \$28 million that otherwise would have been spent.

But we don't anticipate that we can point to any savings on a per cheque basis in the sense that we're trying to substantially reduce the number of cheques that are going out, and instead, to electronically transfer monies to people that are entitled to them.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Minister, one of the other votes, (05), revenue, the revenue expenditure or estimate for the revenue section of your budget is up almost \$3 million, and I note that the explanation there talks about tax and refund programs. Do you see significantly more work in this area for this year to necessitate a \$3 million increase in the budget? What will occur in that department that caused you to increase their budget by \$3 million?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — It is greater expense because of the implementation of the new tax-on-income system. Formerly, as the member knows, Mr. Chair, we had a tax-on-tax system which meant that Ottawa would not only collect our income taxes, as they will continue to do, but they also would make the rules with respect to our taxation.

And you can see that the income tax administration is the major part of the increase, and that is because we're implementing the new tax-on-income system.

We also are increasing the number of auditors that are employed by the Department of Finance. But I should point out that every time we hire another auditor, the amount of money collected by those auditors exceeds by several times the amount of money that it costs to hire an auditor.

And those are the reasons. We're moving to a new income tax system that's being developed, and we're increasing the number of auditors that we employ in the Department of Finance.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Minister. And welcome to your officials too.

If I could, I'd like to follow up on the question that my colleague was just referring to there. And the new taxation

system, the flat rate but accelerating over the . . . in three stages — it's going to be considerably easier, I understand, for personal income tax reasons, to understand, probably fill out.

I would hope that it'll be similarly easier for the department to do the calculations, do the summaries, the audits, and so on.

What you're telling me is that it's going to cost even a greater amount with an increased role for auditors in this newer system?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I should be clear about this. The auditors don't have much to do with the income tax. They have to do with the sales tax, Mr. Chair.

We have auditors to make sure that out-of-province contractors are paying the PST (provincial sales tax) for example, when they come into Saskatchewan — that kind of thing. They don't do any auditing with respect to income tax. That's the role of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, commonly referred to as Revenue Canada.

In my earlier answer I think I said that there was more money with respect to income tax administration. I should say that most of that money will be spent as a payment to Ottawa, not as a payment to ourselves in Regina.

And the reason for that is that under the old system, Ottawa could do whatever it wanted with respect to income tax in Saskatchewan. Under the new system we are saying that we want Ottawa to apply not just the personal tax exemption or deduction that they have, we want every individual to have an \$8,000 personal credit. So they have \$8,000 before they pay any income tax.

(16:30)

And if they have dependent children, we're saying we want every individual to have this year a \$1,500 tax credit over and above the 8,000, which will go up to \$2,500 by 2003. We want senior citizens this year to have a \$500 tax credit which will grow to a thousand dollars by 2003.

We want the tax credits and deductions and brackets eventually to be indexed so that the taxpayers are protected from inflation. We want to reduce the capital gains that would be paid for by farmers or small-business people when they sold . . . when they sell their businesses or farms. And, for example, we want lower income people to have a credit against the PST. That in addition to their GST (goods and services tax) credit they would get a PST credit.

So in other words what we're doing is saying to Ottawa, we want to quite significantly lower the income taxes that Saskatchewan people pay by implementing the credits for everyone, the \$8,000 basic credit, the extra credits for people with dependent children, extra credits for seniors, the capital gains tax reduction for farmers and small-business people, and the sales tax credit for low-income people.

But the difference is when we take on the responsibility to do those things, to lower the income taxes for people, as I think we must do, and we take on the responsibility for the rules, we

have to also pay for the administration of those special rules that we come up with.

So in one sense we're paying Ottawa \$2 million more than we did before to implement this system. But the result by the year 2003 will be \$430 million less income tax paid for by the taxpayers of Saskatchewan. But if we want to reduce the income taxes by \$430 million by 2003, as we're presently doing — and some of that is being implemented this year because we abolished the flat tax, the high income surtax, and the debt reduction surtax — we're bringing in our own system of lower taxation but we have to pay for the administration of that system.

The alternative is we don't pay them the \$2 million to administer it but everybody pays more income taxes in Saskatchewan. And it's the policy of this government, through the budget last year continuing this year, to bring in lower income taxes. And we're prepared to say to Ottawa we'll pay for the administration of some of that.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Is that a similar format that other provinces are going to the flat tax, or the non-tax-on-tax format that you've described? Is that a similar reaction from other provinces? Are they in fact . . . are they paying an administrative fee to the federal government for doing those exceptional kinds of deductions and calculations needed for their changes as well?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — The answer is yes. It wouldn't necessarily be the same amount but each province going through a tax and income system would have to pay the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency an amount of money to develop that system.

Our amount we estimate this year is about \$2 million. But part of that will be one-time costs not ongoing year after year. Each province would have to pay Ottawa to implement the special features of their system. We have a lot of special features because we're making a lot of changes to the income tax system. If we're going to do that to lower the income taxes for people, we have to pay for the development of that system and the answer is, yes, so would every other province have to pay for that as well.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The negotiation with the federal Revenue Agency that is doing this, that has already been . . . you're officials have already accomplished that because the new tax system was initiated on January 1. At least I believe it was.

Now if that's the case, the tax year being finished at the end of March, can you see any problems that have evolved with that new system as has been worked out with the federal agency?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — We feel that the initial launch of the new tax system has been fairly successful. In terms of our relationship with the federal government, we are still in negotiations with the federal government to arrive at a new tax collection agreement. And we have not succeeded in signing a new tax collection agreement with the federal government.

I should tell the member, Mr. Chair, and the House that in this regard we are in the same position as every other jurisdiction in

Canada with the exception of Quebec, because the nine provinces who have the federal government collect their income taxes, none of them have reached an agreement with the federal government for the ongoing collection of their taxes. And we're working on that.

And in fact that's one reason we're having Professor Jack Vicq join us in the Department of Finance to assist us and, hopefully, other provinces in arriving at suitable arrangements with the federal government.

But having said that, in terms of the administration of the system and the collection of the taxes, we feel that it's going relatively smoothly.

Mr. Wakefield: — That's good news. I'm very pleased to hear that, because the more confidence that everybody has in the system and all the details are ironed out and determined, then I think everybody feels more comfortable in going down this new road.

Anything new, of course, requires some level of confidence and I hope you'll be able to achieve that. And I think with the personal income tax, the changes, I hope that confidence is going to continue as well.

I want to get back to a response you gave earlier to my colleague about the auditor, the cost of additional auditors. And I think you mentioned that those were people that were needed to do additional work in terms of PST for things in the province . . . coming into the province and so on. Why would there be an increase this particular year for those kinds of auditors?

And under that general revenue, there is a three . . . under the revenue section, there's about a \$3 million increase and I think that was part of the discussion in your response. Can you tell me why there was a need for these auditors?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, I should point out to the member, Mr. Chair, the increased costs for auditing services we expect to be in the neighbourhood of \$693 million a year. And I'm advised by the officials that they would consider a reasonable level of audit to be in the range of 4 per cent. That is 4 per cent of accounts, I guess, in order to have the affect that an audit is to have. And we are presently at about 2.6 per cent. They want to move that up, which I'm told would be consistent with what is done in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Minister, would that be part of the reason then that the overall spending for the Department of Finance, vote 18, is increased . . . my calculation, about five and a half per cent overall?

I noticed one of the factors on vote 18 was administration, which has significantly gone up to over 10 per cent. Is that a reason . . . your earlier response, is that part of the reasoning for those rather significant increases in the department budget?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I would say no, Mr. Chair. To put it in perspective, with respect to the increase in audit function, we're talking about approximately \$700,000. But with respect to the new payroll system, we're talking about, I believe, in the range of \$6 million.

So obviously, most of the reason for increase in the Department of Finance is not administration or auditing, it is an investment in information technology, which as I said in an earlier answer, we believe will save the government approximately \$28 million across government.

Mr. Wakefield: — But, Mr. Minister, the administration itself . . . the administration line item has increased very significantly. And the reason that I'm dwelling on that is that when I look at all the departments, all the government departments, and looked at that line item of administration, every department but maybe one has increased their administration budget for this year. And it just seems strange to me that in a time when your revenues are down, that expenditure is going up, particularly on administration within department.

Would you care to comment on that?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, well, to put it in perspective, Mr. Chair, I would say this, that the expenses of the Department of Finance are going up approximately \$7 million, I believe, this year. The administrative costs are going up \$356,000 which, as the member can tell, is about one-twentieth of the amount of the increased costs. We're spending about \$6 million on information technology so that the province has a good payroll system that will save us money. And, as the member says and I acknowledge, there's an increase of \$356,000 in administration.

But it's quite apparent that the largest increases in the Department of Finance are not for administration; therefore, investments in information technology to save money across government.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The idea of saving money has a real appeal to me. In a corporate world that is the answer to a situation where your revenues are actually decreasing, you don't want your expenses to increase. And things like administration, I agree, are maybe not a major part of the overall expenditure. But the fact is that there is an increase and those signals are very important. Maybe they're perception, but the signals are very critical in terms of how people look at the provincial budget and your budget in particular.

I guess with that in mind, I would like to maybe just ask a question or two, Mr. Minister, about some of the things that have troubled me, and you and I have maybe discussed these at earlier times.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the signal that is generated from the budget is a very important factor in the economic activity within the province. And I think when you look at the budget numbers — the actual revenue numbers — generated revenue is down. And the expenditure, when you total up all the departments, is up.

That is a signal that doesn't bode well in the business community. I know there's other factors in there but could you give me a statement that would allow me to go back and talk to business people saying that there is a sustainability to your budget even though those numbers in a corporate world would dictate other?

(16:45)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well certainly, Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to.

The member suggests that we're spending more money than we're taking in. And as I myself said in the budget speech — when I delivered the budget speech on March 29 — that's quite correct because our revenues are going down.

The member need not be alarmed about that because as I also pointed out on budget day we are not funding expenditures by borrowing money or going into debt. We are funding our expenditures by drawing down the savings of the province. And let us be very clear about that. There's a big difference. We're not going into debt; we're not going out borrowing money to finance day-to-day operations; we're drawing down our savings.

And I want to say to the member who asks how he's going to explain this to his public; I'd put it this way. Day after day and month after month I have listened and the people of the province have listened to the opposition say you're sitting on too much money. At the beginning of this fiscal year we had savings of \$775 million. And I don't know about the member from Lloydminster, but some of the other members have said that we ought not to be sitting on so much money.

This year in the budget we are spending \$260 million of our savings because we want to fix the roads, we want to put more money into education, and we want to take high speed Internet throughout rural Saskatchewan, among other things. So we're going to rebuild the roads, we're going to put more into schools, and we're going to put more information infrastructure into rural Saskatchewan. That's what the budget says. To do that we're going to spend some of our savings.

The members voted against those measures so they may not be in favour of spending some of our savings. But that seems very odd, Mr. Chair, because day after day the rest of that member's colleagues say we're sitting on too much money. This year we're spending some of it on highways, education, and information technology in rural Saskatchewan.

The member I think finished off his question by saying, what would the business community think about it. Well I met yesterday with the Investment Dealers Association of Canada, which represents at least one part of the business community, and this is what they had to say. Longest string of budget surpluses extended. Then they say, the province (meaning Saskatchewan) is to be commended for prudent management of its finances. By keeping spending growth under control and racking up budget surpluses in the past seven years, Saskatchewan not only has reduced public debt but has been able to introduce tax reform that is leading to cuts in taxes.

They then go on to point out that our marginal income tax rate is the second lowest in the country. They then go on to say — this is the Investment Dealers Association of Canada — and the member is asking about business reaction. They say:

Higher budget spending notwithstanding, Saskatchewan's finances are in good shape. Taxes support a debt of 8.2 billion and a debt to GDP ratio of about 25 per cent are the

fourth lowest among the provinces.

And I want to pause here to say, Mr. Chair, that in the beginning of the 1990s, 10 years ago, Saskatchewan was the worst province in the country in terms of our debt level. The Investment Dealers say we are now the fourth lowest. In other words, we're better than six other provinces.

And then they go on to say this; I think this is very interesting:

Saskatchewan's debt ratio should continue to move closer to the 20 per cent mark by mid-decade and represent one of the lowest ratios among the provinces.

In other words, the lowest debt . . . one of the lowest debts is going to be Saskatchewan according to the Investment Dealers.

So when the member says in his question that somehow by investing in education and information technology in rural Saskatchewan and fixing the roads, that we're doing something wrong and that we shouldn't be spending this money because somehow our finances aren't in good shape because we're using some of our savings, all I can say, Mr. Chair, is the Investment Dealers Association does not agree with him.

I've also read analyses from the Royal Bank, from Nesbitt Burns, and from some other private sector agencies. They think that the Government of Saskatchewan and the people of Saskatchewan are doing a good job moving forward.

We know that the opposition always says oh, you're doing a bad job. One day they say you're spending too much — this is what the member is saying today — the next day they say you're sitting on too much money. That's what the rest of them usually say.

But if we have to choose between what the business community says through their organizations and what the opposition says, I, Mr. Chair, will put my money on what the objective, private sector analysts are saying.

I could add, by the way, that we started out 10 years ago with the worst credit rating in the country. We now have a straight A credit rating.

And so, the member can ask what can he go back and tell the people of his community. I would tell them that we once again have an A credit rating. I would tell them that we're paying down our debt. And I would tell them that yes, we're going to use some of our savings to invest in education, invest in highways, and take information technology to 366 communities throughout rural Saskatchewan. I appreciate that the opposition is opposed to those measures, but that is what is in the budget, that is where this government stands, and we're going to continue on with those measures.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Minister, I'm not sure that you've got the right impression of our criticism of your budget based on your perception of us opposing investment in highways, education, and so on.

I think what we have to look at is when there is a . . . when there is a windfall revenue, that maybe should be handled

maybe in a different way than you have. Maybe we have a different opinion about that.

But let me get back to what you have been talking about in terms of the . . . and quoting from investment dealers and so on. Basically, the difference between the revenue and the expenditures, the difference there, is made up of . . . two or three ways. Transfers from the federal government, and I noticed the transfers have been increased in various ways. Fortunately there's some provinces doing very well in Canada and the transfers seem to be increased.

There's the Canada Health and Social Transfer that has increased, all part of the federal transfer from the Government of Canada. But there's also one that the Crown Investment Corporation dividend of \$200 million comes into play so that the General Revenue Fund does, in fact, have a balanced budget.

But when you . . . we have to look at the bigger picture — maybe for a different day — but when you have to look at the bigger picture, I would have to have a difference of opinion as to whether we are decreasing our debt, particularly in this budget. Is that . . . am I accurate there?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, the member is certainly accurate, Mr. Chair, when he says we have a difference of opinion. We on this side do have a difference of opinion from the opposition.

We believe in balanced budgets. We have delivered the eighth balanced budget in a row. The opposition has consistently advocated through their spending initiatives that we go into deficit and debt. So we have a difference of opinion there.

We don't believe in saddling the next generation with deficit and debt. So, yes, we have a difference of opinion.

We believe that the debt of the province should be reduced. We have been paying down the debt of the province. The opposition would, if they had the opportunity, increase the debt of the province. So we certainly do have differences of opinion.

But the reality is, Mr. Chair, that through the balanced budgets and the payment down of the debt, we've improved our credit rating. We have some money in the bank, of which we're spending some of it this year.

And I think that we need to continue going on the kind of fiscal path that we're on, which has attracted credit rating upgrades and the approval of the investment community from coast-to-coast.

Mr. Wakefield: — Excuse me, I was just going to thank the minister and his officials for the questions and answers this afternoon.

The committee reported progress.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask for leave to, with respecting a motion regarding the sitting hours of the Assembly.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Hours of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Cannington:

That notwithstanding rule 3(4) of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*, that when this Assembly adjourns on Friday, May 18, 2001, it do stand adjourned until Wednesday, May 23 at 1:30 p.m.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:58.