

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of the constituents in the Bruno area who would like to see the Bruno telephone exchange become part of the Humboldt telephone exchange. And their prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to allow Bruno to be part of the Humboldt telephone exchange.

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, all 53 of them, are from the community of Bruno.

I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition about the provincial government's report, the *Saskatchewan EMS Development Project*, which calls for provincially run and centrally operated ambulance services. The prayer reads:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the concerned petitioners come from the communities of Lucky Lake, Demaine, and Beechy.

And I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today regarding the EMS (emergency medical services) report:

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

The people who have signed this petition are all from Rose Valley.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to present a petition today on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens who have expressed interest in maintaining and upgrading the Saskatchewan road network. And the prayer is as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to ask the Government of Saskatchewan to continue with its foresight and vision of increasing the funding to \$900 million over the next three years to maintain and upgrade our thoroughfares of commerce.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good citizens of Foam Lake.

I so submit.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the condition of Highway No. 339. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 339 in order to facilitate economic development initiatives.

The petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Spring Valley, Briercrest, and Moose Jaw.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people in the southwest corner of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the state of the hospital and have signed this petition, the prayer of which 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, this petition is signed today by residents of the city of Swift Current, in addition to the community of Waldeck.

I so present.

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

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Radville, Gladmar, and Lake Alma.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I too present petitions on

behalf of citizens of the province of Saskatchewan regarding the EMS service. 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 intention to work to improve community-based ambulance service.

As in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people in the Storthoaks, Carievale, and Redvers areas.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause 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.

Signed by the good citizens from Saskatoon, Hafford, and Radisson. Also by citizens from the former community of the Municipal Affairs minister, Krydor, and also a former community of Mr. Speaker, Richard community. Thank you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm presenting a petition opposed to possible reduction of health services in Kamsack. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take necessary steps to ensure that health care services in the Kamsack Hospital be maintained at its current level of service, at minimum with 24-hour acute, emergency, and doctoral services available.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are all from the community of Kamsack.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens greatly concerned about the proposed energy rates from SaskPower and SaskEnergy:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Hanley, Loreburn, Elbow, Melville, Delisle, Dalmeny, and Strongfield.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have citizens concerned with the 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 confirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Assiniboia.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again I rise with a petition; reference the cuts at the Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good citizens of Assiniboia, Limerick, and Melville.

I so present.

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

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

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

They are petitions of citizens regarding the provision of immediate financial assistance to North Battleford with respect to the water treatment plant.

And other petitions that are addendums to previously presented petitions as sessional paper no. 3, no. 4, no. 10, no. 58, no. 121, and no. 155.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This year chaperones Mrs. Nissen, Mrs. Chan, and Mrs. Seib are going to prove that the sound of 51 grade 7 Lakeview Elementary School students from Saskatoon, that the sound that

they make, is truly a joyful noise. And their teachers Madame Block and Mrs. Widenmaier are here to let their pupils know that the sounds that all the MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) make is also a joyful noise.

We have, as well as welcoming these very special students from this very special school in Saskatoon, I would like all members to know that two of the students have grandparents who were very special people.

All of us will remember the contributions that MLA John Skoberg made to this House and that MLA Evelyn Edwards made to this House. And their grandchildren are here with us as well today.

So I would ask all members of this Assembly to welcome those two special students and the other 49 equally special students from Lakeview.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the fine community of Rosetown is certainly making its mark on Regina this week. And again here in the legislature I'm very pleased to introduce to all members 41 more grade 8 students from Rosetown Central High School. And, Mr. Speaker, they're sitting in the east gallery and they are accompanied by teachers Norm Cline, Miles Bennett, Leanne Engen, Paula Berezowski, and the chaperones are Don Sparks and Karen Brown.

I had a fine meeting with the first 41 students from grade 8 yesterday. And I'm equally looking forward to meeting the 41 excellent grade 8 students that are with us today. And would all members welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well first of all — I have students from my constituency — but first of all I wanted to say that I too welcome the people from Rosetown because my cousin, Norm Cline, is the principal of Rosetown School and is here with his son, Avery. And I know that when the Leader of the Opposition meets with the students from Rosetown therefore, he'll have only good things to say about the Minister of Finance.

But my main task today, Mr. Speaker, is to welcome 25 grade 5 students from Pleasant Hill School in Saskatoon which is in my constituency and where I attended myself when I was in grade 8 — for my industrial arts training which equipped me for my duties here at the Legislative Assembly.

With the 25 grade 5 students are their teachers, Barbara Wright and Virginia Tapaquon, and also chaperones, Theresa Fiddler and Sylvia Woodward. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, what a fine job the teachers and parents and chaperones do at Pleasant Hill School which is a community school. I, on occasion, along with Sylvia, actually have showed up to cook breakfast at Pleasant Hill School once in awhile but they don't invite me to do that all that often, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say I'm going to be meeting with the students from Pleasant Hill. We're going to get our picture taken; we're going

to have a meeting; they're going to ask me questions; they're going to have a tour of the legislature. And I'd like all members of the Assembly to welcome the students from Pleasant Hill School.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the member from Saskatoon Southeast in recognizing one individual that is seated in the west gallery.

Mr. Speaker, Brenda Nissen, one of the adults along, is the daughter of Evelyn Edwards and I know that the member recognized Evelyn's grandson. I do also want to inform the House the fact — we'll just say a long time ago — Brenda and I were colleagues; we were students at the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Education. I had the opportunity of working with Brenda on a lot of projects and that's one of the reasons why I was successful in getting my Bachelor of Education, Mr. Speaker.

But you know one of the other things is I'd like to recognize, even though Brenda and I are both 39, she looks a lot younger than I do.

And I'd ask all members to join in welcoming Brenda Nissen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join with the members in regards to saying a word of welcome to the students from Saskatoon and Rosetown. And with due respect to all the cultures and traditions of our great province, Mr. Speaker, I would like to teach them one Cree word as they leave this building, and the word is Ta wow, which means you're welcome.

Now, Mr. Speaker, after they leave they will say, wow, I learned a new Cree word. Ta wow — you're welcome.

Now I would also like to say to a special guest at the Speaker's gallery too, there's Cathy McNab, a sister to Gail McNab, a person who has been working in my office for quite a few years from Gordon First Nations. So I would like all members to please welcome them and say, Ta wow. Egosi.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. SERM's (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) mentoring program includes 20 proteges working to complete career development plans with their assigned mentors during 2001. Barb . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Does the member have an introduction? I'm sorry. The member will continue.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Barb Chartier, who is in your gallery, is a protege of Dave Phillips and they've been working together on Barb's work plan for the

past three months as part of SERM's mentoring program. Barb has worked for SERM for 16 years, first at the Buffalo Narrows fire centre and for the past three years at the provincial fire centre in Prince Albert.

Barb has expressed her desire to learn and succeed in her career with SERM. Barb's special strength lies in her will to see any task through to the best of her ability. During her year in the mentoring program Barb intends to increase her understanding of SERM's organization, learn about our working relationship with the Aboriginal people and organization, and visit the Legislative Assembly to observe our government's processes.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to please welcome Barb here today, and to offer my and our encouragement to her during her experience in SERM's mentoring program. Thank you very much.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

British Columbia Election

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the great influence that Liberals have had on good public policy in Saskatchewan through our coalition government has obviously reached British Columbia. Mr. Speaker, the voters of British Columbia were so impressed with how Liberals can help govern that they not only elected a lot of them, they decided maybe they'd give them a chance to govern all on their own.

Mr. Speaker, when the dust cleared — to use a phrase from my colleague, the Minister of Finance — no where was there to be found a single MLA from a Stockwell Day-inspired, snake oil, voodoo economic party like the Socreds, Reform or Tories. I know that comes as a great disappointment to the members opposite who are already reeling from the hard crash of their wetsuited, jet-skiing hero, but those are the facts.

Mr. Speaker, in their wisdom the voters of BC (British Columbia) decided to cast almost all their ballots for pragmatic parties like the Liberals, the NDP (New Democratic party) and the Greens. I know the members opposite are green with envy, but with a great big case of Alberta envy they are already carrying, I'm not sure how many more types of envy they can handle.

But in all seriousness, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Mr. Campbell on his election win. And I'm sure all Saskatchewan people will give him a real warm welcome when he comes to visit during the premiers' conference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Skydiving Exhilarating Experience

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell all members of the legislature of the thrilling experience that the member from Carrot River Valley and myself had last Saturday.

Though both that member and I are known for usually keeping our feet planted firmly on the ground, he and I threw caution to the wind on the weekend and decided we simply must try

skydiving. We headed out to Moose Jaw for the big jump after several hours of lessons. The instructor, Curt Hamilton, was a wonderful teacher and he scared us just a little when we read the back of his T-shirt that said, shut up and jump.

Of course the member from Carrot River Valley and I both kept looking to see who would chicken out first. And I'm glad to say, Mr. Speaker, neither one of us did and we both made the leap of our lives.

Mr. Speaker, the experience can only be described as a few seconds of absolute exhilaration, followed by an indescribable, peaceful feeling as you float gracefully back to the earth. And, Mr. Speaker, you do have time to think as you come down.

For instance, I couldn't help but compare myself to the members opposite, because like their political cousins in BC last night who were obliterated, those members and their party have been in free-fall for years. But unlike myself and the member from Carrot River Valley on Saturday, those members didn't have a parachute to stop their plummet.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Norwegian Constitution Signing Celebration

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, today is Syttende Mai, the 17th of May, the day when Norwegians around the world celebrate the signing of the Norwegian constitution in 1814. People everywhere are singing these words:

Ja, vi elsker dette landet,
som det stiger frem,
furet, værbitt over vannet,
med de tusen hjem.

That's the Norwegian national anthem.

The King and Queen of Norway send greetings around the world and the greetings that come to Saskatchewan are to bring very best wishes to all of those in Saskatchewan who have settled here, along with all those friends of Norway.

It's a great pleasure to celebrate here in the legislature with all of the people across the province.

And I do this on behalf of myself as the member of Lakeview, but also for the member from Regina Coronation Park, the member from Saskatoon Southeast, the member from Regina Sherwood, the member from Rosetown-Biggan, the member from Salcoats, the member from Saskatchewan Rivers, the member from Lloydminster, and the spouses of the members from Moosomin and Weyburn-Big Muddy.

And so for everybody, ha er god dag. Have a very good day as we all celebrate the Norwegian Constitution Day. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberals Win British Columbia Election

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when I woke this morning and looked at the headline in the

newspaper, I thought to myself, more good news for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I went on to read, “NDP decimated.” That’s what the headline said, Mr. Speaker. But unfortunately for Saskatchewan and fortunately for BC (British Columbia), the headline actually referred to last night’s British Columbia election which saw the West Coast socialists go from government to a rump of three seats — I repeat, three seats, Mr. Speaker. Not even enough to form an official opposition party in the legislature.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to the member for Melville, the BC NDP were routed by a party that is basically a coming together of common sense individuals from different political backgrounds in that province . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — . . . devoted to the concept of free enterprise economy and less intrusive government.

And just a note for the beleaguered leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party who may be trying to delude himself into taking comfort from the BC election results. That member should know that many people think that up until yesterday the BC Liberal Party has been under a curse for 60 years when the Liberals signed away their identity and joined a coalition government. It took them 60 years to get out from underneath that curse and I believe it will take them twice that long in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I can’t wait for the day that the headline in our newspaper reads, Saskatchewan NDP decimated. Because, Mr. Speaker, it’s coming and not a day too soon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Business News in *Sask Business* Magazine

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, I bring to you some real good news for the province of Saskatchewan. This time it comes from *Sask Business*. *Sask Business* is the business magazine in Saskatchewan, which means that each month it publishes a great deal of good news — news we are always happy to bring to this Assembly.

And if our tidings of good news is what it takes to get the members opposite to admit that not everything in this province is doom and gloom, if that’s what it takes to get the rest of the story, then we’ll keep telling these stories.

But back to this month’s edition of *Sask Business*. On page 33 there’s a quick list of business items of interest from around the province such as, for one example, the fact that the Estevan newspaper has just purchased a new printing press which will help it expand its business and hire five additional staff.

Or this item from Nipawin. It seems, Mr. Speaker, that because of the recent Team Canada trip to China, led by the Prime Minister, and former Premier Romanow, that Newfield Seeds of

Nipawin formally signed two contracts worth \$10 million. The contracts will see Newfield buy, process, and ship alfalfa seed to China.

And, Mr. Speaker, these contracts will help pay the salaries of Newfield’s . . . Newfield Seed’s 75 to 100 employees, nearly all in the Nipawin area. This is export business for a Saskatchewan company; these are jobs for a rural community.

And so, Mr. Speaker, as my friend from Dewdney is often wont to say, that’s good news for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Woodcarver Aurele Gareau

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize a well-renowned woodcarver from my constituency, Mr. Aurele Gareau. He’s from the community of Bellevue. Mr. Gareau attended a woodcarving workshop in 1982 and he’s been carving ever since.

So for the past 25 years Mr. Gareau has carved many items from basswood, such as footwear, animals, and many commissioned items. He’s done a life-sized figure of Ms. Dorval, the first teacher in Saskatchewan, a project that took him up to 200 hours to complete. And one of his most treasured pieces is a baseball glove in which you can actually place your hand.

Mr. Gareau was recently named the artist-in-residence at the cultural centre in Bellevue. As an artist-in-residence, he’s expected to spend one-half of his time improving and developing himself, and the other half of his time instructing people in the community. He’s served the region which is comprised of the communities of St. Louis, Domremy, Duck Lake, and Bellevue.

Now besides doing woodcarving, Mr. Gareau does scrolling and wood-burning. This is usually done on bolted birchwood. Mr. Gareau has taught woodcarving in many communities across this province of ours. He has taught his own father, six brothers, and some cousins how to wood carve. As well, this great talent has been passed on to his son and daughter.

I have seen some of Mr. Gareau’s carvings which are displayed at the Bellevue Cultural Centre, and they are indeed an incredibly great work of art.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ides and Odes of May

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, the English poet, Shelley, said, and I quote:

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.

As far as I know, he offered no opinion on the words of politicians.

Regardless, all of us have the opportunity tonight to consider the accuracy of Shelley's judgment at an event being sponsored by the Saskatchewan Writers Guild and the League of Canadian Poets. And, Mr. Speaker, this event gives me an opportunity to promote one of the premier tourist events of the Saskatchewan summer held in Moose Jaw.

Tonight 10 Saskatchewan poets will be sharing the stage at the Exchange on 8th Avenue here in Regina. The event is called "The Ides (and Odes) of May - a festivity of poetry". The poets are: Ven Begamudre, Steven Berzenski, Anne Campbell, Judith Krause, Brenda Niskala, Bruce Rice, Paul Wilson, and our newly appointed provincial poet laureate, Glen Sorestad.

Mr. Speaker — and here comes the hometown connection — also reading tonight will be two poets from Moose Jaw, Bob Currie and Gary Hyland — worth the price of admission, Mr. Speaker.

Gary is one of the main organizers of the Moose Jaw Festival of Words, being held the third week in July, an event now in its third year which attracts readers and writers from across Canada.

So tonight in Regina for an evening of enjoyable, stimulating reading, and in July in Moose Jaw for four days of the same at our Festival of Words.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Proposed SaskEnergy Rate Hike

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, SaskEnergy is looking for a massive 42 per cent rate hike. A few weeks ago the Minister of Finance said he would like to give SaskEnergy customers a break by paying down the gas cost variance account which would allow SaskEnergy to keep its rate from going up.

But now the minister seems to be backing away from that idea. Mr. Speaker, why the flip-flop? Why is the minister backing away from his own proposal for providing relief to SaskEnergy customers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member is referring to when he says that we have backed away from any statement we've made on this side of the House. We've been entirely consistent, Mr. Speaker, and our message to the people of the province is this.

First of all, SaskEnergy has done a good job protecting consumers from price increases, increases that have doubled in Alberta and gone up 23 per cent in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. That's not a bad record.

(14:00)

But what we have said to the people of the province is that we know SaskEnergy's view is — that they should have a 42 per cent increase. We are waiting to see what the view of the rate review panel, an independent panel, is. Once we get that rate review panel report, the government will look at that report; the government will then be responding, Mr. Speaker.

But in the meantime, we will not interfere with the workings of the independent panel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, in SaskEnergy's rate increase application, they say the price of natural gas next year will be about \$7 a gigajoule.

But if you look at page 44 of the Finance minister's budget, he's forecasting the price of natural gas next year to be about \$3.39 a gigajoule. That's a huge difference. They can't both be right. Which one are we supposed to believe? Are we supposed to believe the Minister of Finance, or are we supposed to believe SaskEnergy?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: which estimate are we supposed to believe and why is the NDP keeping two sets of books?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if there's one thing that the people of Saskatchewan know, when it comes to believing people who are talking about numbers, there's one group of people that should never be believed, and that is the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I'm going to say, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, I want to say that our . . . the members opposite are always talking about the Government of Alberta — the Government of Alberta this, the Government of Alberta that.

Well our projection in the budget with respect to natural gas prices is consistent with what the Government of Alberta is saying. So the members opposite should be very happy about it, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say also to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, that I find it strange that for several years they called for the creation, the creation of an independent rate review panel so that the people of the province could be told what would be fair in terms of rate review.

Now what they say, Mr. Speaker, and as the member from Swift Current has said and it's on the record, we should scrap the independent review panel. We say no, Mr. Speaker, we're going to have the rate review panel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well you know, Mr. Speaker, it seems the minister is a little touchy about this issue.

And no wonder, because, you know, the last time that an NDP government kept two sets of books, that was in BC, Mr. Speaker, and we know what happened to the NDP in British Columbia.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy is using a high gas price forecast to justify raising energy rates. The Minister of Finance is using a low gas price forecast to not justify helping consumers.

If, Mr. Speaker, the \$7 forecast is right, then the government will have millions of dollars in extra revenue to give SaskEnergy customers a break. If the \$3.39 forecast is right, then SaskEnergy doesn't need such a huge rate hike. Either way, the government could be doing more, much more, to help SaskEnergy customers.

Mr. Speaker, my question: will the minister make a commitment today to give SaskEnergy customers a break on this massive rate hike?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what is currently going on in the province is that there is an independent rate review panel that is looking at the request by SaskEnergy for a rate increase. And we are not going to do what Grant Devine, the friend of the members opposite, did in the 1980s, which was to get rid of the rate review panel.

We're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker, even though the member from Swift Current advocated that in this House several days ago, that we circumvent the work of that panel. No, Mr. Speaker.

If the member has a valid point, that SaskEnergy doesn't need the increase they're asking for, then that information should be made available to the rate review panel. The rate review panel is independent. It should make a decision.

When that decision is made, Mr. Speaker, and when a recommendation is made to this government, this government will consider the recommendation and do what is right and what is fair for the consumers of the province and for the stability of the corporation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is caught in his own little game. And I want to read a quote from the president of SaskEnergy. You know, Mr. Speaker, on April 19, 2001 the president says:

We don't think it's going to be that low (reference to \$3.39). I mean I'm not going to sit here and show you a graph that we think gas is going to be about \$7.50 and go to the regulator and ask for that and have you tell me that the gas is \$4, because I don't believe it. If you've got \$4 gas, I'd love to buy it.

That's the quote from the SaskEnergy. You know, Mr. Speaker,

the minister has gotten caught in his own game. His numbers don't add up.

My question to the minister: which one is it? Is the minister's forecast right, or is SaskEnergy's forecast right? Either way, why don't you give SaskEnergy customers a break on their energy bills?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've been trying to explain to the member opposite, my opinion on what the price of natural gas will be doesn't matter. His opinion doesn't matter. What matters, Mr. Speaker, is the opinion of the independent rate review panel. That's why there is a panel, Mr. Speaker, and it is the job . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, there is an independent review panel. The purpose of that panel is to say this: that it isn't the right of me to say what the natural gas rate should be, it isn't the Premier's right, it isn't that member's right; it's the right of the independent review panel to make a recommendation to government. That's why we have the panel, Mr. Speaker.

And if, as the member says that we have said something from the Department of Finance about the price, if we're incorrect, the review panel will look at that, Mr. Speaker. That's the purpose of the review panel.

But I want to remind the member again, our projections are very similar to his beloved Government of Alberta's projections, Mr. Speaker, so he should be very happy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Investments

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for SaskTel.

Yesterday we asked SaskTel why they spent \$8 million to buy Ag Dealer, an Ontario company, which would be completely in direct competition with the Saskatchewan company called IRON Solutions.

Apparently since the minister wasn't interested in due diligence, he never realized that Ag Dealer competes directly with IRON Solutions. Now the government is promising not to compete with IRON Solutions on agriculture sales business.

The minister says Ag Dealer will focus only on print-based equipment advertising. Well, Mr. Speaker, Ag Dealer's printed machinery advertising competes directly with another well-known Saskatchewan business. It's called *The Western Producer*.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, we ask the minister: why is the NDP buying an out-of-province business to compete directly with a Saskatchewan business, in this case *The Western Producer*?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, our Crowns, Mr. Speaker, will be . . . are in a position, Mr. Speaker, where they will have to diversify in an environment that is largely deregulated, Mr. Speaker. It is our attempt to not, wherever possible, compete especially in Saskatchewan with the private sector — wherever possible. But in a deregulated environment it is inevitable that there will be competition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our intent however is to try and generate revenues from outside of the province. That is why, Mr. Speaker, we are investing in companies outside of Saskatchewan to bring revenues back into our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, the NDP has been on a real buying binge lately — an insurance company in Prince Edward Island, a home security company in Winnipeg, a streaming video company from Nashville. Just how big is the NDP shopping cart?

Well we have a bizarre twist in that just this morning SaskTel President Don Ching confirmed that SaskTel actually considered buying *The Western Producer*. Thankfully SaskTel decided not to get into the newspaper business.

Instead though, the NDP decided to buy Ag Dealer in Ontario and then compete directly against *The Western Producer*.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP spending millions to buy out-of-province companies to compete directly with companies here in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well first of all, Mr. Speaker, based on the amount of debt that that party created in the 1980s and based on the interest that we pay each and every day, Mr. Speaker, we could buy a dot-com company every single day of the year, Mr. Speaker, based on what they've wasted in this province.

I want to say to the public of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, however, to be absolutely clear to them, that there is no proposal as it pertains to *The Western Producer*, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely none whatsoever.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's go into the facts. The NDP is spending millions of taxpayers' dollars to buy out-of-province businesses that compete directly with businesses in the private sector right here in Saskatchewan. In fact things are getting so desperate that the NDP actually considered buying *The Western Producer*.

And, Mr. Speaker, perhaps that's the only way they think they can get a decent headline today, is to start buying newspapers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP should not be in the newspaper business, and they should not be competing with the

newspapers for classified advertising. Ag Dealer is in the business of advertising farm equipment for sale, and so is *The Western Producer* and other Saskatchewan-based businesses. The minister may not understand that, but that constitutes direct competition.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP using taxpayers' money to directly compete with existing Saskatchewan companies?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been no proposal brought forward to the CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) board or to cabinet as it pertains to *The Western Producer*, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and Mr. Ching, the president of SaskTel tells me — informs me — as a result of the questions they asked this morning appropriately at the Crown Corps committee meeting, that no proposal is being proposed — absolutely none.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Future of SaskTel

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

Mr. Speaker, to the minister responsible for SaskTel, has this NDP government considered the sale, the privatization, of some of or all of SaskTel?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — No.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, this morning the president of SaskTel, Don Ching, told the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations that he and his officials were working with private sector consultants to do some corporate valuations establishing a market value for SaskTel, and he went on . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Mr. Wall: — He went on to say that they were considering options for the possible sale of some of or all of SaskTel through an IPO, an initial public offering. If the minister and the NDP cabinet is not aware of or supportive of any effort to privatize any of SaskTel, why is the president of SaskTel hiring consultants to value the company and then at least considering privatization of some or all of the company? Why is your Crown president doing that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I just want to remind the member to complete his question through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, to the people of Saskatchewan there is one party that wants to sell SaskTel, Mr. Speaker, and that party is on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, to the people of Saskatchewan I would say why would we want to sell a company that has earned for us last year alone \$157 million outside of the province for the people of Saskatchewan so that they can deliver services in most of their constituencies in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Why would we want to sell a company like that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. Wall: — On the two sides of the House, only one party in this House, Mr. Speaker, has actually hired consultants to evaluate . . . to determine the market value of SaskTel and consider privatization. It's not this side of the House; it's that side of the House, Mr. Speaker. We found that out this morning.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The president of SaskTel clearly stated this morning in front of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations that he and his staff are at least considering the option of privatizing some or all of SaskTel. Your minister has said . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I would like to be able to hear the minister's question in its entirety and I don't want people to start hollering the minute I sit down. So would the members please stay in order. Order.

Mr. Wall: — The minister, the minister has said categorically that this government is not interested in any privatization in some or in whole of SaskTel. Yet we know that the president of SaskTel has said he is at least considering that option — considering the sale of some or all of SaskTel.

So to the Premier, Mr. Speaker, the question to the Premier is this: why are SaskTel officials considering even the option of privatization without apparently telling you . . . telling the Premier and his cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — For clarification of the member and the public of Saskatchewan, I am informed that the meeting occurred as a request of the company in Toronto, Mr. Speaker; not at the request of SaskTel, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and I would ask that member the following question: is he not interested in due diligence? Does he not want to know the value of the company? I suggest probably not. In the years that they were in government in the '80s, in the 1980s, they had no interest in knowing the value of anything. They spent like drunken sailors, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Premier of the province of Saskatchewan. The president of SaskTel confirmed this morning — again I'll repeat that — he is at least considering the privatization of some or all of SaskTel. But the Premier is saying and the government has said that this is not the plan of the NDP government.

If the NDP government has truly ruled out privatization, then why is the Premier allowing SaskTel officials to openly defy his government? Why is the Premier going to stop . . . When is the Premier going to stop these Crown corporations from bullying him? When will the Premier stand up to these Crown corporations and stop them from kicking sand in his face? He needs . . . These Crown corporations need to be reined in, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier stand up today and commit to do that in this Legislative Assembly?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy, I always enjoy answering questions from the man who would be leader over there. Mr. Speaker, let me speak on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan here to say very clearly . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, this government has no intention nor plan to privatize Saskatchewan Telecommunications. Let's understand that. What discussions occurred this morning in the Crown Corporations Committee with the president I'm not privy to. I haven't seen the *Hansard* or the record. But, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you and all members not to be sure of what was said by the quotes brought here from the member from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker.

We all know the record of privatization when that group of men and women were in government around here, selling off everything in sight. Selling off everything in sight and at the very same time losing services and head office jobs for the people of Saskatchewan; at the very same time running up the debt of this province to astronomical heights. We've got no interest in that kind of an agenda, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Management of Water Supply

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, water, not energy, will be the issue of the 21st century. I want to pay tribute to my constituents for the responsible and level-headed manner with which they have dealt with a difficult situation and at times inflammatory publicity.

But now that the immediate problems are behind us, it's time to look for long-term solutions. We have ample evidence now that the quality and management of Canada's water supply is in some cases on a par with Third World countries. We cannot continue with a patchwork of water quality standards. We need consistent national standards for water management and quality.

There's also the issue of bulk water exports. Newfoundland says that it is interested in bulk water exports. We need a national debate. My question of the Premier is: will he call on the Prime Minister to convene a national conference on water safety and water exports?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce to the House today that as a result of the debate and the motion that was passed in this House earlier, I intend to have this issue raised into discussion at the western premiers' and the territorial

leaders' conference in about two to three weeks here in the province. This will be an agenda item. We will have a discussion and from that discussion there may well be a consensus developed to advance to the national government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear this. But the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program which was announced last fall, reannounced in the Throne Speech, and then re-reannounced last week has left some people in North Battleford concerned that this is the special aid to North Battleford that the Premier promised us.

To date, North Battleford has been promised \$255,000 to deal with a \$14 million problem. This is the same amount of money that as I say was promised last fall in infrastructure program and then re-reannounced a number of times since then.

In view of the Premier's commitment for special help for North Battleford, my question of the Premier: will he stand today and set our fears at rest? Some of the statements last week suggested that that \$255,000, our share of the infrastructure program, was the special help that was promised. Will he now stand in his place and confirm that that is merely a down payment on the special help that has been promised and this is not simply a recycled announcement?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for the edification, once again, of the member opposite, there have been efforts made to help all communities with respect to our water quality problems.

North Battleford is certainly at issue. The people of North Battleford were given assurance that this side, this government, this coalition government would do everything possible to try and assist them.

And I just want to remind folks — because they seem to forget and pick out only the bad things, not the good things — so far this program has committed over \$74 million to 86 infrastructure projects, Mr. Speaker. The federal/provincial share will be twenty-one and a half million dollars. Some of those projects are still in the approval process.

Twenty-one communities identified by SERM as lacking minimum treatment facilities were approved out of this program. The remaining 17 communities under SERM's list of communities that are under precautionary drinking water advisories did not apply. Nine more communities identified by SERM having moderate drinking water risk have also applied.

Mr. Speaker, communities recognize their needs, they apply under these programs, and we'll offer them all assistance we possibly can.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's reply I'm sure will only make the people of North Battleford more nervous.

I don't need to be reminded. I announced the infrastructure program last fall when I signed it. His reannouncement last

week and his statement in the House today suggests and leaves us wondering if our share of the infrastructure program is the special help that was promised.

The judicial inquiry is good. But inevitably, it will focus on assigning blame as opposed to finding solutions. The infrastructure program for two new water wells in North Battleford is also good but it's an old announcement from six months ago.

We have spent two weeks in the national eye. Are we now to be forgotten? And is the government's promise of special help to be fobbed off by the minister saying oh, but there's this infrastructure program, we will simply re-reannounce the infrastructure program and that's the special help. Will he commit that is not the special help, there will be more help to deal with North Battleford's problem?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what that member contributed to this community and to this province while he had an opportunity to make a contribution. But I can assure the people in my home community of North Battleford, I can assure them, that we are working on additional help to help them meet their problems and ensure quality safety and safe drinking water in those communities and throughout the province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would just like the Assembly to come to order before we commence with the ministerial statements.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Allan Blair Cancer Centre

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to rise today in this Assembly and announce that a very significant new project will be undertaken at the Allan Blair Cancer Clinic in Regina. I was honoured to have attended an opening ceremony at the site of the clinic this morning to announce that this project will see the addition of a new linear accelerator, a computerized treatment planning system, and a CT (computerized axial tomography) simulator at the Allan Blair Cancer Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that this government has been able to provide funding of \$1.23 million for the construction of the bunker at the Allan Blair Cancer Centre and \$3 million for the purchase of the new linear accelerator, the CT simulator, and computerized treatment planning system.

Mr. Speaker, construction is already underway on the bunker, which will house the new linear accelerator. Mr. Speaker, for those of you unfamiliar with this type of radiation treatment, linear accelerators are the primary piece of medical equipment that is used to deliver radiation therapy to cancer patients. It is an essential piece of equipment, given that approximately half of all patients diagnosed with cancer are treated with some form of radiation.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, there are three linear accelerators in use

at the centre and with the most recent acquisition, that number will soon be four.

The new system, Mr. Speaker, will include a CT simulator and a treatment computer program, which will allow cancer specialists to simulate the patient's treatment plan before any therapy begins.

This new treatment planning system ensures that the most appropriate and effective doses of radiation are delivered, minimizing the side effects of radiation treatment for those needing care. In short, it is new technology that has the potential to improve patient access to services, reduce unpleasant side effects for cancer patients, and enhance their quality of life.

We are very pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that this new equipment will ensure that cancer patients have the best and most effective treatment available. It will also allow the cancer specialists of our agency to continue to offer high-quality, accessible treatment for cancer patients.

It is an important accomplishment to note, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan continues to provide timely access to radiation therapy for cancer patients. That is because we continue to meet national guidelines for waiting times for radiation treatment of cancer.

Mr. Speaker, we know that many other provinces have not been able to maintain access to this type of treatment in their own provinces. They have had to send patients out of country for radiation treatments. This has not been the case in Saskatchewan and we are very thankful.

Mr. Speaker, strengthening cancer care for patients in this province is part of our government's commitment to an accessible, quality, health care system. In this year's health budget, Mr. Speaker, we provided the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency with \$6.5 million in new funding. This brings the agency's overall budget to approximately \$41 million, an increase of more than 19 per cent over last year's budget.

This is a significant investment that will help the agency on a number of fronts including the rising cost of cancer drugs, the retention and recruitment of skilled staff, and the cost of operating new equipment such as the linear accelerator.

While new and better equipment is always welcome, Mr. Speaker, it means very little if we do not have the dedicated cancer treatment specialists to operate it. I want to emphasize that the health care system in this province would not have been able to offer top quality cancer treatment to its patients without the calibre of professional staff working at the Allan Blair Cancer Clinic.

Mr. Speaker, we know that retaining and recruiting health care providers is one of our health system's greatest challenges. There's a national and international shortage of radiation therapists and radiation oncologists right now. These professionals are essential members of the cancer treatment team and are in high demand at cancer agencies and centres right across North America.

(14:30)

In this highly competitive environment, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency has continued to make extensive efforts to keep and attract these very important health providers. I want to commend the agency for its work to enhance staffing at the cancer centres in our province.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is well-known among other provinces and countries for our accomplishments and leadership in health care. We have led the way in many areas of health care in this country, and we will continue to work together to find solutions to problems facing the health care system today.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency has a proud tradition of innovative and effective programs and services, and that tradition is certain to continue well into the future. And this investment by the Government of Saskatchewan will allow them to continue this valuable service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to rise today on this important announcement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I respond to the minister's statement and the announcement of new equipment for the Allan Blair Cancer Centre here in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, there are few people in this province that at one time or another haven't been close to someone who has been touched by the dreaded disease of cancer. Many of us have had family and friends that go through the very, very trying reality of being diagnosed with this dreaded disease and of having to watch them as they go and struggle through the various therapies that are required in order to try to cope with the outcomes of this disease. And many times these individuals lose the battle.

So, Mr. Speaker, as the Health critic for the opposition, we certainly are very pleased to see improvements in the treatment of cancer in this province. And certainly the Allan Blair clinic in Regina has an outstanding reputation not only in Saskatchewan but across Canada, for the work that they do.

Mr. Speaker, as well I'm glad to hear in the minister's statement that he acknowledges the fact and the reality that equipment by itself is not the only answer. And that unless we have trained personnel — radiologists, oncologists, and all the people that are involved in providing this treatment — that all the fancy equipment in the world will just sit there unusable.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bit alarming yesterday at the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association meeting, the minister was unaware of the shortage of training positions that there are in this province for nurses and other medical professions.

And I hope that this government opposite will take some concrete steps to make sure that there are significant increases in the training seats of this province, and make a long-term commitment to the integrated Health Sciences facility at the University of Saskatchewan that would provide the basis for

this kind of increased training. Because, Mr. Speaker, as the minister said in his statement, all the equipment in the world without trained people is absolutely not going to provide anything useful for the people of this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, we certainly want to join in congratulating the Allan Blair Cancer Treatment Centre for their expansion. We wish them well in recruiting their required professionals that they need in order to deliver and man this expanded equipment facility. And we certainly wish them well in providing much needed care and support to people that are struggling with the dreaded disease of cancer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 34 — The Saskatchewan Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (Treaty Land Entitlement) Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 34, The Saskatchewan Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (Treaty Land Entitlement) Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 35 — The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 35, The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased to stand and respond on behalf of the government to questions 187, 188, and 189.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 187, 188, and 189 are hereby tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 29 — The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to outline the key provisions of the proposed amendment to The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Act of 1985.

Mr. Speaker, on July 31 of this year marks the end of the current lender financial agreement with the Royal Bank for Saskatchewan student loans. The Saskatchewan government will again become the lender on August 1.

The Government of Saskatchewan is negotiating with the federal government to integrate the Canada and Saskatchewan student loan programs and jointly deliver the program using the National Student Loans Service Centre. Successful negotiation will result in improved benefit for borrowers and a more convenient process including the characteristic of one student, one loan. Many Saskatchewan students have told me that this would be welcome.

Mr. Speaker, the current legislation was designed for the private lender agreement that is about to expire. It allows payments from the Student Aid Fund to be made to banks only. It does not, for example, allow payments to be made from the fund to service providers and to other governments.

The amendment provides the administrative authority to pay all or any contractual expenses from the Student Aid Fund or from the General Revenue Fund at the minister's discretion. This will allow the department to meet its obligations to Canada and to the National Student Loans Service Centre as set out in the Canada-Saskatchewan integrated loan agreement.

The minister is still subject to order in council approval of contractual agreements under The Government Organization Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the amendment to The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Act will permit what is essentially an administrative decision to be made in a timely fashion and ensure that Saskatchewan student access to student loans is uninterrupted. It will allow the minister flexibility in paying contractual expenses out of either the Student Aid Fund or the department's appropriation.

With that explanation, Mr. Speaker, of the intent of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 29, The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to respond to the minister's Bill No. 29, an Act to amend The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Act.

Mr. Speaker, it brings a number of items to mind concerning this Bill. The number one item I think, in my mind, that I'd like to speak to a bit here is concerning the Royal Bank's decision not to continue with the program at the federal level. And it brings up a couple of matters. One is, what was the Royal Bank's criteria for eligibility and has that been incorporated into this Bill? Will it be improved upon as far as the Royal Bank's eligibility criteria? And hopefully, some changes have been made to improve the eligibility to Saskatchewan students.

Also, the other item that comes to mind is two-income families, when there's a husband and wife that are working, in many cases that disallows their child or student from being able to apply and be accepted for the loans.

And also I would like to question if there's some changes can

be made. It's a matter of families having to work for two incomes and not having the money to finance their children's post-secondary education.

And really, I'd also like to make a comment on the overall tuition increases at the post-secondary level. The government's . . . unfortunately, it's not supporting the universities to the level that is required and this is off-loaded onto the students and their families as far as the cost of tuition and the cost of going to post-secondary education.

And all these areas need to be discussed because we are currently having a shortage of skilled workers in the province; and a number of our young people, after leaving university, are leaving the province to other areas where there are better jobs and better . . . more well-paying jobs.

And so I need to take this back to the stakeholders and discuss it with my caucus colleagues. And I'd like to adjourn at this time.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 19 — The Land Titles Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to second the reading of The Land Titles Amendment Act, 2001. Mr. Speaker, as you will recall, last year this Assembly passed a landmark Bill that was intended to replace the existing Land Titles Act with a new Act that would implement necessary law reform and facilitate the re-engineering and computerization of the land titles system.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, over 550 sections in length, will come into force later this spring. Indeed, I am pleased to advise this Assembly that the land registry district of Moose Jaw will be the first district in the province of Saskatchewan to proceed with implementation of the revised land system, in June of this year.

Mr. Speaker, in conjunction with this implementation process, it's now necessary to provide for additional consequential amendments to the Bill that was passed last year into other pieces of legislation to further facilitate the implementation of this extensive project.

These changes include amendments to The Land Titles Act, 2000 to remove the requirement for certification of mineral commodities, to permit registration of prescribed interests against an uncertified mineral title, to clarify that implied interests are only applied in titles where they were otherwise applied by law, and finally, to provide discretion to the registrar to set the hours of the registry.

In addition to these rather technical amendments to The Land Titles Act, 2000, consequential amendments are also being made to The Heritage Property Act; The Homesteads Act, Personal Property Security Act, 1993; The Planning and Development Act; The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997; and The Tax Enforcement Act.

These changes deal mostly with terminological amendments to pick up the new language in the original Act, and to catch other minor problems that are now to be corrected to avoid

complications in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is intended to allow the land project to be implemented without undue difficulty. And as you know, many user groups including realtors, surveyors, and the legal community are awaiting the implementation of the new system, and these proposed amendments will assist in that implementation.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Land Titles Act, 2000, and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak on Bill No. 19, an Act to amend land titles.

Mr. Speaker, certainly we're just getting to get a good look at this Bill for the first time, and we need an opportunity to certainly be able to talk to several stakeholders about this Bill as we look at it. And as the minister has said, they were talking there's some changes in here to tax enforcement.

We're kind of curious as to why we're having to take a look at tax enforcement at this time. Certainly it's one of the great problems that's taking place in this province, Mr. Speaker, is tax payments.

We see where in the RM of Rudy where the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation, or whatever their new name happens to be today, receives a tax notice. They simply draw a line through it and submit whatever amount of monies that they so desire.

Now is this the type of tax enforcement then that the RMs (rural municipality) are going to be able to use now that the Crown corporations are going to be able to pay taxes the same as every other individual in this province? Or is this going to strengthen the position of Crown corporations not to pay taxes?

These are things that need to be looked at, Mr. Speaker, and we simply don't know. The minister certainly wasn't clear enough on the issue as he spoke about it. And so we want to take some time and take a look at this type of an issue.

He also spoke about, to a small degree, maintenance orders. Certainly that's always been a very big problem in this province and in any jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker. And so then how maintenance orders are going to apply because of the land . . . this change, this amendment to The Land Titles Act, 2000, Mr. Speaker. We need to be able to look at further. We need to be able to take this amendment to stakeholders out there. How is it going to affect the people of Saskatchewan and will it be positive or negative?

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke about changes in this Act that are going to affect the registration of minerals. And, Mr. Speaker, of course it's a big part of the economy of Saskatchewan, mineral development, whether it's in the North or in the South. And certainly we'll need an opportunity to be able to speak to the stakeholders about what kind of effect this

is going to have upon them.

And so I think at this time it would be best, rather than move it along too quickly, that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 20 — The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2001. Mr. Speaker, in conjunction with The Land Titles Act, 2000, this Assembly passed The Land Surveys Act, 2000 in the last session of the Legislative Assembly.

The Land Surveys Act, 2000 represented a significant modernization of the survey system in the province of Saskatchewan and coordinated this system with the revised and computerized Land Titles system. Mr. Speaker, as with The Land Titles Act, 2000, The Land Surveys Act, 2000 is intended to be proclaimed in force this spring and rolled out on an ongoing basis over the next two years.

Since the passage of The Land Surveys Act, 2000, consultations with the land surveys groups and the legal community have identified certain changes, which it's, felt would improve the clarity and operation of this legislation.

For example, this Bill provides that amendments be made to The Land Surveys Act, 2000 to clarify the extent to which survey records in the land surveys registry may be searched and to replace the existing sections regarding primary and secondary monuments with one section applying to all monuments.

Mr. Speaker, for those of us who are not surveyors, a monument is a device or object which marks, witnesses, or references a boundary of a parcel of land, such as an iron post at the corner of a quarter section.

Mr. Speaker, these changes are not changes to the original intent of the Act but rather improvements in language to better reflect procedures in the survey community, or to make the Act easier to apply.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Land Surveys Act, 2000.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure I stand today to speak to Bill No. 20, The Land Surveys Amendment Act. There is no doubt that land survey is an important issue in the province of Saskatchewan, and any Bill that pertains to land survey should be taken seriously.

But I have first hand in rural Saskatchewan been a witness to boundary feuds, and subsequently I know how serious in nature they can become.

At first glance this Bill appears to address some of the issues surrounding controversies over boundaries and defines them a little more clearly. And the Minister of Justice just said in his

previous address that it would help to coordinate the land surveys and the land titles to electronic media.

But I know some members of this side of the House will need a few more days to examine this Bill a little closer and to discuss the implications with the different groups of citizens that it's going to affect. So therefore at this time I wish to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 22

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 22 — The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise again today to enter in the debate on Bill No. 22, The Assessment Management Agency Act.

Mr. Speaker, I've carefully read over the Bill itself and I've also read over the *Hansard* transcript from May 14 when the Minister of Municipal Affairs gave a brief explanation of the implications of this Bill.

SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) in the past has been a very controversial agency, and there is no doubt that this controversy has accelerated a great deal with the latest reassessment that they have announced in our province.

The minister told the House that an accurate assessment of property values for taxation purposes is critical to the ongoing operations of every municipality and school board in this province, and the members of this side of the House couldn't agree with that statement more.

The problems seem to come in, however, that the assessment values that SAMA has evaluated don't always seem to be accurate or just, and this is happening in more and more cases. There have been numerous complaints by property owners that in many incidences there are sizable disparities in the evaluation of similar properties.

There also appears to be, in many cases, little or no logic to the amount of the assessment value that SAMA has given to different parcels of property. Although there are many reported protests to the latest reassessment, the most obviously hit industry seems to be that of the hoteliers.

The member from Saltcoats has brought to the attention of the Minister of Municipal Affairs the plight of the hotels at Val Marie and Leader, but there are many others, Mr. Speaker, who find themselves in the same type of situation. Many of the hotels in this province are seeing their taxes doubled or more thanks to the new reassessment, and they simply cannot afford this higher tax bill.

Another startling example of the repercussions of the reassessment is the reports from the city of Swift Current whose small businesses are facing property tax increases of 80,000 up to \$100,000. I'm sure the city of Swift Current is not alone in having this happen, Mr. Speaker. They are simply the first ones to voice their concerns and the implications to this province could be very, very devastating.

Many of the small businesses in this province do not have a large enough profit margin to absorb this type of tax increase all by itself, let alone in conjunction with the enormous utility rate increases that they have had to recently face and those that are predicted to be coming in the near future.

The options that they're talking about is anything but good news for Saskatchewan. Some of these businesses are saying that the tax increase will mean that they will have to lay off some of their employees. Sadly at a time when we are now the province that is the leader in job losses, we on this side of the House find that it's very alarming that the new reassessment is going to perhaps drive even more jobs out of our province.

And even more sadly is that, in some cases, job loss may be the best case scenario that the business can offer because some businesses, Mr. Speaker, are saying that this will mean that they will simply close the doors to their business permanently and they will leave our province.

The minister mentioned that SAMA has to build a relationship of trust, confidence, and accountability with the stakeholders, including government municipalities and the public. And I would like to add that it should be, in particular, the municipalities and the public that meet this accountability since this is just one of the expenses that the NDP government has downloaded more and more onto the municipalities, so they're now paying the lion's share of SAMA's bills.

The Bill seems to state that SAMA must ensure that its books, records, and accounts are kept in such a way that it can be verified that the money granted to SAMA has been expended on the purpose that it was intended for.

I find it extremely surprising, Mr. Speaker, that this has never been in place before. I can't imagine why we've allowed a publicly funded agency to conduct business for as many years as SAMA has without having some mechanism of accountability of how the money is being spent, in place before now.

SAMA's levies have kept increasing over the years but up until this point, they have had to give little explanation as to why they need the increase. It looks like we've allowed this agency to have the same free rein as we seem to be allowing all our Crown corporations.

This Bill also, if I'm understanding it correctly when I read it over, will require SAMA to have their books audited by an outside auditor and that report will have to be provided to the minister, to SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), and to SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association). And I view this as a very positive step, Mr. Speaker, because SAMA has enjoyed the power of being a

monopoly service for far too long.

There has been obvious, serious flaws in the accountability and transparency of SAMA, and no doubt this has created a great deal of anger and a lack of confidence for the stakeholders using this agency.

SAMA has simply gotten away with not being accountable because the stakeholders have had few or no other options to turn to. This discontent has been best demonstrated with more and more municipalities talking about no longer using SAMA's services, and in particular the most recent case is the city of Swift Current.

I think this accountability and transparency should be expanded to making the information available in an open and comprehensive manner as to how SAMA arrives at their assessment values. Often something as simple as mere understanding can disperse a great deal of discontent and mistrust.

On far too many occasions, SAMA has been very hesitant in giving the people the information on how the assessment to their property has been arrived at, or they explain it in such a complex manner that the property owner is no better off to understanding than before he asked the question.

We tend to say that they use a market adjustment factor as the mechanism to determine the assessment value, but they are not always open as to what that factor is, Mr. Speaker, nor how the factor was arrived at.

SAMA has also not appeared open to examining suggestions put forward by the very people who are paying their bills as to other options on how the assessment should be calculated in a more equitable manner.

I have heard suggestions of perhaps looking at an income-based form of assessment, or a dollar value for rent based on what a building should bring in if it was rented. And I have no idea if either of these ideas could be implemented, Mr. Speaker. But there seems to be a great deal of frustration out there that SAMA isn't in the least bit inclined to even look at any other options, and yet the present system of calculating assessment value seems to be seriously flawed.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we would like to look at this Bill a little bit longer and discuss it with different interest groups. At this point, I wish to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 24

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 24 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Kwiatkowski — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into debate on Bill No. 24, The Urban Municipality Act amendment. And this is quite a significant amendment, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that this Bill speaks to something that

certainly was very controversial last year, and that was the effort of the government to forcibly amalgamate municipalities in this province.

And I guess it's nice to see that there is an understanding that local municipal government should be respected, Mr. Speaker, and that perhaps their input should be valued. Because going the route of allowing for voluntary amalgamation is something that we on this side of the House suggested all along. That if municipalities were interested in joining forces for social, economic reasons, that that should be their decision, and they should be responsible for determining how the new municipality, how a larger municipality comprised of a number of municipalities interested in amalgamating should look. In other words, Mr. Speaker, they should be the masters of their own destinies.

(15:00)

I think this Bill goes a certain way towards allowing that to occur. We do take away the requirement for ministerial approval on many of the routine operations in municipalities so we give them a little latitude in areas that they previously haven't had. And perhaps now with the legislation and with the ability to amalgamate voluntarily with a greater degree of autonomy, they can make decisions at a level that they weren't allowed to before.

A couple of the items that are specifically referenced in the amendment, Mr. Speaker, include making it possible for a village of less than 100 people to be dissolved by ministerial order rather than by order in council. So something I think that should make it a little simpler to allow municipalities to amalgamate if they so desire, and would allow for that process to happen quicker as well.

We also look at the definition of a restructuring agreement in this Act, Mr. Speaker, in this amendment that would put the provisions for that amalgamations in . . . for that amalgamation into place.

And in looking at the definition of the restructuring agreement, I think that it is . . . it probably contains the majority of the points that would need to be addressed when any municipalities agree to amalgamate or to merge.

The one question I might have of the minister, Mr. Speaker, is: beyond the definition included in this amendment, do they have a draft copy of a restructuring agreement? Do they have an idea of what the actual agreement itself might look like and what it might involve? And if they did, Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully ask that that be shared with us and we would like to be able to take a look at that as well, if they do have an idea of what a restructuring agreement might look like in its final format and version.

There's some discussion in the amendment as well, Mr. Speaker, about giving municipalities the ability to be able to divide into wards, determine more of the process for electoral purposes within the municipality. Certainly I think that's a step in the right direction in that any kind of autonomy, Mr. Speaker, certainly involves municipalities, any self-administering body, to be able to make the decisions around how their elected

officials serve them, and in what capacity, and what the format of their boundaries for wards, constituencies, those kinds of things are.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, there is one concern that I've had expressed to me on a number of occasions by different communities around the province. And I think it's one thing that perhaps the minister could have looked at in this Act, in this amendment or maybe could look at in the future.

And I understand that in both the rural and the urban amendments we're talking about, particularly in the rural . . . I'm sorry, in the rural amendment we're talking about, only allowing people to vote in the rural municipality that they live in and not voting in any other municipalities regardless of whether they own property there or not. And in the past, of course, if they did own property they were allowed to vote in other municipalities.

Certainly I think we have some concern with that. If someone does own property in another municipality and they reside in another municipality, they probably do have the right to be able to vote where they do qualify as electors through the ownership of property, and that kind of thing.

But the one concern that I've had expressed to me is the ability of people to sit on a number of different councils, both rural and urban. We've had a couple of examples of that in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, where individuals sitting on a small town council, for example, becoming councillors, in some cases being the mayor, then decide they have an interest on a rural council as well, and because they do own property and they do have that right to vote, they also then in turn have the right to be able to seek elected office.

Consequently we do have situations around the province where there are individuals who do sit on two or three different councils, urban and rural. And I've had some people express a great deal of concern to me around that issue, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that while they probably can accept the person voting in a municipality that they don't live in but they do qualify as an elector in, they would like to see some limitation, if you will, on the number of elected bodies that a person can be elected to.

And I've actually had people indicate that as a concern even with respect to this Assembly, in that we have a lot of individuals who have served and are currently serving in capacities on rural and urban councils and then become Members of the Legislative Assembly.

And I think that is a whole issue that could be looked at, Mr. Speaker, whether it be between rural and urban municipalities, of course. And urban municipalities, it's not allowed at this point, but you can only sit on the council of a single urban municipality; you can't sit on the council of another municipality, urban municipality. But I think maybe that is something that in the future the minister and the government could look at because it does seem to be an area of concern for people out there.

Another area that this amendment addresses, Mr. Speaker, is the whole area of business licences. And in certain cases it will allow a limitation on the number of like-businesses within a

municipality. And I think we . . . now we certainly understand why that is in there, and I think it is well-intentioned enough and that it comes from the city of Saskatoon, a request of theirs as a result of some of their experiences a couple of years ago.

And as I said, Mr. Speaker, while we feel it is well-intentioned enough, there certainly could be some very negative effects if we don't institute the mechanism to do that properly.

There may very well be situations where we do want to control the number of certain types of like-businesses in a particular area, but I certainly don't think we want to get into a situation where we're controlling, for example, the number of accountants in a municipality. We don't want to get into a situation where we're controlling the number of barbers or the number of grocery stores — those kinds of things.

So I think that whole area has to be revisited in this amendment very, very seriously. As I say, Mr. Speaker, I think we understand the intent, but if we don't approach this with the proper mechanism, I think it could have a very, very adverse effect on private businesses within our municipalities.

We're looking at municipalities getting the authority for setting fees charged to direct sellers for business licences. This was previously set out in The Direct Sellers Act and was on occasion a bit of a problem for municipalities in that it was an area they had absolutely no control in. But I think given the situation here and the fact that they can now set their own fees, that that is something that we can certainly agree with, Mr. Speaker.

We took a look at the sale of land issues that are addressed in the amendment, and it removes the need for ministerial approval if the municipality wishes to sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of land at a price less than market value, once again giving communities a little more latitude in terms of their ability to be able to make decisions that would be in the best interests of their communities, and something that I think most municipalities will receive fairly well.

There are a couple of other amendments in here that give municipalities some of the very basic rights that I think a lot of people would be surprised that they didn't have in the first place. Things like deciding where traffic signs are going to go, those kinds of things.

I think municipalities for a long time now have been asking for and wanted the ability to be able to make those kinds of routine operating decisions at the local level without having to go to the minister for ministerial approval. And I think certainly they will appreciate that little bit of movement there, Mr. Speaker.

We look at the dispute resolution mechanism contained in the Act to settle inter-municipal disputes, and I think we've got a . . . once again, a good step forward here in the sense that it isn't government coming in and deciding what's going to happen between two municipalities; what the relationship between those two municipalities is going to look like. They have the ability through a dispute resolution mechanism to be able to determine that for themselves.

There are other issues around debt approval, investment,

railway land assessment. There's some changes to the board of revision.

One of the other items here that caught our eye, Mr. Speaker, was the special purpose taxation. If we do get municipalities that are going to be amalgamating voluntarily, then they will be needing a little bit of latitude, a little bit of room to move, in order to be able to bring what might be two slightly . . . or maybe in some cases, a lot different structures together.

And so the ability to be able to perhaps provide for a special levy until such time as the mill rates can be merged and the taxations . . . taxation systems made compatible would be a way to allow them to do that.

There's some discretionary authority being granted to communities here in allowing communities to develop community advisory committees to provide linkages between the councils of the amalgamated municipalities and the . . . what would be the new individual municipality that would be created.

And I think this is probably an excellent idea, Mr. Speaker. And I think the only reason that we see this in here is because this is one thing that the government didn't do when they instituted health care reform. They just went out there and they determined what the boundaries of the health districts were going to be without any regard, without any regard, absolutely no regard to what was going to happen to the small communities within the confines of those boundaries, Mr. Speaker, who had through hard work, volunteerism, fundraising, those kinds of ways, raised funds to build hospitals, to build health care facilities, and then lose the ability to be able to control any of that after the health districts were formed. So possibly it was a lesson learned by the government, Mr. Speaker, and one that they are hoping in a situation where municipalities will voluntarily amalgamate that it won't be a mistake made again.

This will provide the opportunity and the ability for communities that are going to be forming a larger community, larger municipality, to have advisory bodies that can, particularly in a transition period, Mr. Speaker, that can provide advice to the overall council, the overall governing body and allow them to be able to work in the concerns of the newly amalgamated communities into the larger structure. So I think that certainly will be something that municipalities can live with.

With respect to municipal administrators, we see the movement more towards the self-regulated organization, Mr. Speaker. And that is something that I personally applaud. When we've got a situation where we have the fine professionals that we do operate as administrators, operating our rural and urban municipalities, I think that it is only a matter of respect to be able to allow them to become a self-regulating organization.

They are now going to be able to establish a board of examiners. SUMA and the Saskatchewan . . . or the Saskatchewan Urban Municipal Administrators' Association will oversee this and then that board will certify administrators. So I think going the direction of SROs (self-regulated organization) is something that will be welcomed by

administrators as well.

With respect to financial requirements and financial reporting requirements going to a more locally determined approach to selecting accountants, those kind of things, Mr. Speaker, I think is going to be once again probably very well-received by the municipalities.

The special municipal charges, once again we've talked a little bit about that, Mr. Speaker, and certainly those will assist communities in that transition period through to the municipality ultimately becoming one cohesive unit.

I think the one thing we should talk about a little bit, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that municipalities coming together, because of the structure, the historical structure of urban and rural municipalities over the course of the history of this province, there are certainly going to be some difficulties. And merging, particularly rural and urban, are going to pose some serious problems for municipalities, particularly in the area of cost when it comes to assuming responsibility for something that's been talked about much in the House in the last week, Mr. Speaker, sewer and water treatment facilities, those kind of things.

I think one of the things that the government may have to look at here is when municipalities do decide to take the initiative, and when they do decide that it would be in the best interests of their citizens and their ratepayers to join forces and become a larger unit, then I think not only should the government be facilitating that through pieces of legislation such as this, but perhaps they should look at a way of being able to provide some funding for that transition as well, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a tremendous amount of response to this particular amendment, Mr. Speaker, and we're hearing everyday from rural and urban municipalities and all of their elected officials in terms of their reactions to this. We still have a number of stakeholders that have indicated they are willing to provide us some guidance and direction on this amendment.

So at this point, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 23

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 23 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and debate Bill No. 23, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act. I've read the Act and I went through *Hansard* and I have some concerns about what's happening there.

As a person that was involved in my own RM, and I am one of those few people that Carl was talking about that sit on a council. And I spent eight years with . . .

The Speaker: — Order, for one minute. I just want to remind

the member that in reference to other members, he should refer to constituencies rather than first or second names.

Mr. Peters: — Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I apologize to the member from Carrot River.

After watching the past decade and seeing the lack of respect that this NDP government gives our hard-working and efficient local government leaders, I think it's only fair to rise today and remind the members opposite of the many indignities that they have laid at the feet of RMs.

Starting with the most recent example, we only have to go back a year or so. At that time we saw the members opposite, through the guise of government reports, launch a cynical and dishonest campaign to paint RMs and small communities as dreadful waste of money.

This campaign by the NDP was waged solely for those living in larger centres, to convince the people that the people serving at local councils were the cause of rising taxes in this province. And of course most of those members over there know, or should know, that serving on a local council is virtually a full-time volunteer position.

However the truth didn't stop the NDP, since their overall goal of course was to worsen rural/urban split in this province, hoping to get some political advantage.

So we saw them launch their forced amalgamation initiative just to lay the . . . slap the people living outside the city. Any argument that these people should have a great deal to say in the future of their local government was lost on the members opposite as they continued to drive ahead with their cynical attempt to once again drive another wedge between rural and urban voters.

They told us that there was no sign of local governments wanting to co-operate or amalgamate because so few over the years had. Therefore the government had to step in and force them to.

I'd like to remind the members opposite that . . . I'd like to remind the government members over on the other side that my RM in my home community shared an administrator for longer than I can remember. We shared an office. We also shared local services, EMO (Emergency Measures Organization) services, firefighting services, so that was not an issue.

However, through the whole debate, at no one time did the members opposite admit to the fact that even if municipalities wanted to bring greater co-operation and amalgamation, there were rules in place in provincial legislation that precluded such co-operation. Once again the members opposite were satisfied to bend the truth to serve their own political purposes.

However, once again those members forgot that the people of this province won't be pushed around by their heavy-handedness any longer. The people fought back and they won — at least for the time being.

That brings me to this legislation, which members opposite tell us takes away the impediments for amalgamation that the

province has in place. You can be sure that we will be looking very carefully at every comma in this Bill before allowing it to committee, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to issues involving municipalities, Mr. Speaker, I am not willing to simply take this government's word for what they are doing here. We will be heavily consulting on this Bill with people throughout the province to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that it's doing the right thing, first, on amalgamation, but on a number of other matters as well.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to touch on a few aspects of this Bill, but first, of course no discussion of RMs can go by without a word or two about this government's 10-year attack on local governments. Municipalities have seen their funding from the provincial government cut and cut again, over and over, Mr. Speaker, and yet these municipalities continue to provide a good service to their ratepayers at tax rates they are desperately trying to hold down. But we know as well, in many cases, it will be impossible for many municipalities to keep their mill rate down this year. And even if they do, an increasing assessment could bring in more tax revenue anyway.

This year both rural and municipalities . . . local governments saw their revenue-sharing grants increased by exactly zero, nothing, Mr. Speaker — zip. This government that for so many years wailed and moaned about federal off-loading onto provinces continues to do exact same thing to local governments. I would say it shows more hypocrisy from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, there are a few items in this Bill that do raise some serious concerns in my mind as well as numerous questions.

One such item that stuck in my mind was the new voting provisions in rural municipalities. Now the way the changes are written here I think are extremely unclear. As all members know, under current legislation all ratepayers in an RM, regardless of whether they reside there, are given the right to vote since they do pay taxes.

Now there's one . . . there's some changes . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, I have new glasses.

Now there are some changes being made here that I am a little unclear of — what effects is and how it pertains to those RMs that amalgamate with urban municipalities in municipal districts or RMs that amalgamate with other RMs.

We do need to make sure that these provisions are intended to do because they are written quite ambiguously. However, let me say this for the record. If the intention of the government is to take away the right to vote from those with property in an RM but do not live in the RM, I would be opposed to that.

So I need to do much more consulting on this provision and I will make . . . have many questions at such time when we see this Bill go into committee, probably later on this fall.

Mr. Speaker, one aspect of this legislation that does appear quite positive is the attempt to do away with much on-hands interference. Many of the everyday practices in operating an

RM currently are under direct control of the minister and are not necessary.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment appears to loosen the grip to a certain extent, and I do believe that to be positive movement forward, though I still want to consult with our local councils and ratepayers before passing final judgment on this aspect.

Mr. Speaker, whenever you're speaking about concept of increased co-operation between municipalities or indeed amalgamation, there is a real, natural worry about community identity and community voice. This amendment sets out something called community advisory committees and allows former urban municipalities to amalgamate with neighbouring RMs to maintain a body that voices concerns of that local community.

And of course until we hear details on how such advisory committees are to operate and how much influence they actually have, it is hard to pass judgment on their effectiveness. However, as a concept it seems positive.

We do see a similar type of system set up in the education system where individual communities have an advisory committee of sort to voice concerns to the board of education in question. While in most instances these bodies have very little authority, they do give voice to concerns in communities.

I do question who gets to those . . . such committees however. As I read the Bill . . . And I don't seen any impediment to former municipalities that strike such councils. However, in listening to the words of the minister here this week, I only heard him refer to urban municipalities' councils using these councils.

So I will need some clarification here to ensure that both current urban and rural municipalities have the right to such councils.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other provisions in this Bill that are very important and on which many, if not all of my colleagues would like the opportunity to speak: things such as restructuring agreements and what entails in them . . . what is entailed in them; things like special levies councils will be able to impose. We need some answers as if . . . as to why this is necessary, and we need assurance from the members opposite that this is not another avenue for the province to download more costs onto local governments, Mr. Speaker.

We need some answers in amendments on business licence restrictions that are being put in place. And there are many other areas that my colleagues will raise in which we need more clarification.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we consult fully and completely on this legislation. Since we've only had this in hand for a very short time, I now move at this time to adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

(15:30)

Bill No. 25

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Osika that **Bill No. 25 — The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to add a few brief comments if I could with regards to Bill No. 25.

A lot of the concerns that were expressed earlier by my colleagues on Bill 24 and Bill 23 certainly do apply to this one. But these ones are a little bit different in that there's . . . I think there's a lot of . . . some positive things in this Bill that on the surface look pretty encouraging.

Reducing government interference, for example, in local decision making. I think that has certainly some positive aspects. Reduction of the unnecessary political involvement, I think, also very positive. Political accountability, streamlining administrative procedures, all sound very good.

The problem I would have with that, and I think, Mr. Speaker, the problem that others might have as well would be the track record that this government has had with those particular positive sounding statements. The signals that are coming back from the past have not . . . do not fit very well with the intention as put forward by the minister in this Bill No. 25.

I'd like to address one or two of those if I could. When we talked about some of the things that the government has promised before, as they have in this Bill, one of the problems that we run into are the things that they promised in other jurisdictions but have not followed up with.

And I'm going to use local decision making as an example of where we have less than full trust in what they're proposing in this particular Bill. Granted, a lot of things in the northern municipalities certainly need correcting, and trust is a very big item there.

But when I look at the items of local decision-making promises with, for instance, health district boards that gives me some concern. That was a promise, but in fact the government agencies, the Health department has put so many restrictions on local boards that they in fact are struggling to do what they're asked to do by mandate — some elected, some appointed — but they're struggling to do what they can do best because of the restrictions that are placed on those particular boards.

I look at the restrictions that are placed on elected boards of education, for instance. Although there is a great deal of decision making proposed for those boards, in reality local school district boards have very little room to manoeuvre.

The number, the amount of dollars that they have to use at their discretion, the conditions put in place, makes it very difficult for those boards to act autonomously and with any kind of consequence other than what the provincial government has placed on them.

Municipalities is no different, Mr. Speaker. The restrictions on the municipalities and what they can do is very much dictated to

by the policies and directives of the departments on those municipalities. I have several in my constituency that have found that they have very difficult times trying to maintain the services needed when the department restricts their money flow so severely that they struggle to be able to offer the basic services.

Those are the problems we have in terms of the government trying to indicate that they want local autonomy and local decision making, but there are conditions placed that are very, very restrictive.

I guess at the same time this becomes an excuse for the government to pass off responsibility for their own requirements for those particular areas. For instance, when there is a particular problem needed to be solved, the government has used these boards as both a sounding board and as a shield so that they don't have to respond directly to the taxpayers.

My sympathy very often goes to these local board members. Whether they're elected for education boards, RM boards, urban or rural boards, their role is very, very difficult. They're the ones that have to make the decisions under very restricted conditions placed on them. And yet they're the ones that are going to have to talk to their neighbours in the coffee shop, at church, other social functions where they have to take the heat for the decisions that they've made.

But the decisions have to be within a very tightly controlled environment.

So I guess, Mr. Speaker, that's a major concern I have when we talk about giving the RM or the municipalities more of local autonomy and local accountability. It's very, very difficult for me to tell my constituents, for instance, with a lot of confidence that this in fact will happen.

One of the things that I noticed in the amendments is in fact the number of business licences and the number of similar businesses that can be allowed to happen in a particular municipality. And in this case, we're talking about the northern municipal regions.

I have a great deal of difficulty in terms of artificially putting these kinds of boundaries on businesses, either the kind of businesses in terms of similar businesses or the number of licences that are issued. Granted, those decisions should be rightfully made by the municipal region and the municipal district. But when artificial conditions are placed on them, then I have much more difficulty in supporting that kind of legislation.

Also one of the other things that jumped out at me when I was reviewing these amendments would be the discussion about the alteration of these municipal boundaries. From what I read and from what the minister's brief description of the Act in this particular area leads me to conclude that if alterations to municipal boundaries are required, it will have to be shown to the satisfaction of the minister.

That gives me some concern. That goes against what we have been discussing earlier about trying to work different municipalities in co-operation with each other in trying to bring

the common services together.

And if they don't have the ability to do that, but the responsibility goes back to the minister with his satisfaction, I think you're really defeating the purpose of local autonomy and accountability as they promised at the beginning of this particular . . . the amendments to this Act.

There's lots of those kinds of subtleties in this legislation, Mr. Speaker. I think there's . . . we need an opportunity to explore some of these further. And for that reason I'd like some of my other colleagues to be able to speak to this that have much more familiarity with the northern municipal regions.

And in that case I would move, Mr. Speaker, that we adjourn debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Culture, Youth and Recreation Vote 27

Subvote (CR01)

The Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much. Today with us is Ken Pontikes, the acting deputy minister; Jill McKeen, director of corporate development; Emile St. Amand, director of sport and recreation; Larry Chaykowski, executive director, finance administration and facilities; and Jocelyn Souliere, Centennial Summer Student Employment Program coordinator.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon, Madam Minister, and good afternoon to all your officials. And a special welcome today to Jill who is such a wonderful conversationalist in the halls of the legislature.

Madam Minister, I just wanted to discuss with you the cultural facilities grants program. I have brought this grants program to the attention of your department a couple of times, and through written questions in the legislature, regarding the funding that has been allotted for cultural facilities, and I guess the whole program that was announced by your government a couple of years ago.

Madam Minister, there was, according to what I understand, \$4.9 million that was supposed to be designated to this program within the last two years, would be '99-2000 and 2000-2001. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The figure that we are working with, the 6.9 million from the AEF (Associated Entities Fund), understanding that that money has accumulated over the years, and in the subsequent years it'll be 500,000 a year because this is a result of a buildup of funds over the years. It won't be on a regular basis that it'll be that high.

Ms. Julé: — All right. Madam Minister, in the budget announcements that government put out — if I can correctly

remember what I saw in the budget — there was \$4.9 million that was designated for this cultural facilities grants program in each of those two years. So obviously, or possibly, there has been some re-jigging or . . . I'm asking why in fact, if that money is budgeted, why it hadn't been used. And that statement to you will also lead me to subsequent questions regarding what happened to the funding and when it will be utilized.

But if you could just maybe clarify for me whether the budget statements did indicate that 4.9 or around that amount would be used in both of those years?

(15:45)

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Just to go back, I think we've found where that 4.9 figure comes from. In 1998-99 that was the figure, 4.9, but if you continue along in '99-2000, 2000-2001, there's an additional 500,000 in each of those years, and again will be in 2001-2002. And so when if you add it all up is where you get the larger figure from.

Now originally there was a requirement in the funding to have matched federal funding. Because it was very difficult for many of the communities to come up with that because of the criteria for federal programs, the criteria was changed, and then communities were given an opportunity to apply under the change criteria and that created a delay in actually allocating the money.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. So, Madam Minister, are you saying that there is an additional \$500,000 in addition to the 4.9 million? Let's just concentrate within the year 2000-2001. What will be allotment for cultural facilities grants? What will be the total sum of money for that program in the year 2000-2001?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The 6.9 that will be allocated, there's a bit of that that goes into the future into the '02, '03 year. And part of that is because some of these are multi-year projects. They don't all get expended in the one year when they're approved.

But if you add up the 500,000 for each of those subsequent years, the total you'd get to is the 6.9.

Ms. Julé: — All right. Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I just want to make reference to a part of your remarks that you just made here. You said that there was part of the eligibility criteria was matching federal funding.

Now a specific town in my constituency applied for this grant and was told about the matching federal funding. And they were also told it was up to them to acquire that funding, so that they had to contact the feds and do their research on who to contact, which was kind of a dilemma and difficult for them because they didn't know exactly where to go and neither were they given any information where to go for this.

So I found it a little disconcerting that if this is a program that the province is announcing and that there had been, I guess, a discussion with the feds, or an agreement with the feds to have matching federal funding in place that that should have been taken care of by the province so that people wouldn't have to —

at the time that they're applying and trying to get their criteria down pat — have to end up starting to contact the federal government. It gets very complex.

But nonetheless, my constituents did do that research themselves. And they did that by contacting an MP (Member of Parliament) from Saskatoon. That MP from Saskatoon told them, after his research into this, that he had no knowledge and neither did the federal government of them being responsible for providing any funding for this.

So it led me to wonder whether or not in fact that there had been a discussion with the province and with the federal government on this. Because if there was no knowledge and no agreement by the federal government, how in goodness name could the province announce this or tell people in the province that this was part of a criteria?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — There have been instances where there has been federal involvement. For example, in Prince Albert the federal government actually funded the feasibility study for that particular community for this cultural facility.

However, the member's point is well taken. If there's going to be an expectation that someone to meet a requirement in order to get funding, then there should be some reasonable belief that the opportunity is there to get the other funding. And as well that people understand where they may have to go to have that inquiry.

Now like the provincial government, the federal government has several different doors you can go through to be creative about looking for community funding for infrastructure. And I think some communities could have used their infrastructure money — if it was agreed to at the municipal level to get that portion — some communities may have been able to find some other pocket of federal funding through which they could justify, if it was a joint-use facility or something, that they could justify doing that work under a different umbrella.

But I think your point is well taken. And I think, generally, governments should be as facilitative as they can to communities being able to put a reasonable amount of work into their funding proposals.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, when this program was developed, was determined by your government to be one that they would undertake to benefit communities, and part of the criteria was that there would matching federal funding, at that point or even prior to that point, it seems to me, there should have been a discussion with the federal government that they would collaborate with you on this. Did that discussion happen? Did the feds know anything about this?

And if they didn't know that they were supposed to be a part of it, why would you tell people in this province that part of the criteria set out by your government was for them to contact the federal government and expect some funding.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well I guess with all due respect, sometimes governments do try to put a little pressure on each other to cough up money that we feel they should be

contributing, because otherwise the tendency is to let the province carry the burden for everything.

And the fact of the matter is we have seen an additional several millions put into the cultural envelope, including cultural facilities. So hopefully, the fact that people did contact them and asked for it helped prompt them to put new money in this envelope.

Ms. Julé: — Well, Madam Minister, I certainly don't charge you solely for the responsibility for this because this was under the . . . another department. And I don't know what all took place. But I think there is a real . . . this is a very sad commentary on government that, you know, they introduce a program, state certain criteria, and really it is . . . I haven't even got words for this.

I don't know how to sort of explain how very frustrating and deceiving I think this is to the people of the province who are trying to meet all the criteria; they're doing their work. But a part of their criteria isn't even feasible because there has been no discussion with the feds targeted to this particular program. And I think there should have been.

There should have been everything in place and ready to roll so that when people did contact the federal government, they had knowledge of a certain pot of money that was there, and when people applied for it, all they'd have to do is make sure that their application was in and then things could move ahead. But without, without there even being an agreement at the federal level to provide funds for this particular program, I think it's very deceiving.

Madam Minister, when my constituent wrote and reapplied after they recognized that there didn't have to be federal matching funding, one of your officials wrote back to them and said that in fact, thank you for applying but, you know, you have to have 75 per cent of funding in place at the time that you applied for funding.

Well the first application they didn't have 75 per cent of the funding in place; the second time they applied, they did. So the funding was in place, but still they were turned down because they didn't have the funding in place at the time of the first application. At least that's the way this seems to me.

When this was made known to your department, that the funding was in place, then another criteria was added that they weren't aware of, that was part of the initial criteria. And that criteria was that if money is going to be given out for this program, the cultural facility that you're building has got to serve a population of, I think it's 3,000 or . . . I can't remember the number. But it's certainly then, you know, was a criteria based on population.

This is unreasonable because it wasn't part of the initial criteria. It was criteria added on and it seems to me a reason — provided a reason for government to deny them a grant because the rationale of having the cultural facility in this particular town — which is Aberdeen — that town serves many, many surrounding towns and the whole surrounding area. There are a number of people that come into Aberdeen that would be using this facility.

So why was the new criteria added, Madam Minister, based on population within the community?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess I'll make two comments on that. One is that the only criteria that changed from the first criteria to the second criteria was the criteria for federal funding. The rest of the criteria were consistent throughout.

And my understanding on looking at the records here is that they are not totally out of the game. There's information still being checked on, regarding the geographic area served and whether it qualifies under that criteria, which again I'll re-emphasize was the same criteria in the first round of applications and the second round of applications.

Ms. Julé: — Madam Minister, that's very heartening to hear that you say they're not completely out of the game this round. Because in this letter that they received from the . . . Associated Entities Fund is the heading on this letter and it's from Lance Brown. He says to them, and this letter is dated March 20:

Thank you for applying for the cultural facilities grants, but the response to this round of applications has exceeded the available funding.

So that means to me that all the funding has already been granted or will be granted, but their application will not be considered, in Aberdeen. So how can you reassure them right now that they're still being considered if there is no more available funding?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Some communities have had outright rejection letters. This is not the case in Aberdeen and that means that as additional monies flow into the pool, additional allocations will be made.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I do appreciate your assistance on this matter and your answers to my questions.

One other thing I just wanted to bring to your attention is the comment by some of my constituents and other people throughout the province in fact, that the application forms often arrive at community town offices and so on, just prior to deadlines. They don't get them in time to really get applications in on time.

So I would just make a suggestion to your department or to Sask Sport, whoever sends out the applications, that it's imperative that they get these applications out in time for people to deal with them in a timely fashion.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Perhaps if I could ask the member to suggest what you would consider a reasonable time frame to have the application ahead.

Ms. Julé: — Well certainly more than a week or two days before. And that was when the community of Aberdeen received theirs on the first round. They said that they got an application, I think through the department, or from the department, but it was late. And they also received one . . . not an application, but notification of the program that was in place through Sask Sport through a phone call that kind of gave them a heads-up, which was helpful.

But just an observation that people have made and I would like to have some reassurance on, that applications will be out in time that would allow them to get it back in before the deadline. Just a matter of getting it through the mail and getting it back in takes more than a couple of days.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, there are a number of museums in rural Saskatchewan who are community-based organizations that work hard to raise funds to preserve the history of the province, and as you can well imagine, these organizations are always looking for extra help so that they can continue to do their good work.

I wonder has your department got a program that would assist and help these museums?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, there is a program through the lotteries. And it strictly applies to community museums.

Mr. Hart: — I wonder if you could . . . Is that part of that \$1.4 million allotment under Culture and Recreation? And I wonder if you could expand a bit on the number of dollars that are available in this fiscal year and how communities would access those dollars.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We can certainly provide you with that information. I haven't got it right at my fingertips because it is under Sask Sport Trust. And that means that they apportion the money, they're accountable for it, but I'm not sure exactly how much they have specifically in their museums pool. But we can certainly undertake to get that information for you and give you the detail that you're looking for.

(16:00)

Mr. Hart: — Do I understand then, Madam Minister, that the funds that are available to museums and like cultural organizations, this is money that comes through things like the video lottery terminals in hotels and lounges and that sort of thing? Is that where that money comes from or is it from another source as far as lotteries are concerned?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The lottery system is funded by lottery tickets. They're the kind you buy in grocery stores, malls, etc. Yes.

Mr. Hart: — Another area of concern is . . . deals with recreational facilities, whether they be skating rinks, curling rinks, community halls, ball diamonds, and the like.

But I think probably the greatest concern would come from the winter sporting activity . . . recreational facilities and community halls where, as you can well imagine, the increase in energy costs is having a huge impact on the operation of these facilities. Many of these facilities are operated by community groups within the community. They receive little or no assistance from the urban and rural municipalities. Their operating funds are generated from . . . through user fees and rental of the facilities and those sorts of things.

And I've had a number of community groups express to me their very deep concerns with the increased costs of energy that they may not be able to open their doors next year and if they

do, they may not be able to . . . it would at a astronomical increase in skating fees and the like.

Now has your department got any plans to assist communities and community organizations with the cost of operating their facilities?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think the best way I could answer that is just to say that we are conscious of the issue and that we are in discussion with the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation people about the issue.

What we'll need to do is make an assessment of how big of a problem it is for how many communities, get some idea of the cost involved, and then when we're sitting down to look at the whole issue of energy costs generally across the province — because of course obviously hospitals, big facilities, all kinds of people will be affected — we'll just have to look at what's doable within the framework of that.

One of the things we are working on right now is, recently the federal government has announced some new initiatives in sports and recreation, and our department is involved in trying to get them to place more emphasis on the fact that sports is largely carried out at the municipal level and to provide more supports to municipal infrastructure, particularly deteriorating municipal infrastructure for sports and recreation. Because I've lived in a small community myself and I know how important those facilities are to what the whole community, never mind just the kids, are able to do in terms of recreation.

So yes, this is something that we'll keep top of mind as we look at the increased costs of operation.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, when you're looking at that problem, and I'm not sure it may not fall within your responsibilities, but perhaps you could initiate it. I think we could look at some large cost savings in the operation of some of these facilities if there were some dollars for the facilities to become more energy efficient. And I realize that may not fall within your realm of responsibilities, but it seems to me that somebody has to take the initiative to start some action in that general area.

And I wonder if that's something that you have thought about as one of the ways of coping with these increasing energy costs.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Actually I can't remember what year it was, but I know there was an extensive program of retrofit and whatnot of community facilities. The problem is that given the just steadily increasing rates, it just isn't enough even with that.

Now I'm certain that the Power Corporation would look again at other programs like that if there were people who weren't covered, or if we could perhaps get more savings by extending that program out again.

But that program has been in place not that long ago.

Mr. Hart: — I guess, Madam Minister, one other thing that I would like to perhaps recommend and put forward is there are a few . . . a number of communities that are looking at some time down the road, building new recreation facilities. I have a

community in my constituency, Wynyard, which is at the moment starting to put some funds together to replace some of their recreation facilities.

And I think something that would be very helpful to them would be a planning service that would help them in design of their facilities, and incorporating as many of these energy-saving techniques that are available.

And perhaps . . . I know other communities have looked at in the past when they built facilities, looked at energy-saving systems and so on, and perhaps just to facilitate an exchange of information between communities. And perhaps a listing of some of the things that are available and some of the experiences that other communities have had in their past would be very useful.

And I was wondering if your department has a service like that? And if not, would you look at providing that type of a service?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We don't at the moment, but one of the opportunities that's been afforded us by having the department established as a department is to take a second look at how we relate to all the services that the recreation side of Sask Sport Trust provides, how that complements what's done in the department and whether there is a changing role for government.

And certainly, I think, as we go down the road of communities deciding what kind of investments they can sustain in their communities, there is a feasibility period, I think, that would have to come before any project is entered into.

And we'll just at this point — if it's okay with you — take that as a suggestion to consider in terms of the changing roles of the department vis-à-vis Sask Sport Trust.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Chair, Madam Minister, the video lottery terminals in particularly small-town Saskatchewan is seen by community leaders as a drain on monies that leave the community. And I've heard it or I've had it expressed to me by a number of community leaders, whether they be mayors of the town or head of a sports and cultural organization, the message is always the same. Why do we have to send all the profits into the government, is a phrase they use. Why can't we keep some of those dollars in our own community where we could then apply them to recreational facilities and cultural facilities?

And I wonder if your government is looking at changing that policy? And if you're not looking at it, why aren't you looking at it?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I guess there's two answers to that question. One of them is that one of the reasons why the lotteries money was dedicated to this area was to ensure that there would be a dedicated pool of funds that would go towards these purposes.

But secondarily I would say that it's a general rule of thumb by the Provincial Auditor that government monies should go into the General Revenue Fund at which point priorities are determined. And you're suggesting that more of those revenues be retained in the community, but that doesn't enable you to set

priorities among communities.

And I think one of the things, even whether it's school funding or whatnot, what you try to do is make it fair across the province, not just within a wealthy school division or a less wealthy school division. And the same thing applies here. The money goes into a general fund and then is apportioned according to needs across the province whether it's for health care, for education, for recreation.

The only real dedicated funds there are, from the point of view that you're talking about, is the lottery funds and the AEF fund that comes out of the gaming area. But the rest goes into the General Revenue Fund and, I guess, is debated at budget time in terms of cross-province priorities.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, the province of Manitoba in 1999 sent \$42 million out to the communities outside of Winnipeg in the form of unconditional grants and so on to be used for rural economic development, and sports and cultural recreation facilities, and so on. It seems to me that perhaps, you know, this province could be looking at doing something more along the lines of what Manitoba has done.

And again I know there's more than one hotel owner has said to me in rural Saskatchewan that we know best what's the needs of our community. And he says, this one particular person that spoke to me recently said: why do I have to send all of that money and then be part of a fundraising committee to raise funds for our community hall? Why can't we have a mechanism worked out where a percentage of the funds raised at the video lottery terminals in my bar would just stay in my community?

And I think that's a reasonable request, and I think your government should look seriously at that.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The amount that goes out right now through the lotteries process is 27 million. But I would have to say that there is several different decision-making bodies that make decisions about funds that are spent in communities.

There's the child action plan that allocates millions of dollars; this is made up of representatives from communities that make that decision. The Sask Sport Trust, that's made up of a board that makes the decisions and involves the communities in those decisions. The AEF fund is made up of a board that makes those decisions. And it's as much of a surprise to me as it is to you who gets the funding and who doesn't.

But there are a number of different pots of money that are created to support the kind of activities you talk about out in communities. And it's not all within the lotteries pool, some is in the child benefit, some is in the AEF.

I think it would be useful if we could know more, what resources flow into each community from all the various sources. And I'm actually hoping that as government gets more computerized that we will be able to provide better integrated data, both regionally and by community, so we can understand better the flows in both revenue and expenditures around the province.

Mr. Hart: — Was it not the original agreement when the

terminals were first put into bars and so on that 10 per cent of the profits would stay within the community? And it seems to me if in fact that was the case, we could short-circuit a lot of administration and bureaucracy by just having the money stay directly in the communities and the community . . . it could go, say, to a rec board.

Most communities have some sort of a structure within their towns and areas to look after recreational dollars and cultural activities and that sort of thing. And it just seems to me it would make a whole lot more sense and be more effective if at least some of the monies were dispensed in that form.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, certainly that was discussed as a proposal at one time as a possible way to do it. I remember many discussions around how that money might be allocated.

But the one thing I would say again, you can't determine the relative merits of where money needs to be spent by the gaming proclivities of the people who live in a particular village. And so where there is some merit to that idea, there also is some merit some time, even though money comes from one source, to relocate it to a place where perhaps the need might be greater for a new facility or for whatever.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, I'd urge you to take another look at that proposal, in that it seems to me that the people who are being directly affected and live in the areas perhaps would be in a better position to determine the uses and the needs of the money, of those dollars, rather than having it all flow into a central fund and then having various agencies of government make those decisions for the communities.

Certainly there is a need for assessments and feasibilities and that sort of thing. And I think the people, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, in areas such as my constituency, have enough common sense and the abilities to make some of those judgment call.

And they're not asking for all the profits, by any means. What they're saying is, leave at least some of the money. The majority of the money is coming from our local people — they enjoy going in and doing some gaming in the local bar and so on — and so why shouldn't that money stay in the community? And I would just urge you to revisit that decision.

(16:15)

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, I have a request of you in addition to my prior comments. Could you provide for me the names of successful applicants for the cultural facilities grants program that have been applied thus far? Because I take it that there has been a determination of those applicants. And I was wondering if that could be supplied to me.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll just read them out here into the record. And these are the ones that have been approved to date — the town of Foam Lake, 1,266; the town of Whitewood, 10,000; the city of Lloydminster, 100,000; the city of Yorkton, 675,000; the city of Assiniboia, 1,062,500; the city of Moose Jaw, 1.25 million; the city of Prince Albert, 2.3 million; the town of Porcupine Plain, 74,338; and the village of Denare

Beach, 32,531 — for a total of 5,505,635.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. I appreciate having that, thanks.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. And, Madam Minister, welcome again to your officials. I'll just continue on with questions that I had before. And because I don't remember all of the questions, I hope you don't remember all of your answers because I might re-ask some questions that I did before. So I'll see if you've got the same answers.

I just wanted to just continue with a little bit on my colleague from Last Mountain-Touchwood on the videos and I come back to that a little bit later on. But we may have a cure for the problem of disbursement of monies to rural Saskatchewan from the VLTs (video lottery terminal) because with the reassessment and the programs that are being instituted of late, the hotels are starting to close. And in my constituency, I think within the last month I've had I believe four hotels close. So this may cure part of the problem of the disbursement of funds if we close all the facilities in rural Saskatchewan.

But I'd like to go back just briefly to the culture facilities grant. And I just touched on, and I believe last time we spoke in estimates, where I was getting to is who can apply . . . the criteria. And I believe I asked the criteria just about the time we shut down the last session. Who can apply for the culture facility grants, what criteria it takes, and the process to do that. And I believe you were going to give me the answer just when we ended last time. So if you could let me know that, I have a couple of specifics that I wish to address. But if you can give me the process.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The cultural facilities grant program supports both construction and renovation of cultural facilities. And it's one-time funding of up to 25 per cent. And it can include community halls, museums, art centres, libraries, theatres, art galleries, and other facilities that serve a broad range of community needs.

Now there was five criteria that had to be met. One was community support, a display of broad community support. Financial support, the 75 per cent of funding that's needed. Sustainability, the ability to support the facility over the long term. Facility condition and life expectancy, if it . . . in the case of a renovation. And the service area, whether in fact it can serve a large enough geographic area of people to justify a facility that's being proposed.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. With that in mind, with those five criteria in mind, did I hear you correct and say that 25 per cent would be from government and 75 from local?

Because meeting some of these criteria and again, I'm going to harp a little bit on rural Saskatchewan because we all know, I mean it's not rocket science to see what's happening in rural Saskatchewan as people move out, and we can debate for days as to why they're moving out of rural Saskatchewan. But as people are moving out, some of these criteria are getting harder and harder to meet.

And I'll give you the example of one within my constituency right now that's having a problem, is the petroglyphs at St. Victor. And I go through this criteria and how do you get support from petroglyphs? There's just not that much. There's tourism in there. The financial support for it, when you look at . . . This is extremely historic property, if you wish, property . . . It's in, it's in, the petroglyphs are in the hills.

Sustainability. The criteria is extremely difficult to meet for this particular one initiative and they will be . . . they've talked to me already and they will be asking for some support some way or other. Quite a, quite an historic piece of property.

And I'm wondering if there's any exceptions to these five criteria that this particular organization that's trying to preserve the petroglyphs, if there's some way that they can apply to this fund and be granted some funds to preserve these?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We can provide you more information on this and . . . But one of the things I would say is there is a heritage portion of the Municipal Affairs department that my colleague, Ron Osika, could address during his questions. And that may well be the appropriate . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Just to advise the minister to use the, either the responsibility of the minister or the constituency, as opposed to the proper name.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, bad habit of calling people by their names. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister responsible for Municipal Affairs could provide more information on the Heritage Fund. But we'll check on that just to make sure that's the appropriate spot, because there was a question in my own mind about whether it might also be in some way related to Parks. So I just want to be very clear that I'm giving you the right advice, on the advice of the member who raised questions previously.

So we will check to make sure, but we think the appropriate place is the heritage portion.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. You'd mentioned earlier there's several doors to open for some of these issues, and that sometimes is the problem. Here we have an organization that has absolutely no idea where to go, and of course, they start with myself. So I look forward to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well they know if they come to me, they're going to get some voice and some action.

So, Madam Minister, I'm looking forward to whatever you can provide me in terms of where these people can seek some assistance.

The other one, Madam Minister, within my constituency, and I don't want to dwell on my constituency, but it's one that I've spoke to already, is the Metis village in Willow Bunch. And I do not know if they've applied to you for assistance or not, but I sat at their meeting and they have a prospectus and a plan layout and land already — maybe not purchased yet — but earmarked, if you wish, to build this Metis village.

And if you're familiar at all with Willow Bunch, it's quite,

again, an historic area. It was part of Sitting Bull's northern camp, along with Wood Mountain, and it kind of flows all along that southern area. And it's another town, unfortunately, in rural Saskatchewan that is dying. And the local people have an initiative to try and create some tourism, and cultural tourism, which should really fit precisely and perfectly into what we're trying to do with Youth, Culture and Recreation.

And again I would like to be able to take to them some methodology by where they can apply for a grant. They've done the initial set-up. Now they're in the process of trying to raise some money — feasibility at least of raising money — and how they can go . . . It's about a \$2 million, two and a half million dollar project, as I understand it, and from a community of a couple hundred people it's pretty difficult to get 2 million.

And then following the criteria that you have laid out, service area . . . I mean the area is obviously huge. If you're referring to the numbers of people again, I'm harping back to what I say about rural Saskatchewan being depleted. And it would be very easy for me to take the five criteria that you have given me and deny everyone in rural Saskatchewan . . . and I don't know, I don't believe that's the intent. But when we're looking at a minimum number of dollars . . . substantially if you look in the rural area — 6.9 million — but it would be very easy to say, no you don't qualify because of service area, you don't have enough people. Sustainability — well how can you sustain a cultural tourism event when your roads are so bad you're not going to get people in there?

So again I would ask, Madam Minister, if you could provide me with the methodology whereby these people could apply for a grant, and I guess probably presumptuous but what their chances would be given the criteria that you have laid out?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well again these criteria are for a particular program and that's not necessarily where the initiative that they are working on would be funded from, Mr. Chair. So I understand that the department is in discussion with this group and that there may well be a different place that's more suitable for them to look at looking for funding from.

But I will say, because you've mentioned it twice, the issue of rural towns dying. I think the member would agree that ever since the horse and buggy left and we had cars, the geography of rural Saskatchewan has been changing. And the fact of the matter is as people are able to travel farther and faster and are attracted to things like big box suppliers and whatnot where they can get bargains, etc., that people will sometimes not perhaps have as much loyalty to their local businesses, etc., as would make them more viable. And government can control some of that, but some of it it can't. So I felt I needed to address that question as well.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I don't know if that was an answer or not, but thank you anyway.

And you're right, rural Saskatchewan has changed. The blacksmith shop in my town closed a few years ago. But I think we could stand up and debate here for ages about why this happened and all we have to do is look at the track record of the last 50 or 60 years where other provinces are expanding and we're actually staying the same or fluctuating up and down,

with our cities expanding but our rural is depleting. And we can debate as to why that happened.

If I may, Mr. Chair, I'd like to have my colleague from Humboldt . . . she has one more question that she would like to ask before I continue.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, I have to leave very shortly so it occurred to me to ask this question. As far as the mandate of your department now and your ministry, in reference to the youth part of it, does your mandate regarding youth just refer to recreational activities and so on or is it anything that might pertain to youths and the needs of youth in the province?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I would say that our focus for some of the employment and career-related parts of our activities will be more on youth that are later years — high school to post-secondary or graduated youth. When it comes to the recreation and culture programs and whatnot, it refers to younger age groups.

But what this is really all about is trying to make sure that youth both have the information they need but also that we have all of the Saskatchewan community engaged in aggressively retaining, attracting, recruiting youth, and that's the business community, the public sector. And certainly we're hoping to act as a conduit for vastly increasing the energy and effort put into both creating opportunities for youth in this province but also connecting youth up to those opportunities in the province.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. What occurred to me is that if you have some influence as far as monies that come through the Associated Entities Fund, and it might pertain to youth and your ministry . . . As you well know, we have a committee established here of the legislature to address the needs of youth that are being exploited on the streets, and I was wondering whether or not you may have thought about a way that your ministry could support some of the initiatives that may have to be taken to help youth that are in the process of healing later on?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think it's worth giving a little more of an answer to this. I'll just pick a couple out here.

But there is 2 million out of the Associated Entities Fund on top of the child action plan that's targeted specifically at vulnerable children and families. And it includes things like youth camps, youth cultural camps, food programs, sports and cultural things, children's festivals, youth and family activities, summer sport and play, back to the outdoors. There's a lot of stuff that has to do with summer recreation — summer literacy, parent resource programs, computers for the community, fitness programs, wellness programs for youth and families.

So there's pages and pages here of programs for vulnerable families and children that are funded under that 2 million from the Associated Entities Fund.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I'm just going to outrightly ask you to use your influence in the future to target some funding, possibly from Gaming, through the Associated Entities Fund that might be and will be needed

most likely to address the whole comprehensive care and healing process that will be needed for children in the province.

And I think if we can do it by establishing a program for cultural facilities, that we might be able to suggest using some of the Gaming money for children that have been exploited and sexually abused on the streets of our province.

I don't ask you for an answer unless of course you'd like to comment, but I wanted to ask you to certainly consider that and work towards it.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I'll just comment that in the absence of having had the recommendations from your committee, this 2 million is already directed that way. And of course you know about the program in this year's budget for families at risk where we'll be engaging with the families right from the point of an anticipated birth through to age 5.

But what I will say is that we are looking forward to the recommendations of that report. And of course, programs are constantly reevaluated for whether they're being spent in the best way — solving the problems that we're trying to solve together, creating the opportunities. So we look forward to your report and any direction it might give for the future.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. My colleague seems to have taken off with my estimate sheet but I'll go from a couple of notes that I have here. If he's watching, maybe he'd bring them back.

Madam Minister, just on the estimate sheets, I noticed that the MacKenzie Art Gallery funding was cut from \$275,000 to zero. Could you explain this, and will the MacKenzie Art Gallery receive any other government or further government funding?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — What we did . . . Not even I would be brave enough to cut all the funding to the MacKenzie Art Gallery. What we did was the money has merely been moved to a different location so that it's more in sync with the way funding is provided to all of these facilities. And that money has moved under the lotteries, and we recognized that expenditure by increasing their retained revenues in order to cover that expenditure.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Madam Minister, did I . . . Just for my own clarification, is that now under lotteries funding? The funding does come from the lotteries?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, the funding comes from the lotteries. But I'll emphasize that we redo the agreement with the lotteries every three years and negotiate. If there's things that it seems more appropriate that they should be managing rather than the government, then that's recognized in the funding agreement. And certainly this amount of money was recognized as additional monies they would need in that pool if they were going to take on that responsibility.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Madam Minister, I believe you touched on this last time — just by my notes — but cultural industries development funding has increased by \$250,000. And am I correct in saying that's for training and marketing and that's totally what it's for? Have some programs been specifically

targeted?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Previously there was 200,000 in this fund, and it was used to do such things as industry workshops for skill development. It was used for marketing Saskatchewan publishers and authors. And the additional monies, there'll be some negotiation around the priorities on how that's spent before it's actually spent.

And we're certainly hoping to, with the new federal money, to use some of our expenditures to partner with their expenditures and create more opportunities for cultural workers to get both the experience and the information needed.

Because really when you look at it, people in this industry are small-business people. And they're the smallest of business people because sometimes it's an individual, sometimes it's a group of individuals who have formed together on an artistic endeavour, music, whatever. But certainly we're looking at this very much as developing the entrepreneurial skill of people involved in the cultural sector.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Is this going to be an annual . . . continuous annual expense then, this extra \$250,000, or is it one time for this year?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well there's no such thing as money that's forever and ever. But in this case certainly this would be seen as core funding for them to undertake the work they need to do over the next several years. And if at some point I suppose they ran out of useful things to do with that money, you would then have to question whether that was the best way to spend it. But at the moment this is a growing industry that's doing very well, and I certainly would foresee that this money would be there for some time to come.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, the Centennial Summer Student Employment Program . . . was there any . . . I noticed that the employment opportunities for students this summer under this program are fairly limited, primarily dealing with — in fact totally exclusively dealing with the public sector. I believe some of my colleagues asked some questions in the earlier estimates about this program.

I guess one of the questions I would have is we experience a shortage of health care workers — nurses, technicians, the like — and I noticed that there aren't any . . . that's not part of this year's program. It seems to me that this would be a great opportunity for students to gain some on-the-job experience, be exposed to hospital in the hospital setting, and be an opportunity for students to see whether a career as a health services worker is a career for them. And I'm wondering why wasn't that included in the program?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I think it's a very good suggestion you're making that we should look at the health sector. I think one of the things was we had a number of areas where there was a fairly specific identified need. There was a desire to get the program moving quickly so that students could apply within this year for the program. So we tended to go with things that were fairly quickly mobilized where there was already an established need.

Right now there are committees working within the health community on recruitment retention, and certainly would make a lot of sense to contact them and ask for guidance on a health component to this program. And I think it's a very good suggestion that you make to add a health component to the employment program.

Mr. Hart: — I'm happy to hear that you're looking at that and that it could perhaps be a component of the program next year.

When I look at the federal summer career . . . the federal program for students, some of the . . . In fact the two priorities that are listed are the ability of the job to provide a career-related experience and the second one is the potential of the job to prepare students for the future labour market participation.

And it seems to me in this year's program, those two components are — in the provincial program, in your program — are not being fully addressed. I mean it's . . . As I once was a student and I have had family members who were students, and I guess they enjoyed summer employment cutting grass and that sort of stuff, but it really doesn't relate to the priorities. I mean we only can use so many turf specialists in the province and that sort of thing.

It seems to me that this program should be . . . It seems to me it was hastily put together is the impression I had when I first was made aware of this program. In fact it seemed to me that perhaps there was a need for the new Premier to make some sort of an announcement, and it seems as if this was the program that he announced way back when during the winter months. And as a result, I think there are some . . . it's pretty limited and there's some real shortcomings to it.

As my colleagues have already indicated to you, the private sector was completely excluded from this year's program. I think they could have easily been incorporated in this year's program.

And so I would hope, and I would make the suggestion, and I guess the question I would have is: for next year's program are you going to look at the priorities set down by the federal program and perhaps dovetail the provincial program more closely with the federal program?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again let me try to go at this from a big picture point of view.

We have a substantial number of people in the province employed in both the private and the public sector. And if some of my colleagues would restrain themselves, I'd have a little easier time answering this question. But the fact of the matter is there is a federal program that covers the private sector and we will not duplicate what they're doing. We're trying to complement career opportunities. And there are many young people who are interested in employment in a range of professional capacities, many of which are available through the public sector.

And I would have to say that when the program was generically advertised, the uptake wasn't really that great — about 500 applications. But when we put up on the Web site what the

specific jobs were, once we got the job descriptions back from all the various people, that people were so excited about the jobs that within a couple of days there was 7,000 applications came in via the Internet.

And certainly, as soon as people recognized there was a real opportunity for a career-related job, the response was huge. And in fact, you feel bad that you don't have a job for every single one of those students that applied.

But one of the reasons for the parks programs — or two — the Regional Parks Association has very much wanted to do more in the development of the regional parks which, of course, serve the rural areas. And there's considerable amount of, I would say, not grass-cutting work that has to do with special projects in the parks, renewal of the parks, and because of the maybe lack of some of the other type of opportunities in those areas, it was seen to be important to provide some support to the parks system in projects that they've been waiting to do for quite a while.

So I think that you'll find that the kind of work people are doing in the parks environment . . . in some instances they're building bike trails, they're doing renewal projects in the various areas. And hopefully we'll see some stories about some of the projects the students are working on in your newspapers this summer.

But I'll also mention that in the public sector, we're looking at about 80 per cent of the workforce retiring in the next 10 years. And certainly it's important that as students are in school, that they take a look at the kind of work opportunities that there are. And some may choose to go into small business, but there's many people who have chosen a professional path. And certainly the kind of jobs that are here give them the opportunity for that kind of work experience related to their professional career choice.

(16:45)

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, I certainly wasn't indicating that you would . . . for your program to duplicate the federal program. What I was referring to was the priorities within the federal program where the summer employment opportunities provide job experience or career experience for students, so once they graduate they have some work experience in their chosen field. Because this is . . . very often when students will tell you I'm sure, as they've told me, that they've got all of the educational requirements, but they're often told you don't have any work experience, and therefore it is very difficult for them to find appropriate employment.

And it seems to me a student employment program, that should be one of its top priorities, is to provide some career experience for students, you know, over and above just a summer job. If we can put those two components together in a program, it's certainly much more beneficial and much more effective.

Now I guess I have to take issue a little bit with some of your statements where, if you want to become a professional, that the only place to do that and follow a profession, that you have to do that in the public service. I think that's certainly not the case, and many small businesses nowadays have professional people within their employment.

And I think that's an area that we have to grow. I think we certainly have seen in the past an overemphasis in the public sector and an under-emphasis in the private sector. And I think that's perhaps one of the reasons why we are . . . this province is in the situation it is in today.

So once again, could you outline your proposals for next year's program? Because if the program works the way — and I'm sure it will because of the time frame — the guidelines and the parameters of the program will be in place before we have that opportunity to review it in next year's estimates. And so therefore I think it's important to have an indication from you as to what initiatives your department is looking at in next year's program, particularly with regards to the private sector.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Well again I will mention that I wouldn't want the member to think that I had anything against the private sector. The cultural industries development fund is very much targeted at entrepreneurial people involved in the cultural industries.

But what I will give you is a list of some of the kinds of jobs that have come forward — audit assistant, biology assistant, business analyst, computer-assisted drafting, electronic data-base coordinator, engineering technicians, geologists and geological assistants, librarian technicians and assistants, pharmacy, probation officer, recreation coordinators, therapist, and veterinary researchers, Web site designers.

So as you can see, there's quite a range of career opportunities here that may well be available in the private sector.

But again I make the point there is a private sector program. It's not that there isn't one; there is one. And we want to make sure there's the balance between the resources allocated by the federal government.

And as we move into this next year, and once we're not in session so I can actually leave the House without worrying about the numbers for a vote, I'll be able to get down and talk to my federal counterparts and see how we can work together.

Because I couldn't agree with you more. The most important missing thing is that experience on the resumé. And anything we can do — either public sector, private sector — to have young people here get that experience factor on their resumé, we're going to be making a big difference for them in their career opportunities.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, beyond the student employment program, what other initiatives is your department planning to promote youth employment and training?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — One of the things we're engaged in right now, you may be familiar with a group called the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board. They do quite a bit of good work in identifying gaps, overlaps, opportunities. Basically what they do is they look at where the developing sectors are in Saskatchewan's economy. And it's a board that's made up of both employees, employers. The Co-Chairs — there's one from business, one from labour. You may be familiar . . . Their executive director is Janis Stone who is just a very highly capable person.

And they've put a fair bit of effort into trying to determine what we need to do to make sure that youth have more opportunities in the province. And right now we're sitting down to work out a partnership with them that will include the private sector as well, to let youth know what the opportunities are in Saskatchewan. Because what they found out through the work they did was that youth were unable to tell them what the job opportunities were. They were unable to tell them what the growing sectors were in the Saskatchewan economy. They were unable to tell them where the labour shortages were.

And so what we're finding out is that young people in Saskatchewan have a lack of the most basic information to be making life decisions with. So we're partnering up with them and there'll be a team of young people that will be going around to speak to young people around the province, giving them basic information about their province, where the growth is, where the opportunities are, and how they can be more knowledgeable in assessing what it is they would like to do, what kind of education they would need to do it, and where they would need to go to do that. So that would be, I guess, one very specific initiative.

Another very specific initiative that I would be working on with the Minister of Economic Development is the youth PACE (Provincial Action Committee on the Economy) initiative involving young people in being part of guiding how economic opportunities in the province could be more attractive to young people, young entrepreneurs.

Another thing I might mention is I'd like to see us get more involved with some of the organizations around the province that provide opportunities for young entrepreneurs to actually be mentored in businesses, to start their own small businesses. And I think anything we can do to facilitate that opportunity being available around the province and support the organizations that are doing that kind of work that it would be a very worthwhile thing to do.

Mr. Hart: — I'm certainly pleased that you're working with youth in promoting youth entrepreneurship. That is certainly an area that I think we need to emphasize a lot more. I agree that today's youth quite often is not aware of the opportunities that are out there, and certainly there are opportunities within the labour force and so on. But what we really lack is young people that have the entrepreneurial spirit and the initiative to develop new businesses and get involved with existing businesses.

And I wonder if you could just expand on that activity that your department in co-operation with Economic Development has with it promoting youth entrepreneurship.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, this is an area that we've started to focus on as the young entrepreneur area, and people keep coming back to it that it's very important to do it.

So I would have to say that with the new department, we have an opportunity here to really take a look at how we're creating that potential for entrepreneurial development around the province. Because I agree with you: people have to be . . . whether they're thinking of how to apply their professions in an entrepreneurial setting or whether you're just wanting to create that initiative where people in the North, people in rural areas,

will be able to be creative about their own opportunities that they can actually establish.

I think the entrepreneurial skill is a very important skill in both urban and rural areas, but particularly in the rural areas and the North where there is not going to be that job quite often waiting for someone to go into. They're going to have to create it for themselves.

So I couldn't agree with you more that we have to figure out how to get a systematic way of ensuring that youth have the entrepreneurial option.

Mr. Hart: — Well, Madam Minister, as we all know we certainly have a problem in this province. One of our export commodities is educated young people, and that's something that's very disturbing to us on this side of the House, and I would hope it's disturbing to you on your side of the House.

Does your department have any initiatives or plans to help deal with this problem and keep more of our educated youth in the province?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The last survey that was done actually . . . I admit I missed part of your question because I was trying to get some information from my colleague. But the last report that was done on graduates staying in the province, we actually had a four and a half per cent plus, net number of graduates in the province over what we actually trained ourselves. So we may have situations with youth leaving for employment, but we also have a good ability to attract youth into the province.

And I do think that one of the areas we have to smarten up on is our recruiting techniques, because when people tell me stories about how they were recruited to Alberta, it's very clear to me that they are much more aggressive in their recruiting style than we are and much more proactive in their recruiting style.

And I think it's important that businesses understand that in Saskatchewan, that the public sector understand that, and that we work hard at ensuring that people in Saskatchewan don't just take their youth for granted and that we court them in the same way that other people court our youth.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, I find it surprising I guess to hear that we actually have a net gain of trained . . . or youth coming into the province. I would suspect though that our people with more years of training and more specialized — and therefore more education and skills training — would be more costly to provide these young people with; those are the ones that are leaving the province. Perhaps we have some young people coming in with minimal skills and so therefore the statistics may at first glance look quite encouraging.

But I mean we hear reports of a high percentage of engineers in the graduating class leaving the province — many of them heading west, some heading south, and a few heading east and that sort of thing. And I'm not privy to all the statistics, but I would suspect that perhaps we have young people with a lesser level of training coming in and therefore making our numbers look better.

And I wonder if you could clarify this net gain that you had

indicated we are experiencing?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — I should be specific that I was speaking of graduates. These are people with university graduation. People who have . . . not necessarily university but people who have graduated as opposed to people who haven't graduated.

But I will also mention, I've talked about a few components today. We've talked about creating the opportunity to gain work experience through jobs. We've talked about the project on understanding the opportunity and recruitment with the labour force development people. We've talked about the cultural industries for young entrepreneurs. In that sector, certainly the film industry is a young industry that we've given a great deal of support to.

As well in this budget, we've put huge, new expenditures into the information technology sector, which is one of the sectors that young people are leaving the province for. And it's very important that with our broadband Internet and whatnot that we do all the value added that goes along with the development of that sector because this is one of the areas where youth are leaving to work in the technology sector.

So it's not going to be any one thing. It's going to be a whole range of efforts. But it is important that there are quality jobs in . . . so that young people are attracted not only just for jobs, but for jobs that are quality jobs linked to the kind of education that they have.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.