

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

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

And we have an additional 28 signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of three unions representing employees in the community-based organization sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and I had the pleasure of meeting with a group from CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees), SEIU (Service Employees' International Union), and SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union) this past February 20 to receive these petitions at the end of the group's signature-gathering tour around the province to impress upon the public and the government the importance of the work being done by workers in the community-based human services sector.

Mr. Speaker, the prayer of these petitions reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to recommend to the provincial government that it implement a major policy initiative aimed at raising the wages of employees of community-based agencies in the broader public sector.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

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

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena and

Hendon.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who have expressed an interest in maintaining and upgrading of the Saskatchewan road network. And the prayer goes 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 this petition is signed by the good folks from Regina.

I so submit.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the condition of Highway 339. And the prayer reads:

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

And the petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Briercrest and Hearne.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan regarding EMS (emergency medical service) 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 intentions to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

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

This petition is signed by the people in the Alida, Antler, Bellegarde, and Redvers area.

I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to the Government of Saskatchewan for a new regional hospital in Swift Current. The prayer of the petition reads:

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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the city of Swift Current, from Stewart Valley, from Elrose, from Dalmeny, and from Climax, Wymark, and the communities of Kyle and Tompkins. I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to present a petition from citizens of Saskatchewan concerning improving the cellular telephone coverage. The prayer reads:

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

Signed by the citizens of Blaine Lake and Battleford. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here with citizens concerned about the rate increases for residential and business customers:

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

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

Signed by the good citizens from Saskatoon, Warman, Davidson, and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to present on behalf of concerned constituents. The prayer reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signators to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Springside, city of Regina, Wynyard, and Elfros.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition signed by citizens regarding cellular telephone coverage. And the petition reads as follows:

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

provide reliable cellular telephone service in the districts of Spiritwood, Medstead, Glaslyn, Leoville, Chitek Lake, Big River, Canwood, Debden, Shellbrook, Parkside, Shell Lake, Duck Lake, and Macdowall.

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

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

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from concerned citizens of the province and it's in regards to the high energy costs. The prayer reads as follows:

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 the Saskatchewan consumers.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by folks from Unity, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again with a petition from concerned citizens with reference to the cuts to the long-term care in southern Saskatchewan, specifically at Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

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

I so present.

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

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

And your petitioners this morning are all patrons of the Battlefords Co-op.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been

reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

These are petitions that are similar to the ones earlier presented and are hereby tabled as addendums to sessional papers nos. 3, 4, 10, 58, 110, 146, 149, 155, 156, and 158.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, to the Minister of Health. I give notice that I shall on day no. 45 ask the government the following question:

To the end of March 31, 2008, what was the original cost estimate for the SHIN project; is the project within budget to date; what is the estimated final cost for SHIN; and is SHIN's development on time and on schedule?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that I get guests and visitors down to the legislature representing a constituency so far away, but when they do come they are of very high quality.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce to you and to other members of the Assembly, a group of students from Jonas Samson Junior High in Meadow Lake. There are 53 members, Mr. Speaker, in the west gallery; I believe all a part of the Junior High Band as well.

With them is their teacher, Mr. Terry Paley. Also as chaperones, we have along Sally Geigo, Pat Beaulieu, Nola Lepage, Darlene Senn, Liela Zacharias, and Debora Walker.

I met with the group earlier this morning. They asked me a number of interesting questions. We had a tour through the cabinet room and through the Premier's office, which I know they enjoyed. And I know they're headed off, just a little bit later here, off to Moose Jaw to see more of the sights and sounds of southern Saskatchewan.

So I'd ask all members to please join with me in welcoming this wonderful group to the Chamber today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you to the rest of the Assembly, I too have a school group in from the town of Montmartre, Montmartre High School. Grade 12 students from Montmartre made the hour trip in, or hour and a half trip in, I guess it probably should be — not an hour trip — from Montmartre.

There are 22 grade 12 students sitting in the east gallery. Their teacher is Janice Skene, and chaperone, Sandra Lipsett. I am going to try and find time to meet with them later on after question period, if time permits.

So I'd like to welcome them here and hope you enjoy the proceedings. And I'm sure you'll have lots of questions once you see question period.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this Hon. Assembly, I would like to introduce a very good friend of mine. Seated in your gallery is Helen Krzyzewski from Ottawa. Helen works in the Senate in Ottawa and she will be here for the weekend, a little mixture of business and pleasure, as we are both attending a wedding in Estevan tomorrow and I . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, you're right, more pleasure.

I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming Helen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the House, a group of 20 residents of Moose Jaw. Now I get the privilege of standing and introducing this group but they represent both residents of my constituency and from Moose Jaw North.

This is the Moose Jaw Camping Club, a group of residents that pack up the gear and travel off every weekend to various parts of Saskatchewan, enjoying the beautiful sites of our province. And what a better way to travel than in the company of good friends and have a good time while you're doing it.

I look forward to meeting with you later. And just as an aside, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Marie Wright for arranging the group's first excursion of the season to come to Regina to visit the legislature. But also I'd like to congratulate, Marie; she just retired after a long and distinguished career from Providence Place in Moose Jaw. So enjoy your retirement and you've got a very good group to enjoy the summer with. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Memorial Cup

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, about a year and a half, a little more than a year ago I stood in the House and gave the city of Regina great credit for submitting a bid for the Memorial Cup, 2001 Memorial Cup. Well, Mr. Speaker, that 2001 Memorial Cup is here.

(10:15)

Mr. Speaker, there will be teams from across Canada coming into Regina for a week-long tournament to determine the best junior hockey club in Canada. The Regina Pats will be hosting three other clubs — the Red Deer Rebels from the Western Canada League, the Ottawa 67's from the Ontario Hockey League, and the Val d'Or from the Quebec Hockey League.

Mr. Speaker, there will be fans, friends, players, scouts from all over Canada, making Regina the hot spot for junior hockey for a week.

Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of attending the opening banquet tonight in Regina where Clark Gillies will be the guest

speaker. It's a kickoff to what will be a great week of hockey.

Mr. Speaker, I think that anybody that loves hockey will love this next week of May in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Regina first stunned the sporting world with Huddle Up in Saskatchewan a few years. And now, as the member from Indian Head Milestone has said, it is time to do it again with the Memorial Cup with the Breakaway in May.

Mr. Speaker, over 700 volunteers have become involved since Regina won the bid to host the Memorial Cup. Saskatchewan is going to put on what is sure to be the best Memorial Cup ever.

Mr. Speaker, an estimated 50 per cent or just over 50 per cent of spectators and guests attending the Cup will come from outside Saskatchewan. These visitors are estimated to leave behind between 9 and \$11 million into the local economy, Mr. Speaker.

Regina has already demonstrated to the rest of Canada that though it is not the biggest centre, it can sure throw a party. On the topic of parties, Mr. Speaker, all of the scheduled and ticketed events taking place for the Memorial Cup have been sold out.

Not to worry however, it will be easy to get into the Memorial Cup spirit and forget all your troubles at events such as the parade or the free concerts during the lunch hours next week in Regina's Market Square.

Mr. Speaker, a big thank you must go out to Ron Clark and the organizing committee who put all this together.

As well I would like to take a moment to recognize and congratulate the players, coaches and staff of the Regina Pats, Red Deer Rebels, Ottawa 67's and Val d'Or Foreurs on winning their respective divisions and coming here. Congratulations to everyone involved in this very significant event.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame Inductee

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize an outstanding individual from Maple Creek who will be inducted into the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame on August 18 this year.

Mr. Lucien Chabot, better known locally as Frenchie, began his baseball career at Lac Pelletier at the age of 15. At 17 he joined the Canadian Army and was stationed in Chilliwack, BC (British Columbia) where he played in the international league. Later he pitched for the Viscount Royals in a semi-pro league which included Prince Albert, Colonsay, Saskatoon, and Delisle.

In 1953, Mr. Chabot played with the Golden Prairie Chinooks in the newly formed Sask-Alta Baseball League. And I understand that league has run continuously now for over 50 years. The following year Maple Creek joined the league and

Mr. Chabot toiled on the mound for his home team for many years to come.

Mr. Chabot's strong arm and hitting ability added to the team's success on the field and, in later years, strengthened the team through his coaching skills. He also served as a highly respected umpire for 15 years and called games around Maple Creek and other places, other communities in the Sask-Alta League.

The selection to the Hall of Fame follows on the heels of another significant achievement when the 2000 Grant Ehnisz Award was bestowed on him last July. This is the Sask-Alta League's most prestigious award and is handed out for outstanding dedication and sportsmanship. I'd like to note that Mr. Chabot's application was submitted and accepted on the first attempt, which to me suggests that he truly is deserving of this honour.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regina Ladies Choir Performing in Ottawa's Canada Day Celebrations

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday, I had the privilege of attending the spring concert of the Regina Ladies Choir under the direction of Wilma Bell Wessel. This was a very enjoyable and tune-filled evening. I even hummed a bit but very, very, very quietly, Mr. Speaker, because I know my limitations.

But I mention this event because this year is a very special one in the 72-year history of the Regina Ladies Choir. They have for decades served their original mandate of providing fellowship and musical training for local singers and filling a cultural need in the city. They bring the gift of song to senior citizens homes and sing in various festivals held throughout the year.

Currently there are 50 women of all ages in the choir. This year the Regina Ladies Choir are taking their show on the road. They have been invited to represent Saskatchewan at the Canada Day celebrations on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. They are actively involved in raising the necessary funds for their trip.

I can think of no finer representatives of our province, and especially, Mr. Speaker, since a prominent member of the Regina Ladies Choir is our own Monique Lovatt from the Clerk's Office without whom we know this Assembly could not function.

So I'm sure all the members will join with me in offering our best wishes and congratulations to Monique and all the members of the Regina Ladies Choir.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Road Safety Week

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks the beginning of National Road Safety Week across Canada. Here in Saskatchewan as everyone prepares for the long weekend

ahead, members from both sides of the House ask travellers to be extra careful.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that drivers and their passengers use their seatbelts. The disturbing fact is that nearly half of the children in Saskatchewan, age 8 and under, are not properly restrained in vehicles. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that seatbelts save lives. Injuries and fatalities resulting from not buckling up are preventable. It is our responsibility to take care of our children, and that duty most certainly extends to vehicle travel.

As National Road Safety Week kicks off, the members of the House would also like to remind our highway travellers to remember and obey the rules of the road. Pay extra attention to other drivers as well because, Mr. Speaker, a recent survey found 75 per cent of people admitted to performing personal or work-related tasks while driving. These are distractions, potentially dangerous activities that could lead to serious accidents.

Mr. Speaker, we ask all travellers this holiday weekend to allow lots of time for their trips, be courteous drivers, and avoid making hasty decisions while behind the wheel that could have an impact on them and their families for the rest of their lives.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Resident to Receive Medal of Bravery

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize a remarkable man from my constituency. Glen Mooswa from Loon Lake will receive the Medal of Bravery, along with 17 other people. The medal is awarded for acts of bravery in hazardous circumstances.

During a house fire, Mr. Mooswa pushed his wife and her granddaughter out of their bedroom window. He then plunged into the thick smoke to reach another child's room. Despite burns to his face, chest, and shoulders, he crawled back inside. He found the two-year-old boy and carried him outside to safety.

By the time the Fire Department arrived the whole interior of the house was now engulfed in flames. After the fire, Mr. Mooswa was treated for smoke inhalation and minor burns.

Mr. Mooswa is the only recipient of the Medal of Bravery from Saskatchewan this year. He will be invited to accept his decoration at the ceremony to be held in Ottawa.

I ask all members to help me in recognizing Mr. Mooswa's courageous act of bravery.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

70th Wedding Anniversary Congratulations

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and members of the legislature, it gives me great pleasure to extend

warm congratulations to Mr. Gordon and Mrs. Edith Taylor on their 70th wedding anniversary.

This extraordinary couple survived the great depression, and in spite of many other world's trials, they managed to raise six children who have blessed them with 10 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Gordon met Edith at the Ethelton store where she worked, and would come by to visit friends. Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from the local paper, *The Melfort Journal*, and I quote:

After two years of going together, Gordon said, I said to her one day, we should get married. She said, if it'll suit you, it'll suit me.

It gets better as the time goes along. We were happy when we got married, and we're still happy about it.

Gordon and Edith continue to live together and look after each other. They each boast about the other's cooking abilities, enjoy having people to come to taste the food that they prepare.

Mr. Speaker, it is with delight that I ask the Assembly to join me in congratulating this special couple on their 70th wedding anniversary.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Positive Attitude Key to Success

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to read into the forum of the legislature, Mr. Speaker, an article from the Biggar *Independent*. It's entitled "We need to believe in ourselves and keep our attitudes positive." It has a quote underneath. It says, "Success is more attitude than aptitude." It goes on to say:

There has been a lot of talk about attitude recently — that is attitude in rural Saskatchewan. It does seem that, at every turn, rural Saskatchewan is taking a beating.

We are losing our population. We may be losing more hospitals. We are going to be forced into amalgamation — both in municipalities and hospital districts.

But really, is it that we are "losing" these things or are we merely being forced to make some changes. Change is neither good nor bad, it is simply change. And the success of any kind of change depends in large part on our attitude.

The population of Saskatchewan, and more specifically rural Saskatchewan, is declining. So, with the declining population we are forced to rethink how we deliver services still keeping within our budget.

Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, there are a number of people that still prefer to reside in rural Saskatchewan. Our towns are not yet on the way out. We often hear of "success" stories in small town Saskatchewan — whether it be the building of a new school, a new park, or simply coming together to help someone when needed.

The reason (for) all these projects are considered a success . . . because of attitude (Mr. Speaker). When we believe something can be done, it gets done.

With a positive attitude we can achieve whatever we want.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Action Saskatchewan — A Blueprint for 2005

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

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce has sounded the economic alarm. After 10 years of failed NDP (New Democratic Party) economic policy the chamber is warning that we in Saskatchewan are running out of time. Yesterday the chamber released . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order, order. Members of the Assembly, I'm sure there are many witty things that are being said, but when they all come at once it sounds like a lot of hollering. And I would ask that members give the member an opportunity to ask the question and then give proper opportunity for the question to be answered.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the chamber released a very interesting report entitled *Action Saskatchewan — A Blueprint for 2005*. We were particularly interested in the chamber's view of the role of government in rebuilding our economy. I quote:

The role of government is to be a facilitator, complementing the business community's growth.

But the NDP government told us last week that the only way to grow the economy was to grow SaskTel. And the NDP's latest budget made government bigger by hiring almost 600 more government employees.

Mr. Speaker, the chamber of commerce says that the way to turn Saskatchewan's economy around is to grow the private sector. So my question to the Premier is: why is the NDP buying companies to compete with the private sector and making government bigger?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I had opportunity to be with the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce several days ago and they were kind enough to provide to me, at that time, a copy of the *Action Plan*. And in conversation with the chamber, there is very much we share in common with that plan and with our hopes with the chamber to build the economy of Saskatchewan.

Now the Leader of the Opposition wants to introduce the question of Crown ownership in this province, which will and has and will continue to play a significant role in the economy

of the province. I'll tell you that, Mr. Speaker.

But I think today is the day the Leader of the Opposition needs to come clean on what his party policy is, Mr. Speaker. In the last provincial election they went to the people of Saskatchewan with something called *The Way Up*, a document with their party policy, in which they said, quote:

Saskatchewan people are shareholders of Crown corporations. They must be consulted directly through a provincial referendum on any specific proposal to sell any Crown utility.

That's what they said in the election, Mr. Speaker. Now I have a document, 2001 policy, and what does it say? No mention of a referendum; privatization will be considered if demonstrated that it's a good idea.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Leader of the Opposition: will he consult the people of Saskatchewan with any proposal to privatize our Crowns?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think about the only thing the Premier and the chamber of commerce have in common is that they both have a copy of the report.

Mr. Speaker, the chamber report says that the test of whether an environment for economic growth exists is whether entrepreneurs are willing to invest capital in Saskatchewan. The chamber says that most entrepreneurs are saying Saskatchewan is not a business-friendly place and they are not investing their capital in the province as a result.

Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, residential construction in Saskatchewan is down 33 per cent, commercial construction is down 62 per cent, and industrial construction is down almost 70 per cent. Business has obviously lost faith in the NDP government that is buying businesses to compete with them.

Meanwhile the government is growing itself by hiring 600 new government employees.

Mr. Speaker, the chamber is saying we need to grow Saskatchewan. Why is the NDP government insisting on growing the government instead of the business sector?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:30)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should pay a little closer attention to the facts of the matter — the facts of the matter.

Right here, right here, Mr. Speaker, from an institute he's familiar with — the Fraser Institute — the Fraser Institute reports the change in aggregate real business fixed investment 1992 to 1999. What's the Canadian figure? 48 per cent. What's the figure in Saskatchewan? 64 per cent. Higher than the Canadian average.

Which, Mr. Speaker, which province in all of Canada had a larger growth in the GDP (gross domestic product) per capita in the 1990s than any other? The province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, people are interested in our province. They are investing in our province because it is a good climate in which to invest. And that climate, Mr. Speaker, is being competitive on the tax front as we are quickly becoming, but competitive also in quality of life. The quality of life that's ensured by good public services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Premier lives in a different world than the rest of us.

Sask Trends Monitor said that among key economic indicators, Saskatchewan is at the bottom of the list in the Prairie provinces. And the chamber of commerce we believe has gotten it right. The chamber says that Saskatchewan's future is all about growth. Unfortunately the way the NDP interprets this growth is to grow the government.

We keep hearing about the NDP's failed business adventures and its plans to buy even more business ventures to compete with existing Saskatchewan businesses. Mr. Speaker, this is what the chamber is saying about the NDP's massive expansion of Crown corporations, and I quote:

Respondents were strongly opposed to Crown participation in economic ventures where they are competing with other Saskatchewan private enterprise.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain why the NDP keep buying more companies — security companies, farm equipment sales advertising companies, cable companies — to compete with existing Saskatchewan companies when everyone in the province is telling the NDP government just to get out of the way?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity in the last number of weeks to be with business groups in the communities of Prince Albert, Saskatoon, here in Regina, a large group, Mr. Speaker, earlier this week with the Moose Jaw Chamber of Commerce.

And you know what I hear from the business community in Saskatchewan. They are applauding the budget that is under debate in this legislature. They are applauding the cuts — 25 per cent cut to small business. They are applauding the lifting of the ceiling on the definition of small business. They are applauding the incorporation of professionals in our province.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, there's a headline right here in *The Leader-Post*, "Budget applauded by business."

Now the question that the Leader of the Opposition — again I challenge him to answer because the province wants to know — is it your plan, sir, to privatize the Crown sector . . .

The Speaker: — I would just ask . . . Order, order. I have two

requests of the Assembly, two requests of the Assembly. First that the questions and the answers be heard. Secondly that all remarks go through the Chair. The Premier of Saskatchewan, 10 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I ask the Leader of the Opposition: which is it? His commitment to the people of Saskatchewan in the last election that any privatization would be first proceeded by a referendum or is it the policy, which is now being distributed that says they will just make a decision and sell the Crown? Which is it, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Investments in Private Sector Companies

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce has told the government that Crown corporations should not be competing with private businesses in Saskatchewan. And what does the NDP do? They spend \$8.3 million to buy an Ontario-based company to compete with IRON Solutions in Outlook, to compete with *The Western Producer*, and to compete with a small business in my community.

FamilyFarmers.com is an on-line magazine service located in Archerwill, Saskatchewan. They make money by selling classified ads for farm equipment — just like Ag Dealer.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation): why is the NDP using taxpayer's dollars to buy an Ontario-based company to compete with a small business in Archerwill, Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, again this goes to show how much the opposition is aware of what really is going on.

Mr. Speaker, FamilyFarmers.com — for the public's information, Mr. Speaker — is a dot-com company that does Web hosting, they do designs, they do consulting, and Mr. Speaker, as I say they design Web sites, Mr. Speaker. They do not sell magazines as does Ag Dealer, Mr. Speaker. They are not in direct competition whatsoever with FamilyFarmers.com .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the minister says they're not competing. Well I have a letter from Karla Folstad who runs FamilyFarmers.com and she says and I quote:

I took a look at Ag Dealer this morning. We consider them direct competition. Or rather, we did. Now our competition is the Government of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, Karla Folstad started this business just three years ago and now she has four people working under her. And now her own government is spending millions of taxpayers' dollars — hers and mine and everybody in this province — to compete against her.

Why is SaskTel buying companies in Ontario to compete against small businesses in places like Archerwill, Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, SaskTel has partnered with over 170 — 170, I repeat — private sector companies so that they can ensure that these companies have an ability to compete with the multinational companies from outside of our province and outside of our country. That's what they have done. They have partnered to ensure their viability, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition however where the real competition is. Mr. Speaker, the real competition comes . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Minister for Crown Investments, another 20 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition ought to know that the real competition comes from the member from Rosetown, the member from Canora-Pelly for the leadership, Mr. Speaker. That's where the real competition is coming from. And he ought to know also, Mr. Speaker, that they are doing due diligence.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, FamilyFarmers.com just received a major contract to host a Web site for the indigenous nomadic communities of northern Russia. It's pretty sad when the nomadic people of northern Russia can find a business in Archerwill, Saskatchewan, and SaskTel doesn't know they exist.

Mr. Speaker, in her letter, Karla Folstad goes on to say:

I was one of the young people who left this province to move to Alberta, and I came home because I strongly believed in the future of this province. That choice has had heavy consequences for me. I have been overcharged on telecommunications, the telecommunications I do receive are substandard, and my repeated requests for fixing the problems are ignored by my own government.

Mr. Speaker, why doesn't SaskTel concentrate on providing better services for the people like Karla Folstad, instead of spending \$8 million buying an Ontario company to run her out of business?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier indicated earlier, the agenda of this party is to privatize. The agenda of that party is to privatize, Mr. Speaker, and I need only quote from yesterday's *Leader-Post*, May 18, 2001, where it says the following, Mr. Speaker:

During the 1999 election campaign, the Sask. Party promised to hold a plebiscite before privatizing a Crown.

That is no longer — I repeat, no longer — their party policy. And, Mr. Speaker, in the face of what our Crowns currently offer for the people of Saskatchewan, they employ over 9,000 people, Mr. Speaker. They purchase over \$1.2 billion worth of goods and services from Saskatchewan businesses and suppliers, Mr. Speaker. And the Crowns spend over \$400 million every year in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, creating thousands of jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the agenda of this party is to grow the province. To grow the province and the people — that's our agenda.

Mr. Speaker, Karla Folstad ends her letter this way, and I quote:

I guess what I'm trying to explain to you, Mrs. Draude, is the importance of this government to stand behind what they say when they talk about revitalizing rural Saskatchewan. And if they can't do that, at the very least stop directly competing with those individuals and businesses that refuse to give up on this province.

Mr. Speaker, will the NDP at least do that? Will they listen to the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce? Will they listen to the Karla Folestads? Will they listen to the people in the businesses in this province, who believe in this province, who want to see it grow? And will they stop competing with Saskatchewan businesses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, it becomes clearer and clearer for the public of Saskatchewan, I hope, what their agenda is. It is clearly to privatize our Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and I say, Mr. Speaker, as it pertains to the companies that she says SaskTel is competing with, I again want to quote from *The Leader-Post* of Tuesday, last Tuesday, May 15, where there is a letter from Robert Freburg, who's the president of Brigadier Security Systems, who says of one of the companies she is criticizing, says . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. It is at this time the turn of the Minister for Crown Investments Corporation — 30 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Sorry, Mr. Speaker. This quote comes from *The Leader-Post*, Mr. Speaker, and it's from the president of Brigadier Security Systems, Robert Freburg, who says that:

SecurTek has more than 16 dealers in Saskatchewan and is providing a much-needed service to Saskatchewan people, protecting lives and personal property and all the while creating jobs and profits that stay (right here) in Saskatchewan (Mr. Speaker).

From the president of Brigadier Security Systems Ltd., a company that she says SaskTel is competing with.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Drinking Water Quality

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Environment. On Monday the minister and his department released the list of 119 communities, which they believe, have drinking water related concerns; 37 of those communities lacked minimum water treatment facilities, most of which have also been issued boil-water advisories.

The other 82 communities have been red flagged by SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) as at some risk due to a variety of concerns, such as a history of bacteria in the water, high trihalomethane concentration, or elevated levels of other substances like arsenic or selenium.

At the time, SERM said they were working with these communities to deal with the water problems. But as many of our MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) have learned over the last few days, some of these 82 communities didn't know there was any concern with their water until they read about it in the paper.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why are these communities not being informed by SERM that there are concerns with their water supply?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — In a very public way, in a very public way, SERM issued boil-water advisories to a number of communities. We have done that on a continual basis. And in a very public way, SERM has approached a number of these communities on a continual basis, indicating that you have problems with your water, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to go back a little bit, Mr. Speaker, to when his provincial cousins were in power during the 1980s, Mr. Speaker. What happened at that time, Mr. Speaker, is 50 per cent of the communities in Saskatchewan had drinking water problems when the PC (Progressive Conservative) government was in power in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker. On this side, only 23 per cent are at that stage right now.

It's a remarkable turnaround, Mr. Speaker, and something that he should not criticize because there's been great progress on this file.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Once again the minister has completely evaded the question, gone back to the don't worry, be happy strategy of this government when it comes to this issue. Maybe we can provide the minister with some specifics.

The community of Davidson says they have been regularly sending in water samples and weren't informed by SERM that there was any concern with their water. They read about it in the paper. The town of Lanigan was just as surprised to see themselves listed as having water at some risk.

(10:45)

The villages of Ceylon, Big River, Bracken, Cabri, Midale,

Senlac, and Viscount, all reported the same thing — that they either learned that SERM considered their water at elevated risk by reading about it in the paper, or by talking with their MLA.

Mr. Speaker, why hasn't SERM been talking to these people and these communities? If SERM is doing its job to manage the water quality in this province, why aren't these communities aware that their water is at some risk? And why isn't SERM working with them to correct the problems?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, once again I will say in a very public fashion, we have documented all the 130 communities that have had challenges over the years. We have continued to say that these are problems in these communities and we're going to make sure we take the very safe step to issue a boil-water advisory until we are absolutely sure that the water is safe, Mr. Speaker.

And what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, as well is that it is no question that the responsibility for safe water lies with a lot of people. And SERM and this government is going to take a very strong stand to make sure we do our part. What we'd also encourage the communities and all the people that operate the systems throughout the province, all to be diligent on this particular challenge. We've said that time and time in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

And what I'll point out, Mr. Speaker, is we have been very proactive. When they were in power, Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the communities had problems with safe water. When we're in power — down to 23. That number's going down. But as always, we have to work together to make sure we continue pushing that number down, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, well the minister talks about his department's communication strategies. Let's see just how effective they've been.

The town of Cabri is on SERM's list as having elevated levels of trihalomethanes. The local administrator said they had talked with SERM about a year ago about their water, but since, they had heard nothing. They have had no contact from SERM until the administrator called the department yesterday herself. SERM confirmed the town was on this list and then recommended the community should be doing more testing. This sounds very familiar, Mr. Speaker.

Last year the minister of Environment adopted an, if they don't ask, don't tell, policy over all of his department's fee increases. And the same thing is obviously happening here again. Does it take a community to have to phone the department before they learn they should do more testing?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why is SERM not fulfilling its legislated mandate to supervise and regulate water quality in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, in a very public way we issued boil-water advisories. In a very public way, Mr. Speaker, we increased the amount of money that SERM gets and we increased the amount of response time for the provincial lab to make sure that the documents and all the samples sent to the provincial lab are returned to these communities as quickly as 72 hours, Mr. Speaker. In a very public way we issued a document through the cabinet to make sure people out there understood that we have water quality problems in the province of Saskatchewan.

And what I will say again, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear — very clear — that we take the responsibility and role that we have as a government across this way as very serious. We have a lot of work to do, Mr. Speaker. We are going to encourage all the towns and villages throughout the province to also share in some of that work that's very necessary to ensure safe drinking water to all the residents of this great province.

And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, furthermore I'm going to go back to history again. When you were in power, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well now we've got the minister bragging about all of the funding that he's providing these communities — well perhaps we should check that out.

The town of Ceylon applied for federal-provincial infrastructure money, but were turned down. The town of Davidson applied for \$40,000 for a new water pump and motor, and were turned down. The town of Midale in 1999 and in 2000 applied for a water filtration system, but were denied. This year they applied to renovate their sewer lift and buy new pumps, once again denied.

Mr. Speaker, these communities, first of all, are alarmed with this moderate-risk classification SERM has given them. And second of all, these communities are trying to make improvements, and trying to do it, are not receiving assistance.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister table his long-term plan for dealing with these outstanding water quality issues specifically related to these 82 communities?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of this province and a lot of people here fully understand that since 1992 there have been a lot of messes to clean up. And there's been a lot of attention paid to water quality. Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is doing is attacking small communities.

He wants a response to Ceylon. Ceylon's project was not eligible under the CSIP (Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program) program because the work had already been completed. They may apply again.

Davidson's was to replace equipment at the treatment plant that would increase capacity, but not water quality. Mr. Speaker, the priority was given to those 39 communities that will receive \$8.2 million to upgrade water services — 21 communities identified by SERM as lacking minimum treatment facilities were approved under those programs.

I want to remind folks that those decisions were made by representatives . . . by the review committee for these various projects, Mr. Speaker, which include representatives from SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), from SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities). They developed the rating criteria; they established it, and they're following those project guidelines, and they're working with the small communities.

I wish the opposition would support those small communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 36 — The Public Trustee Consequential Amendment Act, 2001/

Loi de 2001 apportant les modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move Bill No. 36, The Public Trustee Consequential 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. 37 — The Statute Law Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 37, The Statute Law 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. 38 — The Statute Law Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)/Loi corrective de 2001 (n° 2)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 38, The Statute Law Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2) 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.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, leave to introduce guests?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, five guests in your gallery. At least I think they're all here, yet.

I'd like to introduce Meagan, Spencer, Mari, and Chlöe Pitzell, who are the children of one of my staff members, and with them is their cousin, Nancy Grace from Muenster, Saskatchewan, and

she is here having a little visit with the Pitzell family.

I understand that this is Nancy's first time observing the proceedings in the House, and so I would like all members to give these fine young Saskatchewan residents, a very warm welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Trew: — To request leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you members for granting the leave.

Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are two people who didn't arrive together but I'm going to take the opportunity while I'm on my feet to introduce each of them, together but separately.

We have with us Councillor Mike Badham, seated at the top back corner. Welcome, Mike, to the legislature. And seated just this side of Councillor Badham, is Barb Byers, the president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, and it's a delight to see you here this day.

I ask all members to join me in welcoming both of these guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It makes me a great deal of pleasure to stand and answer questions 190, 191, and 192 on behalf of the government.

The Speaker: — Responses to 190, 191, and 192 have been submitted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 30 — The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise in support of The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2001. This Act will provide benefits for parents. It will benefit children. It will benefit families.

Mr. Speaker, I want to outline what this Act does and why it's being put forward at this time. The Act before us does several things, Mr. Speaker. For birth mothers or primary caregivers of an adopted child, it increases the parental leave protections under The Labour Standards Act to 34 weeks. This is in addition to the 18 weeks of maternity or adoption leave that's now provided under the Act.

The amendments we're proposing will increase the parental leave for birth fathers and for spouses of primary caregivers to 37 weeks.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is rooted in the belief that additions to the family by birth or by adoption benefit from the nurturing and the care given by both parents. As a result of these amendments, the birth mother or primary caregiver would be entitled to maternity leave of 18 weeks and parental leave of 34 weeks for a total of 52 weeks of job-protected leave.

Birth fathers and spouses of the primary caregiver would be entitled to 37 weeks of job-protected parental leave. Together the combined maternity and parental leaves a family is entitled to total 89 weeks. The amendments before us would also enable birth and adoptive parents to begin their parental leave 12 weeks before the estimated birthdate or reception of the adopted child.

I should also point out, Mr. Speaker, for those parents who intend to return to work early from such a leave, the notice that must be given to their employer is being increased from two weeks to four weeks. The increase in the notification period is to provide employers with a reasonable amount of time to adjust their workforce plans when an employee chooses to return to work early. This also provides fair notice for anyone hired to fill in for the employee on leave.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the legislation does. It increases parental leaves and provides job protection for parents. It increases the notice an employer gets should an employee decide to return to work early. And it also gives fair notice to any temporary workers who may be hired to do the work of the parent on leave.

Like the legislation itself, the rationale for this legislation is straightforward. Members will recall about a year ago the federal government passed Bill C-32, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 28, 2000. In a nutshell, Bill C-32 extended the number of weeks of maternity and family leave benefits payable through Employment Insurance.

As well, Bill C-32 says the 35 weeks of parental benefits must be taken within 52 weeks of the child being born or placed with the family. Parliament also amended the Canada Labour Code to extend job protection for workers using full Employment Insurance benefits accordingly.

This is the first opportunity we've had to introduce the changes required to ensure that Saskatchewan parents will have their jobs protected while accessing EI (Employment Insurance) benefits. Mr. Speaker, like the other provinces and territories, Saskatchewan is increasing its parental leave provisions to provide job security for families while one or both parents receive the increased level of Employment Insurance benefits.

We're doing it because it's good for families. We're doing because it's the right thing to do.

I don't think I need to spend time today explaining the importance of family. It was Charles William Elliot, the American educator and president of Harvard University, who

said, quote:

The security and elevation of the family, and of family life, are the prime objects of civilization and the ultimate ends of industry.

I think it's also true to say that within the families, the care and nurturing of children is one vocation whose importance is universally recognized.

By this legislation, we are moving to increase the time the parents, both parents, can spend with new children. I don't think anyone will object to that.

Mr. Speaker, before concluding, I want to briefly outline the anticipated impact of this legislation; that is, who is affected by it. Employees whose child was born or came into their adoptive care on or after December 31, 2000 and who are on leave at the time this amendment is passed can extend their leave to the new maximums.

I know many Saskatchewan people have given birth to or adopted a child since December 31 and that they've been waiting this legislation before making their decision about when to go back to work. I want to assure those parents that we recognize their situation and have taken it into account when we drafted this Bill.

I should also note parental leave is available to both parents. The birth mother and the primary giver of an adopted child are entitled to a total of 52 weeks. The birth father and spouse of the primary caregiver are entitled to a maximum of 37 weeks.

In recognition of the importance of both parents in the early development of a child and to help families deal with work and family responsibilities, this provision has been extended to both parents whether the child is born to them or adopted by them.

The provision of 89 weeks of combined job-protected leave for both parents will ensure that no matter what the circumstances, the maximum Employment Insurance benefits can be accessed by the parents. In addition, the extended parental leave will assist employees in balancing their work and family responsibilities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that we're increasing the parental leave provisions in The Labour Standards Act to provide working parents with a job protection while they make use of the recently increased level of Employment Insurance benefits. This will result in 52 weeks of job-protected leave for birth mothers and primary caregivers, and 37 weeks of job-protected leave for birth fathers and the spouses of primary caregivers.

I think it's important to note that in 1999-2000 there were fewer than 5,200 claims in Saskatchewan for parental leave benefits under the Employment Insurance program. It seems reasonable to assume a similar, slightly larger number of families will benefit from the changes that we are proposing. We think this is a good thing because families are the social building block of our society. We cannot succeed at anything if we cannot protect and enhance family life.

As I said at the beginning, this legislation is good for children. It's good for parents. It's good for families. And I invite all members to join us in supporting Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 30, The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2001. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to enter into the debate I guess on this Bill No. 30, The Labour Standards Act . . . amendment Act. It's one area that we certainly were aware of and as the minister opposite had mentioned before, that the federal government had passed C-32, Bill C-32 — so we knew that it was through the federal government.

If you check with a number of the provincial governments, they've already gone down this road and also have passed legislation similar to this I believe.

This legislation, as the minister has talked about, mainly deals with extending the leave that is granted of course to the parents — the spouse or the mother — and you know, for the most part we think that's a very good idea. I mean it seems to be the provincial trend, the national trend, and it's a trend that we're moving towards here in Saskatchewan.

One of the areas . . . and I was interested to hear the minister talk about how the notice . . . when the person with leave is away with leave, the notice that they have to give before they come back into the workforce. And I believe it was extended from 14 days to four weeks, which is an area that we have heard the most concern about is how — I can just speak from a couple of examples of friends of mine that own small businesses and that was their biggest concern — is would they get enough notice when the person that was on leave was planning on coming back.

And depending on the job and depending on a lot of the . . . I mean the situations, of course there's so many different situations out there, but it was a great concern for a number of small-business owners that we have talked to.

Now we've heard that it is extended from 14 days to four weeks, which we think is a good thing, but I would like to take some time to be able to consult with a number of the business owners that we deal with that we are talking to that raise this concern right off the bat with the whole legislation, and get their feeling for it and how it's going to affect them and perhaps whether the four weeks is sufficient in their eyes or perhaps needs to be longer. We don't know that until we take this Bill back and the information back to a number of the business owners.

So at this time, Mr. Speaker, until we are able to consult with the people we need to consult with, not only on the extension of leave but on the notice of return from that leave, Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 30.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

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

Ms. Draude: — With leave, Mr. Chair, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you and thank you to the members. Mr. Chair, to you and through you to members of the House, I'd like to introduce a group of students from Foam Lake Composite High. There are 27 grade 12 students in the east gallery. The teacher is Ian Cooper, and Anne Cooper and chaperone Dennis Friesen are with them today.

The MLA from Canora-Pelly has asked me to greet you and having the opportunity to meet with you on the stairs for a few moments. I hope you enjoy the proceedings. You're going to see some estimates right now, which is really the real work of the Assembly at this time. And I'm sure that you'll benefit from everything you've learned here at this time.

So welcome to the legislature and I'll see you in a few minutes.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Saskatchewan Water Corporation Vote 50

Subvote (SW01)

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

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And to you and to my colleagues in the Assembly, I'd like to introduce on my immediate left, Mr. Clare Kirkland, who's the president of Sask Water. And on my immediate right is Mr. Wayne Dybvig, who is vice-president of water resource management. Tom Gehlen, vice-president of utility and engineering operations as well. And immediately behind me is Dave Schiman, who is the manager of financial planning.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to welcome the minister and his officials here this morning. Hopefully — I see a new minister than was here last year — so hopefully we'll get some insight into Sask Water's department's operations.

One of the first items I'd like to discuss has been what's in the . . . which has been in the news and is very important to the residents of Saskatchewan, which is the safe water in this province.

And I guess I would start with, my question to the minister is: what is Sask Water's role in providing safe, reliable drinking water to the people of the province?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, thank you for the question.

Sask Water is involved in utilities and water utility projects as well as water quality advisories with communities throughout the province and approve of various methods of dealing with

some of those issues.

Sask Water offers technical advice to various communities as well involved in different projects so there is a good working relationship and the availability of Sask Water technicians to advise various communities with respect to the issues dealing with water in a variety of capacities.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, we've asked I guess the Minister of SERM what his department knew, and when, regarding the water problem in North Battleford and around this province. I would like to ask the minister opposite what knowledge did Sask Water officials have of contaminated water around the province, particularly the situation in North Battleford, and when were you alerted of it?

(11:15)

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, these are very good questions, and I'm sure a lot of the same questions that we'll be asked during the inquiry that's been . . . that we've put in place.

What I want to point out, Mr. Chair, is that Sask Water does not have any direct role in monitoring or compliance, and to specifically say when we were notified of the problems in North Battleford was probably around the same time that the public was made aware through the Health . . . through the Health department. So it wasn't as if somebody picked up the phone immediately notifying any particular department; it was through the Health department that these notifications came forward.

Sask Water technicians then became involved subsequently as a support service and an offer of assistance by allowing the resource people, the technicians in North Battleford who'd been working rather strenuously because of the situation . . . Sask Water's technicians and staff offered support to that community by making their technicians — familiar with those types of situations or at least the project situations — available to give those employees who had been working virtually night and day and very, very hard some respite time.

So Sask Water, in that instance, would work as a backup or support to communities.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, you indicated you basically found out from the newspaper reports or from . . . when you said when Health . . . when the Public Health Board was informed in North Battleford. What I was asking you was, was SERM . . . did SERM contact you personally at that time? Or was it . . . did they contact you after or did you read it in the newspaper and you . . . your officials contacted them of any assistance you could give to them?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chair, the . . . Sask Water was contacted directly by SERM; I wasn't personally phoned directly. But Sask Water officials were phoned and notified, and it then became a team effort — people working in conjunction with one another in their particular areas of expertise, technical knowledge, and responsibilities.

So in that respect the notifications did come internally, not just by reading it through the newspaper.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister. Well since that happened, I'm going to ask you: has Sask Water taken any action to ensure that safe drinking water is provided to the residents and are they working in coordination right now with SERM? Since this happened in North Battleford, has there been any other change in your policy?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, thank you. Just again to remind the member, as my previous answer indicated, Sask Water has no role in compliance or monitoring. The question about change in policy, no. There is no change in policy per se. There has been underway since last December long-term review — a long-term strategy review — to deal with water situations. But remembering again that the water quality testing and monitoring is not Sask Water's mandate. That would fall under SERM. As I mentioned, since last December Sask Water has been undergoing a review, province-wide, and working towards a strategic plan.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, you were talking about the review. I know we have a document, and you have the same document over there, that was presented to cabinet basically regarding poor water quality in Saskatchewan. It was dated I believe September 22, 2000. It states that Sask Water along with SERM and the Department of Health will jointly develop another document within six months that will outline further long-term strategies to further reduce the risks involved with drinking water.

Now that you've mentioned it . . . and I believe that was supposed to be done by March of 2001. Can the minister provide the House with an update on whether or not such an action has taken place and how you are coming along with that or if it's finished?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, I'm told that the September 22 document, from what I understand, was a draft document. Once those documents did come into play, by December is when the strategy began. And the reports, the target date for the report, for the final submission to cabinet would not . . . was extended until June. And that remains in place.

And I'm told that that report will be submitted in a timely fashion, as was indicated at the outset. And I believe, if the member will recall, in March we again with Health, SERM, and Municipal Affairs had referred to this project that was underway as well.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister. I'll just read just a little bit from here. It says they:

. . . would like Sask Water to evaluate the current state and infrastructure for all municipalities and communal private systems to determine upgrade requirements to meet safe drinking water objectives. Sask Water will provide leadership and report back to the government by March 2001.

Have you completed that infrastructure study and have they reported back to the government by March?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, again to the member opposite. Again, the draft document in September did not

initiate any process until December. Therefore the additional months that were added on for the final report, which is on target and will be presented in June as was pointed out in March of this spring, that it was a proactive approach that was taken for this review and everything is in place.

And there will be a report of the findings in June as was indicated during our March announcement of National Water Day.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I take it then that you are doing a complete review of all the infrastructure, water facilities in every town, and will report back by June. We will still be here in June so I will ask you then the questions to see that report.

I would like to discuss a little bit about a program that I see in the Estimates here about rural water quality advisory program. I believe it was introduced in the fall of 1997. Could you please tell me what this program is all about, why was it introduced, what does it do, and is it still running?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, throughout Saskatchewan, as we all know, there are rural residents that rely on water sources from dugouts, groundwater, and some of that may be of poor quality. So recognizing that there may be potential health hazards that exist in these rural supplies of water from potential contamination from such things as perhaps coliform bacteria or naturally occurring metals such as arsenic or selenium, the sources of those waters need to be tested. And that is typical of these types of rural water supplies right across Canada.

So it's not an unusual situation. And most of the supplies throughout the province can be readily treated in an affordable manner to supply the suitable supplies of water that do in fact meet health standards.

The concerns around the rural supplies was why Sask Water had initiated the program that the member opposite had alluded to, Mr. Chairman — the rural water quality advisory program. And that was initiated three years ago.

Under that program, rural residents receive a comprehensive analysis of their supplies and are provided with advice on how they can safeguard their supply and how they can treat it. There are about, I'm told, about 30 parameters of testing that are done. And people with private wells or private water sources in rural areas — private wells particularly — can, with the assistance of Sask Water, apply for testing of their water supply. The fee is \$100 and subsidized then in the event there are additional costs. But that's the cost to the request for a testing of a water supply in rural areas.

And recognizing the fact that yes, there are many rural areas, private wells where people get their own private water sources. So it's important that the availability and the opportunities through Sask Water to have that . . . the sources, the water quality tested is very, very important.

There are a variety, as I mentioned, there are about 30 parameters that undergo close scrutiny to determine the quality of water and to ensure that people are able to address perhaps the potential harmful qualities or coliforms or whatever in that

type of water.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Minister. As everybody on this side of the House and yours said that yes, water is very important in rural Saskatchewan and needs to be tested. You say you charge a minimum of a \$100 or maximum? Or is there a different fee structure? If they would like their water tested every six months or a year do they still have to pay that fee?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, under this rural water advisory program that fee for \$100, yes, is for each time there is a call for testing of that water supply.

Now what that entails is that a water technician visits the farm site and takes a sample from the supply. The sample then will be analyzed, as I mentioned, for 30 different constituents in that particular sample. And then the information or the results will be sent to the landowner indicating any quality concerns and advice.

And that's important that the customer receives the advice necessary to deal with whatever the problem is. It may not be anything that is health threatening or life threatening, but it may be some constituent in that water that needs to be addressed to lessen the potential perhaps for a health problem.

I'm told that there are about 150,000 people throughout this province that rely on supplies from individual wells or systems that are largely untreated.

So I believe this is very, very important and it's good questions that the member opposite is raising, because perhaps it will now allow those people in rural communities and areas may not be aware of this type of service that's being offered, will now be apprised and know that they have the opportunity for a great deal of assistance to give them some assurance with respect to that very vital resource that we require in our daily lives.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well most of the people know about it, but I've had quite a few contact my office about the price — \$100 is costly. When you talk about being maybe once, but you remember that SERM requires towns to test weekly, some of them daily. If somebody on the farm would like their water being tested every six months or once a month — especially if you're dealing with surface water where contaminants can run into from different areas, especially in the spring when there's runoff — it can get quite costly.

And most people just won't test it for the simple price is they can't afford it. I would wonder even if city residents would pay a hundred dollars to have their water tested every few months, themselves.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And once again, these are good questions, very good questions, and I appreciate them. Again because it will also allow people that may not be aware of the fact that for those people you're concerned about that pay a hundred dollars, that hundred dollars covers, as I say, a wide number of constituents within a sample of water. And I'm also told that if the customer individually decided to do it without having Sask Water's involvement, it would cost them upwards of \$300.

Now for a fee through Sask Health, of \$16, the testing will be done . . . can be done in the spring for coliforms and nitrates only. And I believe that's what the member opposite has expressed.

The spring runoffs that may contain some contaminants that would, or may very well . . . and I'm not saying this from a technical aspect, but I suspect that because of Health's involvement with testing only for these coliforms and nitrates, that it would not be as extensive . . . well obviously not as an extensive water testing of constituents in a sample as with the laboratory being involved; Sask Water's involvement in the opportunity for that hundred dollar fee, as opposed to doing it as an individual without going through Sask Water and costing almost three times more.

Mr. Brkich: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, on that one. But I also would like to impart that I think they should provide even free testing like it is for small towns, cities. They're just asking basically the same things that are afforded to them people — testing either at free . . . maybe even . . . or even if they can only do it once a month. But they should be allowed to test.

Because it just isn't . . . I'd mentioned runoff. But I mean you can have a heavy spring or heavy rain at any time, or if there's somebody doing spraying around you, people have been concerned about their water supply. So they would like to test on a half . . . (inaudible) . . . basically on a regular basis like cities and towns are. Because it's nice to know that the water you are drinking from is safe.

One other question I want to ask you on that is with this program, do you do any random testing — just pick spots through the province that you . . . oh I would say if you're testing for all these different kinds, you just pick spots and you keep a record of it to see if it's been changing, going up, different kinds of contaminants been coming in water, all different through . . . all through the province.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm told that there has been testing, random testing done throughout the province in about 1,000 wells, and what's being found is a wide variation across the province. The results of the testing of the waters across the province varies considerably.

The data is being maintained and now there is a good base for the water quality throughout the province. So those kinds of things are happening.

And, Mr. Chair, for the member opposite as well, when he asks for free water testing, I want to let him know that if there's an act of God, and we use Vanguard as an example when they had that horrendous problem in that area, all the water quality testing was done at no cost to any individual. So that service is in fact provided.

And with this testing of a variety of wells, and up to this point I'm told it's at a thousand level, throughout the province, gives us a fairly good idea of water quality. And it also indicates the variation of water quality from one part of the province to the other.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, and it's interesting to know that

that service is provided. When you do the testing on the thousand, you mention, wells, does that include testing surface water?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, it is surface and well water.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, I ask, do you test for pesticides when you do this random testing?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The recent study, or at least inspections done by the Research Council, of dugouts, tell us that they have found some evidence . . .

I'm just getting ahead. I guess my first answer to your question is no, Sask Water has not been testing for pesticides in waters. But the Research Council has done some testing in dugouts, and has found some evidence of this type of contamination, but not to the extent that is beyond the standards of what it should be.

So I want to underline and clarify so that there's not a serious concern suddenly emanates from our discussions and our questioning here. This is very, very important because Sask Water is now looking at the . . . because of the Wakaw-Humboldt system that Sask Water has some direct operations with, Sask Water is looking at the possibility of perhaps expanding and doing something beyond what's being done now, given that . . . as I say, the Research Council has found some evidence, but nothing serious.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. On that end I hope that you keep testing, keep data, because it is a concern from some of my constituents about testing for pesticides and making sure that it always stays below the minimum level in surface water, in well water. And also I would keep encouraging you to do the random testing, maybe even more, so you have a good database of water quality through rural Saskatchewan.

And one other question on the pesticides. When you talked about the \$100 testing, the 30 different tests, did they test for pesticide in that \$100 fee?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — I understand that they do not, Mr. Chair. And having answered that, let me just clarify something — and I apologize, Mr. Chair, to the member — in the Humboldt-Wakaw system that Sask Water has a direct involvement with, there is ongoing testing for pesticides and there has not been any serious evidence of serious contamination found in that system.

So I just wanted to clarify that Sask Water is doing that. But on the tail end of that, given what the Research Council has found through their preliminary testing of some dugouts, Sask Water will be examining perhaps the need to expand from a similar process that's being followed at the Wakaw-Humboldt plant.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That is one of the reasons I brought it up. Because I've had one or two constituents send in the water samples and, you know, spend a hundred dollars, and basically come back and found out it wasn't tested for pesticide and they were just as worried of being tested for pesticide as was other contaminants.

So I would encourage you, especially if you're charging a

hundred dollars, you know, to include that in your testing and not kick your testing up. I don't know how expensive it is, or even what other . . . I'll ask you, what other avenue would a constituent have if they just wanted to test the water for pesticides? Would they send it to you, or would it have to be sent to another department, or would they have to send it to a private lab?

(11:45)

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, this is a very topical issue, no question about it. I'm told as well that the costs for trying to identify specific contaminants related to pesticides, the Research Council is involved in that exercise now, which is a costly exercise.

Sask Water will be working with folks to try and perhaps look at how those concerns can be addressed. And I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that if there are individuals in a specific area that have a serious concern about specific pesticides, because that's where I'm told . . . I'm not a technician in this area, but it's extremely difficult to specifically identify a particular pesticide.

And it gets complicated for those people, the technicians that need to try and sort that out and probably have to go to university for 11 years or whatever to determine how to nail down with some fairly expensive equipment how to sort out those pesticides from perhaps other contaminants. And that's something I'm not qualified to address.

But I know that with the concerns, that there needs to be something done to perhaps alleviate some of those concerns and be able to address such things as serious pesticide contamination in certain areas that will affect water.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I hope that you continue on down that road.

Talking about the rural water quality advisory program, could you provide some details on its level of funding starting in 1997 when it was started, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, I must apologize to the member opposite that I do not have the earlier year data. But I will supply that information for the years in question.

I do have for 2001-2002. There's been committed \$330,000 to the rural water quality, and in addition to that, \$70,000 for rural water quality research. And those are the monies that have been committed for the current year.

But as I mentioned, for those years that you mentioned, for previous years, I will certainly submit that information in a timely manner for the member opposite.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I hope you . . . I'd be interested if you can forward that to me. I know in other estimates there's been one or two ministers that said they would forward me stuff in timely manner, and haven't yet.

But what I want to know is has the funding decreased since '97-98, or has it gone up? You should have that. Your official should know that — whether it's gone up or down.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chairman, thank you. I want to assure the member opposite I will supply the information in a timely manner, because I know it's critical. But I do know, and he will see from the figures that are supplied, that I'm happy to say that the funding has been increased. There's been no decrease; it's been on the rise.

And again, Mr. Chair, people will recognize that the efforts and attempts to address issues that are of a concern to the public at large throughout the province, that those are programs that need to be supplemented and need to be addressed. And hence, the funding is on the rise.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And good morning to the minister and his officials. I'd like to move from the micro aspects of water to the macro, if we could.

From time to time over the last 40 or 50 years the idea of a large dam has been proposed for the boundary between Saskatchewan and Alberta. The dam idea is commonly referred to as the Meridian dam. And the proponents of that dam have been silent until fairly recently, and now we've had a number of people suggest that a dam in that particular area would be of considerably good consequences, especially in view of the drought and the difficulties that the southeast part of Alberta and the southwest part of Saskatchewan are experiencing.

I understand that as of last fall, Sask Water took the position that a dam of that nature wouldn't be practical, would be far too costly, and there would be serious negative consequences to the environment. But I'm wondering if the department has changed its views in the last six months on the possibility of the Meridian dam project?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I welcome the question from the member from Cypress Hills and that area. Yes, I'm aware of the efforts.

The other concern that Sask Water had with that kind of a dam and the location of it may perhaps — and all of this was may perhaps restrict some of the flow of water into the Diefenbaker area.

So there was . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . They do, and you're right. This has been an ongoing discussion about whether or not that a dam would be feasible and would it be practical. Would it be environmentally acceptable to folks on both sides? And who would it benefit most? Would it be advantageous for the people in Saskatchewan? For Alberta?

These have been ongoing discussions and they continue to be ongoing. And I'm pleased to report to the House today that there will be a feasibility study done to determine perhaps once and for all, either in the short or long term, whether or not it may be a project that might be considered.

But there needs to be real due diligence I guess, if I may use that term — I've heard that used in the House here earlier — so there needs to be due diligence done with respect to that massive an undertaking.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, through you to the minister, I understand that the Department of

Environment under the auspices and direction of the Government of Alberta is going to be undertaking a feasibility study.

Will our Department of Environment or Sask Water be part of that study? Will they be contributing to the study? Will they be helping to fund that study?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Again, I'm pleased to report, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member opposite that, yes, Sask Water will be participating with an investment of up to \$25,000 to participate in this very important study, as I mentioned, again to determine the positive, negative impacts that perhaps this massive undertaking, very massive and costly undertaking . . . So I appreciate the different departments that will be involved will come together, will have public meetings, and will determine whether or not it is something that should be pursued vigorously.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm not sure if you want to get into the hypothetical or not but let's make some assumptions.

If the study . . . and I assume this is a pre-feasibility study, not the definitive feasibility study yet, but if the terms of reference are such that this pre-feasibility study concludes that the dam would be economically viable and certainly would enhance the water and agricultural issues of southwest Saskatchewan and southeastern Alberta, can I assume that the government would be willing to move ahead with a project of that magnitude?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member. The small investment of monies at this point is for a feasibility study. Once that study has been completed, determining the impacts — if there are major positive impacts for the province — then there may need to be considerably more money put in for all the environmental studies and all the side effects that a project of that magnitude will have.

So at least these preliminary reviews to determine is it going to be good for Saskatchewan or are there perhaps some possibilities that it may not be so good in the long run — the dam being built, the location of the dam may have some effect on our access to water.

And I appreciate and understand that we do have an agreement. We work very closely with the province of Alberta through that agreement. However, there are those implications that need to be adequately sought out to determine whether or not we should then go to the next step.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Deputy Chair, as you know there's always pros and cons to these kinds of projects. And I'm sure that eventually a fair and thorough hearing will be given to both sides of the proposal.

I am interested, Mr. Minister, in knowing though why Sask Water, and by extension the Government of Saskatchewan, decided to get involved in the feasibility study now, when there didn't seem to be any interest in that as early or as recently as last fall?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — I understand that the impetus seems to

have moved more quickly now from the Alberta side than it had up to last year; that things had kind of settled down. I want to underline that there's a great amount of co-operation between provinces on both sides of us when it deals with issues of water and resourcing water supplies.

I guess what I'm saying is that last year Alberta did not seem to be quite as interested as they are this year, and the pressure is on again, the impetus, as I mentioned. And that could be as a result of something that southwest Saskatchewan is facing, and particularly southeastern Alberta, and that's a shortage of moisture, a shortage of water, and a shortage of runoff from the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

So that has again created the urgency on the Alberta side to proceed. And at this point, in order to be good neighbours and work with our neighbouring province to say okay, let's take a look, we want to continue to co-operate with you in the agreement we've had from way back when, over years and years and years.

So the fact is that the feasibility study is going to go ahead and we're pleased to be participating in it.

Mr. Elhard: — Just a final question, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the minister. Will you assure the House that a copy of the feasibility report will be made public as soon as possible after its completion?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Deputy Chair, it is our understanding that that feasibility study will likely take until the end of 2001. And once that happens, the report I understand will be made a public document. And that's all I can tell you on it.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, I believe our time for these questions is allotted. I would like to thank the minister and his officials today, and also knowing that they'll be coming back and we will have some more questions for them. I would like to thank them.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I would also like to express my appreciation to the members opposite from Cypress Hills and from Arm River for the dialogue and the good questions that allows us to clarify for folks in our great province here that we are trying to look after things the best we can.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I move the committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
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(ED01)

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Minister, I would ask you to introduce your officials at this time.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And it certainly is a pleasure for us to be back to talk about Education estimates again.

With me today I have Craig Dotson, deputy minister of

Education, to my immediate right; and I've got Ken Horsman directly behind me, associate deputy minister of Education; and to my immediate left is Michael Littlewood, executive director of legislation and school administration.

And in the back of the room is John McLaughlin, executive director of Teachers' Superannuation Commission. And behind me as well is Frances Bast, director of finance and administration corporate services. And also at the back of the room, beside John McLaughlin, is Daryl Richter, facilities planning. And also . . . where's Gerry? And Gerry Sing Chin, grants manager, school finance.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Welcome, Mr. Minister. Welcome to your officials.

The last time we had an opportunity to speak, we talked about the global questions that were not available at that time but I believe you had thought they'd be available today. Are they?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Deputy Chair, we have not as yet finalized with regard to the global questions. They are in preparation; we should have them very soon.

But just before we actually get into some further questions, what I'd like to do is just kind of highlight some of the major impacts that this Education budget has had here. And certainly when we look at how we can put this into perspective, when we look at last year's budget for Education as originally presented and ultimately passed by this Legislative Assembly, it was good for Education.

Now over the course of this last year we provided significant additional financial resources in responding to changing circumstances. And last year we provided the necessary additional funding to address the new teachers' collective agreement, which was only concluded halfway through the year. We made the commitment to do that and of course we met that commitment in full, Mr. Deputy Chair.

We also provided an additional \$5.6 million by way of special warrant for compensatory operating grant payments to school divisions adversely affected by assessment appeals mandated by the Court of Appeal.

So for calendar year 2000 the actual effective amount of provincial financial support on the foundation operating grant, not including that one-time \$5.6 million, was an increase of \$29 million. That was more than twice the size of the annual increase that we'd seen in the past 15 years. Now of course, Mr. Deputy Chair, that was very much a difficult act to follow.

Our education partners were very clear in telling us, prior to this current budget, that the coalition government had to invest in education. Indeed our colleagues with the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, for example, were very specific. They wanted to see at least 32 million added to the foundation operating grant on a calendar-year basis.

Mr. Speaker, we did listen to our partners and we heard them. In this year's budget we provided for a substantial increase in

the foundation operating grant. The grant pool, calendar year 2001, is \$460.1 million — an increase of \$33.7 million. This is the largest operating grant increase in 15 years. That's an increase of almost 8 per cent in a year when inflation is projected to be around 2 per cent.

On a budget-to-budget basis, as distinct from the calendar-to-calendar-year basis, the increase to the grant pool from last year's budget is 40.7 or 9.6 per cent, bringing the total to \$466.8 million.

As well, during the most recent round of collective bargaining, the development of the new extended health benefits insurance plan was a very important item for teachers, Mr. Deputy Chair. And in accordance with that new agreement, we are providing in this budget, \$9.3 million specifically for this new extended health insurance plan.

This year will be the final year of the phase-in for provincial payments of grants in lieu of taxes to local governments. In this coming year the amount paid to school divisions will increase by 2 million, to an annual total of \$7 million.

Our partners also asked us to extend programs and services to help the most vulnerable children in our society. And, Mr. Deputy Chair, we listened to our partners and we heard them.

Recently, Mr. Deputy Chair, I accepted the final report of the task force on the role of the schools called *School^{PLUS} A Vision for Children and Youth*. Under the leadership of Dr. Michael Tymchak of the University of Regina, the task force set forth a vision for the future of education in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Chair, the Role of the School Task Force recommended that an expansion of the pre-kindergarten program in the range of 25 per cent to 50 per cent would be reasonable. Our pre-kindergarten program in this budget initially implemented in 1997 has been very successful. Consistent with the recommendations of the Role Of The School Task Force, we are substantially increasing our pre-kindergarten financial support by increasing the number of pre-kindergarten spaces by more than 80 per cent this year.

Saskatchewan's award-winning community schools program has long been recognized as an effective model for meeting the complex educational needs of at-risk students.

Since 1995 we have doubled the number of community school programs. The task force on the role of the school recently lent its voice to the chorus of others in praise of our community schools program. And they said, and I quote:

The community school program is one of the most helpful and hopeful changes to be initiated in recent times. Given its remarkable success and evident benefits, not only for children, but for parents in the whole community, the task force is of the view that the time has come for a major community school initiative in our province.

In its final report, the task force recommended an increase of 26 school programs over the next three years. In fact in this coming year we are more than doubling the number of designated community schools.

We are enhancing this successful program by increasing the number of new community schools by more than 40 and expanding into rural communities and into secondary schools. This is great news for children of this province.

This year the Department of Education is making a major contribution in support of the government's strategy for early childhood development. The purpose of this strategy is to foster children's healthy growth and development by providing a continuum of integrated early intervention supports and services to better prepare preschool children for their educational experience. We are taking an integrated provincial approach involving a number of provincial departments including Education, Health, and Social Services.

There will be provincial leadership of this critical initiative which will be administered at the local level through school divisions and health districts. Mr. Deputy Chair, school divisions in health districts will work with communities and local community-based agencies to ensure our children have the support they need to succeed in life.

The Education budget this coming year includes \$1.6 million explicitly identified for early childhood development. The total amount identified for this initiative this year will be 10 million, rising to a cumulative total of \$73 million over five years. And this is Saskatchewan's share of the federal financing announced last fall.

It is also important that we continue to provide direct provincial policy and financial support to our northern, rural, and urban school divisions to support culturally affirming educational programs for First Nations and Metis students in our classrooms.

This year alone we are providing an increase of more than 90 per cent in our financial support for Aboriginal education programming through the operating grant. This includes increased support for the Indian and Metis Education Development Program, Aboriginal Elder/Outreach, and financial support for innovative partnerships between school divisions and Aboriginal communities.

A little more than a year ago, I received the report of the Special Education Review, *Directions for Diversity*. Our response to the Special Education Review was called *Strengthening Supports*. This budget reflects a strong commitment to make that a reality for special needs and at-risk students.

There are two important changes in our support for special education this year, together entailing a significant increase in provincial financial support through the operating grant program.

First there is a 20 per cent increase in support for designated students with disabilities. In this upcoming budget year, our total supplementary financial support for these students will be more than double what it was just a scant four years ago.

Second, we will be combining several programs into a new diversity program and increasing our financial support in that area by more than 25 per cent.

These enhancements again, are in keeping with the recommendations of the Special Education Review Committee.

This year, Mr. Deputy Chair, the recognized expenditures for all categories of special education increased by 32 per cent, from 82 million to 108 million. Since 1995, when the provincial budget was balanced, special education recognized expenditures have risen sharply from 48 million to 108 million, an increase of 127 per cent.

Our education partners talk to us about the need to enhance the use of technology in our education system. Mr. Speaker, we again listened to our partners and we heard them. Saskatchewan Education will be building on our past state-of-the-art learning technology initiatives such as the Evergreen Curriculum, with some exciting new developments, CommunityNet, high-speed Internet connectivity for all Saskatchewan schools.

For school divisions this means much better Internet access and lower costs. We will cover the 3.7 million cost of connecting all provincial schools over the next three years and they will immediately begin to save an estimated \$1.5 million each year, that school divisions will no longer have to pay.

Connectivity through the Centenary Capital Fund, we will be providing a further \$2 million per year over the next three years for improved in-school distribution and connectivity.

(12:15)

And content, Mr. Deputy Chair. In this budget we have provided 3 million in direct financial support for the development of Made-in-Saskatchewan, on-line learning resources to be initiated and developed by teachers and school divisions.

So that's the package — CommunityNet, connectivity, and content. These sets of initiatives will benefit all Saskatchewan students and particularly those in northern and isolated schools.

Our education partners told us about the particular needs and challenges for rural education. They wanted to see specific initiatives to support rural education. Mr. Speaker, we again listened to our partners and we have heard them.

We have worked with education leaders over the past year to see how we can build on the success of the shared services program, which provides specialized supports to teachers and students in our schools. We will now be implementing these improvements, including a 90 per cent increase in provincial support to shared services.

We are making changes to the way the grant recognizes rural transportation costs, as well as adding a new isolated schools factor to help address the challenges of providing quality education in isolated areas.

And in addition, Mr. Deputy Chair, we have allocated 1 million to support teacher recruitment, particularly in northern Saskatchewan, and recruitment of specialist teachers in rural school divisions.

And also the education property tax rebate on agricultural land

will continue this year, and we recently extended the deadline for both the years 2000 and 2001 for rebates, to February 15 of 2002.

In summary, this budget, this Education budget is providing strong provincial financial commitment and support to public education. The 33.7 million increase to the foundation operating grant this calendar year is the largest operating grant increase in Saskatchewan in 15 years. Compared to the 397.5 million paid out in operating grants in calendar year 1999, this 460.1 million for calendar year 2001 is an increase of 62.6 million, or almost 16 per cent in just two years.

Mr. Deputy Chair, all children deserve to have a complete range of high-quality education opportunities available to them. All across Saskatchewan our education system and our schools continue to strive to provide the highest quality education to our students. This government is proud to provide increased program and financial support to meet that common goal.

Mr. Deputy Chair, this is the best Education budget this province has seen in many, many years.

And so I'm looking forward to further questions from the members opposite. And just having highlighted some of the key initiatives within this budget, I'm looking forward to more specific questions. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that rant. And it sounded more like an election speech.

Mr. Minister, I know that you've got a . . . this patting yourself on the back for the last 15 minutes has given me an opportunity to think of some more questions, so I'm sure that we'll be able to discuss them in August when we're still sitting here.

Mr. Minister, I have a lot of specific questions about the grant, and I know you're talking about all the extra money that your department put into education this year. But I take \$33.7 million, which was the additional funds over last year, take away the 32.1 which was a direct result of teacher contract money, really there's \$1.7 million extra.

We spent 1.6 on early childhood development. We have more than double the money for special education, increased diversity money, so we know that there's a shortage. Some school divisions are paying a lot more money this year. I know we've discussed this a number of times, that many of the farmers — well people right across this province — are seeing a significant increase in their education property tax this year.

I think that you probably received a copy of the information from *The Western Producer* on the Saskatchewan farmers that are steaming over education tax hikes. We have every one of our members on this side of the House can talk about the school divisions in their area, that even though they saw a decrease in their mill rate, they saw an increase in revenue because of the reassessment. But we won't go into that right now.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to talk more specifically about some questions that we've received from school divisions that they haven't had adequate responses from your department on. And I'm going to start with the Hudson Bay School Division. And I

think this letter you would have received quite . . . in the short . . . just recently.

The letter came from someone who is dealing with truancy. And I'm going to just read a couple of the statements that she has made and maybe ask you how you've responded to her and how you're responding as an overall problem in the province.

According to The Education Act, a parent can be charged if a child under the age of 16 does not attend school. The Act outlines that a parent can be fined not more than \$100 for the summary conviction. The RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) sergeant in that area said that the actual result in . . . the parent getting the child back to school, but in this case they weren't sure this was going to happen.

They also contacted the Department of Social Services and she said that there was nothing the department could do to force a child to go back to school.

So the frustration from the writer of this letter said that The Education Act says that parents are responsible for ensuring that their children under the age of 16 attend school regularly. The attendance counsellor can institute proceedings against a parent who does not ensure this.

However, there is no teeth in The Education Act or in the justice system or in the social services system. There is no effective mechanism to convince parents and children that they have to attend school. In some cases the family would easily pay the \$100 and still not have their child in school.

You and I both know that one of the brightest hopes, or the only hope we have in this province for the future is having educated children. So I'm wondering how your department is dealing with this issue.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you to the member opposite for that question. Certainly the letter from the Hudson Bay School Division was very thoughtful and very civil in its tone.

Under The Education Act, of course, it is a requirement and a responsibility for parents to ensure that they are attending school under the age of 16. We recognize that this does provide some difficulties if the parents do not accept that responsibility.

The question that arises is, The Education Act is there, the law is clear. It comes down to what do you do with a parent who is unwilling to accept that responsibility and should it be the responsibility of the state to ensure that that happens?

These are difficult issues. I don't know if there are any answers that are readily apparent for Saskatchewan, and perhaps in other jurisdictions as well. But it's certainly an issue that we are looking at and hopefully we can come up with some solutions on how we can have better attendance in very specific cases. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure the response you'll give to the Hudson Bay School Division won't be really just reiterating what they said. I know that you know it's a problem; they know it's a problem. So are you going to

offer any suggestions, concrete suggestions, to them? Are you also looking at this on a province-wide basis?

Maybe as you're talking to your officials you can also give me an idea if you keep track of truancy in the province.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To be exactly clear on this issue, certainly it is the parent's responsibility legally to have their child attend school. It is the school division's responsibility to monitor truancy.

In terms of the Department of Education's response, recognizing that truancy is an issue that requires leadership and direction, we look to innovative programs that help to alleviate some of the concerns of communities in making sure that children are in attendance. And some of the root causes of why children do not attend school are being dealt with by such programs as our community schools initiatives.

With the doubling we show a considerable investment in not only the policy direction with regard to community schools, but the financial support. And what we found is that by providing greater links between parents and our education . . . our school divisions and our schools themselves, that we are improving not only the attendance of children in schools, but also the retention of those children in schools.

And myself having had an opportunity to actually visit schools like Pleasant Hill and Westmount, which are community schools in Saskatoon, what they have shown over the past five or six years, that not only have their enrolments increased but the retention rates of those students who come in in the kindergarten and then graduate in grade 12 has been markedly enhanced as well.

So our approach is one of, let's look at the root causes of why children are not attending school. What are the issues surrounding parents and communities and schools. In what can we do better to make sure those children are in school, and also dealing with some of the diverse cultural things that we see as well.

So we have expanded our community school program. We are providing leadership in both policy and in finances and funding. And we certainly have increased the support with regard to some of the core neighbourhood issues and some of our Aboriginal educational issues with culturally affirming programs.

So it's not a simple solution to basically say, this child is not in school; it's the parents' responsibility. The school division can monitor truancy, that's true. But what are the root causes? Why are those children not in school?

And it's the policy of this government not to lay fines or not to lay charges against parents, but to look at those root causes and to deal with those root causes to make sure that coming to school is a positive situation, that there is a caring and respectful learning environment, and that that child and that parent want to have that child attend that school.

So that is the policy of our government, and we are putting forward policies and programs to support that policy.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, so what are the root causes you've found for the reasons that children aren't in school?

(12:30)

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well, Mr. Chair, certainly having received the Role of the School Task Force recently and looking at the many recommendations that came from that task force, they certainly did look at the diversity of situations throughout Saskatchewan. But there is recognition that there is, you know, no one particular root cause, but there are some general things that can be seen in terms of fear of attending school, a lack of connectivity from the parents in particular neighbourhoods with their school environment.

And just about a . . . well a significant amount of the recommendations that went around creating the School^{PLUS} environment that the Role of the School Task Force talks about was connecting families and communities to the school, providing services in support to deal with many of these root causes, and identifying them more primarily on a community and case-by-case basis so that we are finding that children and parents and communities are supportive of their schools and feel very comfortable in the school environment.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Chair, thank you, Mr. Minister. One of these opportunities we have to get together and discuss education, we'll probably spend most of that session talking about role of the school. And I look forward to that exchange.

Mr. Minister, I don't know if you had the opportunity or if you keep track of the numbers, but can you give me an idea of what the truancy rate is and is it comparable to other provinces?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. We do not have global figures on truancy, so we can't make comparisons to other provincial jurisdictions. Where we do collect statistics is in relation to dropout rates. And Saskatchewan has one of the lowest dropout rates in any of the recorded provincial jurisdictions.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. I would like to have your comments on a letter that I have from Wakaw School Division, and it's an example of some of the school divisions that have contacted my office regarding special education needs.

There's a concern, probably right across Saskatchewan but specifically in rural Saskatchewan, where there's instances of behavioural problems and learning disabilities when many of the students have severe mental and physical disabilities.

In the smaller areas where there is less staffing available to deal with specific problems when it comes to disabilities, this school division is struggling like many, to ensure that they have enough funds.

Now I know that you told me in your earlier rant that there was two changes in the special education budget or funding, and the 20 per cent increase to designated . . . for designated support. Maybe you can let me know if Wakaw is one of the school divisions that will benefit from this.

And again I'm concerned. Because when we talk about the extra money that school divisions are getting, we know that because of the . . . keeping in mind the reassessment, some school divisions are getting less money this year than last year. And if they are, said, we have to spend so much of the budget we get from the government on special education, that means they're again going to have to increase their taxes to pay for the normal operations.

So can you tell me specifically which school divisions are going to be benefiting from this special education change?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just with regard to a couple of the questions opposite. Wakaw did receive more grant dollars this year compared to last year.

And on the special education allocation specifically, their allocation in the year 2000 was 465,000 and that was increased in 2001 to 553,000. So it's, well, almost a hundred thousand increase, probably close to 20 per cent on the special education side.

And just to clarify with regard to the designated disability program, if you have a designated disabled child come into your school division, for example say a blind child, then you would immediately get those dollars. And if that child were then to move out then those dollars would be taken away, and that's why it's called the designated disabled program. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to welcome the minister here and his officials. I want to talk about a school that I have in my constituency or maybe a lack of school. It's going to be closed . . . or was announced closed yesterday, the school at Marquis.

I have a letter here from the local board stating that each school in the Thunder Creek is experiencing major decreases in their projections and one of them schools is even in the city of Moose Jaw. But she goes on to state, our enrolment has been this low before and often enrolment often has a hill and a valley and right now they just happen to be in a valley pattern.

The Marquis Economic Development Committee has put together a plan to address the enrolment issue and REDA, the rural economic development association, has given this plan their stamp of approval and said this plan is feasible.

The village of Marquis, the RM (rural municipality) of Marquis, are on board. Even the local board has gone so far to say that they would willingly close the school in two years if the projections were not met. In this case then, the division board, the trustees, would not have to follow the process of closure. They could just close the school at any time with local board agreement. But the trustees have gone against this and voted closure.

The reason for closure they have stated that the concern for meeting program needs for children. Yet she goes on to state, they're willing to put our children on a bus for two to three hours a day and they don't think this will affect the quality of their education.

She goes on to state, we as parents are responsible for seeing

our children receive quality education and we believe they are receiving quality education. That the students are coming out of St. Mark's, from there most of them go to Lindale where they all . . . the enrolment there over the past few years . . . they've all graduated and so going in there, their marks are all high. The parents basically have spoken passionately that the closure of St. Mark's School is not in the best interests of their children. Do they have no say at all in their school, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly the member opposite asks a fairly specific question with regard to the St. Mark's School in Marquis.

This government has a policy and a program and a long history of recognizing the local autonomy of school divisions. The Education Act, 1995 specifies that local school boards have jurisdiction over school closures, and final decisions rest with those duly elected boards of education, not with the minister and not with the Department of Education.

These boards are locally elected and make their decisions based on their analysis of the overall needs and circumstances of their particular school division. We do have a process in rural Saskatchewan where notices of motion, public dialogue, have to occur. There has to be feedback from communities, but in the end, the final end, the decision is made by the school board.

And I must say that, generally speaking, these are difficult decisions that any school division would have to make, but they do, by and large, have obviously the best interests of children in their minds, and sometimes these decisions have to be made.

It's my understanding that the enrolment, for example at St. Mark's School, which is a K-8 school, was 33 students, with 3.85 teacher full-time equivalents designated. So again, the answer is that the school division, after consultation and notification, does make that final decision on whether a closure will occur. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister. A question I'll put to you I guess . . . It almost sounds like a business decision, six people making a . . . just a . . . supposedly an economic decision.

I have two other schools in that area. Eyebrow, Loreburn may fall in that category. Children then could be on the bus four to five hours a day. Does that matter to the minister? When basically would they step in?

What's not allowable on busing, or would you let maybe six people in each division make decisions that would close basically most of the schools? Put the kids on . . . maybe they can just come to Saskatoon, board for a week, go back home on Friday morning. When would the minister step in?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Chair, certainly it seems that the suggestion from the member opposite is that the Minister of Education should override the decisions of autonomous, locally elected school boards. I don't think that was his intention.

But we are very concerned with especially young children, in the amount of travel that they have to sustain. We also recognize that school divisions do make these decisions. What

the provincial government has recently done in this most recent budget was to create a new isolated school factor that does provide additional support for school divisions and does recognize schools that are truly isolated in terms of providing additional financial support so that the travelling distances can be minimized. And this is formula driven and it's something that we take very seriously.

But if the member opposite is insinuating that somehow this government or this Minister of Education should be overriding decisions of locally elected boards, we won't get into that. That's not our role here at all. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I guess you didn't really answer my question. I'm asking you, do you believe that in schools of necessity, and are you looking at a policy where you would limit the number of hours a child — kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, grade 3 — would be on a school. Is there a limit that you have or that you're looking at?

(12:45)

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, this department does recognize some of the difficulties and challenges faced by school divisions in rural Saskatchewan. And that is why in this most recent budget and the estimates that we're talking about today, that we have created this isolated schools factor, which does preferentially support schools, that are truly isolated.

And we also recognize that that is one factor. But we also have to make sure that we have the resources so that these isolated schools can maintain quality and provide equitable learning experiences no matter where they are located in the province of Saskatchewan. And that is one of the reasons why we have moved towards our CommunityNet, our connectivity within schools, so that we can provide state-of-the-art learning resources to isolated and remote and in fact, every school in the province of Saskatchewan.

So not only do we have concerns about supporting schools that are truly isolated in terms of the transportation, but also making sure that those isolated schools also have access to worldwide, credible resources wherever that location may be through high-speed Internet and distribution and connectivity within that school or environment.

So supportive education in rural Saskatchewan is very important to this government but we also recognize that school divisions are locally elected, are empowered, and are in the best position to make decisions on local issues. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, would you have the added cost it's going to cost to bus these children from Marquis to the surrounding schools — the added cost of it?

Also you talk about this extra school necessity program. I ask you do you have a policy for school . . . do you believe school necessity? And is there just extra money to that? And does Marquis fall into that category is what I'm asking? Or does Eyebrow fall into that? Or Loreburn fall into that category? That they would get extra funding up and above the other schools that basically . . . because they have to be there because

if you close it you're looking at bus rides of three to four hours.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Just with regard to very specific . . . with regard to the Marquis school, because of the isolated schools factor there's an additional \$39,000 in recognition on their grant formula with regard to that school, as isolated.

And the other question was with regard to Loreburn, and its designated allocation, additional allocation, is \$110,000 on the grant formula.

And the way that the isolated schools' factor has been developed is to look at where a school is located, where is the next similar school to that school, and if the distances are greater, then there is proportionately more dollars that go into supporting that school through the division grant.

So it is a formula. If you're close to a school you would get less grant. If you are further away from a similar school, then you would get more grant. But it still comes down to that school division and that board making a decision in terms of what is best for their students and whether it would be maintaining that school or transporting schools to other locations.

It's a local decision. It's been a local decision in this province as long as we've had school boards and school divisions, and certainly this government is not going to change that local autonomy.

Mr. Brkich: — Talk about the local autonomy there, I think if them trustees would have said, when they were campaigning, that they would be closing St. Mark's School, they probably wouldn't have won the election.

On the busing costs, you didn't address that — how much extra it would cost. And also you're saying Marquis received 39,000 extra dollars. So now that school division, that's 39,000 less they're going to receive. To run that school I believe it costs \$225,000 a year. Yet in taxes, the school division alone just in the RM of Marquis, takes in over \$600,000. I think the parents have a say to where their tax money should be spent instead of having to go possibly to . . . to Moose Jaw is where it's going.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, with regard to the Thunder Creek School Division, it is a large school division in terms of area that it covers. And we recognize that, you know, local decisions in terms of where services are provided within that school division are made by the local . . . by that school board.

We also recognize that within the boundaries of that school division, whatever assessment they have — whether it's residential; agriculture; whether it's a home in a town; or whether it's an oil well or a pipeline — that that global assessment goes to that school division for them to provide services on a global basis to all of the residents and to maintain the schools in their school division.

So certainly it is a local decision. The decisions they make have to be publicized. There is a process that they have to follow as required under The Education Act. There has to be notices of motion. There has to be final motions of intent. And there is an

opportunity for all the public to come and talk about the decisions that are being made and for those school divisions to give the reasons why that difficult decision had to be made.

So in this circumstance, I certainly believe that the Thunder Creek School Board has laboured a long time in making this decision. But in the end it is their responsibility. They are the ones that are entrusted with providing services to the children in their school division. And by and large, throughout the history of this province, that local autonomy has worked very well. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Chairman, just two quick questions and then I believe our time is up.

What I asked the minister was — one of them was — how much extra the busing is going to cost? Because I believe the province pays all the busing transportation so they'll be able to . . . Can you provide details of that? If not today, within . . . by Wednesday of next week?

And also I asked you if you'd looked at busing limits for children. Are you looking at it? Do you have . . . Like what do you call unacceptable? Four to five hours? Two to three? Six to seven? Has that even been discussed? Or is there a limit that you would not allow children to ride a bus to a school?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Just very quickly because time is drawing to a close.

Number one, we do have a rural transportation factor that is a recognized expenditure for school divisions in terms of the grant formula.

And number two, we do not have a specific policy for the province of Saskatchewan. But every school division has specific policies with regard to transportation of, specifically, young children. And I think — it's my understanding — that most school divisions will not allow a child of a certain age to be on a bus before 7:30 in the morning. So that's the final answer.

The committee reported progress.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, before adjournment I'd just like to wish all of my colleagues a good weekend, and I hope you all take the opportunity to spend a little time with your families and get a little rest. And we'll come back next week and we'll get into the fray again.

Mr. Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — I too would like to wish everybody a restful Victoria — and long — Victoria weekend. And this House stands adjourned until Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Assembly adjourned at 12:57.