

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have petition again to present today from people who are concerned about the Fyke report and the resulting impact it may have on rural Saskatchewan:

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena, Archerwill, Hendon, Fosston, and Kelvington.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions from people concerned about the water crisis in North Battleford. The prayer of 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.

Your petitioners come from North Battleford.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people in Saskatchewan concerned about the Swift Current hospital. They've signed a petition and asked me to present it here, and I'm honoured to do so. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the prayer reads as follows that:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition today is signed by residents of Abbey, Saskatchewan, of the city of Swift Current, city of Regina, and Wymark.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present regarding the EMS (emergency medical services) service, and the prayer reads as follow . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by the good people in the Redvers, Manor and Bellegarde areas.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today on behalf of the people of Redvers and the Redvers Health Centre. The prayer reads:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by the people from Antler, Redvers, Maryfield, Storthoaks, Reston, Bellegarde, Fertile, Alida, Gainsborough.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also rise to present a petition calling for immediate implementation of province-wide 911 emergency service. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to fulfill its promise to the people of rural Saskatchewan by immediately implementing the 911 emergency telephone service province wide.

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

Signed by the citizens of Blaine Lake, Shell Lake, and Invermay.

I so present.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to present a petition on behalf of some citizens of Saskatchewan who have expressed an interest in the 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, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks from Preeceville, Kamsack, and Canora.

I so submit.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a petition to present today to do with the lack of funding to non-profit personal care homes and to the seniors that reside in these homes do cause inequalities to seniors throughout the province.

The signators, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Kamsack.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a petition signed by folks concerned about the high cost of energy. And 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 more substantial energy rebates to Saskatchewan consumers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Neilburg, Marsden, and Unity.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise with a petition today from concerned citizens with reference to cellular telephone coverage in the rural area, or more specific, lack thereof. And the prayer 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 to all communities throughout the Wood River constituency.

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

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

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the petitions have been reviewed and received pursuant to rule 12(7), and are received as addendums to 15 sessional papers.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I give notice that on day no. 53 I shall ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Post-Secondary Education: in the past fiscal year, 2000-2001, how many Saskatchewan students were awarded a Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation bursary; what was the total amount of the bursaries that were received from the foundation; were all the bursaries received from the foundation applied to the student . . . Saskatchewan student loan debts?

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 53 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: for what reasons were recent pavement repairs made to the exit ramps of the newly constructed Pasqua Street Highway 11 interchange in north Regina?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this weekend in Regina, the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association is holding its annual conference.

I would add that this is the first time that the association has had its conference in Saskatchewan, and it's hosted by the Regina, Saskatoon and Maple Creek chapters of the association. The association advocates for improved services for hard of hearing people and promotes public awareness.

With us today, Mr. Speaker, are the president of the association, Colin Cantlie of Calgary. I know Mr. Cantlie is an articulate and energetic spokesperson for the needs of hard of hearing people. He's accompanied by the executive director of the association, Janice McNamara.

I would ask all my colleagues to extend a warm welcome to our guests who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, I'd like to as well extend a warm welcome to those representatives of the Hard of Hearing Association that have joined us today and wish them well in the conference this weekend. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like all members of this Assembly to welcome the many, many proud Metis people who are sitting up in the west gallery. There are so many there I'm not going to single anyone out or try to name you by name, because we'd be here all day. But I do thank you so very much for coming to the Assembly.

Thank you so much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a former minister, I would like to join with the minister in welcoming the many representatives of the Metis

Nation we have with us this morning. And to say how proud I was to work with them and how proud I am of the revival of the Metis Nation presently going on in this province.

And I wish them all the very best and welcome them here this morning.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, along with the rest of the Assembly, the members of the official opposition would like to welcome the Metis to our Assembly today. And I hope they enjoy the proceedings that take place, and we look forward to working with them in the future.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again it gives me great pleasure to join my colleague, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, to stand in this Assembly as a Metis member of the Assembly, along with my colleague from Cumberland, to welcome all the Metis supporters in the gallery and to pay special tribute to the president, Clem Chartier, and to also say it's indeed a pleasure to have them join the Assembly today to celebrate the introduction of a very important Act.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the House, a group of 16 students from grades 7 to 9, from the Riverdale School, from Kinville, Manitoba. And they're seated on the east side of your gallery, Mr. Speaker. And they're accompanied here today by their teacher Ms. Wohlgemuth.

And I ask all the members to offer them a very warm Saskatchewan welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you and to the Assembly, I'd like to introduce a person here visiting in Regina from my constituency, in your gallery. Darlene Campbell is a very good friend and a long-time resident of Melfort. She's very much involved in the community, volunteering for a good number of organizations. And she's here in Regina visiting today and is here to observe the proceedings.

And I'd ask all members to please welcome her warmly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a long-time friend of mine seated in the west gallery, Vince Folk. And down with Vince, sitting beside him, I had the

pleasure of meeting just this day, Myles Pelletier.

But I ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming my long-time friend and my new friend, Vince and Myles.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very pleased this morning to introduce to you and members of the Assembly, 33 students from the Yorkdale Central School division.

They're accompanied this morning with their teachers Val Jeske, Lisa Cadioux, teacher assistant Sandy Hubenig, and Emma Markham.

Also parents that are accompanying the student group today is Joan Jensen, Shannon Lizon, and Deb Coleman.

If you were to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the students from the Yorkdale School division they'll say to you that they're the best grade 5 student class that's ever gone through the Central School Division. And this morning . . . today they have a very busy schedule.

They left Yorkton this morning at around 7:30 and they're going to tour the Legislative Building as they are now, then I'm going to have refreshments with them around 11 o'clock, and then they're going to the ferry at Willow Island — by ferry to Willow Island — then to the Science Centre, then to the IMAX theatre, then they're going to have supper at Buffet Village, then get back at Yorkton tonight around 9 o'clock.

So what we'll want to do I think during this session here, or during this morning, is to try to make sure that we keep them awake during the debate because they've got a very long day, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join the other members in saying a special welcome and Ta wow to all the fellow Metis people, President Clem, the area directors and members of the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan.

As a proud Cree Metis from northern Saskatchewan on introduction of this Bill that was here the other day, and with the second reading today, I think it's an important historic occasion in this province and this country. To me I would say this:

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

It is to me a proud moment to be here with fellow Metis people and to be in this legislature to see and . . . (inaudible) . . . recognizing the accomplishments of Metis people and also putting forward the spirit of working together as we enter this new century.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:15)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**75th Anniversary of Royal Canadian Legion,
Melfort Branch No. 30**

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker and members of the legislature, please join me in congratulating the Royal Canadian Legion, Melfort Branch No. 30, on celebrating their 75th anniversary this year.

The Melfort branch of the Royal Canadian Legion has had an active history in our area. The members have worked hard to look after our veterans and their families. Through their visibility in the community and projects like the City Memorial Centre, the establishment of the Royal Canadian Legion Centre, the Remembrance Day programs and essay contests, they promote their organization and remind us all of the sacrifices of those who have served our country ensuring that their sacrifices are not in vain.

The members of the Melfort branch continue to contribute to our community through their involvement in numerous organizations and projects. Without their involvement, our quality of life would not be what it is today.

I am sure you will be honoured to join with me in congratulating the Royal Canadian Legion, Melfort branch, and in thanking them not only for their sacrifices of the past, but also for their continued contributions to our community and our country. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Land Protection in Northern Saskatchewan

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to tell the Assembly this morning that our provincial government is protecting three important and vast land areas in northern Saskatchewan through an interim designation under the representative area network program. The three sites north of Uranium City, north of Fond-du-Lac, and in the northeast corner of Saskatchewan will be protected on an interim basis for 10 years while more information about each site is gathered.

During that time, forest harvesting, mining, and new road development will be prohibited. The total amount of land protected, Mr. Speaker, will be over 600,000 hectares. These areas, adjacent to the Northwest Territories border, include subarctic tundra, important water bodies, widely varying terrain, and vegetation such as lichens that are important to migrating barren ground caribou.

Through the Athabasca Land Use Planning process community consultation will take place to gather more information about these sites, revise and finalize boundaries, and determine the best long-term management plan for each area.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the Athabasca Land Use Planning process will be co-chaired by the Prince Albert Grand Council and Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management.

This is an important step forward in protecting our province's bi-diversity, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Esterhazy High School Band and Choir Win Awards

Mr. Bjerneud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Esterhazy High School. The Esterhazy senior concert band attended a national Music Fest 2001 in Ottawa and when they were there they won a gold medal. They were acclaimed one of the best bands in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, a total of 350 bands, orchestras, jazz ensembles, concert and chamber choirs were at the competition. Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Esterhazy choir was presented with a bronze medal at the same competition.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the Esterhazy High School students and teachers, especially Kevin Hrycay, who was their music director. A job well done.

I would ask all members to join with me to congratulate these students and teachers in Esterhazy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Liberal News Releases

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Even though they have the largest caucus grant of any party in this House, it worries me just how much trouble the members opposite have keeping up to us Liberals.

They seem concerned that we never put out news releases. Apparently with all that staff and with the extra help from the member from North Battleford, they missed our May 30 news release.

Seeing as they can't keep up to our lonely Liberal media person or our news releases, I'll help them out, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The release says, quote: "Liberal caucus success has Sask Party sucking lemons." And goes on to say:

Liberals ran on a platform of approved funding for highways and in the last budget we have seen highway spending at an all-time high. Education funding was a priority in our platform. Those promises were also delivered on. And this follows making good on our promise to provide rebates for school taxes on farmland. Just to name a few of the great accomplishments of this coalition government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was shocked enough the Sask Party can't keep up to our one staffer; but even more shocked, they can't keep up to me either. In their May 30 release they say I'm a 35-year RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) veteran, adding 10 years to my 25 career and, most distressingly, to my age.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess I should be happy that I look that well preserved. Members opposite should know age

and experience always overcomes youth and ambition. So please, I already have advantage enough with them, I don't need any more; although everyone recognizes accuracy is not one of their strong points.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Railways in Birch Hills

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to rise this morning to inform our Hon. Assembly of an important event that took place and will continue to do so in the town of Birch Hills, a town that has decided to ignore this NDP (New Democratic Party) government's doom and gloom, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Rail cars loaded with Saskatchewan's finest wheat is once again moving west after a four-year hiatus, thanks in no small part to OmniTRAX and their subsidiary, Carleton Trail Railways. Officials from Carleton Trail Railways, local government dignitaries from the town of Birch Hills, and the rural municipality of Birch Hills were on hand on a warm April day to acknowledge the send-off of this memorable grain shipment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the commitment of leaders such as Wayne Boyle, mayor of Birch Hills; Earl Mickelson, reeve of the RM (rural municipality) of Birch Hills; and Stewart Adams of the Birch Hills Producer Car Group that Saskatchewan indeed has a future in agriculture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask that all members please join me in recognizing the Birch Hills community and Carleton Trail Railway on their remarkable resurgence in adapting to the marketing realities of this millennium.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Communications Network's 10th Anniversary

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On May 6, 1991 the Saskatchewan Communications Network broadcast network came to a television near you for the very first time.

The 10th anniversary of SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network) was marked appropriately at the Yorkton Short film and Video Festival last Friday when the minister responsible for SCN, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, brought congratulations on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan.

SCN's list of accomplishments during the last 10 years is long and varied and the valuable services provided by SCN to the people of Saskatchewan have multiplied over the past decade. SCN's broadcast network provides the people of Saskatchewan with unique programming choices such as distance education, education broadcasting, and satellite conferencing.

It has doubled its air time from the initial eight hours a day it started out with in 1991 to 16 hours a day now. The SCN training network now serves over 180 Saskatchewan communities, allowing people in rural and remote areas of the province to access credit programming in or near their homes.

SCN has contributed to both the cultural and educational sectors of this province, enriching Saskatchewan's communities. SCN's innovation, its creativity, and its vision are a true reflection of the spirit of Saskatchewan.

On behalf of all members of the Assembly, I would like to offer congratulations to SCN for its accomplishments . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Member's time has expired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Local Improvements in Indian Head

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to draw your attention to the beautiful community of Indian Head located about 50 kilometres east of Regina.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this town is in turmoil right now over the replacement of the curbs, gutters, and repaving of its streets. The town has to rely totally on its local tax base to fund this program. Many residents simply can't afford the increase in property tax for this program. I've talked to many residents who are either going to be losing their homes or their homes are already in foreclosure due to the increase in property tax.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago, this town went through the process of replacing its water infrastructure. It was a little bit ahead of its time. Unfortunately it did not qualify for any of the programs offered federally or provincially in the green programs that are coming out now. It had to fund the whole program out of its tax base there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately the town lost out again and received no money from this year's infrastructure program put out by Municipal Affairs.

The town is trying to grow and prosper, unfortunately with no help from this provincial government. I really feel and so do most of the town residents that money from this government in the form of grant would go much further to revitalizing rural Saskatchewan than any department with more bureaucrats.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskEnergy Rate Increase

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the big headline story in today's *Leader-Post* is that SaskEnergy rates are going up — and way up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But here's the headline in today's *Globe and Mail*, and I'm quoting, "Natural gas price slump eases concerns."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, *The Globe and Mail* is reporting, and I quote:

A dramatic slump in natural gas prices is raising hopes that consumers may not have to endure another winter of hefty heating bills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, *The Globe and Mail* is reporting that many Canadian natural gas providers are actually thinking about cutting rates. Meanwhile, the NDP is considering jacking SaskEnergy rates way up.

Why is the NDP nailing Saskatchewan families with a \$400-a-year increase when natural gas prices are falling?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, this is very interesting because I think it was about 10 days ago in this legislature that that member and that opposition were accusing this government of misleading people by saying that natural gas prices would be going down over the longer term. They said we were misleading people, Mr. Speaker.

Now this member gets up and exposes, he says, that natural gas prices are going down in the longer term.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's what we said in the budget, which we were ridiculed for in this House not more than 10 days ago. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this opposition has no credibility when it comes to numbers.

That member wants to know what we're going to do. I'll tell that member, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are not going to do what was done in the province of Alberta, which is to privatize and deregulate the natural gas facility leading to 100 per cent price increases in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No wonder they aren't contemplating privatizing SaskEnergy, Mr. Deputy Speaker; they're too busy with their plans to sell SaskTel as we found out not long ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's what they're doing. That's what they're doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance has just made an important admission. We were asking not long ago — the member for Canora-Pelly was asking — who was right? Was it the Minister of Energy who predicted price of gas to be \$7 a gigajoule or was it the Minister of Finance who said it would be 3.39.

The Minister of Finance just stood up and said he is right. If that's the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why is the government even considering a 40 per cent rate hike from SaskEnergy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What I would say to the people of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that SaskEnergy has been doing a good job of protecting people from higher energy prices, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's true that in the last year SaskEnergy gas prices went up 23 per cent, that's the cost that they pay for natural gas, Mr.

Deputy Speaker. In the neighbouring province of Alberta the increases were more like 100 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And what the people have to understand is that that member and his colleagues will get up and complain about anything. But what they would do is to sell the utilities to their rich friends, and the consumer would end up picking up the bill because that's what Tories do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And as long as we on this side of the House remain in government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will keep the natural gas prices in this province the lowest prices in North America, which they are, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's two important facts on privatization and deregulation.

Number one fact: the NDP government is considering the privatization of SaskTel.

And number two fact: that government has introduced a Bill in this session for the deregulation of the electrical industry, Mr. Speaker — his colleague, the minister for SaskPower.

(10:30)

Mr. Speaker, the article in *The Globe and Mail* quotes several natural gas distribution companies saying they hope to cut their rates in the next few months. Enbridge Consumers Gas of Calgary says, and I quote:

Lower gas prices would translate into smaller consumer bills this winter.

An Ontario's gas company's official says, and I quote:

If these prices stay, we will see a reduction in the price.

Meanwhile, SaskEnergy is asking for a 42 per cent rate hike. The panel will report today; the cabinet will consider it next week. Mr. Deputy Speaker, why is SaskEnergy jacking up the rates at the same time that most Canadian natural gas service providers are going to be dropping them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well of course, what the member from the opposition doesn't point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that up until the 1980s the people of the province, the people, owned their own natural gas fields, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The people owned the natural gas fields.

And you know what? The government of the 1980s, which that member worked for, Mr. Deputy Speaker, sold — sold — the natural gas reserves of the province to their rich friends, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And then the member gets up and wonders why we're having to buy natural gas on the world market.

Well I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'll tell the people of the province. Because that member and his colleagues sold off the gas that these . . . that the people of this province owned.

And now what they want is to get into power so that they can sell off the gas utility company. That's what they want to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we on this side of the House are not going to allow it to happen, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's easy, it's easy to see why the Minister of Finance is in full rant this morning. We've caught them in a bit of a . . . on the horns of a dilemma.

He just admitted today that his colleague, the Minister of SaskEnergy, was wrong in his projection for the price of natural gas, and that he was right all along and that this increase isn't needed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy said . . . made their application based on a projection for the period of June 1, 2001 to October 31st, 2002. Well today is June 1. Their projection was \$7. The price today is \$5 a gigajoule.

Further CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce), Mr. Deputy Speaker, is forecasting that the price will stay at \$5 a gigajoule for the next period of time. That is a difference of 40 per cent, which is about the same amount SaskEnergy is asking for in this increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Why is SaskEnergy basing its rate request on a \$7 a gigajoule forecast, when natural gas is sitting at \$5 a gigajoule? Why is the NDP government even considering gouging the families of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the member from Swift Current doesn't want to listen to what I have to say, he should listen to what one of his own constituents has to say yesterday in the Regina *Leader-Post*. That member . . . no, the people should note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that member worked closely with the Devine government in the 1980s. And Mr. Bev Currie writes this in the Regina *Leader-Post*:

. . . in the 1980s, the Grant Devine Progressive Conservative government sold Sask Power's reserves of 787 billion cubic feet of natural gas and 495,000 underdeveloped exploration acres to Sask Oil for a pittance.

They sold it off for a pittance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Then he goes and says, then the person sold it to Sask Oil:

Then he sold Sask Oil, again for much less than its real value. Devine also deregulated natural gas, allowing it to be marketed through distribution companies.

So first they deregulate it so we have to buy it on the world market. They privatize it. Then they ask us why we have to pay for it. What a bunch of phony-baloney hypocrites, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, you've heard a lot of stuff from the Minister of Finance this morning, but what you haven't heard is an explanation for why they're even considering this increase when he has admitted that SaskEnergy's projections are wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP family of Crown corporation thinks nothing of losing tens of millions of dollars on dot-coms and potatoes, but they appear to be willing to do nothing to help Saskatchewan families with a \$400-a-year hike in their gas bills.

The NDP can find \$65,000 for their wholly owned subsidiary, the Liberal caucus, which now can conduct their meetings on a bicycle built for two, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they don't have any time for Saskatchewan families and the price of gas.

They've got \$700 million in an election slush fund, but they appear unwilling to help Saskatchewan families with this gas price increase.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when is the NDP going to get its priorities straight? When will the NDP government put the interests of Saskatchewan families ahead of the interests of the family of Crown corporations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well this is how phony and ridiculous that opposition is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First they privatize the gas. Then they say, how come you have to pay for the gas? But then they say, you should have an independent rate review panel — not the government — saying what the fair price would be.

So the government sets up the independent rate review panel that they called for, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Then when the independent rate review panel that they called for says there should be a 42 per cent increase, then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they say don't listen to the independent rate review panel.

So it's very difficult to tell what the opposition wants, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When they're in office they sell off the gas and say it should be deregulated and privatized and everybody should pay the world price. Then when it happens they complain about it. Then they say there should be an independent rate review panel, then there is. When the panel reports, they don't like that either because they're just a bunch of opportunists who are hungry for power, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Resources for Health Care

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's June 1, and just so the Minister of Health doesn't feel left out, we thought we'd ask him a question or two.

Yesterday we learned that the Regina Health District will have a 124 beds closed through the summer months. But the situation in the pediatrics unit at the Yorkton health centre is also serious, according to staff there.

A few years ago this hospital had 32 pediatric beds — 32, Mr.

Deputy Speaker — but now this regional hospital, which serves a huge area of eastern Saskatchewan and western Manitoba, will have only 6 pediatric beds. The staff say they have enough people to care for the existing 8 beds even during summer months. But they don't understand why 2 more beds are being sacrificed in this department of that hospital.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the minister, why is the East Central Health District, under your government-appointed administrator, cutting beds for sick children?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, what we are doing as a government, and what we will continue to do, is work together with the local communities, the health districts, to provide the services that are needed in various areas.

What we know is that in the Yorkton area they have capable administrators who are working with the people there. They have had a number of challenges which they have been able to meet. And they are working to have a plan that will work for the longer term.

And what we have to do, as members of this legislature, is to work together to help create and set out what will allow us to sustain our health system over the long term.

And what I want that member to do, and all of the members of this House, is to be part of our discussion of the suggestions from the medicare commission so that we can continue to work and provide the best care that we can for all the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a health board out in the area too until that government saw fit to fire them too.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest concern in the region is that there's an excellent pediatrician who may leave the area if the pediatrics department is cut further. Dr. Datta is the only pediatrician in all of eastern Saskatchewan. He and the nurses in the department are frustrated with the limits placed on the level of care he can provide due to bed shortages and long waits for equipment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the acting CEO (chief executive officer) of the health district promised the community last fall that the pediatrics unit would try and maintain 12 beds but now he is specifically reducing pediatric beds that is not part of a summer slowdown.

Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that the retention of health care professionals is every bit as important as recruitment. How is cutting beds and support in pediatrics going to help retain the only pediatrician in East Central Health District?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, retention and recruitment of the health providers in our province is a very important issue and we are working on that issue in a number of different ways, including the increased training of people, but also working

together with the professional organizations — whether it's the medical association, the nursing associations — to see what we can do to make workplaces good places to be, and so that we can retain the kinds of specialists that we need across the province.

What happens is that we all have to work together to make sure that we have the resources but also the attitude about how we can provide and make a better health system.

I very much appreciate the member's questions opposite because I was really quite lonely during that whole month of May without a question until yesterday.

What I would say is, Mr. Member and your party, please join us on the Health Committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I just want to remind hon. members to direct the questions to the Chair and through the Chair, and the answers to the Chair and through the Chair.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that hospital, the Yorkton hospital, had 32 pediatric beds a short time ago. Now they're going to have six.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want answers. He's got questions; we want answers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of retaining staff is fundamental to maintaining the present level of health care available in the province. The nurses at the Yorkton Regional Health Centre say that they're losing colleagues left and right because of stress and extreme workload. They keep saying nurses will be difficult unless the government deals with the problem. They're leaving; day after day we're losing more.

Mr. Speaker, this is the second day in a row we're hearing from health care professionals that fear retaliation if they raise concerns about the problems in the system.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why are health care professionals in this province afraid of speaking out? If a health care worker were to come forward with public concerns about their health district or the system, what repercussions will they face?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to that latest line of questions by saying this: I very much appreciate the candour of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and all of the people there, of the CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) workers, of the SEIU (Service Employees' International Union), all of the different labour organizations — the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association). They have been very direct with me and with our colleagues to say; look we've got some work to do.

But they also have said we want to work together with you. And that is the key here — that we're going to work together to solve these problems. And I ask the member opposite, please be sure that your caucus is part of the Standing Committee on Health because that's an important part of what you should do. And I ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the members opposite

please join what we're doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the 1999 election campaign the NDP promised fair and improved access to health services, ensuring that services are available to people as close as possible to where they live.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how is reducing pediatric beds at the Yorkton Regional Health Centre improving access? Why should people with a sick child have to travel to Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Edmonton because there are no beds at the regional hospital in Yorkton? It's just another broken promise by that government. Where are the 500 new health care providers you promised? Where is the 30 per cent reduction in surgical waiting lists? Where are the preliminary evaluations in emergency in only 15 minutes?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: can you explain to all parents of young children . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. The last number of questions and last number of answers, the questions have not gone through the Chair and the answers have not gone to the Chair. So I remind hon. members on both sides please direct your comments to the Chair and through the Chair. Thank you very much.

(10:45)

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the minister. Can you explain to all the parents . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, can the minister explain to all parents of young children in the Yorkton area how reducing the number of pediatric beds at the regional health centre is fair and improved access to health services in Yorkton area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member opposite has raised the promises in the last election. And I know that the people of Saskatchewan are extremely satisfied with the fact that those members opposite are not in control of our health system. Because their promise was zero increase, and we don't know what effect that would have had on our whole system.

What we do know . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. I'm having difficulty hearing the answer. Would members please come to order so I can hear the answer. Order.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan want an accessible, publicly funded health care system. And what we are doing is working to provide a sustainable long-term accessible public health system.

And what I ask those members opposite to do is participate in the discussion on the Standing Committee on Health; also participate throughout the province as we work to build a very good system for all of the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, another issue that is causing stress for health care workers is actually the health districts' budgets.

Earlier in May the staff at St. Anthony's Hospital in North Valley Health District were told that the hospital may not be able to meet their upcoming payroll. In the end, it turned out that the hospital payroll was met by the health district, but not before there was considerable alarm among staff and the hospital board and the community.

Mr. Speaker, this raises questions about cash flow in the North Valley Health District — in fact all health districts in the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the minister. How is it a health district's cash flow is so diminished that a hospital's ability to meet payroll is in question?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the budget this spring we had the largest amount for Health ever in the history of the province — \$2.2 billion. This was an 11 per cent increase over last year's budget. And what this does show is that there's a commitment on this side to make sure this system works.

Now what the member opposite raises is the questions around employees and how they can get resources. Well one of the things that we know from the suggestions that they made in the last election is that they were looking at a zero increase, maybe an inflation increase. But what the effect of that would have been, would have been hundreds and maybe thousands of people laid off over the last two years. We have not had that. We're going to work together with the people in the system to make sure that we can provide the best health care possible for all of our citizens.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for all this new money they're putting into health care, we're not seeing any improvements out in rural Saskatchewan, especially in the Yorkton area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the board at St. Anthony's Hospital said they were led to believe that the health district had a cash-flow problem and they felt that they had to inform the staff at the hospital about the situation. The chairman of the health district board believes it was all a misunderstanding. But the hospital board is still concerned that the uncertainty of the health district's budget and cash flow is a problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the new fiscal year for health districts began April 1 and yet this district still has no approved budget for the operating year.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: how many provincial health districts have received budget approval to date? And specifically, when will the North Valley Health District receive their budget approval?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, all of the districts have received their allocations of money and they are working together with the department to work within those allocations.

But what I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that this member says that there are not improvements happening throughout the province. Well I know that I have been with the member from Melfort to go and see the new facility that's going to be built in that area. I've been in Weyburn, alone, to see the new facility that was going there. I've been out in Unity to look at one there. I've been in Carrot River.

And what I would say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we are continuing to build the health system of the province. We're going to continue to provide health services for people right across this province. But we have to do it together with both the workers and the communities because that's the only way. That's the Saskatchewan way. And that's how this government operates.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Before orders of the day, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cannington on a point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, during question period I'd like to draw your attention to some of the comments made by the Minister of Finance, and ask that he withdraw those remarks and apologize. Specifically for directing comments towards the member from Swift Current as being a phony hypocrite, Mr. Speaker, in referring to that member and to the members of the opposition.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I apologize and withdraw that remark.

The Deputy Speaker: — I thank the Minister of Finance for withdrawing and apologizing.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions 210 and 211. And note this . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, I'm afraid I cannot hear the Government Whip.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions nos. 210 and 211, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — Questions 210 and 211 are tabled.

SECOND READINGS

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Just before the minister takes her feet, I just want to remind all hon. members and in particular members of the Assembly and the galleries, that they are not to participate in debate. The minister is also not to make reference to the members in the gallery in debate. And that includes applause, that sort of thing.

Bill No. 42 — The Métis Act

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you can tell it is my very great pleasure today to rise in support of Bill 42, The Métis Act. Or as I have been taught to say in Cree . . .

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

The Métis Act.

I want to begin my remarks by acknowledging the very, very valuable contribution of the Metis people of Saskatchewan in helping this government develop this Act before us today. Thank you. Padama. Merci.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a vision for all the people of this province. A vision where Saskatchewan people enjoy prosperity and a high quality of life; where we all can seize the future with confidence and a spirit of innovation.

My work as a member of this Assembly and as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has shown me the depth of commitment and the resourcefulness that men and women within Saskatchewan's Aboriginal community have for the fulfillment of that vision for themselves, for their families, and for their communities. I believe this observation is shared by all of us in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, The Métis Act helps the members of the Metis community move a step closer to realizing that vision of a future filled with confidence, pride, and prosperity. I am proud of this piece of legislation and proud to be speaking today about such a forward-looking initiative.

The Métis Act focuses on three principle areas. I would like to speak to each of these areas in turn.

First, The Métis Act defines the breadth and richness of the historic and contemporary cultural and economic contributions Metis people have made and will continue to make to the development of prosperity of our province and our nation.

Again in the words that I have been taught by a very proud Metis from the northwest of Saskatchewan.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Michif.)

They've given a lot to this province.

Metis people have a unique and proud history in Canada and in Saskatchewan. This government recognizes and respects the perspective that Metis individuals have brought to every sector to our society for hundreds of years. We speak with pride of the richness of diversity in our province, and of our respect for the

unique contributions each of us can offer to our way of life.

The Métis Act give us an historic opportunity to celebrate the unique contributions of a community of people who help define Canada and its West.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — The Metis people have a rich and enduring history and this government illustrates its respect for the Metis history through this legislation. Mr. Speaker, I was taught a bit of Michif by a wonderful woman, Lavone Kirklon, who is the mother of a feisty and humorous proud Metis women in my office, Virginia Healey, and this is what she taught me.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Michif.)

Our government respects the Metis.

The Métis Act gives our children and all of us an opportunity to learn about the breadth of Metis contributions. We acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of Metis communities and the traditional ways of life. Languages, including Michif, are a crucial element of Metis culture, and an invaluable gift to Canada's culture and heritage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all recognize some of the well-known and distinctive legacies of Metis culture, including the Metis flag, the Metis sash, the Red River cart, the fiddle, and the Red River jig. Let's seize the opportunity given to us through The Métis Act to help teach our children the significance of these cultural symbols.

Saskatchewan is fortunate to have particularly strong historic ties with the Metis community. The 1885 resistance at Batoche is perhaps the most well-known moment of Metis history, but the proud Metis past in Saskatchewan stretches back to the 18th century with the historic involvement of the Metis in the northwest fur trade.

The Métis Act also pays tribute to the honourable and invaluable service of Metis veterans during the two World Wars, the Korean War, and in many, many peacekeeping missions around the world.

As the daughter of a World War II veteran, I salute and respect the Metis veterans.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(11:00)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — The second major portion of The Métis Act establishes a unique body, The Metis Nation — Saskatchewan Secretariat Inc., as a corporate entity.

The Act sets out a series of responsibilities, reporting requirements, and processes for the conduct of the secretariat's operations. The secretariat is the administrative body by which the policies and programs of the MNS (Metis Nation — Saskatchewan) are to be carried out and administered.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to the specific

provisions contained in this legislation related to the accountability of the MNS to its members. Accountability requirements as we all know are important. The specific provisions included in the Act provide a solid foundation for the MNS to maintain effective systems of accountability. The Métis Act gives the Metis Nation — Saskatchewan the authority to conduct its business in a new business environment, freed from the restrictions imposed upon the organization under The Non-profit Corporations Act, 1995.

With responsibility . . . with authority comes responsibility and this government has ensured through this legislation that the MNS will act in the best interests of its members. The Métis Act allows any Metis person of Saskatchewan access to any bylaws, minutes of meetings and resolutions, a list of directors, all committees of the corporation, notices, and the audited financial statements.

The Act also requires that the corporation appoint a qualified auditor to conduct, at a minimum, an annual audit of the records, accounts, and financial statements of the corporation.

The Act recognizes the importance of ensuring that effective accountability processes are in place. Inclusion of these measures ensures a firm foundation for both the province of Saskatchewan and the Metis Nation — Saskatchewan as we move forward toward the realization of our shared vision for this province.

The third and final section of the Act identifies a mechanism to address practical, non-rights-based issues and enhanced opportunities important to Metis people. These include such issues as land, harvesting, capacity building, and governance.

In relation to land, the Saskatchewan government and the Metis nation agreed to co-operate in identifying opportunities for Metis access to lands and for developing economic opportunities for Metis people with respect to land-based activities such as farming, forestry, and mining. The parties also agree to identify and develop appropriate cultural initiatives related to the traditional Metis gathering places.

In relation to harvesting, the two parties, Saskatchewan and the MNS, agree to work to improve economic development and harvesting opportunities consistent with sustainable management practices for Metis people in Saskatchewan's resource and other sectors. The parties also agree to work toward greater Metis involvement in resource management and economic development related decisions.

In relation to capacity building, the parties agree to work toward the devolution of programs and services to Metis communities and Metis institutions. Together, we will undertake preparatory and planning work leading to the development of a framework for the devolution that will be responsive to the interests of Metis people, effective and accountable.

In relation to governance, the parties agree to continue building Metis capacity for governance of Metis communities and Metis institutions. This Made in Saskatchewan approach will respect federal and provincial jurisdiction and will build on existing and successful models and experiences, such as the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Dumont Technical Institute, and the Metis

Addictions Council.

These issues are outlined in a memorandum of understanding that accompanies the legislation and that will be implemented through the Metis Nation Saskatchewan/Government of Saskatchewan Bilateral Process Agreement that was signed in 1993.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has a proud history of developing successful sustainable solutions through negotiation. This bilateral process, already in place, is an excellent example of a trusted, reliable, effective solution that has already proven its worth to the people of this province.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through The Métis Act, the province of Saskatchewan is confirming its support and respect for Metis people. It acknowledges the historic and ongoing contributions the Metis people have made to the economic, social, and cultural fabric of Saskatchewan. It includes specific provisions that provide a solid foundation for the MNS to maintain effective systems of accountability.

And finally, it articulates the high priority this government places on developing and sustaining sound working relationships with key communities of people in the province.

An effective government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, values its relationships and understands the vital role that constructive, respectful relationships fulfill.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Metis community and also the contributions of past ministers, and the contributions of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, Justice, and Northern Affairs in developing this Act.

Once again, as I have been taught to say in Michif.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Michif.)

Let's keep working together.

The Métis Act moves us a step closer to realizing our shared future, our vision of what Saskatchewan can become.

I will conclude with a favourite quote from Eleanor Roosevelt. She said, many years ago:

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to this legislation today, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move second reading of Bill No. 42, The Métis Act.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

The Métis Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it is indeed an honour for me to join in this debate after the fine

address by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. As a former minister, I'm honoured to have some small role in this and am pleased to participate in this debate.

It is a good day for Saskatchewan, although this is not ground-breaking — the province of Alberta introduced a similar Act many years ago. So fortunately we are now following this example and making formal recognition of the contributions that the Metis have made to our history, and even more important, the contributions they are and will make to our shared future.

As the minister has said, the Metis people arose at the time of the fur trade, and they were the bridge people who crossed the continent, canoed our rivers, did the voyages, and the discoveries, and built the economy, the first economy of Western Canada, as they were the people who bridged the new Europeans and the First Nations.

Their language of course, the Michif that the minister was attempting, is a mixture I understand of Cree verbs and French nouns, which is a metaphor for the Metis Nation itself.

The first economy of Western Canada was built on the Metis people and the opening of this continent was in very large measure due to the work of the Metis. Unfortunately after the defeats of the Red River and Batoche, there followed 100 years of marginalization.

We know that the suppression of the First Nations people has become a blot on our nation's history. What is less well known is that the fate of the Metis was, if anything, even more tragic and more scandalous. The First Nations were herded onto reserves. The Metis, not even having reservations, became known as the road allowance people.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier said at the time of the uprising at Batoche that had he been a Metis at the Saskatchewan, he would have taken up arms against the Government of Canada.

Louis Riel predicted, shortly before his death, that 100 years of shame and defeat would follow the events of Batoche. Sadly, that prophecy came true. But happily, that century of defeat is now past us.

Today there is a rebirth of Metis pride and Metis culture and Metis innovation. This must be a very exciting time to be a young Metis. But it is also important for those of us who are not Metis to join in this celebration and to be supportive of the rebirth which is presently going on in our province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, last year at the Back to Batoche celebrations when I announced the commitment of the government to The Métis Act, I also announced the naming of Louis Riel Trail.

I had thought that we as Canadians were people who didn't know or care about our history. That is something that is often said about us. Well in the ensuing days and the radio talk shows throughout our province, some people phoned in who evidently care very much about our history, and some quite salty remarks were made about naming roads after traitors. It tells me we still have a long way to go and that history can still divide, and emotions can still divide. It is my hope that this Act will bring

us together.

It also somewhat baffled me, Mr. Speaker, in that about the same time I went to Moose Jaw and found that that community is attempting to build a tourist industry around a gangster from the 1920s who may or may not have ever visited that community. And as far as I'm aware, no one has ever complained about the memorialization of Al Capone in Moose Jaw.

Well Louis Riel is one of the pivotal figures of Western Canada. He is recognized as the father of Manitoba and he remains a compelling figure in the history of this province as well, and I think it is fitting and appropriate that he should take his place among the pioneer figures of Western Canada and of Saskatchewan.

There are other issues though besides the renaming of the Louis Riel Trail that we look forward to this summer. There are more substantive issues. There is the issue of the Green Lake farms that this government committed many years ago to, as a Metis land base. I think we look forward to some work being done on that and some movement finally being done on the issue of a land base.

And specifically there is a long-standing injustice over the Primrose Air Weapons Range, and that certainly requires work on the part of the federal government as well. A fair settlement has been reached with the First Nations communities who were displaced by Primrose, and it is tragic that a similar agreement has not been reached to give fair compensation to the Metis who were displaced.

(11:15)

This is an ongoing shame and it is my hope that with this Act we will move on some of the substantive issues as well.

Symbolic issues are important and I support the government in the symbolism of the Metis recognition Act. But I am sure that the minister and others will join with me in saying, even more important than the symbolism is what flows from it — a new and better future, the training for Metis young people, their entry and full participation in the economy of our province.

May I say, Mr. Speaker, that the Metis have certainly been full participants in the politics of this province. I think most members were a little bit taken back in their seats when one of the Metis members of this legislature a few years ago piled up 92 per cent in an election, proving that the Metis have been very successful vote-getters.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that sent some people scurrying to the history books and found out that wasn't a record. Some friends of mine in North Battleford are descendants of Joe Nolin, who actually did better than the present member for Athabasca.

He represented the entire north of Saskatchewan. He got 96 per cent and his family tells me that the way he did that was his winters were spent in Regina attending sessions here and come summer he would get in his canoe, which was the only way around his constituency in those days, and he would paddle

from settlement to settlement through the entire summer, visiting his constituents and 96 per cent of them appreciated it. He was, needless to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a Liberal.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's important to celebrate our history with all its misfortunes and its missteps and its miscues, but also with its successes. But it's even more important to celebrate our future — our shared future — a future of which the Metis will be a proud part.

And I want to take this opportunity to wish all members of the Metis Nation in Saskatchewan the very best on this historic day for them when they are shedding off the century which followed Batoche. They are looking forward to a new and brighter future. We celebrate that with them. We look forward to that new and brighter future because we know the social and economic health of Metis people is the social and economic health of us all.

And with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that there are many other members anxious to participate in this debate. However, at this time I am going to move that this debate be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 44 — The Prairie and Forest Fires Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today for the second reading of the legislation creating a forest fire contingency fund, The Prairie and Forest Fires Amendment Act, 2001.

As a Northerner, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as someone who once worked in the forest fire program, I have seen tremendous improvements in the fire program in particular since the 1995 fire season. Improvements in the fire program since 1995 have been absolutely stunning, particularly in the preparedness system which increases fire suppression resources when hazards arise, even when a fire source has not been identified, allows for a much quicker response time when a fire does start.

In 1995, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were five weeks of high-to-extreme hazards. There were 650 fires, while a ten-year average is 680. One million hectares burned in southern-full-response zones. About \$85 million was spent on fire suppression. There was 16 evacuations involving 2,500 people. There were 20 road closures. There was 48 fire starts in one single day, which resulted in 13 large-escaped fires.

In 1998, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were 20 weeks of high to extreme hazards. There was a record of 1,266 forest fires. Similar spending in 1995, but only 400,000 hectares were burned in the southern-full-response zone. There were 17 evacuations but only involving 650 people this time. There was 225 fires dealt with in three days and no major escape fires.

Last year while there was only 419 fires, the fire program continued its high level of performance by minimizing the number of large-escape fires to just five and reducing the area burned to just 5,000 hectares out of almost 20 million hectares that are intensively protected.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation that I'm introducing to create a Forest Fire Contingency Fund will build on the province's record of excellence in forest fire management. In addition to maintaining the preparedness system and other operational improvements made to Saskatchewan's fire program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the new fund will bring more stability to the forest fire budgeting process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the main purpose of the fund is to pay expenditures relating to large-escaped fires, which can be responsible for 60 to 80 per cent of the total fire management costs in difficult fire years and 95 per cent of the area burned.

The level of costs associated with large fires is often unpredictable because of uncontrollable factors, such as weather conditions, terrain, and moisture in the fuel.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, establishing a fund separating the cost of large fire suppression from other fire program costs will result in more stable government spending projections, reducing the chance that funding for priority areas of the economy, health care, education, and agriculture will need to be redirected during bad fire seasons.

The fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will also promote accountability for the fire program, both in terms of escaped fires, and their costs. The fund will increase the transparency of how fire suppression costs are being allocated. The Provincial Auditor will audit this program to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are being used wisely.

Mr. Speaker, the fund will allow for timely payments of suppliers without the need for SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) to seek additional funding through the special warrant, or reallocating funding within the department in order to payment.

For all of these good reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the fact that protecting communities and valuable forest resources from wildfire benefits the provincial economy and increases employment opportunities for Northerners and other Saskatchewan residents.

I now move second reading of The Prairie and Forest Fires Amendment Act, 2001.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege to join into the debate on Bill No. 44, The Prairie and Forest Fires Amendment Act regarding a new fund, by the sounds of it, to I guess to more stabilize the payment as the minister had spoke about regarding the forest fire problem.

It's interesting that it's coming about this year and this Bill is being introduced this year, as this year it seems to be quite a problem especially to the west and I believe that our northern region is very, very dry also. Talking to a number of our MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from the northern part of the province, and they're speaking how not only the drought has affected the agriculture sector along the west side and moving east as we're lacking rain, I guess, but it also covers a large portion of the North and how tinder dry that is up there. You

know, it just takes a flash of lightening or some careless use of smoke, cigarettes or combustibles to create some large problems.

Now this Bill looks on the surface as if it's just creating another fund that money will go in that in the need will then be paid out for runaway fires or escaped fires — large-escape fires, I guess, is what it deals with. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think when we go through this Bill we look at it; on surface it looks to make some sense. We question that the money wouldn't just go into the forest firefighting fund and not just have to create a new fund.

But those are some of the questions we want to be asking of parties that this will be affecting — interested parties — regarding that. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I will move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 44, The Prairie and Forest Fires Amendment Act.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 45 — The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 2001.

And, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce amendments to The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act to implement policy decisions made and announced in June of 2000. Those policy decisions were based on a report regarding a new funding distribution strategy for the Associated Entities Fund or AEF prepared by the then Department of Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing.

The AEF, Mr. Speaker, is a fund established by the government to distribute a portion of gaming profits to benefit Saskatchewan people and communities. For example, the AEF provides up to 2 million per year for annual and summer grants in support of community programs and services targeted towards vulnerable children, youth, and families.

The AEF provides funding for the construction and renovation of community cultural facilities. The AEF provides funding to selected exhibition associations to help mitigate the reductions in local revenue the casino operations might cause. And the AEF provides up to 1.5 million over the next two years for problem gambling prevention initiatives.

Some of the decisions regarding the distribution of AEF funding cannot be implemented without amendments to the Act.

And now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to review the key components of this Bill.

In its present state, a percentage of funds paid into the AEF are allocated for the Metis economic development. The funds are paid to the Clarence Campeau Development Fund, or CCDF, and are then distributed and managed in accordance with the terms and conditions of the agreement between the Metis Society of Saskatchewan and the province.

Mr. Speaker, government has negotiated with the Metis Society in preparing these amendments and has agreed to the creation of a Metis development fund separate from the AEF, and has further committed to pay to that fund the amount of 2 million in each of the three fiscal years ending with the 2002-03 fiscal year.

It's very important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the provisions that will accomplish this were negotiated and are being presented to the legislature today with the full support of that organization.

In addition to providing Saskatchewan Metis people with a stable source of funding for economic development, this new arrangement also demonstrates our government's commitment to working co-operatively in order to achieve a greater degree of prosperity for all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, as you will note, this Bill also sets out in detail the terms and conditions for the establishment of the new Metis development fund and provides for a very significant degree of transparency and accountability, including full access to the records by the Provincial Auditor.

These provisions were also developed with the input and full co-operation of the Metis Society.

Mr. Speaker, the report on a distribution strategy for the AEF also identified a number of improvements to be made to the existing administration of the AEF. The name Associated Entities Fund itself does not adequately identify the purposes for which the fund was created and has little or no significance to the recipients.

In addition, there was a concern that the present composition of the board does not provide adequate representation.

Several issues have arisen regarding existing adjudication processes for the distribution of the community component of the fund, including its overall effectiveness and objectivity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as the legislation currently reads, the requirements for preparing the financial statements for the AEF are not consistent with The Tabling of Documents Act, 1991.

(11:30)

So in response to all of these issues, Mr. Speaker, we are proposing amendments that will change the name of the Associated Entities Fund to the Community Initiatives Fund; increase the number of members on the Community Initiatives Fund board of trustees from six to eight; confirm that the monies being paid to the MDF (Metis Development Fund) comprise a portion of the 25 per cent of gaming proceeds allocated to the Community Initiatives Fund; make the reporting requirements for the Community Initiatives Fund consistent with The Tabling of Documents Act, 1991; and to give the Lieutenant Governor in general authority to make regulations for the purposes of the Community Initiatives Fund to improve the effectiveness and transparency of the adjudication and decision-making processes for money granted from the Community Initiatives Fund.

Mr. Speaker, we believe each of the amendments will help to

improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the newly named Community Initiatives Fund, and will help to ensure that all Saskatchewan residents continue to benefit from the proceeds of gaming activity in our province.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I believe these amendments are in the best interests of all the people of Saskatchewan and should be supported by all the members of the legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of this Bill, The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 2001.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today on this particular Bill, especially after a couple of weeks where Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming and the gaming industry have been in the news quite a bit, Mr. Speaker.

This goes a long ways, Mr. Speaker, in changing the original Act in how the funds were distributed, dealing with liquor and gaming revenues, Mr. Speaker, and those revenues that are controlled by . . . or overseen by the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation, Mr. Speaker.

There are new stakeholders being included into those revenues . . .

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

Mr. Huyghebaert: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Cannington for interrupting him but the visitors we have in the east gallery are on a very tight schedule, and I would like to introduce them to you and through you to the Assembly.

There are 26 grade 5 and 6 students from the Christ the King School in Shaunavon, accompanied with their teachers, Mrs. Weiseth and Ms. White. And also I'd like to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the member from Regina Dewdney also attended Christ the King School. He said he graduated from grade 6 there and it was the toughest three years of his life.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask you and all members to join me in welcoming the group from Shaunavon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 45 — The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 2001 (continued)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this Act brings a number of new stakeholders

into the revenue stream that this Bill represents, Mr. Speaker. And it will be interesting to determine how the new stakeholders and the previous stakeholders will interact and what the concerns might arise from that, Mr. Speaker.

I guess some of the questions that need to be asked dealing with this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, is how the distribution of the funds will be accomplished? Will it be the fixed term amount of money or will it be a percentage of the revenues that pass through the Associated Entities Fund or now to be changed to the Community Initiatives Fund, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I note that in the Bill that the minister has laid out that a fixed amount of funds will be distributed for a three-year period commencing in the year 2000 and ending in the year 2003.

So part of these funds, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be distributed retroactively, which is not a normal course of events, Mr. Speaker, but certainly not unheard of in dealing with this particular government; that they would either make things retroactive or deem them to have or not have happened, as the case may be, to suit their purposes, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just wondering, Mr. Speaker, dealing with these funds, particularly on the fixed amounts, what was the criteria in establishing \$2 million as the appropriate amount of money to be designated to the Metis fund, Mr. Speaker?

And further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it says that the minister shall pay into the fund any additional amount directed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, but it doesn't describe any criteria why additional funds may be necessary, Mr. Speaker, or on what basis they might be distributed, what would the reasons be? Simply left up to the minister's discretion, Mr. Speaker, whether or not any additional funds would be provided.

And we have to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that the funds coming through the Community Initiatives Fund come from all the people of Saskatchewan, including the Metis people of this province. And I'm sure that they are as concerned about accountability of their tax dollars as anyone else in this province is, Mr. Speaker, and are as concerned about the criteria by which these funds are being distributed to all of the stakeholders, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Accountability is very important and a good portion of this Act deals with accountability, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to see that the minister has included in that, that the Provincial Auditor has a role to play in this. Because we saw, Mr. Speaker, on the First Nations Fund, that the government missed that in the Act. That the First Nations Fund was not being audited by the Provincial Auditor, even though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Provincial Auditor was asking and has been asking for a number of years that he be allowed to do so. Stating that these are funds that are provincial government funds, therefore they belong to the Crown and it's his duty, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to audit all funds expended by the Crown within the province of Saskatchewan and outside that go through the Consolidated Fund, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the Community Initiatives Fund, it talks about the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations or

the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, but it doesn't deal with specifically the First Nations Fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the accountability in that particular area which has been a concern in the past, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the Provincial Auditor stating that he needs to have access to do accounting to do the audit in that particular area, Mr. Speaker.

And I would certainly encourage the minister if it hasn't happened already, to ensure that that does happen, that the Provincial Auditor will be auditing the First Nations Fund, Mr. Speaker.

Because there are many stakeholder groups that need to be consulted in how this will impact on them, Mr. Speaker — how these funds will be distributed, what the criteria is for that distribution — that we need to be able to contact, Mr. Speaker, and discuss this with them, therefore I would move that we adjourn debate at this time.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 22

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker — getting a little accent in there. Yes indeed I do live in the southern end of the province and therefore once in a while a little Cajun slips into my accent, Mr. Speaker, as I do indeed have relatives that live in Louisiana.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) is a quasi-government agency that has a lot to do with the property taxes in this province, Mr. Speaker. SAMA has been designated to outline the process and the final assessment of all properties in this province for the purposes of setting the property tax rate, Mr. Speaker.

And they go through various machinations to determine what the value is. There's a great deal of concern, Mr. Speaker, though about that entire process as there seems to be some inconsistencies across the province when it comes to assessing the same kinds of properties — that in one area you may have a property assessed at X and in another area it may be assessed as Y.

In particular, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen a huge rise in the assessment of some types of properties, particularly hotels, Mr. Speaker. And this has caused a great deal of concern for those hotel owners because their taxes may have doubled, they may have tripled, they may have gone up five times as much, Mr. Speaker. And this is very arbitrary. They can appeal but because of the way SAMA has established the assessment values, it's extremely difficult for them to get any changes made, Mr. Speaker.

This needs to be dealt with to equalize and to make fair the payment of property taxes. The value of property taxes, Mr. Speaker, is directly related to the assessments. And I know that the members opposite have a great deal of difficulty in understanding that, Mr. Speaker. They think the entire concept of property taxes is based on the mill rate. Well in part it's based on the mill rate, Mr. Speaker, but the mill rate tax collection is based on the assessed value of the property.

Now I believe that the members opposite are having a great deal of difficulty understanding this concept, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after listening to the member from Regina Qu'Appelle in his statements the other day, stating categorically that nothing had changed because the mill rate was the same.

Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed something had changed. The amount of taxes that the property owners were paying had increased, even though the mill rate had remained the same. The reason was the assessment had changed, Mr. Speaker.

Unless perhaps it is that the members opposite are simply trying to ignore that fact, Mr. Speaker, because they want to say the mill rate is the same; you know, we're doing such a good job the mill rate remained the same.

But, Mr. Speaker, the assessment has gone up and the amount of taxes being collected has increased.

So for the individual property taxpayer, they don't care specifically what the mill rate is, they don't care specifically what the assessment is — they care about the number of dollars they pay on property taxes at the end of the day.

And the members opposite are completely ignoring that fact, Mr. Speaker, and what's happened because of the rules that SAMA has brought in place, it's not working fairly. There has been huge shifts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in particular in the last year, shifts to such entities as the hotels.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, SAMA needs to seriously review how it does its assessments, how it deals with properties, how it deals with evaluating properties across this province. We need to move, Mr. Deputy Speaker, more towards a line that is related to the revenues that those properties can generate because market values . . . SAMA doesn't seem to be following them, at least not very closely. As properties rise and fall in the marketplace, you may be tied very much to a high market tidewater at a certain point for an extended period of time, which in no way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, relates to the revenue-generating capacity of that property.

So we need to do some very serious reviewing of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, to determine whether or not it's going to reflect the needs of the people of this province; whether the new SAMA regulations will provide for the people of Saskatchewan a fair and level playing ground for the payment of property taxes. Not only, Mr. Speaker, between the various corners of this province, they need to be fair and level with our neighbouring jurisdictions. Because when a company or a business or even an individual are looking to purchase a home, they take a look at all of the issues that affect their ability to pay, Mr. Speaker. Their ability to profit and their ability to pay.

And property taxes is one of those issues. That's why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the last number of years there was some concern about the property tax issues between White City and Regina, because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the playing field was not level. Therefore a good number of citizens made the determination that for property tax purposes, it was beneficial for them to reside in White City rather than some of the other neighbouring communities including the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

(11:45)

On a larger sense, Mr. Deputy Speaker, companies make that same evaluation. What are the property tax costs doing to business in Saskatchewan versus doing business in Alberta versus doing business in Manitoba or in North Dakota and Montana, Mr. Speaker? All other things being equal, those are part of the considerations.

So on this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, we need to take a very serious look at how this Act is going to impact on property taxpayers.

Certainly it has an impact on SAMA, but the really important question is, is how is SAMA going to impact on the property taxpayers of this province? Is it going to be done in a fair and accurate manner, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or is it going to again negatively impact certain areas of our economy such as what just happened to the hotel industry?

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, to give the stakeholders of this province and the opposition time to discuss with them the changes that are being proposed on SAMA, I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 24

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

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise in the House today to speak to the many and varied amendments contained in Bill No. 24, a Bill that attempts to address the concerns of municipal councils throughout Saskatchewan.

One of the main thrusts of this Bill is dealing with the voluntary amalgamation of municipalities. I'm glad to see that the members opposite are admitting the voluntary joining of neighbouring municipalities in the spirit of co-operation is the only direction to go for in the future of rural Saskatchewan, not forced like they've tried in the past.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the residents of this province are more than up to the challenge of getting together to save money and become more efficient. There's never been any doubt about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It took a long time for this government to see the light and use a common-sense approach rather than the top-down approach that they favour so highly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the constituency of Arm River there's a good example of how municipal government amalgamation process works. The RMs of Arm River and the RMs of Willner have had joint offices for decades now and have worked very well. They share the costs of the office, including the wages of a competent administrator who looks after both rural municipalities.

Over the years they have discussed the possibility of joining their two municipalities with an eye toward saving costs on road maintenance equipment, operation of a storage and repair shop, and many other associated costs. Of course the stumbling block in all of this has been the lack of a vision within The Urban Municipality Act to allow for such a joining of municipal government.

I firmly believe that these two local governments could serve as a good, future example of how the process can be done, especially in the light of how close they are to actually beginning the process. I know of at least one village in my constituency that is leaning towards amalgamating with a rural municipality . . . municipal government in hopes of saving money and allowing the village a clear say as how it is to be done is good. With these kinds of ideas being considered by local councils, the will is there and all it needs is due process to proceed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the amendments proposed in this Bill, it looks like there are aspects of it that will help local governments to begin the voluntary process of amalgamation. But we must keep a watchful eye on this government to ensure that these provisions are exactly what they appear to be.

People in rural Saskatchewan are slightly suspicious when they see that the same government, which only months ago were leaning in the area of forced amalgamation in light of the Garcea report which recommended a drastic cut in the number of municipalities in Saskatchewan, now placing amendments on the Act which adhere directly to concerns — and I mean angry concerns — of the people out there in Saskatchewan.

I can recall going to a meeting in Outlook, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where there were over 500 constituents at it when Mr. Garcea was presenting his report, and everybody that got up and spoke on it was against forced amalgamation in that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the amalgamation amendment makes it possible now, I see, for a village of less than a hundred people to be dissolved by ministerial order as opposed to the old way of needing an order of council provided by the cabinet. In my constituency, many villages fall into that category so it affects many of them.

One good thing is it can streamline the order for the ones that want to be done. The only thing that worries me and worries mayors that have talked about this is that maybe the minister will make it . . . will do it in order of council . . . or will do it basically just with a stroke of a pen, just saying all towns under a hundred have to be done without consulting with it. And that's what the towns are asking for. And that's just the questions that have been raised to me. I see the minister shaking his head, which is good.

But these are concerns that were raised when I passed the Bill out to them. So I said I will pass them on to make sure that before any of this happens, that they are consulted; that it is their wish that they want to go into the municipality — that they're not forced.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe the amendments also include a process by which two or more municipalities may hold discussions previous to any amalgamation attempt. Of course in the negotiation process it has to be considered when we look at all the aspects of amalgamation, how it effects the taxpayers and the local governments involved.

We would hope that in this process of discussion, the government has allowed each participant more than ample time by which they can begin the process of amalgamation in the most co-operative way possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, also the municipalities now have the ability to divide into wards for electoral purposes by way of an appointed municipal wards commission.

I'm a bit concerned about the ward boundaries review process. This allows up to nine years between reviews or when new land is added to the municipality. Perhaps we should be including a process by which an interim review can be conducted if ward boundaries become an issue of immediate concern. I'm not sure how accountable the commission would be by only being held to an ad in the newspaper rather than filing a report with the minister.

There's no doubt that streamlining the amalgamation process and its results are important. But at the end of the day, there still must remain accountability to the taxpayers. And while the entire thrust of these amendments is to place more control in the hands of the local government so they can determine their own future, ultimately, it is the provincial government of the day that the people look to, to ensure that these new rules and regulations are followed correctly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill goes on to talk about the authority that municipal councils will be given to establish community advisory committees. Committees that will be able to provide input into the new amalgamated council from individual communities within the affected municipalities.

It is interesting to note that this government is more than willing to allow this process within local governments. But on the issue of health care in Saskatchewan such a committee is rare and, in most cases, ignored. If the members opposite stand by the whole idea — advisory committees made up of average citizens — then perhaps they should look at this idea on the broader scale.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, also this Act gives municipalities the authority to limit the number of business licences granted in a certain class while limiting the number of similar businesses as well as deciding how much they will charge for these licences.

Again some concerns have been raised to me about government at any level randomly deciding the fate of a businessman or businessperson or an entrepreneur whose risk is his own, and who ultimately may refuse an opportunity to develop a thriving

business based on the mood of a council on that particular day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this sounds an awful like, like a present government policy of picking winners and losers in our economy and investing, you know, large sums of money. And I won't even go into the ventures; they've been listed here numerous times.

As well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, municipalities now have the right to levy special purpose taxes specified in a reconstruction agreement. I would guess, as long as these special purpose taxes are respected and are just taxes for special purposes, then most would agree that this would form part of any reconstruction agreement.

But I would be suspicious of any new form of taxation that this present government would suggest because we all know this government knows how to tax people and, indeed, they're very good at it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's also a dispute resolution contained in this Act which is supposed to settle inner municipal disputes in regards to public utility services from one municipality to another. Previously, the minister was required to settle such disputes. Now if we have two sides in a dispute which can look at appointing . . . and if further needed, it can be settled by the Saskatchewan Municipal Board.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, indeed, there are times when utility services can't come into question, and it's up to councils and it can put a strain on future relations between the two councils.

And there are a few other amendments in here that I know some of my other members are willing to look at. So with that, I will move to adjourn debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 23

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

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege to join in on Bill No. 23, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act.

It's good to see the Act come forward as there is a number of Acts regarding municipal legislation. And after going through the firestorm that we went through last year at about this time regarding amalgamation — and some people would coin it as forced amalgamation, I may be one of them — when it was talking about going down to a certain amount of municipalities. And some people would say that that wouldn't be forced but, when you set up how many municipalities there are going to be, unless they were all voluntarily going to jump into that map, it really did look like forced amalgamation.

So I do give the government credit for coming in and, I guess maybe, first of all, taking a step back from that and looking at some legislation changes that will help foster amalgamation

both in urban/urban to urban/rural, rural/rural and that's what a number of these Bills are talking about.

This one from rural to rural is very important. I've talked to a number of RMs that have joined services. And we've probably talked about it before, but a number of RMs that have joined services, they share administrators; they share equipment; they've done everything except the formal joining of the RMs.

And this Bill talks about municipal districts. In other words, joining them into districts which, you know, that was one of the, I guess, the hard parts to understand what was going on last year with the minister at that time. And it should be noted, duly noted, that since that minister was no longer with Municipal Affairs, we've gone through two other ministers.

So it's been a very tough time in the last year for municipalities to deal with this subject, because not only have they had to deal with the emotions of the subject, they've also had to go through three different municipal ministers, and so the continuity just probably . . . has been very, very difficult.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was talking about how they've joined, one of the . . . probably the most difficult things that I've heard from a number of the municipalities — and I know of a couple of resort villages that are going through the process — is the governance. It's how they set that all up. This Bill just touches on it a little bit, and I know it's touched in other Bills. But there are some real concerns with that.

There are a couple of concerns with this Bill, Bill No. 23, regarding the clarity of some of the language that is used. Some of the clauses are worded very unclearly and it makes it very difficult for municipalities. And even on our side of the House, we had one member read it one way and another member read it the other way as far as voting and whether they can vote in more than one district, once the districts are formed, even though they have land in two or three districts.

So there's some of those issues that we would need clarification on as well as some of the RMs and ratepayers in those RMs would need clarification on also.

One other concern that has been raised is section 362 which discusses the RM's ability to provide discounts to those who pay their taxes promptly. And I know myself, as a landowner in the RM of Lajord, when the tax notice comes out and you see the different rates that you will pay, and the earlier you pay, the less amount. And unfortunately I haven't been able to hit that . . . the amount that is least charged by the RM. I'm usually down to the 4 per cent or the 3 per cent instead of getting the bonus 5 per cent.

But regardless, the municipality was able to set that. And this legislation is a little . . . raises some concerns with some of the RMs as to whether they'd still be able to set their own maximum rate discount.

So there are some concerns with this Bill. And I think until we are able to deal with more of the municipalities, more of the RMs, even though a lot of the legislation — and I look through it and it refers to the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) organization that is in favour of a lot of

this — we too would like to talk to some of the ratepayers that this will be affecting.

Although I know their councillors probably have touched upon some of the legislation, we would like to follow it up with some of the ratepayers as well as the RMs before we let this Bill pass forward into Committee of the Whole.

So right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill No. 23.

Debate adjourned.

(12:00)

Bill No. 25

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

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. It's my pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a few comments in regards to Bill No. 25, An Act to amend The Northern Municipalities Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Certainly, on this side of the House, we've always been in favour of amendments that would improve the ability of local governments in this province to be able to provide more and better services to their constituents. As we'd like to think on this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a responsibility of those who are elected to do just that, provide services to the constituents, whether it's their local municipality, or even to the province of Saskatchewan.

Although we've heard quite often in the last few days, several ministers get up on the government side of the House and say it is not their responsibility to be keeping an eye on what their departments are doing. And we've heard that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the minister from Crown corporations, we've heard that from the minister who is responsible for Liquor and Gaming — it's not their responsibility.

Well one of the governments in this level of government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this House, the local governments, the local municipalities, have certainly looked with great favour on being provided an opportunity to be able to do just that — take responsibility for the people who've elected them and put them in place in order to provide the services that are necessary to operate municipal government in this province.

Now we see here an Act to amend how northern municipalities, north of the so-called magic northern line, are having the opportunity to operate. Local governments, who over a great many years have seen their responsibilities reduced significantly, more specifically by NDP governments.

We certainly can hearken back to the time of the 1950s when the government of that time under the ineffective and inept Tommy Douglas decided that the people of northern Saskatchewan should not be afforded the opportunity to be able to make management decisions on behalf of their communities

as equally afforded that they should have had, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in southern Saskatchewan.

Now we wonder why, over the last several decades, that this weak and ineffective NDP government, who has had several opportunities of being in power, could not have corrected this much earlier.

Instead what we see now, an Act that's coming forward that we would like to think — but we're not being able to see clearly in here — an opportunity for local government in the North to be able to . . . who are elected, elected officials in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And one of the things we noticed in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that people who are elected take their responsibilities, their fiduciary, very seriously. In fact, the enthusiasm in northern Saskatchewan for people who want to participate in the electoral process is second to no one, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In fact, to inform that House that what has happened, we found out that in the town, the northern town of La Loche, is that during the municipal elections last year, 54 people — 54 people — Mr. Deputy Speaker, vied for a position on town council. This is the type of enthusiasm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is out there in northern Saskatchewan to be able to go and participate in the operation of their northern communities.

But instead what do we see from this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We see a second Act — a second Act — that's being brought forward, brought forward today where, in all reality, the opportunity for development in northern Saskatchewan will, in all likelihood, be passed on to an appointed board — an appointed board — Mr. Deputy Speaker, by this weak and ineffective NDP government — a government that is so afraid of the electoral process that they do not trust locally elected officials in northern Saskatchewan.

So I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we see that this Act is so full of holes and we have a great deal of concern about it, we're still gathering information from the communities in northern Saskatchewan is that . . . I think it's important that today rather than do anything too rash that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Agriculture and Food Vote 1

Subvote (AG01)

The Deputy Chair: — I'll ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The officials that I have with me this afternoon are, to my right is Mr. Ernie Spencer, the assistant deputy minister. To my immediate left is the director of policy, program and development branch, is Mr. Hal Cushon. Two chairs to the right of me is Doug Matthies, who is the general manager of

Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation.

And directly behind me is Mr. Jack Zepp, who is the director, administrative services branch. Directly behind Mr. Spencer is Laurier Donais, who is the senior manager of financial services, administrative services. And in the back chairs, in the back behind the bar, is Louise Greenberg, who is the director of inspections, the regulatory managements branch; and Al Syhlonyk, who is the manager of Crown lands resources from lands branch.

Those are the officials, Mr. Chair, who are with me this afternoon.

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

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I want to thank the minister's officials for being here today.

I have one quick question that's being asked in my area for some constituents. The Stomp Pork Farm, in conjunction with the new generation co-op, in the area of Leroy, has proposed setting up, I believe it's two or three new barns in new locations in the Leroy area. And people are asking when were the environmental impact studies completed on these new locations because construction is beginning very quickly?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member opposite, in the process of working with the development of the hog industry in Saskatchewan, has been the practice now for several years, we engage, as you may appreciate, a number of different departments in doing work around determining and ensuring that we meet all of the environmental standards. The folks that are involved in this work are people from the Department of Environment and Resource Management; we have people from the Department of Agriculture who are involved in that process; we have a sign-off from Sask Health are involved in that whole process.

Now in any occasion where we have growth or expansion of the hog industry — people from Sask Water would be the other group of individuals who would be involved in that process — we engage them in making sure that all of those kinds of reviews are done, so that at the end of the day when the decision is made to proceed with a project, that we have a sign-off from every one of those departments.

I should say to you that we went a little bit further in the area of not Mr. Stomp's but in the Big Sky operation, in the area from which I come from, partly because there is a large lake or water body from which the water upstream comes into the area. In that particular area we involved an advisory committee of men and women who pay attention to make sure that the kinds of regulatory issues that we talk about, that each of the departments are responsible for, are in fact achieved. And I would report to the House or to the committee and to you, Madam Member, that it's been a very successful process if I might say.

There were a number of individuals who initially were quite concerned about the expansion and growth of the hog industry, as I'm sure there will be questions and concerns in your area the minute that you go to grow it. And often people aren't sure,

particularly lay people who aren't involved in the day-to-day practices, aren't sure whether or not there is due diligence on each of the projects.

So we engage that kind of a process and to say to you, in a long way to your question, that we think that the departments are meeting those kinds of expectations. There needs to be a sign-off on every one of them and where there are issues — where there actually are issues — people are presenting them and we try to engage the departments that are responsible to help answer some of those questions.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess my question is, from what you've said, is I'm assuming that all those studies yet have not been completed for the new barns in the Leroy area or the new generation co-op and can they proceed with construction without having those studies completed?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, that there would not be approval, there would not be a sign-off to proceed with the building of the projects until all of the due diligence was completed by each of the departments.

And I don't know at what stage that's at right now but I will get for you, Madam Member, is an undertaking as to where they are with their development work and provide it for you so that if you do get inquiry around it that you'll be able to speak to it. So we'll get that information for you.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. My other area of questioning is in concerns with the CSAP (Canada-Saskatchewan Adjustment Program) program which I believe the applications are now out and available. Do you have the total sums of money that were allocated to each of three prairie provinces for this program?

(12:15)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I've been searching for the news releases from Manitoba and Alberta just to try to find what amount they provided. It looks like Manitoba's share of the 500 million is about 36.9 million — the provincial funding of 36.9 million — and the federal portion is about 55.2 million. That's Manitoba's.

And it looks like Alberta's share is the 126 million, and the provincial funding is 84.5 million.

In Saskatchewan's case, our share, I believe, was 118 million . . . or sorry, 72 million, and the federal share was 118 million.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I know there's been concerns expressed that this was a program that was supposed to address emergency needs. And I know I heard yourself saying, at different times, that you were in a bit of a dilemma. You had to sign the CFIP (Canada Farm Income Program) program in order to access the emergency funds, which would be the funds for the CSAP program.

And yet it isn't fairly allocated — I don't feel, and a lot of farmers have expressed this same concern — for the provincial needs or the numbers of farmers, because of course

Saskatchewan is looking at more farmers and a greater need, having a greater sector of oil and seeds.

So did you feel that this was a fair method of allocating the funds? And did you address this to your counterparts in Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, the member rightly identifies . . . And I know through her own discussions that she's had with the agricultural community of which she represents, a great deal of discussion about how there is an unfairness in the way in which the allocations are made. And that's absolutely correct.

And we've taken the position and we'll take the position again that we need . . . In our discussions over the next several months, in the review of the entire safety net process, we're going to be encouraging and pressing for a change in the formula. Because clearly when you have a large industry like we have in Saskatchewan today and we have more farms that are — and huge, huge grain and oilseed industry — and at the end of the day when it comes to making the allocation, they don't apply the allocation based on need.

And so in this province we're going to be taking that . . . in fact in the next couple of days this is going to be one of the pieces that we're going to be sharing again or discussing with the all-party committee that we're meeting with in Ottawa on Tuesday. And I believe a member from your . . . the critic of Agriculture from your party will also be there and I know that he will be addressing a similar issue, as I will be, as it relates to the current formulas that we have today.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. A little closer to home then, provincially, I'm also having concerned farmers . . . that it also isn't being allocated fairly or to meet the need within the province. And in particular I'm talking about farmers on the eastern side of the province, where they were flooded, so their incomes were extremely low, if at all. And yet it's based on NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) calculations, and therefore it's based on your net income.

So the farmers on the eastern side of the province are finding that they will get little to no payment from the CSAP program. And again, so that we're, even on a local level, provincially, we're missing the need.

So has the government ever considered allocating that money on an acreage-based payment?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Madam Chair, to the member. I think when you take a look at the way in which the payments are paid out, I think both in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, we're using the net sales approach in our formula.

I think in Alberta what they're using is they are using the acreage payment. And I think in our . . . from Saskatchewan's perspective, we believe that the more fair and equitable way of doing it is to looking at what your net sales are, because we have a huge variety of different land types across the province and it would be fairer, in our view, to pay it out based on the quality and productive level of your land.

And that's been the rationale that we've been using to make our payments.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess it still puzzles me as to again, this is considered an emergency fund to meet needs. You have agreed that it's not . . . basically you're saying on a local level you think that we should be meeting the highest sales. But on a national level, it's unfair for Saskatchewan.

So on a national level, if it's unfair for Saskatchewan to award Alberta more money, and of course their income is higher due to their cattle sales being very healthy right now, and our grain sales are much lower, so therefore Saskatchewan is allocated less money.

And yet on a provincial level this becomes fair. That seems to be quite a conflict of views.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think, Madam Chair . . . or Mr. Chairman, to the member, we wouldn't disagree with the member at all when she talks about the fact that you have today in Canada disparity about the way in which the process is paid out. We agree with you in that process.

But when you take into account the five-year averages today, under which our program is administered today, of which farmers have the option . . . And we look at the net sales. What we're doing in fact is recognizing that there's an equity here amongst producers because it's based on what, at the end of the day, they produce.

If you paid it out on an acreage payment, you'll have some farmers who of course have larger tracts of land and of course they would then be paid out at a different level. And you have productive levels of land today that are far different across the province.

And we think . . . And the policy we've been using by and large, is to try to use or measure at least a payment process which gives more equity to the producer. And that's why we use the net farm sales or the average of the net farm sales in our calculations.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I guess in that area we sort of have to agree to disagree because it is a capped program, so therefore if a producer had more land and it was done on an acreage-based payment it would still be capped. So therefore they wouldn't receive phenomenal sums of money as opposed to the smaller farmer.

Moving into a different area, in *The Western Producer* a number of days ago, on May 17, it says that you will be meeting with the Standing Committee on Agriculture, and you mentioned that earlier in the answer to one of your questions. And I believe that meeting will take place on June 5. And it mentions in the article that you plan to take a number of farm leaders with you to Ottawa. Could I ask who those leaders would be?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, the meetings are in fact on Tuesday so we're leaving on Monday night and the presentation to the standing committee is on Tuesday

morning.

I've been working over the last several months, since I've become actually the Minister of Agriculture, with five farm organizations in consultation to help me with some of the work that we've been doing, not only around this particular trip that we're taking to Ottawa together but in our discussions earlier in the year when we were talking about emergency aid and the kind of emergency aid that we thought Saskatchewan producers should be . . . we should be lobbying for.

And those five groups that we're including or I have included in these discussions, include these: the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; the National Farmers Union; APAS (Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan); the pro — is it Pro West? — the Sask Rally Group; and SARM are the five organizations that I've had at the table with me now for probably better than 10 months in a variety of different discussions that we've been working on.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Is the province paying for these leaders to accompany you to Ottawa? And once they're there, have you made arrangements with the Standing Committee on Agriculture for them to have an opportunity to actually speak with them? Because my understanding is you do have to pre-arrange that.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The process, Mr. Chair to the member, is that the standing committee are in fact the people that are in charge of who is permitted to speak or not speak. And we took it upon ourselves to invite the farm organizations and groups because they, in fact, were not invited by the standing committee.

And so our correspondence to the standing committee in Ottawa was that we felt that it would be important to have our producers, producer organizations, there.

I think that that will be the case for Manitoba as well. I believe that they're bringing some of their farm organizations and their producer groups.

I can't answer for Alberta yet; although I do know that the minister's going to be there.

We will be picking up the costs of the members who will be travelling with us. However I expect that if there's going to be any ability for those organizations to speak, they would have, they would have needed to be advised that by the standing committee.

And the way in which the agenda, I believe, is established, is that there are six of us who are going to have the ability to speak — three of the ministers from each of the three provinces and then the agricultural critics from each of the three provinces would have an opportunity to speak. And that would take about an hour from what I'm told.

We're dedicated . . . or designated about two hours, of which then the standing committee, the standing committee would be responding to us then. We would be responding then to the standing committee, to the questions that they might have of us.

But it's not my understanding that the members who are going to be accompanying us will be allowed or permitted any opportunity to speak at the committee level. Now that doesn't preclude the fact that when the committee's not meeting — both before and after — that some of our farm groups or leaders won't have an opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the members of the committee and/or have a discussion with the press that are there.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In speaking with the Clerk for the Standing Committee on Agriculture, I understand that you have three hours for the three Prairie province ministers and their corresponding critics.

Now in taking on the initiative to bring along the farm leaders and yet not having any confirmation from the Standing Committee on Agriculture that they will be allowed to speak, have you arranged other meetings for them while they're there so that they could perhaps speak to some of the Members of Parliament or other areas where perhaps they would have some impact?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, I have not taken it upon ourselves to arrange a host of meetings for the members of the committee who are attending with me.

But I can tell you that individual members have made some arrangements on their own. I met with the committee last week . . . Or maybe it was early, actually earlier this week, I met with the committee members and they had advised me that there are a number of people whom they're going to be meeting with while we're in Ottawa, and those arrangements by and large have been looked after on their own.

I know that the president of SARM is speaking to one of the committees, I believe on Monday morning. And other members of the committee that are going with us will be speaking individually to some of the members that are on the committee. I know that.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm going to move on to a totally different area again now, and that's the area of ethanol. Up until now it's been handled through your department, and just recently your government announced a new study to be done in this province on ethanol, headed by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. What money will be made available to this member to conduct his study on ethanol?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member. I think that for a couple of years now, we've been talking a great deal about the importance of trying to grow the value added in the province as it relates to agriculture. And when you look at the kinds of development that's occurred in the province, on the value-added side, we have a great deal of optimism and there have been several and many successes.

But clearly, one of the areas that we think that there can be tremendous progress made over the next several years is to put a great deal more energy and resources into the area of ethanol growth.

(12:30)

And so I'm extremely pleased and I have to say excited about what opportunities exist for us. We can take for sure the example that's in your riding and try to expand other opportunities like it or others that are in the province today where people are talking about the value of ethanol, particularly when we see the cost of fuel and petroleum in our province today.

The member that's been named to work on this particular piece will not only be . . . will not be working in isolation of the development of the project. The Department of Agriculture and Food will be closely associated to the work with the member.

I know that because his mandate will be conducted through the Department of Economic Development, that won't preclude all of the other areas of which there'll be need for him to participate in discussions with. Because, as you can appreciate, the Department of Agriculture has huge opportunities in this area, so we'll be much tied to that. My officials that have been doing a great deal of work in the past several years around the ethanol piece will be very much involved in that process.

I know that there are resources, and there have been both financial and people resources that have been invested from the Crown investments side into what we might do with ethanol into the future.

So it will be a collective piece of work or approach that will be undertaken by the member including Economic Development, Agriculture, Crown Investments Corporation.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The person from the Lanigan Pound-Maker Agventures, of course, is Brad Wildemen, and it's interesting that you're asking him to participate in this. I know he's made presentations to your government for a number of years. I would venture to guess more than five.

Jeff Passmore of Iogen, which is an eastern company, said that he's questioned cabinet ministers here for nearly two years on why Saskatchewan is the only province west of New Brunswick that puts an excise tax on ethanol produced. And I know Brad Wildemen has supplied the government with volumes of information, and given them contact numbers and resources in which to look into.

What have you been doing with that information that you now need to do a study that's going to take an additional six months, which is an additional six months that the industry will be on hold?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member that she's correct when she says that there's been a great deal of work in discussion and conversation that's gone on, particularly with people like Mr. Wildemen, who serves also on our ACRE committee on the economic development side and on the resource development side, because he brings to the table a great deal of expertise as it relates to the development of ethanol into the future as well as the industry itself, the livestock industry in the feedlots. Because there's a huge interest, at least, and more than that on this side of the House, to look at how we're going to grow the livestock industry in the future in this province.

Now we shouldn't misconstrue the notion that over the next four or five months that the member who's going to be working on the project, on the ethanol project, will be focusing only his attention to ethanol growth in areas similar to what we are doing today in Lanigan. But we'll be looking at the broader piece around how we can develop strategies in growing the ethanol industry. And we'll be talking to people like Mr. Passmore, I know, to a larger degree. And there are new and innovative ways today that are occurring into the whole industry of a new technologies as it relates to ethanol and the production of natural fuels.

And so our member, who will be working on that particular piece, we say will be taking into account all of the methodology that's in place today, looking at the most modern, new technology and then trying to ascertain how we're going to develop in a Saskatchewan industry as it relates to value added, whether some of it can be and will be attached to the livestock industry which we have today in your constituency, can we attach some of it to other industries in the province today to generate ethanol? And that will be his target, I believe, over the next couple of months.

So we're not going to spend a lot of time studying a lot of what we already know. But it will be looking at the technology that we have today — how you can expand that technology, how you can integrate it in a value-added fashion — and we'll be using the expertise and technology, particularly in the livestock side of production of ethanol with people like Mr. Wildemen.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You had mentioned that the announcement of this new study had quite pleased and excited you previously in one of your answers. And quite honestly, as you describe it, it very much concerns me because it seems to have a broad, very fuzzy mandate, something that should have been done over the past 10 years rather than starting to look at it now; when you should be looking at the specifics now rather than the whole broad area of, perhaps, maybe we could have value added. You've given lip service to value added for a number of years. We should be down to the specific plans and it doesn't sound like that's going to be the case.

Husky Oil has showed a great deal of interest in ethanol. Has anyone from your department actually contacted Husky Oil and looked into dollars and cents? Are they going to be interested in picking up this type of production and will it be worthwhile for our province? Has anyone contacted Husky?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member that I have had personal discussions with the folks from Husky Oil. I know that the minister responsible for Energy and Mines has had discussions with the people from Husky.

And I can say to you that the member from Regina/Qu'Appelle/Lumsden who is undertaking the bigger piece on ethanol today will be having, or may have already had a conversation with the people from Husky as well. I believe he has.

And so this is not that we haven't been in touch with each other; we do have some issues that we're continuing to work through. And in the bigger piece of the development of this project, we

know that at the end of the day we're going to find some solutions of which we're going to be able to assist each other in.

Clearly when we go to develop this kind of an industry you need to have a market. And you need to have somebody who is going to market on your behalf. And for sure the assumption of the Mohawk retail industry in this province by Husky has been extremely important. We know that in our discussions with them — and I think I can say this without breaching any confidence — is that they have interest in developing the ethanol industry to a larger degree in Saskatchewan, taking some of their own retail outlets today and enhancing what they're able to do in terms of sales.

And clearly when you take a look at what the cost of fuel is today in Saskatchewan, at I think 83.9 or 84 cents today at the gas pump, this whole issue today of producing ethanol and integrating it into the fuel system is very economical. And not only do we have, in my view, an opportunity to provide a additional new source of energy in our province but we also have the opportunity to expand today what the value-added side of ethanol can do.

And I only use your example again of what has happened in Lanigan, because it has the excellent complementary process that we have today in growing the livestock. And on this side of the House, as I've said in this ministry, we have a huge interest in taking what we have today — to some degree I might say a fledgling livestock industry in comparison to what's happening in other parts of the world and growing it, or even for that matter, in other parts of our country — and taking that and growing it to a larger degree.

And for sure, I might say, that the role that the member from Regina/Qu'Appelle/Lumsden and people like Husky and people like Brad . . . Mr. Wildemen will play in the next several months around this whole piece will be extremely important. And those undertakings we're already undergoing.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Brad Wildemen and other . . . there are other people that are interested in setting up a similar facility that Brad has set up at Lanigan. They were pleased and excited when the budget was read . . . the 2000-2001 budget was read. A lot of them were here that day. And in the budget address and I just want to quote page . . . I believe it's 39:

The government is introducing a five-year ethanol incentive that begins in the year 2000. It will rebate a portion of the fuel tax to the fuel wholesaler on eligible ethanol-blended fuel, produced and consumed in Saskatchewan.

How much money have we spent on that to date?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, to date we haven't expended anything on this particular project yet. And the reason for why we haven't done that is that it was conditional of course upon an agreement that would be signed between Pound-Maker and Husky. And that agreement has not yet been signed because the volume today that's produced out of Pound-Maker makes its way into the US (United States) market.

And so we have not yet had an opportunity to exercise our opportunity to provide the kinds of financial resources to the commitment that we made, because the product today is not staying in our province but is being sold to other markets.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thanks, Mr. Minister. And that opens up a whole . . . another sector of questioning but I will get to that another day because I have some other members who have some timely questions that they wish to ask.

The one remaining question I would like to ask though — and it is a concern to the operation in Lanigan and to the other interested member or people in Saskatchewan who would like to set up a similar operation — they're very concerned that with this new study that's going to be done, is there a possibility that we will be setting up an ethanol plant here in Saskatchewan that will be a new Crown corporation?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, to the member. That it would be a hasty expectation or a response on my part to suggest for a minute that we have any kind of a methodology in place today that would look at what structures should look like when we're developing the industry.

But I want to say to the member opposite that over the years we've had a number of opportunities to be involved in partnering with the private sector or producer organizations to assist them in the developing of particular initiatives. And so, I mean, we shouldn't be ruling out the involvement of any of the opportunities that may be necessary down the way.

And as I said earlier, we have a strong interest here in growing this industry, have a strong interest in advancing the ethanol opportunities in our province along with the livestock industry.

So as much as you may be looking for some definition in this response, I can't provide that because we need to take a look at what kinds of opportunities are available, what kind of financing we'll be requiring in the various different projects that will be assumed, and who can be the partnership players in getting the industry to where I think we need to get it to.

So as we move along over the next several weeks and months, we'll be able to, I think, more definitively answer that question as we include all of the partners that need to be involved in that process.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, as you are aware, on the west side, primarily on the west side of the province at this point anyway, there are severe drought conditions. The livestock industry, of course, is the first people to be affected by that situation. Recent rains in the last week or so may have helped to a limited degree in the grains and oilseeds sector and specialty crops, but in a lot of cases the situation for livestock producers is very, very serious.

And I'm wondering what your department is doing, first of all, in monitoring that situation, and when we can expect your government to move with initiatives in that area, specifically for cattle producers in terms of feed supply and water supply for their herd.

(12:45)

As you know cattle producers are now, a lot of them are looking at very seriously — and it already has begun — selling down their cow/calf pairs. And that takes a great deal of time to rebuild that kind of . . . rebuild the herd when that starts taking place.

So, Mr. Minister, in terms of monitoring and in terms of program development, where are we and at what stage are those discussions at now?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the member, I should say to the member first that I've been watching very closely what's been happening on the west side of the province given the kinds of weather conditions that you've had over the last several months, and the low amount of runoff that you've had, and of course the lack of water supply that appears to be or is in that area.

So we've been in close contact and work with our Environmental Canada people to see what the precipitation data has been. And we've been monitoring on a weekly basis the crop report and the moisture content and topsoil content in the area.

I've asked, as I've shared with some of your members in the past week, or week and a half, some direction that we want to be taking and looking at around what we might be doing here.

And I should say to the member as well that this past week we had an opportunity to meet with the stock growers here, who represent the livestock industry in the province, to ask them what kinds of direction we might be taking to assist in this entire process. And of course as you can appreciate, this won't be an easy resolve because some of the producers in the province have in fact taken on their own responsibility of managing their livestock and have made arrangements in a variety of different ways to managing.

But we know that there are things that we need to be looking at, and these are some of the things that we've been looking at, if there are things that we might be able to do in the tracking of the markets and also around the tracking prices of livestock around the province. We said that we're going to be doing some work around making sure that farmers and producers know where there is hay in the province, if they need to provide the hay.

We're also saying to producers today that if there needs to be some involvement on the part of the province in the movement of livestock from one part of the province to another, that we should be looking at ways in which we might be able to do that with them.

Also saying to them that if there are . . . I'm going to be saying to them if there are things that we might be able to do to assist with the pumping of water or to reduce the rates for which producers today have rented some equipment are the things that we can do around that area.

So these are some of the discussions that we've been having and putting together today for producers in the province.

Now I know, as I said earlier, that there is some trepidation here

of course when we talk about what kinds of incentives or initiatives you can put into place and some of that guidance was provided to us this week. Because as I say to you, there are some producers who have already looked after what needs to be done, do it on a regular basis, on an annual basis because they know that there isn't any control around the weather conditions. And because they're entrepreneurs, knowing that from time to time they're going to face these kinds of issues, that they need to find solutions to them on their own, and many have.

But having said that, there are a number of things that we're looking at, as I've identified, to see what we might be able to or see if we can be of some asset to some of those ranchers that you're talking about.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I don't know whether you're aware of it or not, but just moments ago Alberta announced a program for their livestock producers. They have announced a rather significant program, as a matter of fact, for their livestock producers.

It is a program that will be an acreage-payment-type program in nature. They will provide \$4 per acre under the native forage component of their farm income assistance program. This is a program that will help in a very significant way the producers — livestock producers — in Alberta.

They are looking at this and have been monitoring their situations, similar to what we have been for some period of time now. And they have acted this afternoon, I understand. I have the briefing information with me here now.

They will be paying that out as soon as possible. And they're doing it, as I said, under the farm income assistance program. There will be . . . Land that is eligible for it will be under: fenced native forage designated for livestock grazing in this year of 2001; a native forage designated for hay production; land registered under the PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Program) permanent cover program; grazing leases within the province of Alberta; specialized areas grazing leases within the province of Alberta. And they've also put in a modest program for honey producers as well.

So, Mr. Minister, you do and should know that Alberta producers have now a program in place to benefit their livestock industry. They haven't at this point done anything with regard to crops and oilseeds areas, but apparently they are considering it as well.

They are looking at other assistance type of programs for their livestock industry as well. So, Mr. Minister, I would suggest that you and your department move these discussions along as quickly as possible to ensure that this program be put in place as quickly as possible, if you're indeed looking at it.

Alberta's problem has been in place for some period of time, and yes, I'm aware that they have been perhaps even more affected by a drought than we have. At least last year and into . . . but now the drought is very large and very real on the west side of the province, and we are getting many calls from livestock producers saying that we need to put in place a program of this nature as quickly as possible.

So, Mr. Minister, I would ask you to comment on how soon we can expect the discussions that you and your department have been working on, will be completed, and how soon we can expect an announcement after that, in Saskatchewan, with regard to a livestock assistance program?

The areas that are . . . primarily is the southwest and the west side of the province that is affected, and the concerns surround native grazing lands, obviously, leased land, and any projects with respect to water. Virtually all the dugouts on the west side of the province are dry or will be dry soon. Feed supplies are in very, very short supply. Cattle producers are shipping their cattle to other areas for feed supplies, and they're bringing in large quantities of feed at this point in time.

So, Mr. Minister, the time to act is getting very, very near. Alberta has acted this afternoon, and on behalf of cattle producers in this province I'm wondering how soon we can expect action from your government?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say, Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, that I share exactly the same kinds of concerns that he has as it relates to the livestock industry in our province. And I've said to the member opposite that we too have been paying attention to what's been happening to the moisture content and to what's been happening with the levels of moisture across the province and some of the hardship that producers are facing, particularly in the livestock industry.

And it's true that the Alberta government — although I have not yet seen the press release because it's obviously relatively warm and has just been released — but I have had some discussions over the last couple of years with the Alberta ministers because the ministers of Alberta have been experiencing . . . And when you take a look at the kinds of precipitation that's been occurring across the two provinces over the last couple of years, you can see that the Alberta drought has clearly been far more influential in terms of difficulty than it has been in Saskatchewan. Not to play down the issue.

But I say to the member opposite that we'll continue to advance the notions that I've already highlighted for you that we're planning on working around, and will continue to complete our discussions and work with the livestock industry in the province.

I know that from our meetings on Wednesday what the livestock industry has said to us is that we should proceed very carefully and cautiously down this path. And we're going to continue to take advice from them to determine what exactly it is that we'll be able to do at the end of the day.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. In following the questioning of my colleague from Kindersley, and making the minister fully aware of the difficulty that the lack of moisture has presented in the southwest in particular, we're at a point frankly in that area where rain right now will not help the pastures of the southwest part of the province. The native grass needs early spring moisture and at this point it's gone backwards to the point where native grass probably is not going to recover sufficiently for grazing, which brings us to a very unique situation.

I was just notified about it in the last hour and that is grazing co-ops that are operating in the southwest. With native grass not being in abundance, in fact, in kind of a critical condition right now, these co-ops face a very unique and special circumstance.

As co-ops of course, they're operating on a marginal basis; they're non-profit. They make . . . they charge their members just enough money to pay the costs associated with it. But with the grass difficulties they're facing this year they may not be able to either keep their cattle in the pasture, in the co-op pasture. And if they do they run the risk of destroying the grass, basically, for next year. However, if they take the cattle out to save the grass, they will not raise enough money to pay the costs associated with it.

So, Mr. Minister, what I would ask is this: have you or your department looked at some way of mitigating the costs for community co-op pastures in the face of these difficult drought circumstances?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I'd say to the member that we've been looking at this very issue that he raises with us, and clearly I can give the undertaking this afternoon that we're looking at how we might be able to adjust some of those rates to ensure that it offsets some of the difficulties and issues that you've raised here with me this afternoon.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Deputy Chairman, I have one final question I wanted to ask the minister about drought related issues in the southwest.

We have had discussions, informally and formally, over the last couple of months and the issue of water is of particular concern to the cattle operators of the southwest. They're all familiar, frankly, with the one-third assistance program available through the PFRA, but that program does not extend to individuals who, because of drought, have had to haul water for their cattle throughout this past winter, and in some cases are hauling water even now.

And I was wondering if the department, as part of their drought relief strategy, would consider the costs associated with hauling water and buying water for cattle. Not just pumping it, because if there's no water resources nearby, all the relief in pumping won't help if there's no water there. And some of the other provisions that are being considered will be of no effect in those particular and peculiar situations.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think, Mr. Chair, to the member, that we, in our approach of looking at what we might find as solutions, and clearly in our discussions this week with the livestock associations, they're telling us that we should be looking for longer-term solutions. And there's no question that we should be.

And so our discussions will include what you've just raised with me this afternoon in our deliberations as to see how we might be able to find some way of sorting this out. Because clearly the point that was made earlier by your colleague on your side of the House about the notion of preserving the livestock industry is hugely important here, particularly on the cow-calf side.

If we're going to be growing this industry in Saskatchewan, then we need to make sure that we can protect the cow-calf industry. And in many situations that we're talking about here today, these are exactly the people of whom we're needing to find some kinds of options for.

And so my undertaking to you will be to continue to look at what kind of solutions we can find for the industry.

The committee reported progress.

The Deputy Speaker: — Have a pleasant weekend everyone.

The Assembly adjourned at 13:00.