

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present today from people who are concerned about the EMS (emergency medical services) report:

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

The people who have signed this petition are from Spalding, Archerwill, and Kelvington.

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

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

And while I'm on my feet, I also present a petition from the good citizens of Battleford. The prayer of relief which reads as follows:

That your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to designate the restoration of Territorial House in the Battlefords as a centennial project and to provide the necessary funds to complete the project prior to the 2005 centennial celebrations.

I so present.

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

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

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

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of petitioners concerned about the availability of the appropriate hospital facilities in Swift Current, the regional centre for the southwest. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of this petition reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by residents of the city of Swift Current; people from Waldeck, Saskatchewan; from Gull Lake, from Pennant, Tompkins, and Stewart Valley.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Weyburn who are concerned with the lack of an in-patient treatment centre in the city of Weyburn and have put forth a proposal for such. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to support this in-patient treatment centre in the city of Weyburn and provide funding for the same.

And this petition is signed on behalf of citizens of Weyburn.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present regarding the EMS service. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

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

I so present.

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

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

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the good people of Redvers, Fertile, Alida, Maryfield, Antler; Sinclair, Manitoba;

Bellegarde, and Storthoaks.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present a petition from citizens calling for the 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 government to fulfill its promise to the people of rural Saskatchewan by immediately implementing the 911 emergency telephone system province-wide.

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

The petition is signed by citizens from Leask and Mistawasis.

I so present.

Mr. Bjonerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a petition to do with the lack of funding to non-profit personal care homes. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide subsidies to non-profit personal care homes in the province so all seniors can be treated equally.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Runnymede, Kamsack, and Madge Lake.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here of citizens opposed to the possible reduction of services to Davidson and Craik health centres. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Davidson and Craik health centres be maintained at their current level of service at a minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency and doctor services available, as well as lab, public health, home care, and long-term care services available to users from the Craik and Davidson area and beyond.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Davidson, Loreburn, Penzance, Bladworth, Regina, Girvin, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I rise in the Assembly to bring forth a petition from Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency in regards to the health care system.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon any plans to reduce current levels of available acute care, emergency, and doctor services.

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

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

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by folks that are concerned about the high energy cost. 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 a substantial energy rate rebate to the Saskatchewan consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from Marsden, Neilburg, Lashburn, and Cut Knife.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again with a petition from residents in rural Saskatchewan who are concerned about cellular telephone coverage or lack thereof. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide reliable cellular telephone service to all communities throughout the Wood River constituency.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the citizens of Wood Mountain and Fir Mountain, where there is absolutely no cellular telephone coverage.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order, nine petitions filed yesterday have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received and they are tabled as addenda to previously tabled petitions.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day 51 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health regarding hepatitis C claims: How many hepatitis C victims have been refused compensation because their infections occurred before 1986 or after 1990; how many hepatitis C blood transfusion victims has the government compensated; what is the average compensation paid to the victims; what is the total compensation paid out; and finally, now that the Manitoba government has compensated all hepatitis C victims regardless of the date of infection because as their Minister of Health says it is, quote, "the right thing to do," has the Saskatchewan government considered doing the honourable and humane thing and following Manitoba's example in compensating all victims?

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 56 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority: what are the exact terms of reference of Justice Wakeling's investigation of SLGA officials?

And while I'm on my feet I would also like to give notice that I shall on day no. 56 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority: what are the exact terms of reference of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's investigation of the former minister of Liquor and Gaming?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 56 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Education: how much was collected in the education portion of property taxes in the year 2000, broken down between residences, business, farms, etc.?

And I give notice that I shall on day no. 56 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how much was collected in property taxes by municipalities in 2000, broken down between residences, businesses, and farms, etc.?

I so submit.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 56 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: how much land did the Government of Saskatchewan purchase under the land bank program; and how much of this land does the government still own?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we know, today marks two very important occasions. One is the observance, annual, of D-Day; this year we observe the 57th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy landings. And this year has a special importance, in that we also celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion.

And, Mr. Speaker, in your gallery are some very important guests here to help us observe and celebrate the D-Day landings and the 75th of the Royal Canadian Legion.

I will not be introducing all of the guests in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to identify, first of all, from the Regina branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, a branch formed in 1926, the first Legion branch formed in Canada, from the Regina branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, Sherry Burgess, president; Murray Carpenter, immediate past president; Sue Mitchell, vice-president; Muriel Kochanski, vice-president; The Rev. Ron Sutton, vice-president; and Marg LaFontaine, president of the ladies' auxiliary.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And having played a significant part, Mr. Speaker, in the invasion beginning with D-Day, were the Regina Rifles. And with us today, from the active Regina Rifles: Lt. Col. Colin King, the commanding officer; Honorary Col Bob Cade; and CWO Ken Bourassa, regimental sergeant major.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And finally, Mr. Speaker, with great honour, I'm pleased to introduce three veterans of the Regina Rifles: Mr. Eric Ashton, veteran of the D-Day landing.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Jack Drummond and Mr. Fraser Hodgson, veterans of the Italian campaign and the Northwest European campaign.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, I want to issue our congratulations again, as we did on the front steps in unveiling the Legion flag in the front of the Legislative Building. I want to extend our congratulations to the Royal Canadian Legion on the 75th anniversary, our good wishes to the current Regina Rifles, and our deep thanks to the veterans of the Regina Rifles.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I want to join with the Premier in extending a warm welcome to the Legislative Assembly, of our very special guests. I had the opportunity with the Premier and other colleagues of the legislature to observe the flag-raising ceremony on the steps of the legislature a few minutes ago to honour the commemorating of the 75th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion and the 57th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy landing.

Mr. Speaker, I know all members of the House, and all visitors for that matter certainly appreciate the sacrifice and the tremendous effort that our veterans made on behalf of all of us that we could enjoy the freedom and the country that we live in today.

Mr. Speaker, I won't name all of the guests, but on behalf of the official opposition I too would like to welcome members from the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch No. 1 here in Regina, including Sherry Burgess, the president, and her executive.

Also I would like to welcome members of the Royal Regina Rifles, including Lt. Col. Colin King and the other members of the regiment, and particularly note the Regina Rifles Association veterans who were just introduced, Eric Ashton, Jack Drummond, and Fraser Hodgson. We certainly appreciate each one of you being here.

We wish you the very best and on behalf of the official opposition thank you very much for your contribution to our country and to our world.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And on behalf of the coalition government Liberal caucus it is my pleasure to stand today and acknowledge the representatives from the Royal Canadian Legion, the Royal Regina Rifles, and the Regina Rifles Association veterans group, who have joined us today to mark the 75th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion and the 57th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy landings.

Mr. Speaker, my father was a veteran of the Second World War, as were four of my uncles, including my uncle John Melenchuk, who died during the attack on Dieppe.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate today that for most of us our only experience of war comes from the media, either on the news or through the movies. But media experiences cannot do justice, can never do justice to the sacrifices made by these men and women who have a proud history, not only as the Royal Regina Rifles, but as a force that helped to unite this province and provided this province with so much pride.

Those of us elected to this Assembly serve the people of this province and country, but our service pales in comparison to that given by this unit and our veterans. They are truly heroes, Mr. Speaker, ordinary people who did extraordinary things under indescribable circumstances.

Therefore, it is with a sense of humility and pride in the accomplishments of our veterans that, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, I salute those who have served and those who continue to serve our country and province with honour and distinction.

To close, Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend our appreciation with the rallying cry of the Royal Regina Rifles, “Up the Johns.” Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce 19 students from the Bethune School, who travelled here with their teacher, Mike Spicer. I know on June 11 — June 11, sorry — January 11, myself and the previous Speaker had travelled to Bethune School and the Speaker did a presentation. Afterwards there was a question and answer period and I found the questions very informative and very good questions.

And I want to congratulate Mike on a very good job of teaching and I'm very glad that he brought his students here today, which I think came about from that visit there on January 11. So again I'd like to introduce, and I know the members opposite here would like to welcome the students and Mike here to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly a group of 35 grades 3 and 4 students

from my old school — Kitchener Community School.

They're here today with their teachers, Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Powell, Laurie Amyotte; and their chaperones, Val Nickel, Jane Heisted, Lucy Bugler, and Brad Buffalo.

I look forward to meeting with you after question period and I certainly hope that you enjoy your time here today.

Please join with me in giving them a very warm welcome to this place.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Royal Canadian Legion

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am a Regina boy who was 18 years old in 1990. Had I been 18 or older on this day in 1944, 57 years ago, I would have very likely been a member of the Regina Rifles, one of the first infantry units to hit the beach at Normandy and the unit that penetrated the farthest inland of any unit on that fateful day. And at what a cost, Mr. Speaker, we can only imagine.

Because of those young men and the hundreds of thousands of other young men and women who dedicated themselves to peace by serving in both wars, men and women of my generation have been allowed choices in life, which they sacrificed.

We owe them literally our freedom, our country, and our way of life. And I am honoured to take part in this moment of recognition — a moment in which we remember D-Day. A moment in which we pay tribute to the 75th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion and pay particular homage to the Royal Regina Rifles whose history has just been published in the book, *Look to Your Front, Regina Rifles* by Gordon Brown and Terry Copp.

The Royal Canadian Legion deserves recognition for its tireless work in peacetime to promote the welfare of veterans and to keep our nation aware of its history.

Mr. Speaker, it was once said that those who served in the war had a defining moment in their lives — a moment of selfless public service which taught them the value of a democratic society by showing them that there are times when you've got to fight hard to keep it.

We thank you for that sacrifice and for learning that lesson that we may go on today in a free and democratic society. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Recognition of Contribution of Royal Regina Rifles

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm also honoured as other members of the House have spoken about the 57th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, and to recognize the 75th anniversary of the Legion. It's very

special to me, Mr. Speaker, because being a 35-year Legion member and a past-president of branch 342, it gives me great honour to speak on this today.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very special occasion for veteran members of the Regina Rifles. The Regina Rifles fought in the Normandy campaign and we understand that they were the first Canadian unit to successfully complete their mission on D-Day. It is because of them, Mr. Speaker, that we are able to enjoy the peace and freedom we have today. We owe much to those who fought so valiantly on our behalf. What we have had for the past 50 years, other countries are still fighting to achieve.

To all members of the Royal Canadian Legion and the Royal Regina Rifles and especially to those veterans who are still with us today, we humbly recognize the great service you have given to our country. We honour your dedication and commitment.

I ask all members of the House to please recognize this very distinguished group of people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Show

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Put your ear to the ground and you'll hear the sound of drilling throughout Saskatchewan. And today, Mr. Speaker, is the opening ceremonies for the Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Show in Weyburn.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas industry is a very significant part of Saskatchewan's economy. I would like to take this time to mention just a few facts about Saskatchewan's oil and gas industry.

Last year the industry invested about 1.6 billion in new exploration and development in Saskatchewan. Slightly more than 20,000 people were employed by the upstream industry in the province last year. Government revenues from oil and gas exceeded \$1 billion last year, an all-time record. Last year also saw new records established in the province for gas well drilling at 1,200 wells and oil production at 152.5 million barrels, Mr. Speaker.

This is an industry with great potential and I'm very excited about what the future has in store for it in this industry. This potential can and will be realized through effective partnership between the industry, the province, and local communities, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to congratulate Ray Frehlick and the Weyburn Oil Show Board, the city of Weyburn, and the many volunteers for organizing and hosting the ninth Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Show.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Cancer Survivor Leads Relay for Life Team

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I proudly rise in the

House today to update the members on a member's statement that I made in the House a few weeks ago. At that time I spoke about the remarkable life of my next door neighbour, a 10-year-old boy named Tristin Vincente, and his successful battle with cancer, followed by this boy's fantastic work to raise money for cancer research.

On June 1 and 2, the Relay for Life event for cancer research was held in Saskatoon with a total of 31 teams participating. The relay started at 7:00 p.m. Friday, on June 1, with all the cancer survivors completing a lap, followed by the main event that lasted 14 hours, ending at 9:00 a.m. Saturday.

Tristin was a captain of his team nicknamed Tricky's Troop, which raised approximately \$4,000. Tristin himself won a trophy for raising the most money by an individual, by raising \$2,000.

Tristin's team also won in the category of the best-decorated campsite, which added to the fun the kids were having that weekend.

All totalled, the event raised about \$65,000 for cancer research, Mr. Speaker.

This is a remarkable achievement both for Tristin and the event itself. This event brought many people together for a common cause and fun was had by all, as there was various entertainment throughout the night; the event including several bands, numerous games, and activities for all.

I would like to congratulate Tristin Vincente and his family for their inspired volunteer work, and further congratulate all those who attended this important fundraiser for cancer research.

I would ask that all of the members join me in congratulating Tristin and his family, and the successful Relay for Life event in Saskatoon. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Opening of New Ranch Ehrlo Home Dalla-Vicenza House

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ranch Ehrlo opened its latest home in Regina last Friday. The 10-youth capacity home is a beautiful legacy for Ranch Ehrlo's past chairman, Mario Dalla-Vicenza. Current chairman, Del Robertson, President and CEO (chief executive officer) Geoff Pawson, and the board have much to be proud of.

Dustin, one of the residents, proudly toured us through his new digs — all 10 bedrooms, the kitchen, living room, counselling office, storage rooms, every bathroom in the house, and even the crawl space, Mr. Speaker. He is enthusiastic.

Mr. Speaker, whatever career choice Dustin makes I am sure he will do well, and I predict he's going to be a legislator in this very building one day in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the young people are in Dalla-Vicenza House because there are problems in their lives. What helped me understand this best about these young residents is best

explained through the "If I had three wishes" papers that were posted on the wall at Dalla-Vicenza House.

Mr. Speaker, Craig, age 12 said, if I had three wishes I would wish for: one, to go home; two, to have a good family; three, to live a good life. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Federal New Democratic Party

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, never let it be said again that good ideas can't come from Ontario or even from *The Globe and Mail*. While perusing *The Globe and Mail* this morning, I came across a story regarding a group of mainly Ontario-based people who are making it their life's goal to once and for all dissolve the NDP (New Democratic Party).

Now some might say there's nothing new about this since the Saskatchewan Party is in the process of dissolving the NDP in this province right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — And the good people of BC (British Columbia) virtually wiped out the NDP Party in that province in their recent election.

But the difference now, Mr. Speaker, is that the people now trying to perform a mercy killing on the federal NDP are none other than members of the NDP. Among those agitating to bring down the curtain on that party, on the party that received only a little more than 8 per cent of the vote in the last federal election, are well-known socialists like Judy Rebick, Murray Dobbin, and Svend Robinson, along with what appears to be virtually the entire union movement in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, let me be the first in this Assembly to endorse this group's mission and to wish them well. And we in the Saskatchewan Party will continue to work against the NDP at this provincial level while those people prepare to pull the plug nationally.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Foam Lake Student Wins National Science Fair Award

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan people have always been among the most innovative in Canada, and a grade 10 student from Foam Lake Composite School proves that our teenagers are no different from our adults.

Mr. Speaker, Amber Lee Fay from Foam Lake won a silver medal at the National Science Fair in Kitchener, Ontario this May for a project that was innovative, forward-thinking, and practical.

Amber Lee saw the problem her RM (rural municipality) was having with the expense of treating dust on gravel roads. To treat 1 mile of gravel road with calcium chloride cost \$3,360. So Amber Lee came up with a way to suppress dust on gravel

roads with an inexpensive and readily available material, Mr. Speaker — canola oil.

She found that using canola oil on gravel roads worked far better than traditional methods. And besides being more cost-effective, using canola oil on gravel roads is more environmentally friendly. Her project is now in the hands of the Canola Council of Canada and she is working with the local RM to set up a test on the gravel roads in the area this summer.

Besides winning the silver medal, Amber Lee received a \$2,000 scholarship to the University of Western Ontario. I want to mention that this was Amber Lee's fourth trip to the National Science Fair. We should expect that she'll be up for a fifth trip next year because of her innovative ideas.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all members would like to join with me in wishing success to this bright, talented young individual from Foam Lake.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Impact of Job Action by Health Care Workers

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. One day after CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) serves strike notice to the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, the effects of pending job action are already being felt throughout the province.

Health districts directly affected are cancelling elective surgery scheduled for this Friday, and the Regina Health District is taking other measures, such as closing 198 beds. This has a tremendous effect on other health districts, even though not directly involved in the CUPE action, because they won't be able to send patients to Regina.

We're also getting calls from people in rural health districts who have relatives being moved to other health care centres in anticipation of the strike. And they are very concerned about how this effect will have on their elderly patients.

Mr. Speaker, can the people of Saskatchewan be assured that access to necessary health care services will not be compromised should job action occur?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what I want to report to members of the legislature and the public is that CUPE and SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) have agreed to resume bargaining tomorrow with the assistance of the conciliator.

We're extremely pleased that the parties will renew their efforts to achieve a collective agreement with the assistance of the conciliator.

I'm advised that SAHO and CUPE are meeting to discuss

essential services, and that meeting will occur tomorrow should job action occur; and that the health districts have contingency plans in place to ensure that people who require services on an urgent and emergent basis, should job action occur, will receive those services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the key issues of this contract dispute is workload, an issue we have spoken about time and time again in this House.

Health professionals from across the province have been expressing grave concerns about the chronic staff shortages in the health care system, and all they get from this government is lip service. And you can't blame these workers for wanting this issue addressed in these current union negotiations. You can't blame SAHO because the health districts are competing worldwide for doctors, nurses, technicians, and other health care workers.

But you can blame this government, in particular the minister who answered the questions in her role as past Health minister, for not doing enough to retain and recruit workers, for not doing more to expand the number of training positions at the university and at SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), and for generally mismanaging the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, will this government accept responsibility for the mess it's created with the chronic shortages of staff across this entire province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We want to indicate very clearly that we value the hard work and dedication of health providers in this province. We want a collective agreement that recognizes that the workplace requires improvement, provides fair compensation, and also recognizes the province's fiscal capacity.

What I can say to the member is that the Government of Saskatchewan has provided over \$400 million in additional funding in the past two years. That represents an increase well beyond the rate of inflation.

And what I can say to the member, if I recall in the 1999 campaign, The (new) Way Up, the Saskatchewan's Party way up was to freeze — freeze — increases in health care. And I can say to the people of this province, had those people been elected in 1999 we'd be in far worse shape today with them in place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Potato Valley Corporation

Mr. Brkich: — My question is for the minister for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan). You know the NDP may not be able to deliver safe drinking water, reliable health care, or driveable highways, but man they sure know how to pour millions of taxpayers' dollars into money-losing potato companies.

Mr. Speaker, most of us thought the NDP had learned a lesson when they bankrupted SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) and lost \$10 million in 1999. But apparently losing millions of taxpayers' dollars is not something the NDP is worried about because last year the government decided to step up with a new potato company, the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation. And then the NDP promptly lost another million dollars in just their first seven months of operation.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell us how much the NDP has lost so far in 2001 in their latest failing business venture, Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, and as I've stated often in the House, we have significant irrigation infrastructure out in the area that the member speaks of, Mr. Speaker, some \$120 million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting the agricultural industry in ways that we are able to add value to the agricultural industry, Mr. Speaker. Part of that is in supporting the growers by growing potatoes, Mr. Speaker. If you speak to many of the growers out there, they are very appreciative of the support that the provincial government has provided.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to support that industry but, Mr. Speaker, and I add and I've said frequently in this House, we will also, when the time is right, and we are prepared to turn this back over to the private sector, Mr. Speaker, when we recover the costs that the corporation has invested, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday we drove out to one of the NDP's potato storage facilities at Broderick, and it turns out the NDP isn't selling potatoes; they're dumping them on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, as we speak, the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation is loading up their trucks and dumping thousands of pounds of rotting potatoes out in the field behind their multi-million dollar storage shed.

Mr. Speaker, after spending two hours yesterday at the dump site, I can tell you this whole thing stinks. And I mean really stinks. You ask the people from Broderick when an east wind is blowing, how much this stinks.

Will the minister explain why the Saskatchewan Valley Potato Corporation is dumping out thousands of pounds of potatoes? How much money is the NDP losing on its latest rotten potato deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what also stinks a bit is when the truth isn't accurately reflected, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, this occurs every year. This occurs every year. The potatoes that were grown last year, simply

what's happening right now is they're being culled. Mr. Speaker, I'm advised . . . Mr. Speaker, I'm advised that the industry average, the industry average is some . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The Minister of CIC, 40 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Too bad some of those members wouldn't have eyes like potatoes instead of just . . . and would pay attention instead of . . . and listen as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is not — this is not, I repeat — unusual, Mr. Speaker, for the Sask Valley Potato Corporation or for the industry, Mr. Speaker. The industry average, Mr. Speaker, would see something in the vicinity at this time of the year of culling between 5 to 25 per cent. Sask Valley Potato Corporation falls well within that.

And I also want to advise the member and the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, that roughly half of the potatoes belong to the Sask Valley Potato Corporation; the other half belong to private growers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's really an interesting place to visit, to the NDP's rotten potato company. You know, the NDP spent millions of dollars building these massive state-of-the-art potato storage facilities. We visited them yesterday.

But maybe the minister could help us out with the NDP's business strategy. After having spent and lost millions of taxpayers' dollars building these giant potato storage facilities at Broderick, why is the NDP storing potatoes on the ground in between their fancy and extremely expensive storage shed? Why is the NDP piling up thousands of pounds of potatoes on the ground to rot? And I will say, five rows, length of football fields, four feet high; I wouldn't say it's exactly culling between 5 and 10 per cent.

Instead of storing their potatoes inside their multi-million dollar sheds, why aren't they selling them to recover their multi-million dollar losses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this shows that party's priorities, Mr. Speaker. Two questions on health. Two questions on health, Mr. Speaker. The third question on potatoes, Mr. Speaker, today, already out of five questions.

Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the question again. I'll answer the question again if they want to listen, Mr. Speaker; I'll answer the question again.

Industry average this time of the year, this is not unusual, Mr. Speaker. I'm advised that the industry average culls roughly 5 to 25 per cent, Mr. Speaker — at this time of the year, 5 to 25 per cent.

The Sask Valley Potato Corporation is currently culling, Mr. Speaker, from potatoes grown last year. This is not at all

unusual.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister wants to talk about priorities. The town of Broderick right now is in a boil-water advisory. Right beside them, million dollars being lost. Where are their priorities, I want to ask the minister.

The town of Broderick, the town of Broderick could fix their water facilities, could build brand-new water facilities for the money you're wasting next door.

The minister appears to be more willing to travel around to liquor stores and go fishing with the president of Bacardi rum company. So why isn't he interested in the millions of dollars being lost in his government . . . government's failing potato company?

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Valley Potato company is a disaster. It's using taxpayers' money to compete with private-sector potato growers and to steal their customers besides. They're losing millions in dollars. And worst of all the NDP is risking US (United States) trade sanctions that will be devastating to Saskatchewan potato industry. The NDP's failing potato company is losing millions and it's threatening the future of the whole industry.

Mr. Speaker, how much more damage does the NDP plan to inflict before they stop competing with the private-sector growers and get out of the potato industry for good?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, it's 4:2 now, Mr. Speaker — four for potatoes and two for health, Mr. Speaker.

I can't do much more than repeat the answer I gave, Mr. Speaker. This is not at all unusual for the industry. The industry average, Mr. Speaker — not just in Saskatchewan but across the country at this time of the year — would see a culling of somewhere between 5 and 25 per cent, with potatoes that were grown last year.

Sask Valley Potato Corporation falls well within that average, Mr. Speaker, well within that average. The potatoes that are being culled right now, I am advised, represent roughly 50 per cent of the potatoes belonging to the Sask Valley Potato Corporation. The other 50 per cent belong to private growers.

Nothing at all unusual about this, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Purchase of Natural Gas by SaskEnergy

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SaskEnergy. Mr. Speaker, natural gas prices continue to fall dramatically. This morning on the Alberta Natural Gas Exchange, it was \$4.55 a gigajoule on the spot market and \$5.33 for the upcoming gas year.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the falling natural gas prices, isn't it worth having a second look at the current recommendation that's based on \$6.57 a gigajoule?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know I want to refer to the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* yesterday afternoon, and I quote. It says:

“Why isn't the government of Saskatchewan locking in at the price that they can today, at \$5.56, which is significantly lower . . . than either the rate that's been requested or the one that's been recommended to cabinet?”
Wall asked outside the House.

(Ken) From said his company is waiting for the lowest price before it locks in its buying rates.

And I continue the quote, as of yesterday:

“Today we believe (that) the market may go down, which is why we have not locked anything in.

Well, Mr. Speaker, guess what? Guess what? The price has dropped. You know what, Mr. Speaker? I'm advised, by over 30 cents. Today, it's down from 30 cents yesterday. That member, with all his due diligence, wanted us to buy yesterday, Mr. Speaker. Does anyone want to guess what they would have cost the people of Saskatchewan? \$20 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — . . . due diligence. I say leave it to the experts . . . (inaudible) . . . that expert, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, if the minister was interested in the whole truth, he would know that we made those remarks in response to the following question from the media, when the media confirmed that his officials said they expected gas prices to rise in the long term.

We then said: if he expects gas prices to rise, why doesn't he lock in at the lower price. That's what we said.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Later, later, Mr. Speaker, later . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

(14:15)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And then later, when the media asked Mr. From the same question, he then said:

While we believe the gas prices to rise in the long term, we believe that they'll drop in the short term.

And he was right. As I said in my first question, this morning the price fell to 5.33 but that begs the following question.

If SaskEnergy is confident they can lock in at . . .

The Speaker: — I'm sorry, members, but I must be able to hear the question. The member will continue.

Mr. Wall: — That begs the following question. If SaskEnergy is confident they can lock in at today's price of 5.33 or lower — or lower — why is the NDP considering a rate hike based on \$6.57 a gigajoule?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — You know, Mr. Speaker, every time we listen to that member supposedly be an expert, he stands in here and makes points, then goes out into the . . . outside of the House and is proven wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give that member some credit though, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Yesterday in the interview outside of the Chamber yesterday, Mr. Speaker, and I want to quote, this is what he said:

If he (and he's referring to Mr. From) thinks the price should go lower, then we should let the experts do their job, said Wall.

Mr. Speaker, and I want to go on. Here's what else he said, Mr. Speaker. He said:

I also understand Mr. From, and he is an expert in this, he knows more than I do clearly, or anybody (he goes on to say) in the opposition would know (Mr. Speaker).

He acknowledges he's not an expert. I give him credit for that. Let the experts in SaskEnergy make the investments, not those people or us, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, that's entirely the point. If the experts are saying they could lock in at 5.33 or lower, then why is this government considering an increase based on \$6.57? Why won't they listen to their own experts?

Mr. Speaker, this morning I received an e-mail from another expert, Richard Zarzeczny, he's the president of Canadian Enerdata Ltd. That's a prominent Canadian energy information services company, and he says and I quote:

For the very short term, the downward pressure on gas price will continue. Gas buyers would be prudent to watch the market closely and be prepared to lock in one-year prices in the range of \$5 to 5.50 a gigajoule over the next few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, the price this morning was 5.33. Enerdata says the delivery charge from Alberta to TransGas is 22 cents a gigajoule. That would make the total cost \$5.55 a gigajoule for SaskEnergy. If that's the case and if it could go even lower, as SaskEnergy says, why is the government considering a rate hike based on \$6.57 a gigajoule?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, if that member is such an expert I don't know why on earth he would be doing the job that he's doing there today, Mr. Speaker, because he could

make significantly more money, Mr. Speaker, as an investor in the gas industry, Mr. Speaker. I am sure of that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, somehow this member portrays the fact that a declining gas price is somehow bad for the people of Saskatchewan. Ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. And Mr. From, our vice-president, has indicated yesterday that any reduction in gas prices will be captured by SaskEnergy and will be passed on to SaskEnergy customers. This is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, a good thing.

And that's why they've not locked in their prices, Mr. Speaker, because exactly of what the member asked us to do yesterday was to buy at 5.56 when our experts knew significantly more than he did.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, one more time for my colleague, the minister. We simply indicated that if Mr. From's original comments, which were that the price would increase over the next year, were true, that he should lock in at the lower rate.

Mr. Speaker, since SaskEnergy made its original request the gas market has changed dramatically. That's not meant as a criticism of SaskEnergy. They were working with the best information they had at the time. But that information has now changed. SaskEnergy's original rate request was based on a natural gas cost of about \$7 a gigajoule. Now the price is 5.33 a gigajoule and a leading energy analyst is saying SaskEnergy could and should lock in the price between 5 and 5.50.

Mr. Speaker, in light of this dramatic drop . . . in light of this dramatic drop in the natural gas price, in light of this market analyst's advice, will the NDP ask SaskEnergy to take a second look at this massive 38 per cent rate hike?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — You know, Mr. Speaker, that member asks us to ask SaskEnergy to lock in today. Well that is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. And he asks us to ask them to lock in at yesterday's prices.

If we had listened to that expert, Mr. Speaker, it would have cost SaskEnergy customers \$20 million. That is absolutely ridiculous. Leave it to the experts. And he says in his own quote yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that SaskEnergy is the experts. They are not the experts — either he or members opposite in the opposition. I agree with him and I give him credit for acknowledging that point.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Annual Report from the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Liquor and Gaming.

Mr. Speaker, why hasn't the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority tabled its 1999-2000 annual report yet?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite would know, part of the Liquor and Gaming annual report also includes the financial statements from the SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) reporting and the casino operations. When that was finalized by the SIGA board, we got that information and have incorporated it, and we'll see that financial report and annual report very soon, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, under the NDP's own Tabling of Documents Act, the SLGA's (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority) 1999-2000 annual report was required by law to be tabled at the end of December 2000. It is now over five months late.

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister breaking her own law by failing to table the SLGA annual report? Is it because of the ongoing investigation into SIGA?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the member opposite for the question.

As I stated, there was a lot of work that had to be completed in conjunction with the SIGA board to understand the total financial statements subsequent to all of the work that was done within the SIGA organization. And then that goes through the auditing processes and is finalized then by that board of directors. Once we receive that information, it's incorporated into our financial documents.

We stated all along those reports would be late because there's a lot of information that had to be accessed and then checked in to, and the receipts follow those kinds of things.

Once we had the total picture and all of the information that was then approved by the SIGA board — it's their document — it's incorporated in ours, and we will see that out shortly, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, of all the government agencies that require more accountability, Liquor and Gaming should be at the top of the list. They are already the subject of several investigations.

We've had a special investigation by the Provincial Auditor; there's an RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) investigation into SIGA; there's a judge investigating Liquor and Gaming officials for accepting gifts; the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is investigating the former minister; and now we have the NDP breaking its own law by failing to table its annual report on time.

Mr. Speaker, you'd think with all of these investigations, the Liquor and Gaming minister would want to ensure that at least she is following the law. Why is the minister breaking her own law by failing to table this annual report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Mr. Speaker, we knew, when the Provincial Auditor had been part of the intensive, comprehensive auditing process, that there would be a number of items that would have to have intensive follow-up and follow through.

We've given all the information all along on how we intended to do that. We would want to incorporate into the annual report the correct documentation and the correct figures.

She's right, we want to make certain that we have the full information that can be provided and available from the SIGA Board of Directors.

It's then passed and approved by that new board, who looked very carefully at all of the information to make certain it was the correct information. It's given then to the Liquor and Gaming Authority to be incorporated in our documents.

Mr. Speaker, we'll get that to everyone as quickly as we can with the correct information and the complete picture included, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. There's real concern in Saskatchewan that this cabinet may think they are above the law. And now we have another example of a minister who has not demanded a report on time, and the law is being broken.

So my question to the Premier of Saskatchewan, the president of the Executive Council of Saskatchewan, why is his own cabinet ministers not demanding that the law of Saskatchewan be kept?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, we have just listened — those who chose to listen — to the Minister of Liquor and Gaming explaining the circumstance around the filing of the annual report, Mr. Speaker.

I recall a time in this House, when those folks were in government, when I tell you reports would be not months but years late, Mr. Speaker. When Public Accounts wouldn't be filed in this House. When in fact we didn't even . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, it got so bad around here when they were in government, there was one year when we didn't even have a budget in this House, never mind reports.

Mr. Speaker, as the member pointed out, it was this government, this government who put in place this kind of legislation. And I'll compare the track record of this government, Mr. Speaker, with any government of this province's history, any government in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 53 — The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I move that Bill No. 53, The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 54 – The Education Amendment Act, 2001/Loi de 2001 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 54, The Education Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 55 – The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal (Regulatory Reform) Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 55, The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal (Regulatory Reform) Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

(14:30)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

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

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, in December of 1997, the Steering Committee on the Abuse of Adults in Vulnerable Circumstances, a group made up of representatives of community agencies and provincial government departments, presented its report and recommendations to the ministers of Justice, Health, Social Services, Labour, and Municipal Government.

The recommendations of the committee followed extensive community consultations respecting the abuse of adults in vulnerable circumstances.

In response to that Act, Mr. Speaker, this government amended The Saskatchewan Evidence Act in 1998 in order to facilitate the participation of vulnerable adults in the civil justice system.

Mr. Speaker, the steering committee also made a number of recommendations respecting adult guardianship and the financial abuse of vulnerable adults.

In response to those recommendations a legislation working committee was formed in May of 1998. The mandate of this committee is to produce draft legislation in the areas of adult guardianship and financial abuse.

I'd like, Mr. Speaker, to read to you the list of community agencies represented on this committee along with the departments of Justice, Health, and Social Services.

They are, Mr. Speaker: the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living; the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan; the Autism Resource Centre; the Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan; the Canadian Mental Health Association, Saskatchewan branch; a consumer of mental health services; the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres; the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism; Senior Power of Regina; the Seniors' Education Centre in Regina; the Social Policy Working Group; Council of Canadians with Disabilities; Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities; Office for Disability Issues; Native Counselling Services; Regina General Hospital; capacity assessment Department of Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan; Regina and district Personal Care Homes Association; Elmwood Residences in Saskatoon; family and friends of Cosmo and Elmwood in Saskatoon; Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations; system-wide admissions and discharge, Regina Health District; the long-term care, Regina Health District, the wills and estates section of the Canadian Bar Association, Saskatchewan branch; and the Law Reform Commission of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation working committee completed stage one of its work last year when it recommended the introduction of The Adult Guardianship and Co-decision-making Act. The Act which displaces The Dependent Adults Act was passed in the 2000 session.

The Adult Guardianship and Co-decision-making Act includes provision for the appointment of the personal or property co-decision-maker for an adult who requires assistance in decision making but doesn't require full guardianship services. It also provides provision for the appointment of temporary personnel or property guardians in emergency situations.

To protect against financial abuse, Mr. Speaker, the Act requires that co-decision-makers and guardians provide annual accounting to the Public Trustee. The Act also includes procedural protections for vulnerable adults who may be the subject of applications under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments to The Public Trustee Act that I'm introducing today represents stage two of the legislation work and the committee's work.

These amendments include the expansion of the Public Trustee's role to include personal decision-making services where there's no appropriate person to act as a personal co-decision-maker, personal guardian, or temporary personal guardian for a vulnerable adult.

Mr. Speaker, the Vulnerable Adult Steering Committee's consultations indicated that this change is strongly supported by service providers and by advocates for seniors and persons with mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities.

Some elderly persons living alone may have lost the ability to make decisions respecting their personal care or safety. Parents of intellectually or psychiatrically disabled adult sons or daughters may be concerned about who will care for their adult children after the parents' death. There's sometimes no family member or friend who can take on that guardianship role.

In short, Mr. Speaker, these amendments will be welcomed in this community.

Mr. Speaker, the name of the Act will be changed to The Public Guardian and Trustee Act to reflect this new role, and a number of consequential amendments to other Acts will be made. The amendments will also include a new Public Guardian and Trustee powers to combat financial abuse.

The Vulnerable Adults Steering Committee learned that financial abuse is the major type of abuse faced by adults in vulnerable circumstances. They recommended new Public Trustee powers deal with such abuse.

Mr. Speaker, those powers are included in the amendments before you today. They include the power to investigate financial abuse and preserve the vulnerable adult's assets while the investigation is underway.

Mr. Speaker, the Act also includes amendments aimed at clarifying provisions in the Act and aimed at administrative improvements in the Public Guardian and Trustee's operations.

These amendments, Mr. Speaker, clarify that in most cases where a child has a legal custodian, Public Guardian and Trustee will not be involved in court applications relating to the child's property interests. They also clarify that the Public Guardian and Trustee will not administer an estate where a property guardian has died but has in his or her will, named another person to take his or her place as the property guardian.

Also, Mr. Speaker, these amendments allow the Public Guardian and Trustee to act as a co-decision-maker, guardian, temporary guardian, or litigation guardian in other provinces with respect to Saskatchewan clients who have assets in those provinces.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the amendments allow the Public Guardian and Trustee to deal with the dependent adult's real property as appropriate, while ensuring that the adult's wishes respecting the ultimate disposition of the property are respected.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the legislation working committee for their dedication and commitment to vulnerable people in our province and congratulate them on a job well done.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of An Act to amend The Public Trustee Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important document, a very important institution, the Public Trustee. The mandate of the Public Trustee is indeed to provide protection for those members of society who are

unable to provide it for themselves, particularly in the area of financial protection, that they are not being taken advantage of, Mr. Speaker . . . taken advantage of in very many different ways. It could be by an institution, it could be by family members, it could be by strangers, Mr. Speaker.

This particular Act deals, Mr. Speaker, with adults, but the Public Trustee also deals with the financial resources that might be available to children in the case of estates or insurance claims and those types of things, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important though that the Public Trustee, when there are family members or community members who have an interest in the individual that the Public Trustee is administering, that they be in contact and take into account, Mr. Speaker, the needs that might be identified by that individual for the person the Public Trustee is responsible for.

I know, Mr. Speaker, at times I have received calls of complaints from individuals in a community that a person who is under the administration of the Public Trustee, their finances, need some financial support, but that it's difficult to get that through the Public Trustee on a short basis, Mr. Speaker. That the Public Trustee's office is more aligned with making the monthly rent payments or whatever it might be, but in the cases of necessity, of immediate necessity, it's difficult sometimes for either friends or the institution the person may be in, whatever it may be, to access the funds quickly through the Public Trustee.

And I think we need to take steps, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that those kind of emergency situations can be dealt with expeditiously, that the person receives the proper support.

An example of which would be, Mr. Speaker, let's say a person is in a long-term care facility of some kind and they have to come into Regina for — or Saskatoon, wherever it might be across the province — for medical attention. They can hire somebody to transport them in or they can get an ambulance — lots of cases are used, Mr. Speaker, to transport people in from health centres — but they have to be paid.

And so how is that dealt with, Mr. Speaker? It seems to cause problems. I don't know just what the hang-up is on it, Mr. Speaker, but it does seem to cause problems at different times.

I'm interested, Mr. Speaker, in the comments that the minister made about investigative powers that the Public Trustee would have. I think when the Public Trustee is carrying on an investigation, and has taken into security the finances of a person to determine whether or not they, or some other member of their family, or somebody else in their community should be responsible for them, there needs to be a time frame in which those investigations are carried out, that the finances are not unavailable to the person involved. So that they can carry on with their life, as it should be allowed to be carried on, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously there's a need for the Public Trustee to protect the assets of that individual if they are, for some medical reason let's say, spending inappropriately. But there needs to be an availability to the individual to access their own resources, Mr. Speaker.

This Bill is fairly comprehensive. It affects a large number of people across the province, Mr. Speaker. Families, individuals, and communities are all involved, therefore it's important that they be consulted to determine what they believe is happening with this particular Act, how it's going to affect those individuals that come under the purview of the Public Trustee, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore to give them time to ensure that this Bill is what is needed; that it affects the individuals in a proper manner; protects them as they need to be protected without being overly restrictive, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate to give them time to look at this.

Debate adjourned.

**Bill No. 36 — The Public Trustee Consequential
Amendment Act, 2001/Loi de 2001 apportant les
modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Public
Trustee Amendment Act, 2001**

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Public Trustee Consequential Amendment Act, 2001. Mr. Speaker, I've just introduced amendments to The Public Trustee Act, and these amendments include the expansion of the Public Trustee's role to include personal decision-making services and the investigation of financial abuse of vulnerable adults.

These amendments necessitate consequential amendments to a number of Acts, Mr. Speaker. Most of these consequential amendments have been included in the Act I've just introduced; however, there are four bilingual Acts requiring consequential amendments. These are the Acts dealt with in the present bilingual consequential amendments Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act to make consequential amendments to certain Acts arising from the enactment of The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I commented earlier on the Bill itself, The Public Trustee Act, the need to hold consultations all across the province for individuals, communities, families to have a look at the Bills. It also affects the consequential amendments in a like manner.

As the minister indicated in his brief comments, the Bill itself is the meat of the subject. These are consequences arising from the implementation of this Bill. The people need the opportunity to look at the Bill, Mr. Speaker, before they can make a determination on how it affects any consequential Bills. Therefore I would move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 40

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed

motion by the Hon. Mr. Melenchuk that **Bill No. 40 — The Teachers' Dental Plan Amendment Act, 2001**, be now read a second time.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to stand today and address Bill No. 40, The Teachers' Dental Plan Amendment Act, 2001.

I am encouraged to see these amendments brought forward, but I have a question about the timing and the reasoning behind it. Are these amendments being addressed now because of the serious job action that was expressed by the province's 12,000-plus teachers last fall? And has the Minister of Education finally realized that there is and will continue to be a sharp decline in the available teachers in the province of Saskatchewan unless action is taken in order to recruit and retain these same services?

Mr. Speaker, last spring, teachers, parents, and even students province-wide were expressing their concern and outrage over the government's handling of the issues relating to the negotiations between the government and the teachers' union. However it is unfortunate but not surprising that this Bill does not even begin to address the Education minister's appalling lack of consideration and timing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Education minister uses the term greater consistency, but I'm not sure that the minister's definition of that term would be the same as mine. After all, how would this term be applied to the government's history and track record with health care, highways, job growth, and population numbers?

Greater consistency is not a term that can be applied to the current government and its handling of the very real and very serious everyday issues facing Saskatchewan taxpayers. Nonetheless, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister does use the term greater consistency when relating to the application of dental benefits to teachers in a small number of registered independent schools in this province.

(14:45)

Schools like Ranch Ehrlo in Regina and the Radius program in Saskatoon will see their teachers benefiting from a dental plan, as well as teachers working in historical high schools will benefit.

I know that there are a few stipulations, such as a school must be registered or otherwise recognized by the Department of Education. And it must be in receipt of foundation operating grants. And also this would not apply if teachers in these schools belong to a trade union, as they would be able to negotiate their benefits through their own collective agreement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the opposition applauds the government's efforts to level the playing field, it was noted that this amendment would cost the Saskatchewan taxpayers \$10,000. This is the amount that was quoted by the minister in his second reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm certain that the taxpayers of this province would sooner pick up the \$10,000 price tag attached to

Bill 40 than the \$65,000 price tag that they have to cough up for the so-called Liberal caucus.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are encouraged to see these amendments come forward as they should aid in addressing the very real and serious issue of teacher recruitment and retention. However I do believe that the government still has to work . . . has work to do and there needs to be further consultation and discussion regarding this Bill.

And with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 41

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Melenchuk that **Bill No. 41 — The Teachers Superannuation and Disability Benefits Amendment Act, 2001**, be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to make a few comments on Bill No. 41, The Teachers Superannuation and Disability Benefits Act.

After reviewing *Hansard* and looking at the comments of the minister, we recognize very quickly that this is . . . while the length of the Act is not very long in terms of number of pages; it is a very extensive Bill in that it deals with active teachers and certain conditions that active teachers will face.

It affects retired teachers. It affects spouses of former teachers. It affects in fact students who have recently graduated that are still looking at entering the teaching force and haven't been fortunate in signing their first contract. But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it affects students and it affects the kind of education that I believe will be delivered in all parts of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we know for the last decade that this government has ignored education. We know that cumulatively the amounts of cuts that this government has made to K to 12 education almost total \$400 million. And it is time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this government to put education first, to look at education as a high priority in this province, and to move forward on a number of issues facing students in this province.

As the minister indicated and the comments made by my colleagues, there are four specific sections in this Act and I want to deal with all four of them, probably starting with the section of the Act that is probably the least controversial, and moving to some of the sections that have some very effect on people's lives and the like, in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, section 2 deals with contributory service and its reflection as far as the two plans.

Currently in the province of Saskatchewan there are two pension plans. One is controlled by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, and that is referred to as the STRP (Saskatchewan

Teachers Retirement Plan) plan, for those teachers that entered into the teaching profession after 1979, specifically July 1 of 1980. And then there is the old plan as it is often referred to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that deals with all of those other circumstances.

Well there's a number I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that there are probably a number of people on this side of the House and maybe even on that side of the House who do belong to the old plan.

Mr. Speaker, the contributory service is recognized in section 2. That indicates that while a person, a teacher in this case, an active teacher, is on disability benefits, that when that teacher returns to work that there will be indeed recognition for contributory service while that person has been on a disability plan. And I think that is a good change to the Act, one that has been supported.

The part that is not necessarily confusing but is uncertain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is section 46, and that's the regulation section that this Bill makes reference to. Under the regs or under section 46 which is the regulation, there has to be a period of time determined for when this person returns to service before they will be eligible for indeed purchasing that year of contributory service.

I note in *Hansard* that the minister has made reference that the regs may determine that there will be a 40-day period, but there's no clear direction from the minister. And I believe that when indeed this Bill makes it to Committee of the Whole, that's a response that I'm sure people will be looking for in determining whether or not 40 days is appropriate, and if the minister is indicating that 40 days is the correct amount, what did he use to determine that that is an appropriate length of time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, section 43 now does not refer to the old plan, it refers specifically to the new Saskatchewan Teachers Retirement Plan. And it changes matching contributions and that has already been put in force for a number of situations in the STRP plan. And what it allows the government to do is to match for a year of contributory service for anyone in that plan. And I think that teachers across the province will take advantage of that and appreciate the changes being made to that section.

Section 24, Mr. Deputy Speaker, refers to survivor benefits. And this is probably the one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we've had the most feedback on from people across the province because what it deals with; it talks about the surviving spouse. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this plan is now referencing the old teachers . . . the old superannuation plan and the people that are in that plan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a number of changes have taken place over the years and I think that there is a degree of confusion out there and in understanding in how this plan has fallen into place. We have had a number of phone calls from children of former teachers whose parents, in this case a teacher, and either the father or the mother, the spouse of that teacher have passed away and they have concerns about whether or not they are eligible for any of these benefits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1990, July 1 specifically, there was a change made that allowed a repayment or a refund of contributory service to anyone who had at least one year of teaching experience and had attained the age of 65. And that prompted a number of teachers in the province to make application to the superannuation commission to allow for that type of refund to take place.

Then again, Mr. Speaker, last year at the conclusion of the negotiated contract that is currently in force with the teachers in the province of Saskatchewan, it was recognized that indeed there were teachers . . . there were spouses of former teachers that had become ineligible to receive the benefits that were left in the plan.

So a change occurred, a change that was asked for by many spouses who — and I know right within my own office a gentleman has been asking for a number of years why he was excluded. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the unfortunate thing was that his spouse, who had been a teacher, had passed away just a few months before this plan had come into force on July 1, 1990. And he was ineligible to receive the benefits that had been left there by his spouse.

So when the changes were announced last year, they were, they were greeted very willingly and very gladly by those surviving spouses of former teachers.

The confusing part now, Mr. Speaker, and I think the Minister of Education and the Teachers' Superannuation Commission have to communicate with all the people, in that indeed it does not recognize the surviving children of the parents that have since passed away.

It does provide for a very short period of time, in that when the contract came into force, which when it was signed was about January of 2001, it is retroactive to July 1. So if it happened that someone passed away in that period of time, in fact it is the executor that would make application for benefits to be paid to the estate of that teacher.

Now that is, that is going to be taken, I think, very literally. I talked with the Teachers' Superannuation Commission and they don't believe that there are many people that will have fallen into that category where the spouse has passed away.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the final section deals with the repealing of two sections. It does not add anything to the Bill; it in fact deletes from the current Act. And those are sections . . . that is section 21(10) and (10.1).

Mr. Speaker, for a number of years we have talked about potential teacher shortages; we've talked about whether or not there are opportunities for students who are graduating from our universities, both the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan; whether graduates of the Education colleges have opportunity to be able to have a job in Saskatchewan.

So a couple of years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a change was made where retired teachers would be restricted in terms of the number of days that they could teach before there would be some adjustment to their pension plans. And that, Mr. Speaker, was that in the first year after retirement, a teacher could

accumulate 120 days of service without any penalty, and in any subsequent year after that first year it would be 60 days.

There have been concerns expressed by both teachers, by school boards, and I think by parents and students, that in some parts of the province the availability of teachers — and I'll refer to them I guess as active teachers who have not retired, who are maybe, you know, do not have a current, full-time, permanent position — that there are just not enough of them to meet the needs for school divisions.

So both the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association passed resolutions that indicated that the government should not restrict the number of days that superannuated teachers could teach without having their pensions affected.

The minister has also made reference to the fact that in the new plan there is some concern as to whether or not, in fact, this is legal. Whether or not a person's pension could be affected by the mere fact that they have gained employment again.

So while this is indeed a good change for those people that, you know, should not have their pensions affected, there is concern. And I have had a number of concerns from students, those people who have just graduated or maybe have graduated in the last two or three years who still have not obtained a teaching position. And while we recognize that in certain subject areas: the math, the sciences, French for instance, there is a potential for a teacher shortage, in many other areas there are not, and students have expressed the concern.

And I think the minister will have to very clearly identify in Committee of the Whole how or what kind of restrictions there will be put in place by boards of education to ensure that — and I'll use this example, Mr. Deputy Speaker — where a superannuated teacher is helping out a school division by being on the substitute list. And there are many of those in the province and they are making a great contribution to the education of our students in our province.

However when a particular position now comes available, short-term contract, let's say we have a maternity position that requires maternity leave to be filled for a period of four months. The concern by students is that now the director of education and the boards of education will suddenly say, well we do have a superannuated teacher already who's been subbing for us. We no longer have to worry about the 120-day clause or the 60-day clause if that person is in their second or subsequent year, and that they actually do not pursue trying to find out if there is an employable active teacher in the province of Saskatchewan to fill that position — some young teacher who would like to start a teaching career and who would like to begin by at least obtaining that short-term contract.

(15:00)

So those are concerns, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think very real concerns that people have expressed why we need to have a balance. We need to ensure that the quality of education that the students are receiving is met by qualified teachers. And in certain areas we recognize that that may have to be assisted by teachers who are already retired. And indeed we do not want to

see those teachers suffer by loss of pension just because they are helping out a school division meet the current needs on the short term.

But on the other side, as I've indicated, we want to make sure that indeed this is not abused by school divisions and directors of education, to ensure that students have the opportunity to begin teaching careers.

There are a number . . . as I've indicated there are a number of people who have contacted us on the various concerns — spouses; we've have students contact us; we've have had retired teachers contact us about certain concerns of the Bill. And while we continue to have those discussions, we believe that we want to take a little bit more time to ensure that we have had an opportunity to review every section of this Bill. And with that I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 28

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 28 — The Commercial Liens Act/Loi sur les privilèges à base commerciale**, be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill No. 28, I think is a Bill that's much needed, and there's some good points to that. There's also a number of areas where it falls quite short, and I'd like to deal with those this afternoon.

A lien, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you probably know, is when some service has been provided, and in order to ensure that a payment is made, the person providing those services can put a lien against the property, so if and when that property's sold, the individual can have the first chance of getting their money back out of that.

Unfortunately, I would say that we have to have these kinds of documents and these kinds of laws and regulations in our country. It would be nice if everyone that had bills to pay would take the responsibility to make sure that you say, I owe that, I'll pay it. Because at the other end is somebody who's provided a service, expected to go ahead and make a living from providing that service, and then doesn't receive the money.

This particular Bill, Bill No. 28, essentially covers three areas — liens for repair work; liens for those who rent out space to other people to store their goods; and liens for movers who transport people's properties.

And so when they've done these sorts of things, what can they do, as I said, to ensure that they would get the payment for that, and that is to put a document against the property, and eventually, hopefully, get that money back.

There is something though that isn't included in this, and it probably should be, and it's been left out of government laws and regulations, and that is a unique little gap that's been left there. And it seems to fall in both the areas of the federal and provincial areas. And that is that . . . it's interesting, but you can't put a lien against a piece of government property, Mr.

Deputy Speaker. You can't do that.

Now here's the problem that creates and one of these happened in my community last year. The Saskatchewan government had some work done and so they had one main contractor doing a particular job. Did the job and in doing the job had probably, I believe, six or seven local individuals supply services — whether that happened to be in the area of electricity, doing some wiring or happened to do some trenching or concrete work, supplying materials, whatever else. But there were probably about a half a dozen that had supplied some services to that.

At the end of the day, Sask government paid out the contractor but all these other individuals who had some money owing are left out in the cold. And as of today — and this happened early in the spring, I believe, of the previous year — as of today, these people don't have their money.

Now the Crown — basically is what it was, it was a Crown corporation — did hold back some money, some money. And that money was held back from the contractor to ensure that all the subcontracts were paid out. Now unfortunately, the amount held back was not enough to cover off all the subcontracts.

So these people who did the subcontracting now are not going to end up being paid and that is strictly because government doesn't allow a lien to be put against its property. And so we have a major, a major gap in the whole lien situation that exists in this particular province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As we know, because of the 50 years of NDP government in this province, we have Crowns all over the place. Wherever you look, there happens to be a Crown pop up because these people are convinced the Crown can do a better job than anyone else. Now that's a philosophical argument and they'll have to take responsibility for that at some time. However, it is also a fact in this province.

So one of the major carriers-on of business and enterprise are the Crowns. However, you have the largest doer of business then — I believe something close to 60 per cent — cannot have lien put against their property.

So all those individuals who provide goods and services in repair work or building or whatever else, they're taking a major risk. Not because the Crowns aren't paying their bills — want to make sure that's understood; the Crowns in those cases are paying their bills — but because the property belongs to the Crown. That is the only thing that these subcontractors can go ahead and really put anything against and say, that's what I'm going to secure to make sure that I get paid for the work that I do. It can't be done. I wasn't aware of that, Mr. Speaker, but I am because it was brought to my attention by numerous contractors in my community.

In my constituency, one of the first things that came to my attention when I was elected about seven, eight years ago, an individual came and called me up. I went to see him. And he had supplied some goods in this case — not services, but some goods — for a construction project for a federal building or a federal site.

Basically it happened to be at the major historic site that's just across the river from my constituency. Had supplied basically tens of thousands of dollars of goods for a project that was going on out there. And when they weren't being paid by what ended up being the contractor that was in between the federal government and this supplier of goods, the money wasn't there.

Now the interesting thing that happened in this particular case is the provincial government had been the one that had supplied the funds for construction on what is basically a federal site. It left the supplier of goods with no option, no means to address this cost that they had incurred — as I said, tens of thousands of dollars. The only way they got their money back eventually was by addressing . . .

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

Ms. Eagles: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank the member for Rosthern for allowing me to interfere in his speech. I'm sure everyone's very saddened by that.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, I'd like to introduce some people that are very special in my life, and they are sitting in the Speaker's gallery. And that is my son Terry, his wife Marnell, and my little grandson Shelby. And Shelby will turn three this Friday.

So I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming them. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 28 — The Commercial Liens Act/Loi sur les privilèges à base commerciale (continued)

Mr. Heppner: — It's always good to have our children and our grandchildren come and see the important work that we do.

As I was saying, what course of redress did this supplier of goods have? And when we looked at all the legal aspects, again it was a government piece of property; he couldn't put a lien against it — well it happens to be a historic site — so what avenue did they have?

It was also said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the funds for that project for that project were supplied by this particular government. So what eventually had to happen is that fortunately a number of the individuals in the area knew some individuals in the government side who were involved in granting the contracts and basically just put some very personal

pressure on there. And then these individuals put pressure on that particular group of people, the organization that was doing the building, and said, we're going to stop giving you any more funds if you don't pay your bills. The bills were paid.

But that's not the way the process should take place. What would have happened if that particular supplier of goods hadn't had that contact on the front bench of government? They would have been left out. Those tens of thousands of dollars would have shown up on their bottom line, probably been in the red that particular year.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are issues that are very important throughout our province, much more important I think than we realize when we drive down a highway or street in town, we see something happening and say, hey that's great; someone's getting some work done; someone has some work doing it; and everyone's happy. Not always the case.

Under this particular Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the value of a lien is restricted to the actual value of the outstanding amount owing to the company or person in question. Now I'd like to read the second point that also relates to this because I think those two are tied fairly closely, one to the other.

The Bill also puts in place a method for a person facing a lien being placed against him or herself to challenge the lien in court. As we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we do have individuals in every society that love nothing better than to go ahead and just throw a lot of court cases around and drag everyone into court they possibly can.

I'm sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you've read the book, *The Crucible*, and in there you'll remember that there are a number of individuals who pretty well make a livelihood of, you know, trying to drag everyone into court for all sorts of defamation of character or the fact that his cow walked across the cornfield and those sorts of things. Unfortunately we also have those people in our society.

This Bill has a good aspect to it in that it gives the person who has a lien put against them a course of action to challenge that. And the other thing that I also mentioned is, it ensures that whatever the amount of that lien is, cannot be more than the outstanding amount of the money that's owed. So that essentially if someone has . . . is being owed let's say \$50,000 for some work, they can't just slap on a lien for \$100,000 and say, well I want to fix this individual. It has to be for the amount that they have owing.

And the other part, as I said, ensures that you don't have a lot of people just making a nuisance of themselves — and I think that's probably the best term, just making a nuisance of themselves — slapping liens on all sorts of people and individuals just because they're mean-spirited.

The Bill also makes it possible to enforce liens when the subject of lien leaves the province — also very good. And I think we always have that concern. What happens if someone leaves the province and they find themselves in other jurisdictions?

We had an unfortunate family situation that occurred in Alberta a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and where the

situation says, well this happened in this province, therefore it doesn't apply in that province and someone else can't rule. Very unfortunate.

This Bill makes sure that you can enforce those liens even when the subject of the lien leaves the province. And so there are a number of excellent things in this particular Bill. And I think we need to underline those to say that it has some good points in it.

We've done some consultations on this particular Bill, and as I said, those three points in particular do make good sense. But because these things happen more often than they should, and that's unfortunate, we have to make sure that all areas and avenues are addressed and we don't leave some gaps in the law.

And I mentioned some of those gaps that are there. And I'm not sure if this government would be prepared to say, well yes, there are certain situations in which government property, particularly that owned by the Crowns, you should be able to put a lien against those.

It does make a certain amount of sense to bring the rules for various liens under one Bill instead of the various provisions that are currently in place under what's commonly called The Garage Keepers Act. I think that's the one we're most familiar with, where an individual gets his car fixed and basically can't take it out or there's a lien put against the vehicle to make sure that the person doing the work gets paid for it. And I think The Garage Keepers Act is the one that we've probably all heard about the most. And the other one's called The Hotel Keepers Act and those Acts.

So at present, someone wanting to find some redress under the law for bills owed would have to very carefully go through a whole series of Acts and try to find out which one they fit into. That just puts an unusual and unnecessary amount of stress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the individual who is trying to get his money back for services offered. So this Bill, by putting it all under one Act, I think is a very fair change that's taking place.

The Bill also puts in place a number of exceptions as far as priorities of liens. And we do want to delve into those into a little greater detail and look at what those changes are in the current status.

(15:15)

Now that essentially means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that over time you might have a piece of property that has four or five liens against it. Now which one of those take priority? If that piece of property is sold and the liens need to be cleared up before the selling . . . the seller gets his money, what's the priority? And I think that's an area that is very important, an area that we need to look at in greater detail.

What about the other area I mentioned? It says that . . . there's a part in there that ensures that there won't be a lot of frivolous liens being put on a piece of property, and we need to look at that very closely. What kind of protection is there against those individuals who want to put a lien on a piece of property wrongfully, and for those who do not pay their bills for a service-provider because of a legitimate dispute over the

quality?

And we talked earlier on about The Garage Keeper's Act, and that that's the one we're most common with because it applies to our vehicles when we get some work done on it. But what do you do when the work that is done and is billed is of a shoddy quality? Surely you're not going to have a lien put against the vehicle when the vehicle hasn't been fixed properly. There needs to be a different course of action taken.

So those are some of the things that we need to look at. We also have quite a number of questions regarding the scope and breadth of regulatory control contained in this Bill, which we have often seen gives cabinet a whole lot of power.

Probably about a week or so ago I spoke in this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you may recall that I lifted up a heavy volume of documents. I think if we look at all the regulations that exist in this province, it'll make a very long list.

And it's always a little frightening to know that government can pass a law and it's debated, and the people can see it being debated on television; they can read it in the magazines; it might show up in the newspaper from time to time. But then after that's all over with and cabinet sits down and works out the details, and we know that the trouble is always in the details.

And the frightening thing is that someone may actually check through after a new piece of legislation is passed and find out what the regulations are, believe they understand what's going on, but don't really understand that month after month cabinet can come back to that piece of legislation and change the regulations on it. So that over time how the thing is being put into force — the values and the fines and all those sorts of things, the fees — are being constantly changed to the end that, over time, that piece of legislation may not even be recognizable any longer.

In his opening statement the minister told us this Bill has been well received by a number of groups, and they've talked to groups and consulted with groups such as CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business), trucking association, automotive repair association — ones that probably deal with this more often than anything else.

But I think there's some other individuals that need to be questioned and interviewed and asked what their situation are. Now I mentioned a few of those in the example that I set up for you at the start of my discussion of this piece of legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So we'll have many questions for the minister when we get to committee at a later stage this year. But I think at this particular time we need to have some more input into this. And I think we have some other members that will want to discuss this. And so at this particular time, I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 32

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed

motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 32 — The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2001/Loi de 2001 modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine** be now read a second time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a privilege to stand today and speak on Bill No. 32, The Queen's Bench Amendment Act. This is one of the more important pieces of legislation that has come before this session and involves children who find themselves in potentially very bad situations which are not of their own making.

And it's unfortunate in today's world that many of our families . . . and we know colleagues and families and friends are touched by divorce and family breakup. And this seems to be a fact of life in our society. Really the family unit is fundamental to our society and the stronger the family also helps the strength of the community and the province and the country that we live in.

But unfortunately in today's world that is not quite the case. In past generations, families held together for a number of, various number of reasons. And in the past families, there were two or three more generations living if not in the same house, in the same community. And the grandparents and great-grandparents would take the family under their wing and look out for the family, and in many cases that prevented a number of family breakdowns that we have seen in recent years.

And also in past days the community was a much closer-knit community that really looked out for the families and the children in their community. And as we know today, this is not quite the case. Nowadays many families, young families that have children, live in communities and their parents and grandparents live in other, even not only other communities, other provinces.

And with today's technological advances, much more is based on what is going on on the television and many of the children in families of today get the wrong impression what life, married life is all about, and the family unit.

And unfortunately, as I had mentioned before, there are a number of family breakdowns and what we have to take into consideration, if a family does break down, we have to take into consideration the children of that family. And unfortunately too many families that end up in divorce or family breakdown use their children as a weapon in a divorce proceedings or in a breakup. And not only they argue about the financial aspects of a breakdown, the splitting up of property and maintenance, but they also unfortunately in some cases use children as a weapon in a divorce.

And it's very painful to see children nowadays that have to go through that situation. They're in the middle of a pair of divorcing parents and they see them bitter and angry all the time, and that has a dramatic effect on the children of divorced parents in many cases. And unfortunately these people do not or cannot come to the conclusion that they need to put their children's best interests first over their own.

And, Mr. Speaker, this Bill speaks to some of those concerns about trying to help divorced parents or parents that are entering

that divorce stage in the laws, or family breakdown, to try to help them work through their problems and hopefully benefit the children through that situation. I . . .

The Speaker: — Excuse me. Why is the member from Cumberland on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I'd like leave to introduce some visitors.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I would like to thank the member.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very pleased to introduce to the House some special visitors from Southend. And Southend in Cree is called Padigochiwunoohk. And, Mr. Speaker, this is quite a long, long ways from here. It's about at least a seven-hour drive to La Ronge and then a further three hours, you know, north of there to go to Southend, depending on conditions.

Mr. Speaker, the people that are up there in the west gallery are William Dumais and also he's with the grandsons — Wilson, Tyrone, and Billy — and also a stepson, Wilfred Thomas.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to as well say Ta wow to them and say . . .

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

So, Mr. Speaker, I told them it is a pleasure for me to see them and for them to come and watch the proceedings of the House. I'll probably see them in a bit, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask all members to please welcome our special visitors.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 32 — The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2001/Loi de 2001 modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine (continued)

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would welcome the visitors in the gallery this afternoon. I hope they enjoy their stay, and stay for the afternoon and watch the proceedings.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is setting up two pilot projects, one in Yorkton and one in Saskatoon. And it seems to be a very good first step to try to help in the situation of a family breakup and get the two warring factors together and try to work out some ground rules — if not ground rules, some sanity in their discussions and in their concerns, and really try to come to a resolution concerning their problems without having to go to court for starters, and help to work out their differences and not have the children brought into the dispute.

Mr. Speaker, I believe after these pilot projects are finished, I would hope that the government would look at the pilot project and see how effective they were. And if they are effective, I hope they would try to build on those projects. But if they are not effective, I would also encourage the government to look at other alternatives and not give up on this issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as we know, we can't force people to do things in this society. Individuals have rights and also in cases of where parents are really bitter and fighting, trying to force them into a situation where they have to be basically in the same room and have to thrash out their problems may be more harmful than good in some circumstances. And I see that there is some discretion in the Bill to release parents from these classes.

And also, I hope the courts will look at these cases on a case-by-case basis. As we know, one blanket policy will not do, as every situation, every divorcing couple, every child is different and we need that flexibility in the system to do what's right in these particular circumstances.

Not only some couples may not necessarily need to take part in the project because they will not overcome the differences, but in many cases . . . And I hope in many cases that couples are able to work out their differences even though they may be going through a divorce, work out their differences for the benefit of their children and not bring the children into that warring situation.

I'd like to also speak somewhat too, concerning this Bill, but also before people get married, many churches give pre-marriage classes. And again we can't force people to do things. Some churches are very stringent in their rules, before they will marry couples that they take pre-marriage classes. And I would think that that's something that's very important that we take preventive measures as a society.

And I wonder if the government has a slight role in there to encourage pre-marriage classes. I know the churches are doing the best job . . . a very good job. And if we had more resources put towards at the front end of the marriage, hopefully we would have less people in marriage breakups and having to go through divorce and the traumatic experience that it is for everyone concerned.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, a number of reasons go into why there are divorces and marriage breakdowns. Of course financial problems are one of the . . . probably the most common one that causes stress in families. And in this province, we need to take steps and measures that give opportunities to all people in this province, but in particular young people to have well-paying jobs and a future in this province. And in many cases, I believe if the financial aspects are looked after, that goes a long ways towards keeping families together and happy in their communities.

(15:30)

Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of questions that we have as the official opposition. We've had a number of phone calls and concerns to our offices. And one item that is of some concern, as my colleague spoke about the previous Bill, is the

regulations concerning Bills in general and this one in particular.

It seems that most of the important information has been left out on this Bill and it will be placed through regulation at a later date. And of course when it's done that way, the Legislative Assembly does not have an opportunity to look at the regulations; it's done through cabinet. And I always worry that there's not enough work done and not enough foresight taken to look at the regulations.

And I would encourage the government to, in two cases, after the pilot projects are done and . . . to bring the results of those pilot projects back to the legislature, and also have the legislature look at the regulations that are in place.

And again ask the citizens of this province — the churches and individual citizens and constituents — how they feel the next step should take place.

Now the number of questions that have been asked that we don't really have answers to are, number one, what will these classes consist of? I mean is this just a counselling session to get the people back together again, or is it a . . . are the classes directed towards how to break up the family unit or help them in . . . once they've made that decision to be divorced, how to help them through that process to offset any trauma to the children? And also what does the government hope to accomplish through these types of classes, which really speaks to the previous question.

And I wonder if the government has looked into any of the other jurisdictions in Canada and seen what has been done in other provinces, in this province, concerning this issue and possibly learn from their mistakes before we go ahead on this particular piece of legislation.

Now I think we all agree that anything we can do to cut down on the terrible circumstances that arise too often when a couple is parting ways and the children become a pawn in their tug-of-war, I believe that we all would agree that that's very important. But this is certainly a very interesting idea.

But before moving this Bill on, we would certainly want to study the Bill closer and talk to a number of our people that have asked us questions and try to get their comments on which direction the government should go after the pilot projects have been completed.

Now this is slightly . . . this is also related, but we also hear from a number of the stakeholders, not only about the children aspect — which is very important; it should be the most important aspect — but also how to come about with an agreement concerning maintenance enforcement, and the office that looks after that. I know in a number of cases that is a huge issue that, even after agreements are made, the money is not paid, and the problems of maintenance enforcement is very real and it drastically affects the family after the family unit is broken down.

And also the continuing problems of non-custodial access. And I believe that's a very important aspect of what is going on. Again, parents continue to use the children as weapons, by not

allowing the other parent access to the children or making it very difficult to make arrangements to allow this access to continue.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take all those various options into consideration. And we'd like to go back to the stakeholders and discuss this issue in much more detail. And at this time, I'd like to move for an adjournment.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 2

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 2 — The Securities Amendment Act, 2001**, be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand today to speak to Bill No. 2 and in regards to Bill No. 2 and discussions surrounding the intent of the Bill which is to amend the original legislation to allow for a permanent registration system for those salespeople involved in securities trading. Rather than having them register every 12 months, they would be registered permanently.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly concur with the comments of my colleague from Rosthern who spoke to this amendment on May 2. The need to cut down on red tape in this province is long overdue, because the NDP government in the past has thrived on imposing unnecessary regulatory burden on business people and others in this province. And that virtually creates a nightmare for those business people.

Mr. Speaker, excessive regulatory red tape is, without a doubt, a major, major deterrent to creating a friendly business environment, and so I'm pleased to see that finally some initiative is being taken by the government in addressing this issue.

I wonder though, Mr. Speaker, as do all members on this side of the House, how the NDP does intend to prohibit anyone with the intent of making a trade to make statements that contain untruths, as is slated in one of the clauses of this Act.

The member from Rosthern has stated that he envisions the NDP hiring hundreds of bureaucrats to be truth police, thus really that would defeat the purpose of cutting down on the bureaucracy. And it seems, Mr. Speaker, that the Big Brother attitude of the NDP could very well be locked in perpetuity in this province. Thank you.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party has some concerns and questions for the government on this Bill and we look forward to further discussion on the Bill in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

Bill No. 19

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed

motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 19 — The Land Titles Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, land titles are a very important part of Saskatchewan's history. After all, it relates to every landowner, every building owner, every property owner, in every way, shape, or form, Mr. Speaker. Their titles have to be registered in some fashion and recorded for posterity so that as the titles change, we can track who the owners are.

And in things like the commercial liens, Mr. Speaker, there are liens placed against real property and those need to be accounted for, Mr. Speaker. And the Land Titles Office tracks all those things like caveats and mortgages that are registered against the piece of property.

What the government is doing, Mr. Speaker, is making a number of changes here that deal with the process of the registrations of properties, the land titles, and how that is dealt with.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, what the government has done is created another Crown corporation to deal with land titles. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that it's another money-losing Crown corporation, just like their potato Crown corporations and all of the other ones that they get involved in like IQ&A and NST cable down in the US that lost \$16 million.

This one, Mr. Speaker, has only lost — I say the word only, Mr. Speaker — \$11 million which roughly represented 15 to 20 per cent of their assets, the total value of the company or the total value that the government has put into this project. I'm not sure what you would classify the value of a money-losing corporation as, Mr. Speaker, because that's certainly what this one is.

While we need, Mr. Speaker, to computerize our Land Titles Office, it seems that in this province it's virtually impossible for this government to get it done. We're the very last, Mr. Speaker, in moving in this direction, in moving towards a computerized land titles system, Mr. Speaker. If we're not the last, we're almost there, which is the way most things are in Saskatchewan in comparison to the rest of the provinces in Canada.

Although I must admit, Mr. Speaker, there are times when we're in number one or number two place, such as paying taxes. We're either number one or number two when it comes to paying taxes in this province.

We're also number one or number two when it comes to losing people out of this province, Mr. Speaker, when people move to other jurisdictions. We're number one or number two at the bottom, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to job creation.

This government's very proud of their being number ones and number two, but are generally on a negative sense, just like the balance sheet is with the government's new land title corporation, the Information Services Corporation, Mr. Speaker.

In this province it takes on average, Mr. Speaker, about four weeks to register a title — about four weeks. Mr. Speaker, in Ontario, in British Columbia, in Alberta, it takes one day — one day, Mr. Speaker. But as the Minister of Finance says, that's progress, Mr. Speaker, that's progress, because we used to have to do it almost by pony express at one time. And so I guess you might say that doing it in two to four weeks is progress.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, down in my corner of the province at Arcola we even still have a building called the Land Titles Office. It's not utilized for that any more, Mr. Speaker, but when you had a horse and buggy it would take you a couple of days to get there — I'm not sure how long you had to wait around in a hotel to register your property — and a couple of days to turn around and ride home again.

But I suspect, Mr. Speaker, even back at the turn of the century when that Land Titles Office was operating — 1910, 1920s — that it was faster to register a piece of property in Saskatchewan at that time than it is today because of this government's incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting, the person that was in charge of STC (Saskatchewan Transportation Corporation) and their computer system, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't working right. The fact is they failed to bill for a million dollars worth of bills, Mr. Speaker. It came to the point where that individual in charge totally shut down the computer system — said that's it; throw it out, we're going back to doing it by hand.

That person received a promotion, Mr. Speaker. At one point in time, he was put in charge of the Information Services Corporation. No longer there, but they put the guy who shut the computers down in charge of building the computer system for the Land Titles Office. That's progress, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the government has spent roughly \$60 million in trying to get this corporation up and running. As I said earlier it lost \$11 million last year. And now the government wants to turn around and sell this idea, this process, this concept around the world.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they did get one taker. Ukraine decided to take a look at it, and cost . . . they paid \$150,000 to take a look at our system. Well I'm not sure that they ever implemented it or not. They probably can't afford to lose \$11 million like the Government of Saskatchewan did with this corporation last time.

And I know the members opposite really don't want to hear the facts, Mr. Speaker. The facts bother them a lot. You know, if you have facts, you have to accept responsibility. And this government, Mr. Speaker, since 1991, has failed to accept any responsibility for their actions.

They're the most irresponsible government I've ever seen, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about some of their irresponsibility. Well in question period today, my colleague from Arm River raised the issue of potatoes. Well they lost a lot of money on potatoes under SPUDCO, Mr. Speaker. They lost a lot of money in Channel Lake. Initially it was \$5 million but then there was still outstanding gas contracts so nobody knows for sure, Mr.

Speaker.

But the Land Titles Office, it's another money-losing operation, Mr. Speaker — the same as all the other ones. There are lots of connections when it comes to losing money with this government, Mr. Speaker, and Information Services is only one of them. NST (NST Network Services of Chicago) lost \$16 million. Clickabid lost a couple or three million dollars.

(15:45)

And, Mr. Speaker, the history of this government when it comes to enterprise is to lose money. If they run a monopoly situation, Mr. Speaker, if they run a monopoly, they can manage to make a profit on a monopoly where nobody else is allowed to come and play in the field and they can set whatever rate they want.

The government has figured that out. They manage to make a profit under those circumstances. It's sometimes difficult for them to do so, but they still manage it.

But in those areas where there is actual competition, Mr. Speaker, they seem to have a great deal of difficulty in building up the expertise to be able to make a profit under a competitive system.

Mr. Speaker, and it's not just us that believes that the Information Services Corporation is off on the wrong track. Indeed the former minister of CIC, the member from Saskatoon Idylwyld, in a memo that we gained access to, Mr. Speaker — one of the infamous little brown envelopes — was opposed to what was happening at Information Services and believing that they were off on the wrong track, Mr. Speaker. And it seems she tried to at least correct it.

Now that doesn't seem to be . . . didn't seem to have any effect, because she was only in that portfolio for a very short period of time, Mr. Speaker, and it carries on today without the oversight of someone like the member from Saskatoon Idylwyld.

One of the concerns that have been raised to us, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the land titles system being on computer and accessible, is what kind of security do people have to ensure that those titles remain in their name; that those titles are not mixed up in some way, shape, or form; that people are simply not hacking the system and changing the owners, the ownership of a piece of property.

We haven't heard of any of those kind of security systems, Mr. Speaker. We haven't heard from the government whether they can guarantee that that kind of intervention by outside forces would not be happening or that they have the system in place to prevent that from happening.

I mean if you can hack, Mr. Speaker, into the US Department of Defense, why should we assume that you can't hack into this government's Information Services.

The information, Mr. Speaker, that the software that's going to be used to track this land titles system and to make it work, has been in the development stages now for a considerable period of time. It hasn't been working up till now.

Mr. Speaker, how long is it going to take to get it working properly? And if it does start working at some point in time, what kind of changes and upgrades are going to need to be made to the system to make sure it remains viable into the future, Mr. Speaker? And when that happens, how much is that going to cost and is it going to be tendered out, Mr. Speaker? After all we've already spent over \$60 million on a system that isn't really up and running yet.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are still lots of questions to be asked about this particular corporation. The government has not yet supplied the answers. People continue to be concerned about how long the access time is, who is going to be able to access the system, what kind of services are they going to provide.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, to try and gather that information and gain those answers, I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 20

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 20 — The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 20 is sort of a cousin Bill to the one that we just discussed a minute or so ago. And there's two things we have to clarify as I get into my discussion of Bill No. 20.

First of all the direction of this particular Bill is good, Mr. Speaker. Let's make sure we know that right upfront. Both land survey groups and the legal community, their consultations and their input has been into the direction of this Bill. We support that.

However I want to spend my time, Mr. Speaker, in discussing how this government carries out its directions and its purposes. And I think that's where the problem comes in. There's not always a question with what they want to accomplish, because I'll give this much credit to the people opposite — they sometimes do actually want to do something good for the province, Mr. Speaker. And I can see they're already saying thank you, because I know we don't always hand out those sorts of compliments.

However just having good intentions isn't necessarily going to get you anywhere. There's a famous phrase that says, the road to Hades is paved with good intentions. And so we know where this government is taking the province. But they do have good intentions, but it's not going to slow the pace down.

So let's look at some of the things that are involved in The Land Surveys Amendment Act, and how this government carries it out. We've seen in many cases where this government, thinking they can accomplish something, that they can do it better than anyone else. In this particular one, Mr. Speaker, I believe they've overspent by about three or four times their original estimate.

And again as we said, their intentions may be good. They

intended to accomplish all of this — land surveys amendment — they intended to accomplish all that for I believe it was around 18 million at one point. But they rounded it off to about 20 in case they needed some more. And then it was just on a regular basis about 5 or 10 million was added to this, till, as my colleague just mentioned in his part of the Bill he was addressing, it's at 60 million. That's a far cry from 20 million.

I think we all expect some cost overruns. We're not surprised. So when they started off at 18 and sort of rounded it off to 20, that should have covered cost overruns, because that probably gives you a percentage of about 5, 10 per cent of an overrun, and that should just take care of it just nicely.

But no, that wasn't adequate — 5, 10 per cent cost overrun for a socialist is not enough. They have to go ahead and just grind this province down as much as they possibly can. So they round it up to about 60 million. We're not talking 60,000 or 600,000 here, Mr. Speaker. We're talking \$60 million — approximately \$42 million of a cost overrun.

You recall question period earlier on today, Mr. Speaker, in question period where we discussed potatoes. And in that particular discussion this government is the one that thought they could do a whole lot better job of raising . . . or growing potatoes than anyone else could. And now why are they doing it? Rows as long as a football field, one after another; 5, 6, 7 feet high of rotting potatoes. That's the way they run the system.

And that is exactly what happened when they set up, Mr. Speaker, The Land Surveys Amendment Act, Bill No. 20. They have absolutely no idea, Mr. Speaker, on how to organize something, how to get it running the way it should. We've seen that time after time.

Not long ago, Mr. Speaker, we had the AgDealer.com. And that wasn't very long ago. That was within weeks. And I think we need to discuss that, Mr. Speaker, as we look at this Bill because we can see the way this government operates. And the way they operate is consistent, unfortunately. Because they're doing in The Land Surveys Amendment Act exactly what they did in the Ag Dealer one, where again they thought they could do it better than anyone else.

So they got into this Ag Dealer thing where people were supposed to be able to get on site and, you know, buy some farm equipment. Clickabid was somewhat similar; IQ&A.

And so what you have happening there, Mr. Speaker, is they get into this operation and then they find, lo and behold, it already exists in the province. Now what do we do? Well then either one of the other two things — either have to buy them out or just say no, it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. Unfortunately, as they're saying, they can't walk away. They can't hold it. They just lost it all. They just lost it all.

And they do this time and time again. This particular venture, getting into the land surveys, was one of those key things where this government lost it all. They had an idea. They went out for a venture.

And why, Mr. Speaker, somewheres down the line, they don't

get some good consultants in there to say, what is this going to cost. Because there's not a doubt in my mind, Mr. Speaker, that throughout the world we've had this sort of thing happening. It's happened almost all the way across Canada. We're one of the last ones, one of the last ones in this dominion to go ahead and get involved in this kind of a system.

So surely all they would have to do is get Ma Bell to go ahead and ring up a premier or a minister or deputy minister in another province and say okay, this is how you're doing it; how did you do it; what's the best way to do it; how can we save some money; how can we have the best system?

But not this group of people, Mr. Speaker. This group of people says, well surely we can do it better.

Well I think a classic example, Mr. Speaker, occurred when their cousins in British Columbia decided they could have a better ferry going from Vancouver Island over to Vancouver. They thought they could have a better ferry. So they built it. They didn't bother checking out with the people who ordinarily build ferries. They just said, on their own, surely we can do it better. Now first of all, we need a light one, so let's get an aluminum one. And let's just have the thing, you know, go real fast and real quick.

And here you had all the environmentalists of which they want to be, some of them. And I see one sitting over there smiling because he's listening, he's paying attention, Mr. Speaker. They find out they've got these big, fast ferries — or they did, because they're gone now — and they can't use them because the wake that they create is environmentally disastrous.

That just gives you, in a different realm, how the socialist mind works. They had the one track — we're going to have this aluminum ferry; it's going to be the fastest thing in the world. They build it. They spend the money. And then they can't use it.

Right here, we have another example. Do the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, have any idea if the system is going to work? It isn't working yet. At this point in time, it's not working. We have no idea.

Now had they gone to another province and said, what are you doing; how did you do it; can we, you know, learn from you; we might have had a system that worked. Right now we don't know. Bill No. 20, Land Surveys Amendment Act, no idea whether it's going to work or not.

It's frightening, Mr. Speaker. It's frightening when this government has good intentions, good intentions. The land surveys group, the legal community were consulted. They said, this is what we need. The people of this province understood this is what we needed. The government understood this is what we needed. But it's how they do it. That's where the debate needs to centre around The Land Surveys Amendment Act, Mr. Speaker.

Government has said that their newest Crown — that's this particular one — lost 11 million last year. It lost that amount while expected spending is going to increase to 60 million for its Land Titles Automated Development Project. Basically the

acronym LAND (Land Titles Automated Network Development Project) is the one that's being used for that. So their LAND project cost is overrun up to 60 million, losing 11 million a year.

Now why didn't they also look at the other concept. If we're going to go with this land surveys — every piece of property basically in the whole continent of North America has been surveyed — why didn't they spend some time to say, can't we look at this? What's the possibility of selling our technology to some other place?

But that's not going to work, Mr. Speaker. The reason that it's not going to work, Mr. Speaker, is because we're the last ones on. We're the last ones on. Had we been the first ones in this racket, Mr. Speaker, we could have probably sold our technology to other provinces. But we're the last one on, so we have no one else to sell this to. We have no one else to sell this to — not in Canada, not in the US, Mr. Speaker.

It reminds us, as I've said, of the other ventures into IT (Information Technology) industry concepts.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP calls this the cost of doing business. Well when the cost of doing business is losing money, that's not a cost of doing business. That's just being wrong-sighted. It's not being hindsighted, foresighted, left-sighted, right-sighted — they're just wrong. They got it all wrong. They got it all wrong.

(16:00)

And as you can hear, Mr. Speaker, they're chirping from their seats. They don't like to be told they're doing things wrong. This is probably the best example. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, many people in the province don't know what a disaster this was. But by the time we get around to voting on this Bill, I am sure we will have convinced the people of this province that this particular government doesn't know how to step into a new venture.

This was a new venture because, as my colleague said in the previous discussion of another Bill, that at one time land titles was taken care of in small offices, in small communities — it was all there. It was working well. It needed to work better. It needed to work faster. The changes are necessary. But they worked that system out well; this one's been a disaster.

So this Bill certainly clarifies and streamlines some of the operations surrounding The Land Surveys Act, it doesn't address issues of poor planning and poor spending habits of this government. Those issues need to be debated in great length. We will be doing that, Mr. Speaker, and in order to allow that discussion to take place, I move to adjourn debate at this time.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 7

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 7 — The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a few minutes on the superannuation amendment Act. When we're talking about pension plans, we do have to take a great deal of care with these to make sure they're in the best interests of the people who depend on these plans to see them through their retirement years.

And we've seen some effects of plans recently, Mr. Speaker, with the price of natural gas going up and the effect that has on pensioners that are on a fixed income with no inflationary clause in their pensions.

And, Mr. Speaker, this has happened on numerous occasions in the last few years, and so pension plans have been eroded considerably by the costs of utilities in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment talks about providing widows or widowers of the plan . . . who are members of people of the plan who happen to pass away, who give the widow or widowers maximum benefits under the plan. This has not always been the case because before you had to opt into that particular option.

I think this should be a welcome change to the plan for members, though we'll be endeavouring to find out if that is indeed the case of this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that executives of the Government Employee Superannuates Association have been lobbying the minister, the Finance minister, for some changes to the pension plan of workers in the public employees plan prior to 1977. And this goes along with what I was mentioning earlier about pension plans that are not indexed.

And, Mr. Speaker, they've been lobbying for improvements to the plan, including the cost of living increase which they do not have now, and how much effect this has on the pensions that are not governed by cost of living increases.

Also, Mr. Speaker, these employees are very concerned about drug plans. And we know, under this government, the price of drugs that have gone up, and as people have retired and getting into the senior years, their usage of prescription and non-prescription drugs does increase. And so they're very, very concerned about these incremental costs.

Mr. Speaker, I know that this has been an issue for the government for some time — changes to this drug plan. And I'd really like to know where this is going in the future. Because if you look at people that had retired prior to 1977, in calculating the costs of this, I don't believe that the small number of people that this would affect, that the cost is very onerous.

Also in this amendment, Mr. Speaker, there are several administrative and legal changes that are necessary to comply with the federal tax guidelines. It is vital changes like these that have to be made in order that we ensure that these pension plans do not lose their registration.

One provision that does cause concern is the plans will be able to charge fees to its member for certain services rendered. And I think that's a concern for most people when you can indiscriminately charge fees to the plan.

Now even if these are small, I think we would need assurances from the minister that these would be very small, and also that the minister would have to lay out a very good case to justify another fee to be imposed on pensioners.

Mr. Speaker, we have many more questions that we would like to ask with respect to this amendment, but we'll raise them in the Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Education Vote 5

Subvote (ED01)

The Deputy Chair: — The last time we dealt with these estimates was on May 18. I'll ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And today I have with me, Dr. Craig Dotson, deputy minister, immediately to my right. Mr. Ken Horsman, right behind me, associate deputy minister of education. Dr. Michael Littlewood, executive director, legislation and school administration, directly to my left.

John McLaughlin, at the back of the room, executive director, Teachers' Superannuation Commission. And Don Sangster, over on my right here, executive director of school finance. Cal Kirby at the back of the room, director, facilities planning. Ms. Frances Bast, director, finance and administration, corporate services, right behind me. And Gerry Sin Chin, grants manager, school finance, again to my right.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, and to your officials, welcome. We have a number of issues that we want to discuss today.

And I think to start with, last time we had the opportunity to meet I asked the first question about the global questions and I received a 20-minute dissertation on what the department was doing. So I'll ask the same question this time and just ask you if it can be a brief answer.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well certainly to the member opposite, Mr. Chair, the global questions question will be given a brief answer today. The global questions have been prepared by the department and have been submitted to the Government House Leader.

Ms. Draude: — Oh, thank you very much. So I'll just . . . I don't have the opportunity to ask the Government House Leader where the global questions are, so maybe I'll just ask you to ask him if he'll bring them over because I really would appreciate them. There'll be many answers in there I'll be interested in having.

Mr. Minister, in the last couple of days one of the big questions

that was brought up not in question period but during the emergency debate was the SaskEnergy rate increase. And I never had the opportunity to speak myself, but a number of my colleagues talked about the concern that schools and school divisions would have with this tremendous increase.

We know that there was an increase in the budget last year to Education. A big percentage of it went to teachers' salary, and there was about 1.7 million, I believe, that was more than what we had paid last year, what they received last year after we took out the increase in teachers' salaries.

But I have been told that there is, with the change or the increase in SaskEnergy rates, this is going to be more than gobbled up.

Can you give me an idea of what your department feels the increase will be to school divisions with the SaskEnergy rate increase that was announced today?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Chair, we haven't as of yet received any information from school divisions with regard to a potential impact from the increase on natural gas. What I have seen is that the School Trustees Association, Gary Shaddock, the president, has indicated that the impact, depending on the size of the increase, would be anywhere from 2 to \$5 million in terms of increased costs for natural gas for the schools in the province of Saskatchewan.

To put that in context, we certainly recognize that this provincial government has provided the largest increase in 15 years to the foundation operating grant, and on a calendar year basis, this was close to \$33 million.

We also recognize that this was a year of reassessment; that global assessments did increase across the province of Saskatchewan on average about 10.8 per cent. In some jurisdictions, considerably higher than that. For example, in Saskatoon it was closer to 21 per cent.

There was a corresponding decrease on their mill rates, but I understand that we're also seeing some increase in revenues derived from that local tax base to school divisions. And some of their calculations did anticipate an increase in natural gas.

So we believe that with the large increase in the foundation operating grant, which is an equalization formula, and certainly the promise that we have received from various school divisions in terms of their response to our budget, in many circumstances, in fact in most circumstances, they were extremely positive.

The School Trustees Association stated the budget will help children, and gave it an A. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation said this is a great budget for the educators in Saskatchewan, and especially for students, and gave it an A.

And certainly the correspondence in terms of letters that I've received from school divisions, individuals throughout the province of Saskatchewan have been very positive on this budget indeed, Mr. Chair.

(16:15)

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, I heard you say before you went into how wonderful the budget was again, that you expected . . . the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) was expecting there was going to be between 2 and \$5 million increase because of natural gas rates increase. I talked to them this morning and they're thinking that it will be around the \$5 million mark. And I'm sure the minister is aware that there are many school divisions that are tapped to their limit right now.

I phoned three of the school divisions in my area yesterday and they both . . . all three of them told me that the increase would be about \$20,000 for their school division. They don't have extra cash sitting in their accounts right now. The budgets are already set, the tax rate is set, and \$20,000 makes a huge impact.

I think one of the city school divisions that I talked to said they are going to have a \$190,000 increase and that was just if you take it at 35 per cent — and I guess I understand today it's 24 per cent but whatever the rate is — and if it's a larger school division or a larger user, the impact is going to be higher than whatever the announcement is because part of it figures in the transition amount.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is going to be a lot of school divisions that are hurting big time because of this. Has your department looked at this? And are you considering going any further towards relieving the problems that they have because of this increase?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Chair, we recognize that . . . all of the stakeholders and partners in the education system have recognized that the contribution from the provincial government these past two years on the operating grants, which is about a 16 per cent increase, is a substantial amount.

With this regard to the specific issue on natural gas, we recognize that obviously that when you are planning your budgets and into your budget cycle, if natural gas increases occur outside of the normal planning cycle, that you cannot obviously have an answer for that in that every time frame.

But we recognize that many school divisions have anticipated that their costs would go up. I don't think it was any surprise to anyone that we have seen increases in natural gas throughout North America that have come on in the past six months to a year; in fact longer in some circumstances.

We also recognize that they do have the opportunity to plan for these things because they are the final, the final body. Local school divisions do make these decisions on their expenditures. They look at their revenues. They recognize the cost due increase and they make provision for that by setting their local mill rates. And it's my understanding that many of the school divisions have anticipated an increase in natural gas.

And certainly we also recognize that when we're budgeting for our budgets. We provide . . . in many areas the vast majority of our grant increase was unconditional this year on the per student — in fact the largest increase in over 20 years on the per student allocation which is the unconditional part of the grant.

And so the school divisions and students across this province have benefited from the budget this year. And we also recognize that we respect the autonomy of school boards and school divisions to make those decisions on service delivery.

And by and large, the business managers in the school divisions and the school boards themselves have done very well in managing the dollars that have been provided to them and accept that responsibility very well.

We also recognize that with regard to natural gas, that this provincial government through SaskEnergy has been selling gas for this past winter at substantially less than what they should have been charging. The fact of the matter is that the gas variance account, the gas cost variance account, had run up a deficit of \$80 million. And technically that should have been paid for by consumers because there is no gouging on gas costs.

Gas costs, it's a requirement that the utility provide that gas to the customer at the price it pays. And it has been providing that to schools and businesses and families throughout Saskatchewan for the past winter at less than what it costs them.

And now we're saying is that they have had some benefit from that. We expect that gas prices may go down in the future, and we probably would not be going to those school divisions to ask for that money back, Mr. Chair.

The fact of the matter is that these things do occur and we try to make allowances, and school divisions by and large have done a tremendous job in managing the dollars that have been allocated to them.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I'm sure that your official is going to be getting this answer ready for you because you just said you're not going to go back to the school division and ask for this money back. What money were you even considering asking back for?

Before you answer the question though, I do want you to know that there isn't going to be one school board in Saskatchewan that's going to sit around and say, my, the gas variance account has taken a little bit of a beating and I'm sure pleased that we can pay some more money here and make the government feel better.

Mr. Minister, what they're doing is trying to pay their own bills. The government's job is to make sure that this operation is working and make sure that there's money to educate the children in this province.

They set their budgets. They had no idea that there was going to be 40 per cent gas increase, and they had no idea that gas was going to go, for their vehicles and their school buses, was going to go from 62 cents to 84 cents. That's going to make a huge impact. In one school division alone, it's going to cost \$9,000 a month more for the gas.

So, Mr. Minister, maybe we should . . . maybe first of all you could answer the question about . . . you could respond to the comment you made that you were not going to go to school divisions and ask for some money back.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well, Mr. Chair, obviously the member opposite hasn't been listening. We're talking specifically about natural gas and the fluctuations on the market. We are in a deregulated environment. We have been deregulated with regard to major industries in this province for over 15 years. We have been deregulated on the residential side for over two years.

The fact of the matter is that the commodity price of gas has been fluctuating dramatically since deregulation has occurred. And the point that I was obviously making to the member opposite is that if a gas increase occurs and the cost is that cost on the open market, then of course school boards will be paying that price.

The government provides its budget as a foundation operating grant, as an equalization formula, and that is the amount, the grant dollars that are provided to school divisions.

Now if we were to follow the member opposite's logic, then if every time there was an increase in natural gas, and the school divisions would come and ask the provincial government to cover those costs, well then obviously the opposite would be in effect as well. Well why wouldn't the government, if there was a massive decrease in natural gas costs, go to these school divisions and say, well why don't you pay it back because we've given you more than was obviously allocated.

Well it makes no sense. So that's why we have a process in this province where we have a budgeting cycle and we look at the grants that have been provided, and it's a 16 per cent increase in the past two years.

And we have targeted grants. We have grants for transportation, we have grants for isolated schools, we have grants for special education, we have grants with regard to special needs and other areas like learning disabled, and we have disabilities grants. And these grants are provided to school divisions.

The school divisions look at their bottom line. They then make the adjustment with regard to their global assessment and their mill rate, and they pay for their expenditures. And they have done a very good job at that over the years, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, and to the minister, are you aware of how many school divisions contract with CEG for their natural gas?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Chair, that's not information that the department generally keeps.

In terms of school divisions, they basically have the opportunity to contract for their natural gas supply with other marketers throughout the province, just as any individual or corporation or business or industry in this province. So the fact of the matter is this is not something that we would compile on an ongoing basis.

I couldn't tell you if Tiger Lily School Division or schools within that division have a special arrangement with a gas supplier other than SaskEnergy. Basically they have the autonomy to make those decisions; they have the autonomy to determine what is in the best interests of their students. And

they make those decisions, and they have done very well in making those decisions in the past.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I have a question on the small schools factor. I believe this year it's called the isolated schools factor, but last year it was the small schools factor. How much money last year was allocated for the small schools factor?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Chair, the numbers for last year when we had the small schools factor was 20 million in the allocation.

This year the isolated schools factor is 17.3 million, but we've increased the number with regard to rural transportation. And the actual number of dollars going into support of rural students is considerably higher than it has been in previous years.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, when I read through the budget and the information that the school boards received, I understand that there was some grandfathering clauses that were considered this year, but next year that those clauses will be removed.

Can you give me an idea of how much money will be allocated next year with the removal of the grandfathering part of the clause?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — I assume that the member was talking about the small schools factor. There is a phase-down of that factor over the next two years to full implementation. But in terms of the actual dollars, we won't know until we see the global grant pool for next year.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair, Crystal Lakes School Division last year received \$179,000 for what was the small schools factor at that time. This year they're going to receive 143,378, and next year it's anticipated that they'll receive \$108,000 — 108,640.

Mr. Minister, that is a huge difference and is going to make a great impact on the school's ability or the school division's ability to provide the information to the students and all the essentials for educating the children.

I heard you say that there was going to be other monies put forward. But this school division is faced with this decrease in funding and I'm wondering if this is something that you're expecting to be happening to school divisions right across the board.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Deputy Chair, certainly with the very specific question with regard to Crystal Lake, now it's my understanding that last year their grant in total . . . And you can talk about specifics of that grant structure. And of course when you look at the actual grant allocation, each school division is provided with that information on budget day, and any particular line item, you may find some have gone up, some have gone down.

But if you look at the global bottom line for Crystal Lake, last year it received \$3.7 million in grant. This year it's \$4.3 million in grant, an increase of 13.6 per cent, Mr. Deputy Chair.

(16:30)

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, that wasn't the question; I'm sure the minister was aware of that. And we also know what the increase is in the teachers' salary and support staff and the other increases that . . . this doesn't really answer the question that I had asked.

I know that there will be more than one school division that will be contacting my office and giving me the same numbers because this isolated school factors, if I remember correctly, is something that you talked about the last time we were in estimates, saying how it was going to be benefiting rural Saskatchewan and how it was going to make it possible to keep some schools open.

So irregardless of the overall picture, I wanted to know how many school divisions are going to see a decrease in the grant that they received in this aspect of the formula — the isolated school factor.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Deputy Chair, we can compile that information with regard to every school division and send that to her. But I would remind the member opposite that as we phase out the small school factor and move into the isolated factor, we also recognize that the costs of providing services in rural Saskatchewan are higher and that this government does recognize that and does provide a premium on its grant structure.

So when you're looking at small schools factor, isolated schools factor, sparsity factor, rural transportation factors, per capital grant with regard to pupils — all of these things are taken into consideration and there is a benefit that does recognize that the costs of providing services in rural Saskatchewan are higher than the costs with regard to urban Saskatchewan. And so we have made these adjustments.

And the base philosophy for the Department of Education and certainly for this government is that we want to provide an equitable opportunity for students throughout the province of Saskatchewan with regard to their learning opportunities.

And certainly the focus of this past budget with regard to the largest increase on the foundation operating grant in 15 years, the targeted program with regard to technology in CommunityNet, and of course all of the targeted programs with regard to enhancement for special education recognizes the diverse needs of the students throughout the province of Saskatchewan and specifically the needs with regard to rural Saskatchewan.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I'm sure that we will go back to this issue again. I haven't received the global answers that I've asked for. But in the meantime, I'm wondering if you can tell me how many school divisions actually receive less funding this year than last year.

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'll just . . . wanted to make one point with regard to the member's previous question. I have the copy of the external reference committee's report of February 2001 which is a committee made up of all the significant stakeholders and partners with

regard to education in the province of Saskatchewan. And I'll quote:

The committee reaffirmed its conclusion of last year — the small schools factor should be replaced with funding arrangements through the grant formula that more appropriately support schools that are unavoidably isolated.

It was noted that the department had conveyed in writing in March 2000, its intention to pursue such a course. And the committee noted that any changes along these lines implemented in 2001 should be phased in and should entail increased support for truly isolated schools.

Now with regard to the last question, there were 34 school divisions out of 99 that received less grant. But we also have to recognize that the foundation operating grant is an equalization formula and it's very sensitive to enrolment and assessment. There was a 4,000 student decrease in enrolment. There was a large assessment increase provincially overall of 10.8 per cent which correspondingly would result in lower grants to school boards that had higher assessments. And we also eliminated the cap this year.

So in essence what happened was that poorer school divisions — in other words school divisions with less capability of generating local revenue — benefited substantially by this budget.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, how many school divisions are zero grant status right now?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the 99 school divisions, there . . . on a calendar year basis, there are four school divisions that would be considered zero grant or negative grant school divisions.

Ms. Draude: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. A number of the school boards that have contacted my office are concerned because of the increase in taxes this year. Even though the mill rates may have gone down, as we discussed last time because of reassessment, they actually will be bringing in more money through the property taxes.

And of course this is something that is hitting many of the centres, the cities especially. The city of Saskatoon is very concerned because of the reassessment and the effect that it had on their property tax owners.

Mr. Minister, one of the questions that a number of school boards have had is the issue around funding and the fact that they never know until the fourth month of the year or third month of the year what their funding is actually going to be, and it makes it absolutely impossible to do any long-range planning.

School divisions have asked if there is going to be some time when your government is looking at some type of a long-range planning, a five-year plan, so that they can actually make some decisions and provide the kind of educational opportunities that they would like to do for the students in their area. So is your department looking at long-range planning to allow school divisions . . . to enable them to do their job?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, I can understand the intent of her question, and I must say that we have made some significant improvements by going to a change in our year, our fiscal year. So now that school boards actually . . . when they receive their budgets, not only are they getting the budget for the balance of the calendar year, but they are also receiving their budget information for the first quarter of the subsequent year.

So in essence they are much better positioned through the new arrangement in having statutorily gone to a March 31 year-end. We are now in a situation where school divisions can say that they have much better planning tools.

In terms of long-range planning, I think that there . . . it's certainly a good idea in terms of . . . and I certainly would welcome further information from the opposition if they'd like to see how this would roll out in terms of a plan, but we also recognize that the ability of government under its current balanced budget legislation depends substantially on current revenues and revenue projections.

So it's easy to say we'd like to have longer planning cycles for school divisions — in fact any agency that benefits from government grants or government payments — but we also recognize that the revenues that the government derives in providing those dollars are sensitive to market forces, and sometimes it's not as easy to predict a year and a half or two or three years down the road.

So I would suspect that it's the changes that have been made, have been received positively by school boards, and it's my understanding that just by having changed the way grants are provided that school divisions have benefit to the tune of somewhere between 1 and \$2 million in not having to carry those interest charges that they previously carried.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, the short answer then is no, you're not going to have a long-term plan. I know that you've added three months to it, and that helps a little bit, but it's not going to help the school divisions that are dealing with their enrolment problems, and a lot of it is the capital funding problems as well.

Mr. Minister, I was interested in hearing you talk about interest payments, because one of the issues that I'm sure you know about and you've read about it in the paper lately is the Silversprings school and the fact that the announcement of this school and the building of this school before the funding is actually there is going to cost the school division around \$300,000. This is a huge concern.

And the school boards, of course, were very grateful for the fact that they've finally received the school that they've been asking for . . . for I believe it was eight years. But now they are going to have to take \$301,000 out of their operating money or . . . to actually get this school built.

Is your department dealing with this? Is this a concern that has arisen before?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, the capital allocations in terms of funding of new projects like new

schools is very transparent. The policies and procedures that have been itemized with regard to how those capital projects are funded and financed, generally we look at a two, three, and sometimes four-year cycle in providing. Normally we put up funds that would cover the planning stage in the first year, with a substantial bulk of the funds provided in the second and third years.

In this case, because there was a perceived need by both of the school divisions in Saskatoon to have the Silversprings elementary school and also Mother Teresa provided, that the information was given to these school divisions which they fully concurred with, recognizing that they would be provided their grants in such a way that would require them to carry increased interest costs.

But we also recognize that from the original negotiation that did occur that we have actually increased the amount of dollars that have been provided to the Saskatoon Public with regard to Silverspring. And this year alone, 2001-2002, we will be providing \$1.34 million of our total funding of 3.5 million which is actually greater than what was initially negotiated.

So the fact of the matter is that there was no wool pulled over anyone's eyes here. This was an agreement that was made, and the purpose of the agreement that was made, and how the funds were allocated to that school board was to allow for a fairly rapid completion.

And I can recall having this conversation with the former board Chair, Lindsey Fast, who basically wanted to see us proceed and provide the approval for the building of that school in an accelerated fashion. And so the department accommodated that request to allow for that school to be completed and to be open this fall.

(16:45)

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, I agree with you. The ratepayers and the citizens of that part of Saskatoon were delighted to get their school built. They'd been asking for it for a number of years. And when the pictures were taken and the big announcement was made that the school was going to be built, everyone was joyful. But the school board themselves, they're the ones that knew that this was going to cost extra money.

I'm sure that if the school ratepayers knew that this \$301,000 was going to come out of their budget, they wouldn't be quite as happy to know that the minister's there getting his picture taken and it's going to cost ratepayers a pile of money.

So again, Mr. Minister, I think this goes back to the fact that the long-term planning, especially on the capital end, is badly needed.

I know that capital funding has been frozen at about \$26 million. And I know that the minister will say that there's been an extra \$5 million to the Centenary Capital Fund in the last few years. But most of the buildings, most of the school buildings here in Saskatchewan are over 30 years old.

I'm wondering if you can give me an idea of how many dollars are on the list for capital funding projects? And if you had, if

you have any intention of increasing the amount of money that's going into capital funding?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, when we look at how capital allocations are provided to school divisions, they have capital requests; we have facility planners. We prioritize capital requests based on, number one, health and safety issues; number two, critical shortage issues; and then other issues. So we also provide about a 10 per cent premium for how joint-use projects are prioritized.

If we look at the old way of providing funding for capital projects — and this government changed to accrual accounting on this matter in 1994 — we recognize that prior to that time a large proportion of the new capital that went into constructing schools in the 1980s and early 1990s was borrowed money. And if we look at the capital allocation lists from those years, the budget items, the line items, they look like substantial dollars — 80, \$90 million. But the vast majority of those dollars were interest payments.

Currently, when we put a line item out of \$26 million in a capital line item, well over 24 million of that is actual real dollars, new dollars, going into capital construction. And with the 5 million Centenary Capital Fund it's close to 30 million overall, and that is actual dollars.

Now with regard to the number of new schools since 1997, despite declining enrolments in many areas, we have Jack MacKenzie Elementary in southeast Regina; St. Gabriel Elementary in southeast Regina; there's Brunskill; there's new Westview Elementary in P.A. (Prince Albert); there's the new high school in Lloydminster; there's the new elementary school in Pinehouse; the new high school in Meadow Lake; Silverspring Elementary, as mentioned, and Mother Teresa.

So there have been a lot of new capital constructions. Now if we look at the overall number with regard to what the government contribution is for all requests from school divisions for capital projects in the province of Saskatchewan right now, it's roughly \$200 million.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, is that number up or down in the last couple of years?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Deputy Chair, it's my understanding that that number was well over 300 million a few years ago and it's down to that 200. So it is down substantially.

Ms. Draude: — So, Mr. Minister, if there was nothing else added on the list of wants by school divisions, which of course will not happen, it would still take 10 years at the current rate to get the construction and maintenance under control. And we do know that the school divisions are . . . most of the schools are over 30 years old and that the repairs needed are mounting. And it's one of the big concerns that . . . as I've met with school divisions around the province — and I'm sure you've done the same thing — it's one of the concerns that you hear.

I've had a question from a number of school boards saying that if there's going to be a one-time payout to different departments, why doesn't the Department of Education ever get a payout — a one-time allocation of money so they can put it

towards capital funding? Is that something that your department is pushing for?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, certainly the suggestion from the member opposite is something that we could look at obviously.

The reality is though, that when you look at all of the capital requests and the government contribution of 200 million, we recognize that the way that those capital requests are prioritized are primarily for health and safety issues. So in terms of the structures that require urgent repairs, there is no major lag time. I mean these requests are prioritized right at the top of the list.

And when we look at the Centenary Capital Fund, well indeed this is a contribution of one-time money and it obviously is helping because the total overall requests have dropped from over 300 million from several years ago down to 200 million today. And I would anticipate, as we continue to put in that close to \$30 million over the next little while as the provincial government contribution, that that global number will continue to fall.

Certainly requests are requests. We make sure that health and safety issues are covered off as the top priority. Critical space shortages are covered off next.

We also recognize that more needs to be done and currently we are, as a department, having discussions with the School Trustees Association and others with regard to some changes we may look at in terms of our capital allocation, specially with regard to a new restoration plan.

So in fact, Mr. Deputy Chair, we are doing more that is having an impact. And that positive impact is having an impact on the learning experiences of students throughout the province of Saskatchewan, and also having a positive impact on the working environment for the classroom professionals in this province.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I imagine it must be somewhat of an embarrassment when you know that the decisions on who's going to get capital funding revolves around health and safety issues. The number of school divisions that have contacted me say, you know it's very sad when you know that the only way you can get money is if it's such an extreme problem that it's going to be an irritant to the health of the children in the school, or to the safety of the children in the school. So I believe that this is one of the issues that must be addressed by your department.

Mr. Minister, the issue of bussing in the city is something that is a concern to the school boards as well. I understand that elementary school children receive bussing but the collegiates do not. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, the member is correct. There is no provincial grant support for bussing with regard to secondary students, except for special-needs bussing.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Minister, is this brought up as a concern to you by the school divisions that are dealing with the issues in

our larger centres?

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Certainly, Mr. Deputy Chair, we recognize that school divisions are in the best position to make those local decisions.

We also recognize that, for example, in a city like Saskatoon there are open boundaries. So what happens is if a secondary student wishes to attend a collegiate that is on the other side of the city, that's a choice they can make.

So what the department has decided is that it is best for those local school divisions to make those decisions, and that is why the vast majority of grant dollars is provided on an unconditional basis.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:01.