

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today presented from people who are concerned about the Fyke report:

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Wadena and Kuroki.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition, the prayer of relief of which reads as follows:

That your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon the Saskatchewan government to repair Highway 43 from Vanguard to Highway 4 in order that area residents may have access to necessary services without endangering lives and property.

Your petitioners come from the village of Vanguard.

I also, while I'm on my feet, have a petition from the city . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Members of the Assembly, yesterday I inadvertently allowed the member for North Battleford to present two petitions. That is not the custom of this House and not the ruling of the House. I would ask the member to present one petition per day. Could he wait till tomorrow?

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

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

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

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of concerned citizens of southwest Saskatchewan regarding the state of the hospital in Swift Current. And the prayer of their 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, it's a pleasure to present a petition with signatures this afternoon from the communities of Success, Cabri, Vanguard, Main Centre, Tompkins, Gull Lake, Dalmeny, Morse, Central Butte, Shaunavon, Ponteix, Val Marie, Admiral, and the city of Swift Current.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have petitions to present today on health care. 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 area . . . communities of Redvers, Carievale, Maryfield, Fairlight, Moosomin, Bellegarde, Storthoaks, and Fertile, and Manor.

I so present.

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

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

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

Signed by the good citizens of Leask and Marcelin, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure the health care services in the Kamsack Hospital be maintained at its current level of

service at minimum, with 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctoral services available.

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

Mr. Harper: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are expressing support for the Government of Saskatchewan's decision to increase the foundation operating grants to school divisions. And the prayer goes as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to ask the Government of Saskatchewan to continue with its foresight and its vision of increasing the foundation operating grant to school divisions by \$40.8 million for the fiscal year 2001-2002, the largest increase in 15 years.

And this petition is signed by the good folks from Saskatoon.

I so submit.

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

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition come from the communities of Dafoe, Wynyard, Wishart, Regina, and Punnichy.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly also today to bring forth a petition for improved cellular telephone coverage in the Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause government to provide reliable cellular telephone service in the districts of Spiritwood, Medstead, Glaslyn, Leoville, Chitek Lake, Big River, Canwood, Debden, Shellbrook, Parkside, Shell Lake, Duck Lake, and Macdowall.

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

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, on this petition are from Spiritwood and the Witchekan Lake Reserve.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with concerned citizens about energy costs. And the prayer reads:

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 revenue to provide a more substantial energy rebate to Saskatchewan consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by folks from North Battleford and Battleford.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

The first petition is:

Of citizens requesting that the restoration of Territorial House in the Battlefords be designated a centenary project.

And there are 12 other petitions that are tabled as addendums to previously tabled petitions.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 57 ask the government the following question:

To the minister of the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority: what was the dollar amount of Larson Consulting's successful bid on the request for proposal issued by SLGA in 1996 for the leadership development program?

Thank you.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 57 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: (1) why did Saskatchewan not formally sign the Canada Farm Income Program until June 5, 2001; (2) what was the reason Saskatchewan did not sign the CFIP agreement in January when Alberta did, or in March when British Columbia and Manitoba did; and (3) how much has the late signing delayed payouts to Saskatchewan producers?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today is to introduce to you and through you to the other members of this legislature, 55 grade 6 students in your east gallery, from PrairieView Elementary School in Dalmeny. And I believe these students have spent the past number of weeks in some discussion of what happens in government.

They're accompanied today by their teachers, Darlene Thiessen and Roxanne Bitner, and also a parent, Karen Baerg.

And I'd like you to join me in welcoming them to the legislature this afternoon. I hope they enjoy their time here and

that they learn something about the process that takes place on their behalf. Would you join me?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join with the member from Rosthern in welcoming the grade 6 students from PrairieView School in Dalmeny this afternoon.

I had an opportunity to meet and chat with them earlier this afternoon and I was very impressed with the questions that they asked me with regard to the education system and how positive they feel about their school.

And so I'd ask all members to welcome this group to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today, 36 grade 5 and 6 students from Waldeck School near the west end of Thunder Creek. The students are accompanied by teachers Sandi Reimer and Marv Parschauer, and chaperone Ms. Teresa Ruf.

It's my hope that the students will have an educational and interesting afternoon in the legislature and I'll be looking forward to meeting with them later.

And I hope that all members will welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also want to join with the colleague from Rosthern, as well as the Minister of Education, in welcoming these grade 6 students from PrairieView Elementary.

I was able to visit their class in the last couple of months and they've probably the best grade 6 class with the best grade 6 teachers, as well the best resource room teachers, in all of Dalmeny.

So I would just like to join with colleagues and welcome you to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and to ask all members to join with me in welcoming to the legislature this afternoon Mr. Ed Keyes of Toronto.

Mr. Keyes was raised in Saskatchewan so this is a homecoming for him. He is joined with his daughter, Heidi, also of Toronto, and they are guests in Regina with his brother, Walter Keyes, who is a former deputy minister with the provincial government, in the east gallery.

I'd ask you to all welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to the rest of the gallery, I'd like to introduce a constituent of mine, Maynard Slater, sitting in the east gallery. And I'd like to welcome him here. And he's a councillor in Unity, so welcome here Maynard.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, up on your gallery we have three special visitors. They were in my office earlier on getting an overview in regards to my experience in the legislature.

Mr. Speaker, we have there, Laura Ballantyne, originally from Deschambault Lake and we also have Jade Sutherland from One Arrow and Beady's, and also teacher, Linda LaFontaine, who is the sister of one of my hard-working staff, Brenda Husli. And, Mr. Speaker, they are Miller High students.

Mr. Speaker, these two students also speak Cree. With that I would like to say to pass on due respect to everyone.

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

But also, Mr. Speaker, to say to work at the highest level of capacity.

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

Welcome. Ta wow.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to also join my colleague from the Battleford area to welcome Mr. Walter Keyes. Mr. Keyes, as you know, worked in the North for a number of years and he's certainly served the North in time of his capacity in his past work.

So I wanted to take the opportunity to welcome him here on behalf of the constituents of Athabasca. Thank you.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Induction into the Saskatchewan Oilmen's Hall of Fame

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the presentation of awards was held last night in Weyburn of the Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Show. This event, which included a delicious dinner, was attended by close to 800 people.

I had the privilege of witnessing the following individuals being inducted into the Saskatchewan Oilmen's Hall of Fame: Ron Kuchenka, Lorne Larsen, John Lindvoy, Bob Pierce, Helen Turgeon, and Doug Baldwin. The evening concluded, Mr. Speaker, with Mr. Norm (Pierre) Mondor, being named South-East Oilman of the Year.

Congratulations to all recipients, and congratulations to Weyburn for again hosting this great event, and also the oil industry, particularly in the southeast part of the province, for making this event such a great success once again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Saskatchewan Takes Better Care of its Poor

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An article on page A6 of today's *Leader-Post* states Saskatchewan "takes better care of its poor." The article quotes comments from Mr. Andrew Jackson, an economist with the Canadian Council on Social Development, who spoke to a group of MPs (Member of Parliament) in Ottawa yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, the article speaks in detail about how Saskatchewan has done a much better job at reducing both the incidence and the depth of poverty among lone-parent and lone-income families than the two richer provinces of Alberta and Ontario have done.

The CCSD (Canadian Council on Social Development) paper reports that the portion of lone-parent families living below StatsCanada's poverty line plunged more than 31 per cent from 1993 to 1998.

Saskatchewan's building independence programs, launched when our Premier was the minister of Social Services and fully implemented under our current Minister of Social Services, help families leave and stay off social assistance.

Since July of 1998, 3,800 fewer families including 8,100 children no longer rely on social assistance as a direct result of the building independence programs. And our social assistance caseloads have dropped 19 per cent in the last six years. They are now at their lowest point since 1992.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud that Saskatchewan is again receiving national recognition for its positive role in social welfare reform.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rethinking the Way We Look at Politics and Politicians

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to read the most recent editorial from the Biggar *Independent* entitled "Re-thinking the way we look at politics and politicians." And I quote:

Two headlines in the news this week have provided an opportunity to re-think the way we view our politicians . . .

One is the wage increase for federal MPs. The other is the Sonntag-Bacardi merger.

There are two schools of thought on whether our MPs deserve a salary increase. Some think that if we are to attract the "best" to serve as our elected officials we must be willing to pay them accordingly . . . On the other end of the scale there are those that feel the MPs don't earn the salary they presently receive . . .

As for Sonntag and his fishing trip — it is common practice for companies to "smooze" clients. In the private sector,

that is. If Sonntag had been the CEO of a private company, nothing would have been said about the trip. However, the mere fact that he is an elected government official there is the perception that there is something sordid about the whole affair. It just proves that government cannot operate in the world of private business, not effectively.

These two issues simply point to the fact that Canadians and Saskatchewanites are re-thinking politics. We are re-defining what we feel are political issues and what is best left to the private sector . . .

More and more the public mood seems to be: governments should look after health, education and our infrastructure, leave business to the private sector. We want our elected officials to do their jobs with honesty and integrity.

The voters know what qualities they want in their representatives. Now we only have to convince the politicians we know what we want.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hudson Bay Composite High School Sturgeon Environmental Project

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this is Environment Week. And here's an encouraging story, Mr. Speaker, showing that our kids are working to preserve the environment for themselves.

The Grade 7 class of Hudson Bay Composite High School has just been given a certificate of recognition by the fish and wildlife branch of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) for a very interesting, educational, and very worthwhile project.

Did you know that lake sturgeon were once as numerous in our lakes and streams as buffalo was on our prairies? Did you know that sturgeon are now on the watch list, which is one step before being put on the endangered species list? Did you know that the same thing that happened to the buffalo almost happened to the sturgeon?

I didn't, Mr. Speaker, and I gather that neither did the students in Hudson Bay. But thanks to the efforts of their teacher, Mr. Bill Lozinski, and to officials of the wildlife branch of Prince Albert they learned. They then proceeded to communicate what they learned throughout the community — an educational project in which the students became the teachers.

Most interestingly the students were given two sturgeon fingerlings, food, and equipment by wildlife branch. They successfully raised the fish. And anyone who's helped kids raise goldfish know that's not always easy. Then, Mr. Speaker, they released them into the Red Deer River near Hudson Bay. With luck, in 20 years their sturgeon will lay their first eggs. That's how long it takes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lozinski says he hopes to make this an annual project for Grade 7s. The environment is being conserved bit by bit, step by step. This is one such step and I congratulate the students at Hudson Bay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Survey on New Rural Economy

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I recently learned of a project within my constituency which should be of significant interest to the minister of Rural Revitalization.

The village of Spalding has been chosen to participate in a national survey as part of the new rural economy. It's being conducted in 20 rural communities across Canada to determine trends in those communities. Wood River is the other Saskatchewan community involved. The purpose of the project is to get a better understanding of rural Canada.

Criteria for choosing communities consisted of distance from cities with populations of 300,000 or more, high or low capabilities, impact of industry on the environment, and whether the economy of the community is stable or fluctuating.

Outcomes of the surveys are expected to determine where the rural economy is going, what Canadian rural communities have in common, what can be learned from similar communities, and what type of government services will best serve rural Canada.

As part of the project, a national conference will be held in Muenster in late October with the project surveyors from across Canada. It includes a field trip to Spalding.

The project is an initiative of the Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation. If the minister of Rural Revitalization is not aware of this group, I would urge her to contact them. They've been studying the issue of rural economy and revitalization since 1997. And they could likely save her department time and money if they attempt some of adoption for rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gas Pricing

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to read from the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* an article, Mr. Speaker. It says, "Energy critic's arguments leaky."

Consumers facing steep hikes in SaskEnergy bills should expect better from their politicians than (opposing) MLA Brad Wall's deplorable use of misleading numbers to attack the utility and the asinine posturing that has been the response by cabinet . . .

Especially disheartening was the performance of Wall and the Saskatchewan Party who believe they are poised to take the reins.

Nothing in Wall's theatrics shows that he's informed on the complicated issues of gas pricing, that the Opposition has a coherent policy on consumer subsidies or that it's actually capable of governing without (being) bogged down into micromanagement.

The problem is — and as energy critic, Wall should have

made it his business to know — the Alberta price isn't what applies in Saskatchewan.

Instead the Opposition's instant gas expert wants SaskEnergy to lock in at \$5.56/GJ because, he alone, magically knows when a market wilder than the stock exchange has hit rock bottom (Mr. Speaker).

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Skills Competition

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker on May 31, Tim Paetkau who was recently named Skills Canada Teacher of the Year in his capacity as head of the industrial arts department at L.P. Miller Comprehensive High School in Nipawin, together with instructor Sherri Stevens, escorted eight students to the Edmonton Agricom for the national skills competition.

Earlier this year, at the provincial skills competition in Moose Jaw, students from L.P. Miller took home 12 gold, 11 silver, and 5 bronze medals.

About 500 youth came out to compete in an Olympic-style playoff to determine who would be the best florist, welder, or speechmaker in the country.

L.P. Miller was hoping to set a new record for the school and take home a national medal. Sunday at the awards ceremony they were very excited when their school was called forward four times.

Konrad Jurgens won gold in the job skills demonstration; Michel Chabot, gold in workplace safety; Andrew Hamilton, bronze in electronics; Carl Dahl, bronze in small powered equipment. Reyna Paisley, Ryan Scheuer, Derek Cosh, and Steven Paetkau, also drew high praise for their entries.

Skills Canada promotes youth employment within our province and our country. Next year will be an international qualifying year for Team Saskatchewan, with the nationals being held in Vancouver. The gold winners there will be invited to the international event in 2003.

Currently the instructors from L.P. Miller are working hard to develop work experience programs that will be beneficial to all students.

Congratulations to the instructors and the students from L.P. Miller High School in Nipawin.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Environment Week Activities

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, this is Environment Week and it is never too soon to become involved in protecting and preserving our environment. The theme of Environment Week is, quote, "Acting Today for Tomorrow." And I want to congratulate some school children in my constituency who are

doing just that.

Today the Minister of Environment presented a certificate of achievement to the students of Lakeridge School in the wonderful constituency of Saskatoon Southeast. Lakeridge School has achieved Earth School status. In order to be recognized as an Earth School, Lakeridge students had to complete 1,000 environmental projects.

The students took action to enhance the environment. They talked to others about the environment. And they practised wise and sustainable use of environmental resources — just as we all should, Mr. Speaker.

Lakeridge is the fourth school in Saskatoon to reach Earth status. I know they are proud of this accomplishment, just as I am proud of them. We all hope that all other schools will follow this example and that the Lakeridge students will now begin work on their next 1,000 environmental projects. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskEnergy Rate Increase

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for SaskEnergy. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the minister for SaskEnergy told us about the millions of dollars he was saving by not locking in the price — and at that time he said what with the price being now below \$5 a gigajoule. But then about an hour later, he and the Premier announced that SaskEnergy bills would be going up by 24 per cent to \$6.30 a gigajoule.

Mr. Speaker, if SaskEnergy hasn't locked in a price that means they're buying on the spot market. And you know what the spot market price was today, Mr. Speaker? It was \$4 a gigajoule — \$4 a gigajoule. The NDP (New Democratic Party) is buying natural gas for \$4 a gigajoule, if they're in the market today, and today they're charging Saskatchewan people \$6.30 a gigajoule.

Mr. Speaker, the question to the minister is: why?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I do admit I'm a little surprised at this question. Just yesterday I pointed out that if that member had been investing in gas and if SaskEnergy had listened to him, we would have lost \$20 million. Well now that member is pointing out for the public of Saskatchewan, had we listened to him for investing for the day before, we would lost a lot more than that, Mr. Speaker, a lot more than that.

I say again to the member, I give him credit for acknowledging that the people in SaskEnergy are the experts in investing in gas, and he should let them invest in gas, Mr. Speaker, not that member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that the minister

stood up yesterday in the House and talked about the fact that SaskEnergy, by buying on the spot market, was doing us all a favour. And we agreed, because the price currently is falling.

But the price today, Mr. Speaker, is \$4 a gigajoule. Using SaskEnergy's number, when you add all the attendant cost to that, you get 50 cents a gigajoule, according to SaskEnergy, so you're up to \$4.50 a gigajoule landed in Saskatchewan to Saskatchewan homes today.

So the question to the minister is this, Mr. Speaker: why are the NDP charging \$6.30?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Before I answer the question, Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out for the public that this entire discussion would be entirely unnecessary had those members opposite when they were in government not sold all the reserves, Mr. Speaker. Had they not sold all the reserves, Mr. Speaker, this discussion would be entirely unnecessary, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as was also . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. Order!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, as all our experts in SaskEnergy have pointed out that in fact they would anticipate as well that . . . I should say the reason that they've not locked in is that they expect that in the next little while that the prices might in fact continue to drop, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as was pointed out yesterday in our announcement, any savings that can be incurred will be passed on to SaskEnergy's customers.

Mr. Speaker, this should not be portrayed as a bad thing with prices dropping, Mr. Speaker. Again I say, leave it to the experts in SaskEnergy to make the investments, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly experts should be involved in the purchasing and the deciding of the timelines for purchasing the price of gas. But you don't need an expert to tell you that.

Why would you go through the bureaucracy, Mr. Speaker, the bureaucracy of approving a \$6.30 rate effective June 1 as they did yesterday, when you know in a couple of weeks you're going to have to give the people's money back, if that indeed is what this government would do, Mr. Speaker. A lot of people have questions about that.

Mr. Speaker, very quickly, let's go through it again. Yesterday the Premier and the minister announced that the NDP will charge Saskatchewan people \$6.30 a gigajoule. We know that SaskEnergy is buying on a . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

(14:00)

Mr. Wall: — We know that currently SaskEnergy is buying on the spot market. The price on the spot market is \$4; add in the 50 cent attendant cost that they say it takes to get the gas here; that's \$4.50.

So the question is simple: if their price is \$4.50, why are the NDP charging Saskatchewan people \$6.30?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I want to again, for those who didn't catch it just yesterday, I want to refer to a quote. This came from the interviews that took place out in the rotunda the day before yesterday, Mr. Speaker:

Mr. Wall (it says) says the following: I also understand Mr. From (who's the investor for SaskEnergy), and he is an expert in this, he knows more than I do clearly, or anybody in the opposition would know.

He should listen to his advice, Mr. Speaker. He should listen to his advice.

Again I say, Mr. Speaker, the reduction in prices is a good thing for consumers of natural gas here in Saskatchewan. That's a good thing, Mr. Speaker. And any savings that can be achieved will be passed on to SaskEnergy's customers, Mr. Speaker. A reduction in price is a good thing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Province's Economic Development Strategy

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. This morning the NDP released yet another economic strategy. And right now librarians all over Saskatchewan are trying to decide: are we going to put this in non-fiction or in fiction? Mr. Speaker, I think they're leaning towards fiction.

Once again the NDP is promising to create 30,000 new jobs. That's the same promise they made in the election two years ago. And since that time there are actually fewer jobs in Saskatchewan than there were then.

Mr. Speaker, why does the NDP keep setting these job targets when they have no plan to actually reach them?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I would have assumed that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition's members would have reported to him, at the event this morning there were in essence several hundreds of people there, many, many of whom are leaders in their own communities, leaders in the business community across Saskatchewan, all of whom, plus almost 10,000 other Saskatchewan people, participated in forming this partnership for prosperity, the targets, and the plan, Mr. Speaker.

Now if the Leader of the Opposition says that these 10,000 Saskatchewan community leaders and business peoples are wrong, fine. He can say that. What we have developed here is a

partnership of Saskatchewan people who have set some ambitious targets. There's no question about that, Mr. Speaker, some ambitious targets with some action plan steps to achieve those targets.

Mr. Speaker, knowing the people of Saskatchewan, we will achieve those targets.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to quote from the NDP's 1999 election platform. It says:

499,300 people were working this July. We have a comprehensive plan to create another 30,000 new jobs over the next four years.

Mr. Speaker, there were 465,000 jobs in Saskatchewan last month. That's over 30,000 fewer jobs than when the NDP made the election promise, the same promise they're repeating today.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is making unbelievable phony promises to the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the NDP is killing jobs, not creating jobs.

My question is, why should people believe their latest promise when they have never ever delivered in the past?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about campaign commitments made in the last campaign. Well I happen to have here *The Way Up*, the election platform of the Saskatchewan Party in the last campaign. What does their forecast predict right here in the campaign document?

By 2000, we would have employment of (with their strategies in place) 483,500.

We've exceeded that, Mr. Speaker, already. We've exceeded their plan already.

Mr. Speaker, we set in place some years ago . . . Mr. Speaker, we set in some place year . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now, Mr. Speaker, we put in place some years ago, as the public will well know, a document called the *Partnership for Growth* with targets, with plans. Mr. Speaker, almost every one of those targets have been met or exceeded, Mr. Speaker.

Now while I'm on my feet, I know we've had a recent expression from the Leader of the Opposition about their economic development strategy, how we're going to return young people to the province and so on and so on. And he said, in *The Leader-Post*, "if," Mr. Speaker, "if the federal government and the weather co-operates."

Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't have a plan based on weather permitting. Again, it's an all-weather plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would just remind the Premier that we found that information out of his Finance minister's budget document — that's where we got that information.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would also tell the Premier that had we followed the Saskatchewan Party plan, we'd have 20,000 more jobs than we have today in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's an old proverb that says vision without action is a daydream and, Mr. Speaker, the NDP are still daydreaming. Other provinces are taking action. "B.C. Premier," it says in the *National Post*, "to cut taxes 25%." Mr. Speaker, the new Premier of BC (British Columbia) has been in office for less than a week and he's already taking action, while the NDP are simply still in a daydream world of creating jobs, but they have no plan as to how it's going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP keeps setting job targets and they keep bringing in policies that drive people from the province. Mr. Speaker, why would anyone believe this latest job target, given the fact that Saskatchewan is currently losing jobs and they have never kept their commitments to create jobs in the past?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition today raised the announcement made by now Premier Campbell in British Columbia to cut their personal income tax rate by 25 per cent. I'm glad that Premier Campbell is following the leadership of Saskatchewan in this regard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — For as you well know, Mr. Speaker, we've made the same cut announced a year ago in the budget; well underway to achieving that goal in this province making Saskatchewan, if I may say — taking in light BC medicare premiums — more competitive than British Columbia, that's for sure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I invite the Leader of the Opposition to carefully read the Partnership for Prosperity, to carefully read, carefully read the assessment of 10,000 Saskatchewan people. And, Mr. Speaker, one of the conclusions in the Partnership for Prosperity, one of the key ingredients in reaching the prosperity that we know that Saskatchewan can reach is in attitude, Mr. Speaker. Attitude that says enough of the doom and gloom that we've heard from across the way throughout this session.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Nations Fund

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just in reference to the Premier's last comment, Campbell didn't raise taxes like this government did.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Mr. Speaker, today the Acting Provincial Auditor released his Spring Report, and once again, the First Nations Fund received considerable attention. At last, the auditor has been allowed access to the fund's accounts and is able to report on the management of these public resources. What he did find is proof that the First Nations Fund should have been audited by the Provincial Auditor from the beginning.

Mr. Speaker, the auditor has learned that contrary to The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act, the trustees of the First Nations Fund are operating two trust funds, of which the gaming proceeds they receive are paid into.

The auditor states, and I quote:

The trustees' position is not consistent with the law and how they administer the money.

Mr. Speaker, what actions will the minister be taking to ensure the trustees of the First Nations Fund operate according to the Act they are governed by?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that I have read the auditor's report dealing with the First Nations Fund very carefully and the auditor has identified certain expenditures that in his opinion fall outside the range of authorized uses for the First Nations Fund.

I want to also say that we have made considerable progress in strengthening the accountability of the First Nations Fund. As the member opposite knows, the First Nations Fund has always been audited by a private firm.

Due to the hard work of our government, the First Nations . . . the Provincial Auditor now has access to those . . . to the fund and I am confident that by working together co-operatively with the Provincial Auditor, with the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), and with the trustees of the First Nations Fund that the people of Saskatchewan, and the First Nations people in particular, will be well served.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the auditor says the trustees of the First Nations Fund maintain that the agreements between the FSIN and the NDP government allow the establishment for two funds. However the Legislative Assembly only provided for one fund.

He says that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is responsible to supervise the trustees and ensure the trustees spend money with due care and operate in accordance with the laws.

The auditor states that a letter received from the trustees dated as recently as May 3 indicates that they believe they can act outside of the legislation by operating a second trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, the auditor points out that supervisory responsibilities for the trustees of the First Nations Fund belong to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Why, why did the minister allow the trustees of the First Nations Fund to operate outside the law?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say very clearly — and I believe the member opposite knows this, but I will state it for the record — that yes, there is a second fund, the FNF II (First Nations Fund II). They have established a second fund. But, Mr. Speaker, they are not using that second fund. So that is an important fact to keep in mind when we're having this discussion.

Now I want to tell the members opposite that we have made progress in strengthening the accountability of the First Nations Fund. We do accept the findings of the report of the auditor that the rules and procedures to safeguard and control the assets of the funds are not adequate.

However, there is no suggestion that there is wrongful spending of the First Nations Fund. The auditor has identified a couple of expenditures that in his opinion fall outside the range of authorized uses for these funds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act authorizes the First Nations Fund to spend gaming proceeds on economic, cultural and social development, education, health, and recreation initiatives for Aboriginal people.

However the Acting Provincial Auditor raises serious concerns that the money from the First Nations Fund is not going to these areas. He says the trustees do not have any procedures in place to ensure that the money paid to First Nations are going to these programs. He states, and I quote:

As a result we are unable to determine if the money the trustees paid to the First Nations was used for the purposes set out in the law.

The trustees have paid out over \$34 million in the last four years to First Nations. Where has the money gone?

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to act immediately on the auditor's recommendations and ensure that the money from the First Nations Fund is spent on the purposes described in the Act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, what the Provincial Auditor and the First Nations Fund private auditor have identified is that the First Nations Fund trustees need rules in place so that they themselves can be assured that the funds of the First Nations Fund are properly used. So that they themselves can be assured that there is wise use of the money.

I endorse that and I want to tell the member opposite that I have taken several actions as a result of reading the Provincial Auditor's report.

I have phoned the FSIN and advised them of the auditor's findings. I have instructed my officials to meet as soon as possible with the FSIN and with the First Nations Fund Board of Trustees to work out expeditious processes to strengthen the rules and procedures that safeguard and control the assets of the First Nations Fund. I have asked my officials to report to me on the results of those discussions on a regular basis.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — The auditor clearly stated this morning that there was no detailed accounting from the bands to the trustees of how money has been spent. So the minister cannot dismiss the fact that not all of the First Nations money is being spent properly.

In fact the auditor has discovered over \$280,000 that was spent on travel and FSIN senate contributions. Payments not authorized under the Act. And what is more disturbing is that the Acting Provincial Auditor said this morning that there is absolutely no evidence of how any of this money paid out from the fund is being spent.

Mr. Speaker, I hear from many grassroots Aboriginal people who do not believe money from the First Nations Fund is getting to their communities and to their children. They believe they would be seeing greater results if even half of the \$34 million was spent on programming for their people.

Mr. Speaker, what action will the minister be taking on behalf of Aboriginal people to recover the money that has been improperly spent by the trustees? And will her department be imposing penalties on them for breaking the law?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate, with respect to specific expenditures, there is no suggestion of wrongful spending of the First Nations Fund. The auditor identified a couple of expenditures that in his opinion fall outside the range of authorized uses for these funds. And the members opposite will know the authorized uses are: economic development; social development; justice initiatives; education development; recreational facilities, operation and development; senior and youth programs; cultural development; community infrastructure development and maintenance; health initiatives; and various charitable purposes that are mutually agreed upon.

I think that all members in this House recognize that these are important goals and important things upon which the First Nations Fund should be . . . to which it should be devoted. Mr. Speaker . . .

Investments by Saskatchewan Government Insurance

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the Crown spending spree of Saskatchewan taxpayers' money outside of the province continues uncontrolled. The latest example is an 8.2 million investment in a Toronto insurance company. The deal keeps 30

jobs in Ontario and creates 10 in Saskatchewan — 8.2 million for 10 jobs. That's a staggering \$820,000 per job created.

Today the government said it wants to create 30,000 jobs in Saskatchewan. Well at that rate that would cost the government \$25 billion and result in three times as many jobs outside the province. Surely there are more cost-effective ways to create jobs in Saskatchewan. Surely there are better ways to reverse the 11,000-job loss we suffered last year.

My question for the Premier: will he reverse the policy of external investments by the corporations and say that the priority of our government and of its Crowns is to create wealth here, not to compete with existing private business or to create jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the member is of the view that the creation of jobs is important, he is correct in that Crowns in their external investments of course try to create jobs.

But that is not their only objective, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan Government Insurance has amongst the lowest auto rates in all of Canada. And part of the investment, Mr. Speaker, as SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) has done in the past, is to try to spread and diversify risk, Mr. Speaker.

In this investment, Mr. Speaker, they have made a very good investment by anybody's yardstick, Mr. Speaker. And clearly this will spread risk for SGI, Mr. Speaker, and it will be profitable and it will bring revenues to Saskatchewan that can be spread amongst the taxpayers of Saskatchewan and people who buy insurance from SGI. This is a very good investment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

New Provincial Economic Development Strategy

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to today bring attention to the House some news about a new provincial economic development strategy that was released today, that will continue economic growth in this province over the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the former minister, the member from Saskatoon Idylwyld, for beginning the Partnership for Prosperity consultation last fall. A consultation in which 10,000 Saskatchewan people attended meetings, visited the Web sites, sent in surveys, or called the toll-free number that was available to them.

Mr. Speaker, the message was very clear. People care about this province and, Mr. Speaker, they realize that we have opportunities here today. However we must take action in a number of areas to ensure that we can continue to have those opportunities and more of them in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Partnership for Prosperity is a plan that is based on 16 targets, concentrating on three main areas.

Our youth. Keep them in the province; give them the tools

through education and job and business opportunities so that they may stay here and raise their families here and create businesses here.

Innovation. Let's make sure that we're up for the challenges of the new economy so that we can compete with more research and development, more access to the Internet and technology.

And rural revitalization, Mr. Speaker. Working with businesses, rural leaders, farmers to revitalize and prosper in rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy presents a solid, forward-looking framework to keep us in the right direction. More jobs, thriving businesses, strong communities, and more opportunities.

Partnership for Prosperity is a positive step in continuing the growth from the 1990s. It will continue the tradition of being the best that we can be, meeting our challenges, and finding innovative solutions to succeed today and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the many business men and women from across Saskatchewan. I want to thank the people from organized labour, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Métis Society, all of the people who were involved in putting forward the thoughtful comments that built this document and that helped to put this document together.

I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development can be very proud of the work that they've done. It is a very easy-to-read document. It's easy to understand. The goals are clear. The targets are clear. But what's more important, Mr. Speaker, it's not based on the weather and the national economy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for sending over a copy of his statement earlier.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's a good thing that this new partnership is not based on items out of the Minister of Finance's budget, like the idea of relying on the weather, Mr. Speaker, because that's what that document stated.

Mr. Speaker, it seems that this is the third or fourth statement like this that this government has presented. It seems we get them virtually every year — a new five-year plan every year.

The government in 1999, Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the economy recovery, promised 30,000 new jobs in their election campaign. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the record is almost 30,000 jobs lost. We can't afford, Mr. Speaker, any more of their economic development.

Mr. Speaker, the minister talked about rural revitalization. Rural Revitalization, under the present minister, is simply a bureaucracy in Regina while the doors are being closed across Saskatchewan because of the Fyke Commission, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we agree with the government that a plan needs to

be put in place to create a prosperous Saskatchewan. Unfortunately though, the model and plan used by the NDP-CCF (New Democratic Party-Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) for the last 60 years has resulted in miserable failure, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP government's continuation of that plan — no matter what the platitudes they mouth — is simply more of the same bad medicine of failure, Mr. Speaker.

The province needs and deserves a vision, not one that simply relies on the failures of the past. One which is this government's solution, Mr. Speaker, a solution of Crown corporations as the only economic engine in this province. One where Crowns enter into non-essential areas and continuously lose money, Mr. Speaker, such as SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company), Channel Lake, IQ&A. Or try to grow the Crowns by buying successful businesses out of the province to compete against private enterprise here, such as against ironworks at Outlook or familyfarm.com at Archerwill, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, please. I would ask all members to allow the opposition Economic Development critic the privilege — and the House Leader — to make his remarks on the ministerial statement. Order.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the best solution to create prosperity in this province would be for the NDP to simply step aside. This would allow someone else with vision and innovation to create an economic environment, which will indeed create a reason for businesses and people to stay in Saskatchewan rather than be driven out.

In British Columbia, Mr. Speaker, after only a few days in power and having thrown the NDP out, taxes are dropping by 25 per cent. The new government in British Columbia knows how to create an environment to create prosperity.

The Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, is ready; it has the vision and the innovation to allow the people of Saskatchewan to make this province a prosperous place that we know it can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Members of the Assembly, I wish to put on record that at 1:30 p.m. today I tabled the 2001 Spring Report of the Provincial Auditor, silently.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 4

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 4 — The Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand today and make a few comments regarding Bill No. 4, The Registered Nurses Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand, this Bill further expands the scope of practice for registered nurses allowing them to diagnose basic medical conditions, prescribe medication and other diagnostic tests.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe this piece of legislation has been discussed at length over a period of years. And in fact a few years back, if I'm not mistaken, there was some discussion about coming forward with a piece of legislation of this type that would expand the role for registered nurses in the province of Saskatchewan.

And one may ask, well what exactly are we expanding or why are we expanding the role of nurses? What we have before us today, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that there are many communities and certainly in rural areas, where communities are facing physician shortages and doctors are leaving the rural areas.

(14:30)

And, Mr. Speaker, we still have health care facilities, community services, and a lot of RNs (registered nurse) working in those facilities. And what has been brought to our attention is the fact that many of these individuals with some additional training would certainly be able to meet some of the basic needs of the clientele in those communities.

And so, Mr. Speaker, in that regard this Bill certainly is an appropriate piece of legislation in dealing with a concern of that nature, and indeed addressing one of the issues that the Saskatchewan registered nurses have had for a number of years in the fact that with the level of training they receive and with a bit of additional training that could certainly expand their scope of practice and meet some of the needs on the floor of our community facilities and the hospitals and emergency wards, especially at times when there may be a shortage of doctors on those floors.

So it's encouraging to see that the government has been able to come up with a piece of legislation. And as my colleague, the member from Melfort, our Health critic has done some intensive research, certainly he finds that there's a lot of support for this piece of legislation in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I might add though, we are not . . . we don't want to see this piece of legislation as well, however, just begin to replace doctors. I think the people of this province still want to see physicians available. We want to see opportunity for some physicians to open up practices across this province and in the rural communities. We do not want to see this expanded to the point that in cases where doctors would like to come and practice, but rural health districts may choose to hire a licensed practical nurse, licensed nurses, clinical nurses versus doctors.

So I think it is important that the legislation we have before us indeed be very clear in its definition of what an advanced clinical nurse is, what that definition means, so that there isn't the conflict between nurses and physicians.

What the legislation as well does for advanced clinical nurses is gives them the opportunity to provide the practice and prescribing medication and providing some diagnostic tests, as I've indicated earlier. And indeed, Mr. Speaker, what this may do once this piece of legislation is fully enforced, it may streamline some of the medical services that we have in the province, areas where we find that there are bottlenecks currently in the system. And, Mr. Speaker, we hope that with this piece of legislation, Bill No. 4, that it indeed will alleviate some of the concerns that we have in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health care, people in this province are certainly concerned about the health care. And for years we have prided ourselves as a province in the role we have taken in expanding medicare and certainly ensuring that the public — not only of Saskatchewan, but as we have seen through the past number of decades, the people of Canada — have become accustomed to a health care system that has been provided to them by the tax base, that it guarantees access to the services, to the health needs and services that a person would experience at any particular time.

And over the past number of years, Mr. Speaker, we have seen in the province of Saskatchewan that many people have found that they've ended up on longer and longer waiting lists. And certainly, in loom of the current situation we have in the province, I know there are many people scheduled for surgeries that are very concerned about the fact that those surgeries may be delayed as a result of possibly a conflict within the health field between employer and employee.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about . . . we talk about waiting lists and we talk about ways in which we can address those waiting lists. We talk about procedures or professionals who can provide the services to address those types of concerns.

This piece of legislation I do believe does go a fair distance in ensuring that we are listening very carefully and we are looking at alternatives that can be utilized to meet the health needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we'll find many, many professionals across the province and certainly many associations and health care districts have expressed a very positive view in regards to Bill No. 4, The Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2001. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it certainly is moving in the positive direction.

While we're encouraged by this move in the positive direction, there needs to be . . . some more issues need to be looked at a little more carefully before we actually move further in debate of the legislation. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe some of my colleagues want to address a few other concerns before we actually move into addressing the Bill, line by line in committee. And therefore, at this time, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 5 — The Dietitians Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure that I rise to speak to Bill No. 5, The Dietitians Act.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing this legislation I recognize that it is certainly time that this legislation be updated, as it is destined to replace legislation that was on the books dating back to 1958, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

And certainly in the world of health care, and specific in the field of dietitians much has changed since that time. I think it's important to recognize that this Act will have the potential of strengthening the Act under which dietitians operate in this province, and it ensures a number of very important things from a regulatory and an accountability standpoint.

It makes for sure for example that only qualified practitioners that are authorized under this Act and under the association that will administer the Act, will be allowed to use the name in their title of dietitian or registered dietitian. And I think that's important for public confidence so that people understand when somebody uses those titles they have the appropriate training and professional background so that their advice and recommendation in regard to the nutritional issues that many people face, are indeed going to be held to a very high standard.

And I think that those kinds of things are good moves in legislation to make sure that we aspire to the highest possible standards, for particularly those people practicing in the health care field, but in other areas of independent regulation as well.

In addition to that, in terms of the public accountability, there are a number of amendments in this legislation that I think will go a fair distance in the right way to enhance and improve public accountability by the dietitians of this province. And it's very important and very helpful, I believe.

For example, it expands the number of public representatives on the council that governs the activities of dietitians. It requires more open disciplinary hearings and the filing of an annual report with the Minister of Health, which were actions that were not previously required in legislation. And I think all of those moves are very important and very worthwhile.

Mr. Speaker, very often dietitians and the people that practice dietitian work operate in the . . . out of the limelight of public perception and they work in many different fields in the health care area.

They work in food services in major health care institutions to make sure that the diets that people are receiving in either acute care or long-term care are appropriate to their needs. And make sure that they are going to be . . . not have allergic reactions or things of that nature that may be detrimental to their health.

They work in public health. And I know in that field that there's

much good work that goes on in terms of advice for new mothers and people that perhaps have some health challenges because of their diets. They work as community dietitian and nutritional supplement programs and even in special clinical areas like pediatrics.

All of these areas deal with the requirements that people have to have healthy lifestyles and healthy diets.

Mr. Speaker, many times in the whole field of health care we get very much occupied by the immediacy of issues in acute care and accessibility to surgeries and waiting times and waiting lists. But we also have to understand that as an investment in the future we have to very much keep our eye on the determinants of health. And one of the very clear determinants of health into the future and diminishing the long-term requirements of health care going forward, is that people be encouraged in every way possible and assisted to have healthy lifestyles. And healthy diets are a very important component of that.

And very often that we hear stories of people that get very much off on the wrong track by investing far too much of their food dollars in junk food and fast food things that are only very short-term expedient and they don't look at the longer-term implications of that kind of course of action. And people like dietitians are very important in communities as part of a district health board in order to have the advice that's necessary.

Too often we hear of children that come to school in the morning and they haven't had a proper, nutritional breakfast. And it's very much of a determinant that they cannot learn as well as other children because they haven't had proper dietary breakfasts in the morning. And I think all of those issues indicate that there is much more to the role of dietitians in this province than what most people may think.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important that when we update legislation of this significance that we make sure that we have a sufficient amount of time for not only people practicing in the field, because we've heard from the official association who are very supportive of this proposed legislation.

But we also have an opportunity for individuals and citizens who are practising or experiencing services by dietitians to have their opportunity to consult. And we've had indication that we still have some people that would like to advise us on this matter. And, Mr. Speaker, I know everyone in the Assembly will want to make sure that we do our due diligence and make sure that this legislation not only meets the needs of people for today, but going forward into the future. And we certainly want to make sure that we do that job responsibly.

And so, Mr. Speaker, with that in mind, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 26

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 26 — The Hearing Aid Sales and Services Act** be now read a second

time.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to further debate on The Hearing Aid Sales and Services Act.

When we listen to the Minister of Health who brought forth this Act, Mr. Speaker, we were, of course, on this side somewhat pleased that finally something was being done in this area. Of course I'm musing also too, Mr. Speaker, that probably some of the cabinet ministers on the other side will probably be able to make use of this in very short order.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we notice that we've certainly heard from the government over the last period of years that there has been serious complaints brought forth to the government in this area of hearing aid sales and service; that there seems to be a small segment of the sales and services community that have unfairly taken advantages of those people who are unable to be able to protect themselves.

And certainly it's important that as government and those of us in opposition, that we stand up for those people who are less fortunate than us and be able to protect them from those people who are . . . quite willingly take advantage of people. So it's important that this Bill finally be brought forth.

Although we've noticed that through some of the conversations we've had out there in the industry — and I do say some because there is certainly a lot more conversation that has to take place yet, Mr. Speaker — is that consumer action groups out there have actually been pressing this government for the last 10 years, and it's actually taken them 10 years to get to this point. We are certainly disappointed it has taken them so long but I guess it's quite an indication of how slow they actually get business done over there.

(14:45)

But there are some important aspects in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, that are important that we see that for consumers from now on that this government is proposing that there be a period of time take place, three working days, in which consumers are going to be able to stop and spend some time, Mr. Speaker, making a decision, and maybe working out with a neighbour or with a loved one, whether the deal that they just got into over a hearing aid has actually been a good one for them, or else they have been scammed to some degree.

But what we need . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would ask that only one debate occur in this Assembly at a time.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, as we listen to the minister and his comments, we are very pleased that finally something is starting in the right direction. Of course we also see that the government may be going a little too far. We need to spend a considerable amount of time, Mr. Speaker, making sure that this Bill is the right one.

We know that the industry out there, for the most part, a very, very large percentage of them, providing a very valuable service

to our communities, and to our . . . especially the senior citizens out there that require this service.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we make sure we take the time, that this government is doing the right thing; that what they're bringing forth is what the citizens of Saskatchewan need, and not just some more red tape that will be administered by the Department of Health. As well though, we have a lot of concerns about how the Department of Health is operating that maybe there are some advantages here.

But until we receive all the information that we need, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 39

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Trew that **Bill No. 39 — The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand today and speak on the Act to amend The Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Mr. Speaker, these changes being put forward seem to make a lot of sense and appear to be supported by the industry, and that is absolutely vital in Saskatchewan to have industry on side with any changes.

As we've seen in many other areas, as a number of regulations come forward without consultation with the business sector, they're put through without any legislative scrutiny, and it's very important to have the industry on side in these matters.

Anyone filling the role of the chief mines inspector must have a great expertise in a wide variety of areas, given the range of the mining activity that Saskatchewan is so lucky to have. Saskatchewan is blessed with potash, uranium, coal, precious metals, and possibly even diamond mines in the future.

The mining industry employs upwards of 20,000 people in Saskatchewan. It has annual sales of about \$6 billion. And it's a very important industry to Saskatchewan and to citizens of the province.

We understand from the industry that the government is currently working on a major rewriting of the mining regulations in Saskatchewan, and these changes are necessary to comply with those changes.

And again, I'd like to emphasize that the government needs to consult widely with industry and make sure the proper regulations are in place and bring back to the House, to the legislature for scrutiny.

I would hope that when this Bill winds up in the Committee of the Whole, the minister would be kind enough to give us an overview of the regulatory changes that government is contemplating at present.

With regards to the chief mines inspector, it is our understanding that both the Saskatchewan Mining Association and the labour movement are supportive of changes being proposed here. And it's again very important that labour and business have input into changes in the regulations.

One of the chief mines inspector's major roles is to ensure a safe working environment for the 20,000 men and women who work in our mining industry, which is very important to the Saskatchewan economy.

Mining traditionally has been a fairly dangerous occupation, compared to others, with the potential for more to go wrong. So we need to ensure safety of the workers and at the same time make it possible for the mining industry to continue to flourish. Mr. Speaker, that is why it is so significant that we have heard supportive words from both the mining association and the labour movement.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are a number of other members on the official opposition side who do want to have an opportunity to speak to this legislation. So at this time, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 30

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Trew that **Bill No. 30 — The Labour Standards Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand in the House today and speak to Bill No. 30, The Labour Standards Amendment Act. The amendment to The Labour Standards Act stem from changes made to the federal legislation and Bill C-32 and the need for Saskatchewan to harmonize the provincial legislation with the federal legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment to the provincial legislature matches that of the changes to the federal EI (Employment Insurance) which now provides for 52 weeks of maternity and parental leave. The provincial government, the provincial changes would increase the job security aspect of The Labour Standards Act to match EI in maternity and parental-leave benefits. Also, Mr. Speaker, fathers entitled to 37 weeks of job-protected leave combined would be a total of 89 weeks of job-protected leave for a family of a new baby.

People can begin their parental leave up to 12 weeks prior to the estimated time of birth. Protection also includes the parents of newly adopted children.

The notice an employee on parental leave must give their employer when they are returning to work has been increased from two weeks to four weeks, Mr. Speaker. And some employees do not take their full leave and come back to work early.

Mr. Speaker, I agree that the first years of life are very important and parents should have an opportunity to spend time with their newborn or adopted children. Our children, our

families are the most important, precious part of our lives and the family health and welfare is fundamental to not only ourselves personally, but also to the stability of our communities, province, and country. We rely on our family for strength to overcome the bumps and difficulties of life, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, parents often speak of the need to create good-paying jobs, which will employ the children here at home in Saskatchewan. They want meaningful employment opportunities that offer the children safety and security. Now the desire and the creation of a strong, vibrant, diversified, and growing economy that offers the hope of employment stability which will keep those dear to them near to them.

And while I'm on the subject of jobs, Mr. Speaker, the government side has been quoting numbers during question period and I'd just like to make clarifications. I'd like to quote from the NDP election campaign in 1999. And they say under the jobs . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I believe the member is in second reading of a particular Bill and should try to make his comments pertinent to the Bill.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was outlining the concerns of people having, wanting, and needing good jobs in this province. As we have seen, Mr. Speaker, not only parents speak of the need to create good-paying jobs, but the business owners also desire many of the same things.

There's no doubt that family issues are an important element of many small businesses. In fact it should be remembered that a significant number of small firms are owned and operated by families that strive to build a family environment within their company that values the contribution of employees.

They will also tell you that they want the ability to conduct their business affairs with a minimum of regulation in a competitive environment that provides them with access to markets in which to sell their goods and services in a manner which generates a fair return on capital they have invested. They tell you that they want to exploit opportunity and markets, not people.

Mr. Speaker, they want to grow the business enterprise, thereby creating employment and of course wealth. Most will express a desire to be good corporate citizens and contributors to the economic well-being of their community and this province.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, it is possible to radically alter the economic landscape of Saskatchewan and still maintain a worker-friendly regulatory environment. There is no contradiction between efficient, highly productive, leading-edge workplaces and worker safety, financial integrity, respect, and dignity. They are not mutually exclusive or at odds with each other in any respect.

Indeed the hallmarks of world-class business enterprises are respect for worker rights and appreciation of the essential elements of competition. As examples, safety, productivity, quality, and efficiency.

We believe that Saskatchewan can become a prosperous,

thriving economy which attracts and retains businesses which create high-paying jobs, produce value-added products and services, and serve customers throughout the world. We believe that the diversification and growth, opportunity and abundance can be achieved if a stable and reliable economic climate exists here in Saskatchewan.

We need to convince ourselves and the rest of the world on the concept that Saskatchewan is a terrific place to live, work, and invest.

The business community feels strongly that sustained economic growth can be achieved only if government at all levels gets out of the business of regulating the workplace beyond providing for a basic level of protection for occupational health and safety, workers' compensation, employment standards, and a social safety net, all of which enhance the competitive position of Saskatchewan enterprises.

Saskatchewan should be viewed as a place becoming the best jurisdiction to live, work, and do business in North America, Mr. Speaker. We want sustainable growth, high-paying jobs, and excellent working conditions.

We want to achieve a high standard of performance based on the superiority of our people, and practices, and our technology.

Some specific concerns of small businesses, Mr. Speaker, concerning this Bill. The most important, critical impact for many employers is the prospect of losing a key employee for an extended period of time and the difficulty this will impose on a small firm. If a business of five employees loses just one staff person for an extended period of time, it means that 20 per cent of the firm's workforce must be reallocated either to a temporary employee who must first be trained or it must be spread over the remaining staff and employer.

Considering that about 75 per cent of Saskatchewan firms have five or fewer employees, such an impact is very real for many firms across Saskatchewan. The impact of losing a key employee for an extended period of time can be significant to a firm's production in day-to-day activities.

However firms are also concerned with the added financial burden they will have to endure in order to train temporary employees and in many cases, also retrain the returning employee if they are gone for a year. This is especially difficult for firms located in those areas where shortages of qualified labour are severe and in those industries where specialized training is required.

Considering that Saskatchewan has a growing concern over the shortage of qualified labour, the further prospect of having to find, train, and then replace a qualified employee is difficult for many small businesses.

Also of concern to many small-business owners is the impacts such legislation would have on the temporary employee. Many businesses have questioned the fairness of hiring and training someone who has been able to integrate themselves into a firm over the course of a year, only to let them go once the parent employee returns from leave.

However, in light of the economy, it is difficult to find employees willing to take on temporary work. It may also be difficult to retrain these temporary employees as they will likely move on to more permanent positions, once they get one, forcing the employer to find yet another temporary employee.

Mr. Speaker, the concerns of small business need to be balanced with the concerns of new parents. It is now broadly understood that small business provide the majority of new jobs, provide most young people with their first job experience, and are the backbones of the Saskatchewan economy.

As such the continued success is integral to maintaining Saskatchewan's economy. Imposing policies that may hinder such growth could jeopardize many small firms. Couple such legislation with increases in energy prices, increases in CPP (Canada Pension Plan) premiums, and rising property taxes, small business firms are finding it more and more difficult to operate.

(15:00)

Mr. Speaker, the primary focus among small businesses is to have government recognize the added financial burden extending maternity leave will have on most employers by providing some form of compensation to make up some of the costs.

Some of their recommendations, Mr. Speaker. They believe that the government should promote to employers and employees the fact that there is no loss of parental EI benefits should an employee decide not to return to work. This may help to encourage those parents who have no intention of returning to work to inform their employer of their intention early on without fear of losing their benefits for the full year.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the provincial government should apply political pressure on the federal government to provide compensation to small businesses by providing an EI holiday on the employer portion of EI for those temporary employees brought on to replace permanent employees on parental leave.

Also the government should consider providing additional tax relief to small businesses to recognize the financial impact of extending leave to parents in small businesses. For example, reducing Saskatchewan's small-business tax further while providing relief on the onerous business education portion of property taxes may help alleviate this burden. The small-business community would welcome such tax relief as most citizens of Saskatchewan would, Mr. Speaker.

More specifically to the Bill, many of the concerns raised in the business community are legitimate, Mr. Speaker. However, we have to keep in mind that the federal government has made these changes despite these reservations. Those changes to EI are a reality and it makes sense that the laws that are in place provincially that coincide with these federal statutes be changed as well.

Overall, it is also a positive when parents get to spend more time with their children at any time in their life. This change will allow up to 89 weeks of parental and maternity leave between the two parents — 52 weeks for the mother and 37

weeks for the father. The importance of a family should never be underestimated. Therefore we see it as a positive that parents be allowed to spend more time with their children.

One would hope as well that changes be made to tax rules that tend to punish families where one parent chooses to stay home with their children instead of working. It is a positive that the government has seen fit to extend the provision for an employee to give notice to an employer for their intention to return to work prior to their 52-week period. This is important in order to allow employees to make the necessary arrangements in terms of informing replacement employees, Mr. Speaker.

The business community has also asked for a notice on the other end as well. Prior to leave commencing, because there is a window of up to 12 weeks prior to the birth of a child where the parent can begin leave, it would seem reasonable that there also be an increased notification period prior to leave to minimize disruptions on the workplace by allowing employers to get their replacement employee in place, as in Alberta there is a requirement of six weeks prior to the start of leave.

And there are other issues we believe should possibly be examined when it comes to parental leave, such as the minimum period an employee is in a job before becoming eligible for leave benefits. I note that in other places, Mr. Speaker, that employees are required to work one full year before becoming eligible.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, while we are generally supportive of this Bill as a sensible and practical Bill, we recognize that it must be a proper balance achieved between the very important needs of family, and the needs of small businesses in Saskatchewan.

And there are some issues that we do want to continue to consult with interested parties, and therefore I move adjournment at this time.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 14

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 14 — The Provincial Auditor Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to get into the debate on Bill No. 14.

I want to, first of all, Mr. Speaker, repeat some of the information that the minister has indicated as to how we arrived at the placement of Bill No. 14 before this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill was introduced to this Assembly back on April 9, 2001, but a lot of work, a lot of work occurred long before this date to get us to that point.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee, which tabled its first report of the second session of this Legislative Assembly back on May 2, has had a number of meetings dealing with this very topic.

Mr. Speaker, when that Public Accounts Committee met for its first time back on February 29, we didn't realize the amount of material that was going to be presented to us to be able to make some recommendations to the Minister of Finance through his advisory committee. I just want to review some of the things that have happened.

Mr. Speaker, the first mention of changes to The Provincial Auditor Act were made back on December 6, 1999 when, in the Speech from the Throne, the government indicated that there would be changes to The Provincial Auditor Act. As a result of that announcement in the Throne Speech, the auditor — at that time actually, the acting auditor, Mr. Wendel — decided that it was in the best interests of the auditor's office to put together a special report. And that special report of the Provincial Auditor was tabled on April 11, 2001 with the Public Accounts Committee. So we had the opportunity to review the concerns as outlined through the Provincial Auditor.

At the same time and concurrent with that, the Minister of Finance had created an advisory committee to report also on recommended changes to the auditor's Act. And that committee presented a report to the Public Accounts Committee that was sent to us by the Minister of Finance.

So basically we were dealing with two reports on the same issue. What kinds of changes would be best for the province of Saskatchewan to ensure that an independent Provincial Auditor's office could function; that the concerns that have been expressed over the last number of years would be addressed correctly; and that indeed, the auditor would be able to do his job or her job efficiently.

So while we were looking at these two reports, we had — and I want to thank the Minister of Finance for allowing his advisory committee members to come before the Public Accounts Committee — and we had the opportunity to question them and to determine what would be the best course of action based on the concerns raised by the Provincial Auditor and the concerns raised by the advisory committee.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, we put together a report that was agreed to by all members of the Public Accounts Committee and produced recommendations on what we like to see happen in the way of changes to The Provincial Auditor Act. That was of course an advisory report that was tabled back through the Minister of Finance's committee back to the Minister of Finance to come forward with the Bill, as I've indicated, which came before us on April 9.

Mr. Speaker, I too also want to thank members of the Public Accounts Committee for working so diligently. And I know since, you know, the short time that the committee has been in session, about 15 months; we've had numerous changes. We've had different people. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think we have already had three Vice-Chairs for that committee. And we're achieving, I think, what was asked of us by this Assembly was to compare those, those two documents.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other documents that occurred immediately after the committee put forward its recommendations was that the Provincial Auditor made comments that we wanted to have dealt with by an independent

person. And we asked the Legislative Law Clerk to review the conditions that were put forward, to review the Bill, to in fact determine whether or not the Bill that was introduced on April 9 actually reflected the points that were put forward by the Public Accounts Committee.

And at one of our nine meetings that we had on this topic, we had a chance to compare what the Law Clerk had interpreted, as well as what the Provincial Auditor was stating. And we were pleased, as a Public Accounts Committee, that indeed the changes proposed were adequate.

And, Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Provincial Auditor has tabled the 2001 Spring Report and, in his observations chapter, he makes a comment about the changes to The Provincial Auditor Act. And one of the paragraphs, Mr. Speaker, is this, it says and I quote:

The Government introduced Bill 14, *An Act to amend The Provincial Auditor Act* on April 9, 2001. We supported the changes, set out in this Bill, because they enhance the Provincial Auditor's independence and maintain the Government's accountability to the Assembly. Also, the Bill results from a reasonable process that provided for adequate consultation among key legislators, the Minister of Finance, and our Office.

You see, the reason I wanted to mention that quotation from the acting Auditor, Mr. Speaker, is that he clearly identifies two reasons why the Auditor's office needs to be improved, needs to be enhanced by the Act that's been put forward, and that is to ensure its independence.

And we believe that the Public Accounts Committee is the place to review the different people that will be applying for the position and to make a unanimous recommendation to this Assembly that will be presented through you, Mr. Speaker, at some appropriate time.

The other part is to ensure that government's accountability to this Assembly is maintained. That is critical. And the report this morning, the Auditor has indicated a number of concerns in other areas but, most importantly, he's had the ability to do his job, to ensure that the reporting and the accountability of government agencies, government departments is maintained.

Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 14, I think, does that. I think it puts forward many good recommendations that were worked on co-operatively by many people. And I look forward to questioning the minister on a couple of issues in Committee of the Whole that we need to ensure that the process that seems to be identified in the Bill, we'll need to clarify an interpretation of some of those things.

But we have a feel that in light of the fact that the Provincial Auditor, the Law Clerk, the Public Accounts Committee — we have all had a chance to review the legislature, we've had a chance to look at the sections and we believe it is an Act that is in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan. So I look forward to continued discussion on this Bill in the Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Bill No. 15

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 15 — The Credit Union Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a privilege to rise in this House and debate the legislation that's coming before it.

Bill No. 15, The Credit Union Amendment Act. I think all of us that are members of this House recall that it wasn't that many years ago that The Credit Union Act received a major overhaul. And it was at that time, I believe, that probably all of us were contacted by members of our credit union executives and boards across this province trying to impress upon us very much some of the changes that were needed in The Credit Union Act. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, that those changes were probably passed unanimously by this House at that time.

Those changes at that particular time allowed the credit unions to modernize, to improve, and to focus on the services that each one provided. The Bill before us this session seems to continue that work and maybe more or less just to tinker with the major Bill that, as I said, was passed previously.

More and more credit unions are becoming an important part of Saskatchewan. And probably more so in rural Saskatchewan than in urban Saskatchewan for a particular reason that in many cases in our rural communities, banks have chosen just to remove themselves.

In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, one of the major banks basically withdrew from a number of communities and made a deal with the credit union. The credit unions bought some of the buildings and took over a lot of the services on that particular aspect. And then just essentially moved the memberships or the accounts over into the credit union unless those people consciously wanted them moved elsewhere.

So the fact that they've become a large part of Saskatchewan, there is no doubt about it.

Unfortunately those areas not served by major national banking institutions become more dependent on services provided by credit unions, and those people not necessarily inclined in the past to do business with a local credit union are now finding that credit unions become a valuable service in those places no longer adequately served by the banks.

(15:15)

Now the reasons why some areas aren't adequately served by banks are many and varied. But I think one of the major ones is that we're seeing a lot of businesses close and people leave. And I think that's an unfortunate thing, Mr. Speaker. And I think for that we have to essentially look at this particular government and they have to take the blame for those sorts of things.

We discussed today in question period, Mr. Speaker, and you will vividly recall, I'm sure, when the question of jobs created came into play. We've had the members opposite on the government side of the House consistently make job commitments in tens of thousands of jobs at a time. And then they come back some time later and they make another commitment in exactly the same area for another . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I would like to bring to the member's attention that the subject of debate is second reading of Bill No. 15, The Credit Union Amendment Act and I would ask him to relate his remarks to the Act.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reasons that The Credit Union Act becomes so critical in our province, Mr. Speaker, is that they've become a more major part of a lot of our communities.

And I think that's one of the things that I would like to spend some time on, is that we find that those communities that should have actually maintained their size, maybe grown, definitely not decreased to the size that they have, basically have done so because of the direction this government has taken.

Banks need a certain customer base, Mr. Speaker, to justify their operations just like any other business. And as we know, the credit unions haven't been spared from that either, because we do have certain areas in which our credit unions have also moved out of areas because there aren't enough people left.

And I think that's very critical to this province. It's critical to almost every piece of legislation that we deal with, is the fact that the populations that were there at one time aren't there now.

So The Credit Union Act essentially is dealing with how to operate in a different environment than the environment was 10 years ago, 20 years ago.

For many reasons we see too many of our communities shrinking. But we can't ignore that this is a general worldwide view of the members opposite.

The creation of jobs — today, as we discussed — the numbers of jobs have actually gone down. We had commitments that they would go up, but they haven't. So obviously, the revitalization isn't taking place in rural or in urban Saskatchewan, at least when it comes to building the private sector economy in this province.

Recently we heard the minister of Revitalization defend the government's decision to go into direct competition with the very successful businesses across this province. And at that time the minister of Revitalization said very specifically that the only way to keep business and industry and revitalize the province was to grow the Crowns, Mr. Speaker.

It seems a very bizarre thing when in the next breath we'll have this government say that small business is the backbone of this province and is a great engine of employment opportunities.

The credit unions, Mr. Speaker, because they are the only

financial institution available to many people, available in Saskatchewan, and because they are also the financial institution of choice for many others, Mr. Speaker, we do have to ensure that the legislation is in place that our credit unions are as nearly perfect — if anything can be that way in our world today — as possible so that they can meet the needs of the customers in the best way possible.

As the minister stated in his opening comments whenever you have a major change to an Act, as we saw at the credit unions a couple of years ago, at some time later we need some revisions. And that's what this particular piece of legislation is doing. It's taking that major piece of legislation and bringing it up to date with what's happening now. And as it appears, that's what's happening here — some basic revisions to make the Act that's in place a little more conducive to the needs of the credit union, Mr. Speaker.

And while we still have some consultation to do on Bill 15, it does appear to me that the changes being made here are overall positive and making sense. All of us I believe as legislators in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, have had contact with credit union members that have told us what they need and where that particular organization's going.

In my community, Mr. Speaker, the credit union recently built a brand new building. They invested some three-quarter of a million dollars in a new facility. And basically it's the head office of about three or four other branches, and so it's a key part of my community. And so when the members of the executive come to see me on the various issues, it's obviously something that I pay close attention to.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, puts forward a clarification that states that the president and vice-president of the credit union can indeed sit on the Audit Committee. Now that's new. That didn't used to be the case. Presidents and vice-presidents at one time could not sit on the Audit Committee. And that's an important distinction.

The president and vice-president are the team leaders and should basically be included in all aspects of the organization as it relates to good operations of the credit union. And while I believe it was never the intent of the Act that's in existence at the present time — the major Bill that we passed some years ago, as I said — to exclude presidents and vice-presidents from the Audit Committee, the amendment put forward here, Mr. Speaker, clears up any confusion that may have been due to the deficiencies in that Bill that we passed, I believe it was back in 1998.

Furthermore, this amendment puts forward some changes to the conduct review committee. In the case of this amendment and this committee, it does appear that the role and the scope of the conduct review committee is being greatly expanded. And many of the functions, Mr. Speaker, that are currently conducted by the board of directors and by the credit union appear to be shifted over to the conduct review committee. And so I guess this aspect of this piece of legislation is something we have some questions about.

The conduct review committee will take . . . form a board of directors and function to ensure that proper practices are being

followed in the transactions of related parties. And I think that's critical. Because as the credit unions become larger in most of our communities, they start playing roles in different people's lives and in different businesses that they may not have had a role in before.

We need to make sure that proper practices are followed in all cases. This includes sound business practice considerations and overall goals and vision of the credit union. While this sounds good, there's some practical questions that we do have. For example, we're not told who's going to sit on this committee.

Now just a minute or two ago, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the fact that the president and vice-president were now allowed to sit on some committees they hadn't been on. So are we going to come back in a year or two and say, now we need to define the makeup of this committee and who can or cannot sit on that committee?

We need to know how will this committee operate. What will be the board of directors' role in the important decisions that are now being made by the conduct review committee?

In the explanatory notes that come along with this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for this work is being removed from the board of directors. And no one knows better than the members opposite — and we've seen that happen within the last month or two — what happens when you remove too much responsibility from the people who are supposed to be ultimately in charge, or from the fact they don't have any idea what's going on.

If we take the provincial government and what we've seen recently, we've had members elected to this Assembly, and a certain number of those and dealing with operations of government, not knowing what's going on.

Of course in the last decade, Mr. Speaker, we've seen governments move further away from this in an effort to escape responsibility. And the term that's used by this particular government is I wouldn't micromanage, which is doublespeak for I don't know anything and I don't want to know anything, take me on a fishing trip and that's all I'm to do.

On a daily basis in this Legislative Building we see this. When the opposition turns up the heat on a particular point where the media want to ask a question of the minister more closely, what happens? Either we can't get a hold of the minister, and when he's supposed to deal with it, he finds someone from his bureaucracy to come out and answer the questions.

Back to the credit unions, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the key things. And we want to ensure that it doesn't happen in the credit union system as it's happening in this government. One is probably a microcosm of the other one, Mr. Speaker, and the last thing we need.

And I think knowing how my credit unions in my community operate, I ask them a question, they never say, I don't want to micromanage. They never go ahead and say, well, call up somebody we're paying a salary for, he'll ask it, I don't know anything about it. They haven't even asked me to take him on a fishing trip, Mr. Speaker. So the credit unions in my

constituency operate a whole lot better than the government over there.

The other thing is when I speak with members of my credit union back home, I get much better attention than I do from the members opposite than I'm getting today.

Mr. Speaker, once again on the surface I believe that most of the things that we're dealing with in this piece of legislation are positive and worthwhile. But we do have to take some more time for some more calls and consultation. And so at this time, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 29

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Hagel that **Bill No. 29 — The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Amendment Act, 2001** be now read a second time.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And it's certainly a pleasure to enter into the debate on Bill No. 29, An Act to amend the Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Act, 1985.

It's somewhat ironic that we are discussing student aid and student loans and those sorts of things in view of the recent announcements by both the . . . our two provincial universities of some pretty significant increases in tuition fees. The U of S (University of Saskatchewan) announced that they'll have an increase in tuition fees in the upcoming academic year of some 15 per cent, and the U of R (University of Regina) has, in more recent days, has announced an increase of an average of 9 per cent for the upcoming academic year.

So what does this mean to students who will be attending university this fall? And what it will mean is significantly higher student debt.

And the minister said in his introduction of the Bill . . .

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

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Last Mountain-Touchwood for allowing me to interrupt him.

Mr. Speaker, seated in the east gallery are 20 students from Hillside School in Estevan. They are grade 4 students and they are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Barlow; their chaperones, Mrs. Doan, Mrs. Karas, Mrs. Stepp, and Mrs. Vlieland. And I hope I pronounced those names correctly.

I will be meeting with them shortly, Mr. Speaker, for refreshments and to have a little visit. They can ask a few questions, and hopefully, I can have some answers for them.

But I would like all members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

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

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, what the effect of these higher tuition fees will mean — significantly higher student debt for students upon graduation.

We're told by the University of Saskatchewan — and I'm sure the U of R will be forced to make similar adjustments in the next academic year — in the year 2002-2003, the U of S has said that they will be . . . unless there's significant increases in operating grants from this government, they'll be forced to increase their tuition fees significantly again. And I'm sure the U of R will be faced with that same situation.

What are some of the reasons for this significant increase in tuition fees this year as opposed to some of the other years? It's the chronic underfunding by this government in the last 10 years to our universities.

The president of the U of S recently provided some figures, I believe it was to the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, that in constant dollars, '98 dollars, that the funding level was in 1990 to the two universities was the equivalent of \$205 million and it fell to a low of, in 1998, of \$163 million. A significant decrease at a time when costs of operation are increasing on the yearly basis, and particularly in the last two years, the energy costs that people of Saskatchewan are faced with, the universities are not immune to those kinds of increases. In fact I've been told that in the last two years their energy budgets have doubled. And yet we're seeing only a small increase this year of 3.5 per cent, which is certainly not enough to offset the increases in operating costs and also make any allowance for recouping some of the work . . . to address some of the work that's been neglected in past years.

(15:30)

We have, particularly at the U of S, we have older buildings that require renovation and repair and upkeep. And the U of R also points out, they have told me, they said they're not immune to having repair and maintenance done on their buildings, although they are somewhat newer. They still have buildings that are 25 and 30 years old.

And this 3.5 per cent increase in provincial operating grants certainly doesn't come near to meeting the mark, in their cases.

It might be interesting to look at some of the actual increases in tuition fees. I've been provided by this information by the University of Saskatchewan. Granted their increases averaged out to 15 per cent, but if you look at some specific colleges, they have significantly — some of those colleges have

significantly higher increases in tuition fees.

You take the College of Pharmacy for instance, they're going from a tuition fee in the last academic year of \$3,978, to this upcoming academic year the tuition fee will be \$5,110, an increase of \$1,132. I believe that works out to 25 to 28 per cent increase.

You look at some of the other colleges. The College of Medicine is looking at an increase in tuition fees of \$994, the College of Nursing, \$512. And that's just for this year. And as I've mentioned, the U of S is looking at having to increase their tuition fees next year by most likely a similar amount so that they can address some of those problems that haven't been addressed in the past.

So this all translates into a significantly higher student debt that our students will be having to address once they graduate. And I have a number of students have talked to me in the past few months about the problems with their existing student loans.

It seems that on a weekly basis I get calls from graduates who are having great difficulty meeting their commitments under the student loans that they incurred while attending, whether it be universities or SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) or some of our private colleges. And now if you add on these significant increases in tuition fees, that's going to make the situation so much worse, Mr. Speaker.

It might be interesting to look at some figures as to how the increases in tuition fees compare to the increases in operating grants to the universities. I'm told that the increase in tuition fee at the U of S is expected to generate some 7.3 million additional dollars in student tuition. And the increase in operating grant is only \$4.7 million.

The U of R, their increase in tuition fees should generate an additional approximately 1.9 million where the operating grant is somewhat less than that. I believe it's approximately 8 million.

So if you just take the two universities and look at the total number of dollars that they will have to extract from their students in the increase to tuition fees, it comes to a total of \$9.2 million. And if you add the combined increase in operating grants to the two universities that only amounts to some \$6.5 million.

So what this tells me, Mr. Speaker, is that the universities will be forced to extract some \$2.7 million more from their students in increase in tuition fees than they get in operating grants from the provincial government.

I'm also told that the tuition fees will be increasing at SIAST. And so this is adding an overall burden to our students and increasing the debt loads to our students. And so when the minister says that with this new arrangement that he's negotiating with the federal government to have a one-stop student loan program, it's going to be a much better student loan program — well it better be. Because the students will certainly have a greater need. They'll be incurring a greater debt.

So as I said, they certainly should be looking for a better program with perhaps some greater bursaries and so on to reduce the overall student debt.

I'd like to look at this time, Mr. Speaker, at some of the things that students have lost that were there for them or at least they thought would be there for them, and in fact, when reality set in, they weren't there.

The millennium scholarship comes to mind. Many of the students when they heard about this federal millennium scholarship, which in fact is a bursary, were quite excited and felt that their student loans would be written down and they'd be the net benefactor.

Well in fact, when they received their statements from the millennium scholarship people they found that their student loans really didn't . . . the amount of student loan really didn't change because what happened is this government backed their provincial bursaries down by an equal amount of the millennium scholarship. And so there was really no net benefit to the students.

And then in the last sitting of this legislature, the last session, this government introduced a . . . made some changes to the six-month interest free provision with the provincial student loan and the students lost that so that they are now required to pay interest on their student loans once they've graduated, whether they have a job or not.

And also during the '99 election, Mr. Speaker, there was promises made by both parties on that side of the House about free tuition and all those sorts of things. Well we all know what happened to those promises, Mr. Speaker.

So as I said, there was some things that students perhaps had a moment of hopefulness and then it was ripped away from them.

When you look closely at this Bill, it's not a very long Bill, it's an amendment but there are some questions that we certainly have, Mr. Speaker, with regards to the Bill. It might . . . I suppose we'd feel more comfortable in moving this Bill along if we had an idea of what this new student loan program looked like. I understand the minister will be bringing that forward some time later on and we will know exactly what the new program will look like.

Of course as I mentioned earlier, with the higher tuition fees the students will be incurring a higher debt. There's also some of the effects of this government's action in the last couple of years that are having some negative effects on post-secondary education in this province.

And as I mentioned, the higher debt would be one of them; but also we're seeing, whether we like to admit it or not — and I'm very sad to have to make this observation — but I think we are seeing a slip in the quality of the education that is being offered to our students.

You look at the *Maclean's* ratings and certainly there are some problems with the way they rate things and so on, but I've had it said to me by more than a few people that there is a basis and a reason why those *Maclean's* ratings of our two universities

are and why they are slipping in those ratings. And I think a lot of it has to do with the commitment this government has to post-secondary education.

And what this is meaning, what this means to some of our high school graduates that are looking at our two universities — particularly our top graduates, they're looking at having to pay now higher tuition fees at our universities and SIAST — they look at the *Maclean's* rating and it does have an impact. We can try and say it doesn't but it does have an impact. And so when they look at these two things, they might be saying to themselves, maybe I should look more closely at some of the other universities in the country and perhaps even outside our country.

And in fact, some of them are attending other universities and therefore we are losing those bright, young minds. And that has an effect on the number of graduate students that we have down the road. And our universities are telling us that that's one of our problems with research and not being able to attract some of these research dollars is that we don't have a sufficient number of graduate students in the wide variety of programs to attract some of these federal grants and so on.

So all of these things impact, and there's a chain effect that takes place, Mr. Speaker, and I think this government has to look at that very seriously and make a commitment to post-secondary education. And the post-secondary education institutions have told me that 3.5 per cent is not a significant commitment to post-secondary education.

Now getting back to the Bill, there are a number of issues as I said, we have . . . and concerns we have with the Bill, one being we haven't seen the new program. Also, I'm wondering, is there anything in the new student loan program that addresses debt relief?

The middle-income family scenario, that's a problem where middle-income families have children that want to attend . . . whether it be SIAST or university or one of the private colleges, and apply for a student loan. The family income is too high so they don't qualify, yet the families don't have the resources to send their students on to post-secondary education institutions. And so some of them are falling by the wayside, or having to go to banks and so on, and paying, you know, and paying interest from the time they take the loan, and those sorts of things. So has that issue been addressed?

Also one of the concerns that has been raised to me by graduates is that it seems like the repayment of student loans is geared to those graduates who go on and get a job and have a monthly income, and thereby they have a . . . can set up a repayment schedule based on monthly payments and that sort of thing, and that seems to work well for the majority of them.

There are . . . as I mentioned earlier, there are a number of them who for one reason or another, perhaps haven't got a job or have a job that isn't providing them with the type of income they had anticipated and are having some real problems servicing their student loan.

But there are also . . . there's a group of graduates who have gone on to set up businesses, and the repayment of the student

loan and the provisions within the program really don't meet very well with those type of people who really . . . When they set up a business, quite often there's a period of six months or a year perhaps where income is quite . . . the income generated by the business is quite low and they really don't have the ability to service their student loan in the way they were required. And so they're running into some problems.

Yet given a bit of a grace period, I guess is what they are asking for, that they could see their businesses taking off and they could perhaps repay their student loan more quickly than many other students. So I guess that's a concern that I would have with this new program and I would like to see perhaps some of the details on that.

And also, in the Bill, it mentions that the minister can pay expenses that are associated with the student aid fund. And I suppose I would like to know what type of expenses qualify for payment with this amendment and what type of an impact it would have on the total fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, until we have some of these questions answered and we are consulting with some third parties, I would move that we adjourn debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

(15:45)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment and Resource Management Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

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

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all to my immediate left is Stuart Kramer, which is our deputy minister. And directly behind Mr. Kramer is Joe Muldoon, the director of environmental protection. And to the right of Mr. Muldoon and to my immediate back is Donna Johnson, and Donna is the manager of the financial, management, and planning of corporate services. And to my immediate right is Hugh Hunt, who is the director of regional services.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, welcome to your officials here today.

I think what I'll start off first in regarding questions, is a letter that I just received from the Whelan Bay Cottage Owner's Association.

And as you know, they are in some heated contesting regarding the forestry up in that area, where Weyerhaeuser wants to cut.

And I just want to read into the record, Mr. Minister, a letter that was sent to you — I believe you have a copy of it — and it reads as follows. And I quote:

Dear Sir:

The Executive Board Of Directors Whelan Bay Cottage Owner's Association met on May 20th. Your letter of January 24, 2001 was discussed along with the twenty-year plan for Prince Albert Forest Management. The Board expressed concern that there has been no written response to our position letter of December 15th, 2000, from SERM or (from) Weyerhaeuser.

In your letter you indicated you asked Mr. Al Willcocks, Director of Forestry Ecosystems Branch, to meet with the Whelan Bay Cottage Owner's Association. To date we have not heard from Mr. Willcocks.

In view of the lack of written details regarding verbal presentations, it was the desire of the board to have all agreements in writing. We respectfully request a written response from the Government of Saskatchewan on this issue.

To that, Mr. Minister, have you sent a letter to the cabin owner's association, Whelan Bay cabin owner's association in regards to the 20-year plan of Weyerhaeuser and the plans for forest cutting in that area?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Chairman, I want to just point out is I would ask the member for a copy of the letter because I can't make reference to the letter today. I don't have it on me. But what I will do is, if you forward me a copy of yours, I'll certainly get a timely response to that.

What I want to say to the Whelan Bay Cottage Owner's Association is that we believe in consultation. And one of the things and the challenges, as the member can appreciate; we have to make sure that we consult with as many stakeholders as possible.

And in the province of Saskatchewan the one company that you mentioned, the Weyerhaeuser company, they have been doing a tremendous amount of work to try and ensure that not only stakeholders' interests are heard but they also balance the environmental and the economic demands that the natural forest stands certainly provide for Saskatchewan as a whole.

So one of the things I think we should be proud of as a province is not the fact that, you know, that we have forestry, but the fact that it's been done in such a fashion that it's recognized throughout the world as being a sustainable, good use of our forest. And I think different groups like the Whelan Bay Cottage Owners Association could certainly take part of the pride associated with that status that the company has achieved for themselves.

So again, consultation is something that we want to do. If you forward me a copy of the letter as opposed to me going back to my office and tracking it down, we'll get one of our officials to give a major response to the cottage owners association. Thanks.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. Yes, I will forward you a copy of this letter here.

Also myself and the member from Saskatchewan Rivers attended a meeting at Whelan Bay. That was some time ago. And at that time the members there said that Weyerhaeuser would not do nothing until their 20-year plan was submitted. Well their 20-year plan, forestry plan has been submitted. And that's why I believe the cabin owners are anxious to find out what your stand is and where you're going to go with this in regards to Weyerhaeuser's 20-year plan and the problems in and around the Whelan Bay area.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to point out that the Weyerhaeuser's 20-year plan has been submitted and as a minister, I have approved the plan.

There's no question that there are conditions on the plan. And the conditions of the plan very clearly have the discussion of insurance, that we have long-term sustainability of our forest activity in the province as a whole. There is conditions in terms of how they construct roads. There's conditions there with the reforestation. They also have annual cutting plans that they have to submit to us.

And once we get the letter from you and get this all straightened away, we'd be able to let the cottage owners know as to terms of their submission of plans for logging and harvesting, that they would have some prior information as to what the company plans to do in that specific area.

But without the letter and without consultation with the Weyerhaeuser in terms of trying to find what year they're going to cut there and what their plans are — I'm not sure if they're there yet but I imagine that they are planning on doing some cutting in the area — that they have to submit that to us.

And certainly as per our discussion with the companies and the stakeholders that they're . . . consultation will be undertaken.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I just got the page to get a copy of that letter to you.

When I was at that meeting, Mr. Minister, I noticed that a lot of the concerns regarding that area was mostly in the way of how the logging was taking place. And a lot of them objected to the fact . . . that they felt that clear cutting that whole area was not appropriate and if they would look at maybe ways of select cutting rather than clear cutting, I think that group of people could be worked with in regarding to obtaining the forestry in that area.

But I'll let you read that letter and deal with it with the cabin owners association, but I would stress that you get back to them as soon as possible with a letter so that they can address the people in and around there.

Now I'd like to move on, Mr. Minister, to around the questioning — it's an area that I hear quite frequently in my area — and it's to do with forest fringe land. Now you know, Mr. Minister, I've asked some questions regarding forest fringe land, questions of late and I would like to take it a little bit further. To the members here and around, what is the definition of forest fringe land and where is it?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Just to point out as well, the letter we got from the Whelan Bay Cottage Owners Association was dated May 22, and that's probably one of the reasons why we haven't got it — it's only been a couple of weeks.

So what we want to do is certainly make sure that when we respond to a letter that we respond as quickly as we can. And I know that the owners association, or the cottage owners association can appreciate we do have quite a number of letters that come our way. So we'll certainly try and do that in a timely fashion. But two weeks is something that we will try and do our very best to respond to some of these questions or this correspondence quickly as we can. But more time is certainly needed.

In relation to your question about what is the definition of forest fringe land. We have a line across the province of Saskatchewan that is deemed the provincial forest line, provincial forest lands. And of course, there's a line that goes across the province.

In reference to the forest fringe land, it's any forested land south of the provincial forest line. And for further clarification, we can certainly forward you a map that indicates where the provincial forest lines are.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. In regards to forest fringe land, who governs that land and who administers forest fringe land?

(16:00)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I guess the question of who governs the land certainly has a lot of bearing as to who owns the land. We know that there's a lot of private lands that are in the area that we would consider forest fringe.

We know that Agriculture and Food also have some of the lands that are available in that area, and certainly some of the lands are also under our SERM mandate. And as well there's also wildlife habitat protection areas as well. So there is a wide variety of owners, and certainly those four I would deem as the primary ones.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. Now would it be fair to say though that SERM, which is your department, governs the biggest portion of that land? In other words, forest fringe land is basically governed by your department.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. Just to point out that I would . . . Again this is taking a guess. It's a very hazardous guess. But I would put the guess that SERM certainly is involved with the harvesting of the wood in the sense that they would permit some of the people that wished to harvest the trees. That would come through SERM.

I would point out that about two-thirds of the government-owned land in that area is under ag lands and one-third is SERM. And I guess that's a guess.

And there's no question that in terms of harvesting as a whole

in the province, that SERM would certainly have a very strong role to play in permitting the harvest to proceed.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and Mr. Chair. Can you identify to me who are the users of forest fringe land? In other words, all the users of that land that occupy and use it?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — The two areas that we have in terms of some of the uses of the forest fringe land, if that's the question, are ranchers like the ag leases that are out there, which include grazers, of course. There's also some of the timber companies that use some of the lands in and around the forest fringe area. And there's also some of the recreation users of the province as well. So those are the basically four primary areas of use for the forest fringe lands.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I just want to read into the record, Mr. Chair, a letter that was sent to me by the cattle grazers of Shellbrook, Holbein, Nisbet forest fringe area.

And it states:

Not all RMs in the Nisbet forest areas are taxed cattle grazers. There's only a few of them. The land is owned by the government (the provincial government, which is SERM, your department) and it controls when the cattle can be pastured in this area.

When the cattle grazers purchase a permit from your department, they are allowed to graze cattle in that section of area. But the only allowable time that they can pasture that cattle is a maximum of 145 days, depending on weather. We have no control over the personal usage of the forest fringe area. Gates cannot be locked. Roads and trails cannot be blocked.

Just to point out to you, Mr. Minister, that there are other users of this forest fringe land. Those users are woodcutters, gravel haulers, skiers, snowmobilers, ATVers (all-terrain vehicle); in fact, Mr. Minister, even your department uses that land for hunting seasons.

My question to you is that these areas . . . or not this area . . . this cattle grazing permit holders as of 1996 are being taxed on this land.

Now I'll just give you a history of this tax. In 1996, SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) came to SERM — which you were not minister at that time — and wanted the SERM department to allow RMs (rural municipality) to tax forest fringe land.

Now in recollection to that, Mr. Minister, they are paying tax on a year-round basis on every quarter that's on their permit. And the permits are instituted by your department, which is SERM. They are only — the cattle grazers — are only allowed to use that land for a max of 145 days, depending on weather; but they are taxed for one full year on that area.

And like I just mentioned before, there are other users of that said area regarding skiers, snowmobilers, woodcutters, loggers — in fact, Mr. Minister, even your department. Now why

should one group of people, in other words the cattle grazers, be taxed on a year-round basis when they only use the land for a maximum of 145 days?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I just want to point out that there is the cattle grazers that are being taxed . . . in terms of some of your questions, I can report to you that this is not a provincial tax. This is not a SERM-imposed tax. The RMs are the one that placed the tax on these permits.

So what I would encourage you to do is that, while SERM has very little involvement with this, I would encourage you during the Municipal Affairs estimates that perhaps you could direct your question to the minister at that time.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. I understand that the RMs are not under your jurisdiction, that they're under the Municipal Affairs jurisdiction. And I have talked to the minister regarding this.

The fact remains though, Mr. Minister, that the land that is being used by the cattle grazers is your land. And the people in your area that control that land control the users of that land by handing out permits, which is a fair and proper way of doing it.

But somewhere along the line, the RMs now have the autonomy to tax that land which they don't own, which you own. Is it your idea as SERM minister and officials to drive the cattle grazers out of that land which you own?

The Chair: — Order. Just remind hon. members that in committee we are a little more flexible as to putting the comments to the Chair and through the Chair. But that's generally agreed that we are not personalizing the debate. So I would just encourage hon. members to put their question to the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out that the member is correct, this is SERM land. But any land within a RM is taxed; and upon disposition of any permits in the area by SERM, automatically the RM is going to be taxed in that particular area.

And again these are questions beyond SERM's mandate. As I mentioned before, the province and the Municipal Affairs branch are probably . . . And SARM agreed to this process and that's probably the best place to direct the question.

But no question, when SERM has a disposition on land, that land is taxed by the RM.

(16:15)

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I will try and direct all the questions through you, sir.

In regard to your latest response, Mr. Minister, I know the said land is your land. You know that. Also that the RM . . .

The Chair: — Order. The hon. member could please put all directions to the Chair.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will rephrase the question.

Mr. Minister, we know that SERM is the governor of the said land. I know that the RMs are under the jurisdiction of Municipal Affairs. There are questions I will be asking Municipal Affairs in regard to this.

But I just want to point out to you, Mr. Minister, that the said land which is where the cattle grazers operate, the taxes that they are being charged on there to date is not only municipal tax but it is also education tax. So if you couple the education, the municipal which is Municipal Affairs, plus the permit which is SERM responsibility, that adds up to a lot more than what they would pay if they went to community pastures.

And so, it brings me into questions which I asked you . . . pardon me, asked the minister some time ago, in regards to the Minister of Environment and Resource Management, how many land grazing permits were issued to users of forest fringe land by SERM in the year 1999, year 2000. And the answer was 146. Now also, Mr. Minister, previous to that year, there was approximately 165 permits issued to cattle grazers of the same said land.

Now interesting, Mr. Minister . . . to the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, how many land grazing permits have been issued to users of forest fringe land by your department in the year 2001-2002? And, Mr. Chair, the answer to that question was 10.

So you can see, Mr. Minister, that the number of permits has diminished substantially and the reason is that there is municipal and education tax charged to this land, which the land in question is governed and operated by SERM department.

So I guess I'm wondering, what is the department's decision in regarding the cattle grazing operations in the said land and what will be their, I guess, longevity in regards to this said land?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I just want to point out that there is no question that the educational tax and the municipal tax — as I mentioned time and time again, Mr. Chair, to the member — that that's certainly an issue that the Municipal Affairs portfolio would be in the best position to answer.

In terms of land grazing permits and do we support that? Of course we do. We support multi-use of all the SERM lands that are out there, and try and balance as many interests as we can as a province.

But what I will point out is the normal year, being approximately 165 grazing permits being given or being issued. That's pretty well a normal year. And the member points out that as a result of some of his questions that he submitted in the Assembly for this year, for 2001-2002, the number is 10.

And the reason for that is that it's been about two weeks since the grazing period has begun and so the question that you posed to me in the Assembly — if I can take a wild guess here, is probably no more than a couple of weeks ago — that's when I

would assume again that the grazing permits were not applied for.

So the contrast of last year versus this year, being only 10 this year and being 165 last year, is I would say that that was due to the fact that the grazing season only began two weeks ago and we anticipate that there'll be more applications coming forward.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. In regards to the questions I asked, that was roughly about two weeks ago when I asked them. And I know that the cattle going into the cattle . . . or grazing operations may just start of late.

I also want to point out to the minister that, because of the dry season, basely in the northwest, but along the forest fringe area, that a lot of the cattle grazing owners are not allowed to put their cattle in yet because virtually there is no grass.

This comes back to my statement that the permits issued by SERM department only allow for cattle operations to own permits for a max of 145 days. Well as you can see, Mr. Minister, that with the dry season we have, that number of days is going to be diminished quite substantially. So therefore they may only get a max of a hundred days, or 90 days, or whatever.

The question still that I'm trying to impose is the fact that because they're only limited to a number of days to utilize that area, they are taxed on a full year, which then adds up the cost that much more in regards to the paying of permits plus education tax and also municipal tax. And it still begs the question, Mr. Minister, that they are, the cattle grazers, the only ones paying that tax.

Have you got any comments regarding that?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just for the record again, I want to point out that the issues of taxation certainly is between the permittee and the RM. And I understand that there's an appeal process for the taxes to be paid on an annual basis, whereas the person that's paying the tax has an appeal process in which they can go and appeal their taxes based on some of the arguments that the member has forwarded.

I will point out that there's no question that in the province that there is weather conditions. Some areas are wet and some areas are poor in terms of moisture. There's some very dry areas. And again this is something that these arguments have to be forwarded to the appropriate places.

And again I would tell the member that the appeal process for taxation would certainly be handled between the RM, the permittee, and certainly the people that would be involved from our perspective would be the department of Municipal Government. Thank you.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I just want to go back a few years to a rural municipality convention that was held in 1994 in . . . where Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management convention . . . the Environment and Resource Management agreed to develop a process to assist RMs' collection of tax arrears originating from assessments on or with SERM permits. Has this been followed through?

Now I know it happened a few years ago and you were not minister. But has this been followed through and is it your department . . . pardon me, SERM's department that will follow up on this to assist RMs in the collection of taxes?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much. Just for the record, I'm glad that the member certainly pointed out that I was not the minister at that time. In 1994 I was pursuing a hockey career. Of course I didn't make out that well.

But just to point out that as a result of the RM convention 1994, the process of tax arrears on permits was followed through. We followed through for a few years. And a permittee approached the Ombudsman and appealed this particular process. And certainly the Ombudsman then turned around and said that this process was beyond SERM's mandate and that's when SERM stopped.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I'd just like to read a little bit out of the SARM 2000 mid-term report. And this resolution actually comes from the RM of Shellbrook. And it states, and I quote:

WHEREAS, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management has withdrawn all assistance for municipalities who are experiencing problems with the collection of taxes on forest (fringe land and) grazing permits and hay permits; and

WHEREAS, this has caused considerable concern for . . . municipalities within . . . (those) boundaries SERM has been in the practice of issuing permits in the names of (the incorporated) . . . bodies,

. . . BE IT RESOLVED, that SERM reinstate its policy of refusing to re-issue permits (and) where the permittee has not paid taxes in (the) . . . amount equal to the previous years levy or that SERM guarantee the taxes on these permits in . . . (such a) manner (that) as Saskatchewan Agriculture is doing in regards to the lands they lease.

Now, Mr. Minister, can you give a response regarding that?

(16:30)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well thanks for the question. There's no question that in the six or seven years that this issue has been before us, I would point out that it's very important that we continue looking at some of the arguments that are coming forward. On one hand, a few minutes ago, we talked about the grazers getting the permit and having to pay the tax and so on and so forth. And now we're going down the road of, well if the permittee doesn't pay the tax, then SERM should cancel the permit.

What clearly this is, is it becomes an issue again where in 1994, when the Ombudsman was involved, the Ombudsman said that this was beyond SERM's mandate. In the year 2000, the situation is still the same. It is beyond SERM's mandate. Thank you.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, in regards to the resolution I just presented before, there was a

response by the Minister of SERM, the now Minister of SERM, and I'd just like to read that into the record.

Response from, and I quote, Mr. Chair:

Response from the Hon. Buckley Belanger, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management:

SERM recognizes that rural municipalities have the legislative authority to assess taxes on grazing and hay permit issues on forest fringe lands. The authority comes from The Provincial Lands Act, (SERM) however it has no legal authority to collect or enforce the payment of municipal taxes or tax arrears. SERM's legislative mandate and activities are directly related to resource management.

Basically what it's stating here, Mr. Minister, is that it's your mandate.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Again I want to point out that SERM's mandate, I concur, that it's resource management. And when we issue permits, there's certainly dollars that are achieved to help us reach for those goals, however, SERM's mandate is not tax collection.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. The reason I brought this up is because there is a number of people in and around the northwest area who have grazing permits on land, and some of them are in a position right now where they are being summoned to court.

And I would just like to read a letter from a group of people from the Onion Lake area regarding that and some of the problems they state regarding the forest fringe land which they believe is the jurisdiction of SERM because where they're grazing their cattle, it is on the SERM land. And I'll just read into the record, Mr. Chair, if I can.

From the time we entered into the grazing agreement with the Saskatchewan government in 1996, up until 1995 we were not taxed on this government-owned land. The first year that the Loon Lake RM slapped a tax on, they very graciously reduced the amount in order to reduce the shock. The next year we had to pay the full tax because the RM made an agreement with SERM which disallowed their granting us a permit unless the taxes were paid.

This we took to the Ombudsman and that policy was revoked. Then after two years of now payment of tax, we were threatened with legal action. (So again they had to pay all of the taxes including tax arrears.)

To our way of thinking, this tax is totally unjust. First of all, we are not the landowner, the Saskatchewan government is.

Secondly, we are given nothing in return for these taxes — no roads nor bridges, no fences. We do not ask even the RM for permission to build fences. We ask SERM. There are no schools, yet we are taxed full education tax. No land assessment. We pay the same for every quarter, whether it be a lake, a slough, a muskeg, a forest or whatever. How can a fair tax be levied when a complete and accurate

assessment was never done before?

Thirdly, we have no control whatsoever over whoever might use the same area that we graze. Outfitters, hunters, trappers, snowmobilers, quad enthusiasts, berry pickers, etc., all of them pay no taxes.

Finally, we pay a full year's taxes but are only permitted use of this land for approximately five months.

Now, Mr. Chair, I know, to the minister, that maybe some of my questions should be directed to Municipal Affairs and I will direct them to him. But the problem still lies that the land in question is governed by SERM — it is SERM land. That's where the cattle-grazers are utilizing it. How can another jurisdiction like the RMs have the autonomy to tax another jurisdiction of land?

Also, Mr. Minister, when you pay tax, you expect something in return for that tax you've paid. In SERM land there could be nothing done with that land — there could be no bridges built, there could be no roads. The government-owned land, which is SERM land, wants the land to be just as it is because it is public property open to everybody.

So therefore, Mr. Minister, the cattle-grazing permit issuers are utilizing that land, they are paying tax on that land, but are absolutely getting no services whatsoever for it. That's where the unfair system comes in.

There are many, many users of the said land who are not being taxed. Why is it that the cattle-grazing permit holders are the only ones paying tax on a full year of taxation for only usage of the land for a maximum of 145 days?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. I just want to point out that it is common in Saskatchewan for occupied Crown lands to be taxed by the RMs. I think it's very important, and I'm glad the member concurs that these questions need to be directed to the minister of municipal services.

And what I will point out though is that 1996 or 1997, somewhere in that time frame, the RMs found out that they could tax the lessees on this particular land. So the RMs did tax the lessees. So as a result of that, this is clearly an issue between the lessees and SARM, and the RMs and the lessees need to work these things out. And again that jurisdiction is beyond SERM's mandate, as I've indicated time and time again.

But I'll point out that there's no question that SERM is always very supportive of multi-uses of our land. As you know, land doesn't grow overnight. We have to make sure we're able to balance as many interests on all lands throughout the province and we're certainly trying to do that.

But what I will point out is — and I'm glad the member concurs — that the majority of the taxation issues will certainly be dealt with through the RMs and through the Municipal Affairs portfolio within this government and not by SERM.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, in regard to that then, maybe what I'll do then is direct more of the

questions that I have regarding forest fringe land at another time when I meet with the minister from Municipal Affairs.

I still believe that the department of renewable and natural resources still has a part to play in regards to the questions I'm asking. But therefore, I will ask those questions to them and then we'll go from there.

I would like to go on now, Mr. Minister, to the chronic wasting disease in regards to animals in and around the area of Saskatchewan. And I know the SERM department came to our caucus to point out what's happening in the way of chronic wasting disease in mule deer, whitetail, and elk. And the SERM minister at that time pointed out that they were going to be taking some animals around the Marsden area; I believe in the neighbourhood of 200 to 220 animals. Has this happened and can you concur on what's been taking place to now?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. There's no question that in terms of the challenge of the chronic wasting throughout the province — as a result of some of the heads submitted by the various stakeholders, various users in the province — that we had a tremendous amount of heads over the past three years that have been tested.

And what we wanted to do is to make sure that we are able to determine whether chronic wasting is in the wild, and if we are able to determine that as to whether . . . what the extent is. So that work continues. And as you can know, several months ago we announced that there was one positive test out of the heads submitted by the hunters.

And so to point out that one of our strategies was to look at the other issue of where the deer was found and to have a concentrated area of harvest. And I can report to you that 213 of the animals were taken — 71 by Lloydminster and the remaining from the Manitou hills area.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. Of the 213 which you just mentioned regarding animals that were taken, has there been any test results of these said animals to date?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well certainly there's no question that one of the first things that we wanted to do as a result of chronic wasting — and SERM certainly has led that file on a regular basis — is we increased the testing, as I mentioned, for the past number of years. And I can report that we anticipate further tests in the field to really begin to study the prevalence of chronic wasting in the wild.

Certainly on the positive news, all the testing has been done. Of the 213 heads that were tested, 212 proved negative. There's one suspicious case that we have sent further down to Ontario for further testing and to confirm if there's a problem. So certainly in anticipation of this, I can say that 212 heads proved negative. There's one suspicious case that we have to try and get confirmed by next week and of course that test is being done in Ontario.

(16:45)

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. In

regards to SERM's department taking animals on the Saskatchewan side to be sent away for testing, has the Alberta government instituted regulations to take animals on their side that would also be taken and sent down for testing?

The Chair: — Why is the Minister of Finance on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask leave of the House to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. I see up in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon, Hugh Harradence, Q.C. (Queen's Counsel) who's a well-known lawyer in the city of Prince Albert and visiting Regina today for a case but staying over for the meeting coming up of the Bar Association. And Hugh is the past president of the Canadian Bar Association, Saskatchewan branch and well known in legal circles and some other circles.

And I'd like all members to join with me in welcoming Hugh Harradence to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Julé: — With leave also to . . .

Leave granted.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party official opposition, we too would like to welcome Mr. Hugh Harradence to the Assembly today. And we're pleased to see that you're watching proceedings, listening carefully, and hope certainly that you do enjoy and benefit from the afternoon.

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Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to point out that the collaboration with our neighbouring provinces is very important. Chronic wasting, of course as you know, doesn't know any borders so the collaboration with Manitoba and Alberta is very, very important to the province of Saskatchewan.

And again on the situation, from the information that we've got, there were 241 heads taken adjacent to the Manitou hills in Saskatchewan on the Alberta side. And to date, 60 per cent of those heads have been tested and the good news of course is that all 60 per cent have proven negative. Now we still have 40 per cent to go. We understand that those tests will be completed by the end of June.

So certainly we're well on our way to doing increased testing in that particular area. We want to see what the prevalence is so there's good collaboration and co-operation from our neighbouring provinces, and we'll continue working together to try and solve this problem as best we can.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. In regards to the one animal that you said is in question right now that could test positive for CWD (chronic wasting disease), was it taken in the same area as the one that tested positive before was taken?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. And what we want to point out is that animal was taken within 5 kilometres of the other animal. And the reason why we're deeming it a suspicious case right now is it's very important. As soon as we find out the results of those tests, we let the public know.

What we want to do is we don't want to speculate again on this particular challenge, because as I mentioned, there's a lot of work being done. What we want to do is absolutely make sure what we're dealing with before we make any announcements.

So we're deeming it suspicious. The animal was harvested within 5 kilometres of the other animal, and of course those tests will be confirmed by next week, and the Alberta tests will be done of course by the end of June.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. In regards to the 213 animals that were taken, were they taken at random from spots in and around, or was a lump of deer that was seen all taken at one time?

Basically the reason for my questioning is in regards to the one suspicious one now and the one that was tested positive. If that area, all consume this . . . Where the two diseased animals were taken, if all the animals were taken totally from that area, is that part of the 213, or were they taken at random in and around the area?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Just to point out that of course we're seeking adult animals, but these adult animals were harvested on a random basis. And to point out that 71 of the animals were harvested in zone 45, which is the Lloydminster area, and the remainder were harvested out of zone 46, which is the sandhills area.

So the concentration of the harvesting took place in zones 45 and 46. The animals were harvested at random, and of course we're looking for adult animals. And again, all we have right now is one suspicious case but it needs to be confirmed. Thank you.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:57.