

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

That your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to designate the restoration of old Government House in Battleford as a centenary project and provide the necessary funds to complete this project prior to the 2005 centennial celebrations.

Your petitioners come from the town of Battleford.

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

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

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

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I rise again on behalf of people from southwest Saskatchewan concerned about the state of the Swift Current hospital and requesting this government to do something about it. The prayer of the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition today signed by residents of Rush Lake, Ponteix, Morse, and the city of Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present but this one is regarding the EMS (emergency medical services) service in the province. The prayer reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people in the Redvers area.

I so present.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens who are expressing interest in maintaining and upgrading of the Saskatchewan road network. And the prayer goes as follows:

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

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

I so submit.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today on behalf of the Redvers area. The prayer reads:

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

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Redvers, Carievale, Maryfield, Fairlight, Moosomin, Storthoaks, Alida, Antler, and Manor.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Signed by the good citizens of Marcelin and Blaine Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have petitions on behalf of those who are concerned with the

harmful effects of tobacco smoke, primarily relating to youth. And the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to legislate a total ban on smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces, and on school property within the province of Saskatchewan.

This petition is signed by people from Henribourg, Prince Albert, Canwood, Christopher Lake; and primarily by students, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present today to do with the lack of funding to non-profit personal care homes. The prayer reads:

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

The signators, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Kamsack, Togo, and Yorkton.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by the citizens opposed to the possible reduction of services to Davidson and Craik health centres:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Davidson, Bladworth, Lumsden.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today on behalf of citizens 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 improve community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition come from the community of Wynyard.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring forth a petition in opposition to the reduction of health care services 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 the government to abandon any plans to reduce current levels of available acute care, emergency, and doctor services.

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

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

I so present.

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

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

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

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

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order a petition presented on June 7 regarding increasing the foundation operating grant to school divisions has been reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) is found to be irregular and therefore cannot be read and received.

The following petitions have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

A petition calling on the government to repair Highway 43 from Vanguard to Highway No. 4.

And nine other petitions presented yesterday that are addendums to previously tabled petitions.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my thrill this morning to be introducing 51 students from the Saskatoon French School. The Saskatoon French School, Mr. Speaker, as the name will indicate, will tell the members that these students are studying in the French language and therefore they come not just from the constituency of Riversdale but in fact from across the city of Saskatoon.

Today, Mr. Speaker, they are accompanied by: their teachers, Sylvie Fortier, Julie Vermette, and Lucien Deux; and chaperones and other guests with them, Suzanne Tosh, Lorraine

Grier, Doug Thorpe, Blake Rooks, Randy Kerney.

I would ask all members to welcome this large group of students from the Saskatoon French School to the legislature. And I look forward to meeting with you about 11 o'clock.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, 24 grade 8 students seated in the east side of your gallery, Mr. Speaker. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Clare. They're from St. Dominic Savio School in the constituency of Regina Wascana Plains.

I've had a few occasions to be at St. Dominic School and was very warmly welcomed and spent many an hour watching ball games on their playground.

So I'm very pleased to be able to welcome them here today and I would ask all members to join in greeting them. I'll meet with them in the members' dining room later for refreshments and the questions they have probably after question period, Mr. Speaker.

I tried to convince some of them to sing around the circle in the rotunda because the sound travels so well, but I didn't hear them break into song. But certainly I know that they'll be full of questions after they've watched the proceedings.

Please join in welcoming the St. Dominic Savio grade 8 class.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature a number of people who are in your gallery who are people that I think you know from your previous work, working on the all-party legislative committee.

And I'm going to list a number of people and I think some of them may still be coming because of some interviews that they're doing.

But I'll start off with Shaine Peters, who is the coordinator of the Students Working Against Tobacco; Dawn Anaquod and Jen Marshall, who are from the Fly Higher Team at Riffel High School; Lynn Greaves, who's the Chair of the advocacy committee for Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction and works as a health promotion consultant, Regina Health District; Roberta Cox, from the Heart Healthy Partners, Regina Health District; Joan Riemer, who is the president of the Saskatchewan Public Health Association; Mary Smillie, who is the president of the Saskatchewan Coalition for Tobacco Reduction; Keith Karasin, who is the executive director; Andrew Caswell, who is the director of communications; and Gary Semenchuk, who is the president, all of the Canadian Cancer Society, Saskatchewan Division; and Cliff Burnett, who is the tobacco enforcement officer with Health Canada; as well as Lynn Koehler, who is a tobacco enforcement officer with Health Canada; Rhae Ann Bromley, who is the director of communications for the Heart and Stroke Foundation; and Lisa Williams, who is a health promotion program coordinator, also

with the Heart and Stroke Foundation; Loretta Eberts, who is a board member of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Saskatchewan; Dr. Ross Findlater, who is the medical health officer for the Regina Health District. He's also representing the Saskatchewan Medical Association. Marilyn Reddy, who's the vice-president of the Volunteer Board of the Saskatchewan Lung Association; Sharon Kremenjuk, who's a staff member of the Saskatchewan Lung Association.

I would ask all members to welcome these people to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as Co-Chair of the Special Committee on Tobacco Control, I would like to join my colleague, the Hon. Minister of Health, in welcoming all those, and thank them for their input and their interest in the tobacco legislation that is going to be put forth today.

So on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, I welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All members will be aware that these days there are post-secondary students working all across Saskatchewan. Included in that are some who are in your gallery today, Mr. Speaker, who are, through the new centennial summer employment program, employed at the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training.

They're here today, accompanied by staff members Debby Smith and Shelley Ostafie. And these students, Mr. Speaker, are working in a variety of offices in Post-Secondary ranging from communications, finance and operations, regional services, policy and evaluation, deputy minister's office, corporate information technology, and human resources.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join in saying welcome to the students that are here today; to wish them well in their work experience and in their academic studies in the fall, and in their careers here in our Saskatchewan. And I'll look forward to the opportunity to meet with some of them later this afternoon. So welcome to them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join with the Minister of Post-Secondary Education in welcoming the students here this morning. I wish them a productive and profitable summer and I hope they enjoy the proceedings this morning. And I'd ask all members to join with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With so many esteemed visitors in the gallery today, I would be remiss if I did not introduce two constituents of mine sitting in the back row of the Speaker's gallery.

(13:45)

Doug Raynes is there, as well as Grant Halkyard. Both, as I understand, work for the Department of Justice, although I suspect their visit here today is entirely pleasure. And I'd like to welcome both of these people. Doug used to live in the Yorkton area and has only moved to Regina about a year ago, as I understand. So while this is clearly Yorkton's loss, it is definitely Regina South's gain.

I also want to point out that Grant is the president of the Whitmore Park Community Association and as such is very involved in keeping the community I live in beautiful. And I'd like to thank him very much for that and welcome both members to the gallery.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Nelson Mandela Honourary Citizenship Denied by Action of Alliance Member of Parliament

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday I stood in this Assembly and expressed my pride and gratitude in the heroic and selfless achievements of our guests who were part of the D-Day invasion. I was very pleased that I could thank them for giving me a Canada based on understanding, decency, and freedom.

The nation learned yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that at about the same time I was speaking in this legislature, a Member of Parliament was putting to shame the very qualities which I was extolling. I know that all members join me in being appalled as legislators and embarrassed as Canadians that Alberta MP (Member of Parliament), Rob Anders, denied a unanimous motion in parliament that would have given Nelson Mandela honorary Canadian citizenship.

Why did Anders say no? Because as he explained and I quote:

Mandela was a communist and a terrorist and a left-Liberal poster boy.

Mr. Speaker, Nelson Mandela was in prison 27 years for opposing tyranny and apartheid. He was the first democratically elected president of South Africa, elected by all of the people of that country. And when he was in power, Mr. Speaker, he forgave his oppressors. And he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, perhaps the highest international award that can be given a world citizen. He embodies the principles of tolerance, compassion, and understanding — principles that those men who waited ashore at Normandy died for.

When he comes to Canada in September, Mr. Speaker, I and I'm sure all of the people of this place will be proud to welcome him as a fellow Canadian.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

DARE Graduation in Broadview

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this past

Wednesday I had the pleasure of attending the Broadview grade 5 DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) graduation.

Mr. Speaker, DARE stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education. Over the past two years Cst. Sandra Sutherland of the Broadview RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) detachment has introduced and taught the program in both Whitewood and Broadview schools to their grade 5 students and hopes to expand this program to a number of new schools next year.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of the program is to inform young students of the consequences of tobacco, drug, and alcohol abuse, and the problems that arise as a result of abusing these substances.

The program also stresses the importance of showing respect to your fellow men regardless of their cultural background.

It was certainly encouraging for the students and Cst. Sutherland to see the support of the community evidenced by the large turnout of parents and interested community residents for their graduation ceremonies.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the grade 5 classes of Broadview and Whitewood DARE programs, and Cst. Sutherland for their support and completion of such a worthwhile project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Hosts Special Olympics Summer Games

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Starting today and continuing until Sunday, over 400 athletes and staff will gather in Saskatoon to partake in the 2001 Special Olympics Summer Games.

Over the past few years, Saskatchewan's 1,300 Special Olympians, who range in age from 7 to 86, have been training and preparing for these games. And because they are held only every four years, the summer games are that much more exciting for both the participants and the spectators.

And every athlete will be trying their hardest as the summer games are a qualifier for the national summer games which will be held next year in Prince Albert.

The University of Saskatchewan will play host to most of the summer games events, and Saskatoon's many volunteers will help to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

Though these games are an athletic competition, they give all Special Olympians the chance to learn valuable skills such as teamwork and dedication, and above all, they give the athletes a chance to form a close bond with fellow athletes.

Mr. Speaker, I want to offer my congratulations to Co-Chair Angie Ginther, who is a special woman who grew up as my neighbour — I've known her since she was a baby — and the organizing committee that have worked tirelessly to put on these games since Saskatoon was awarded them last summer.

I also want to thank the volunteers who, as we know in Saskatchewan, make every event hosted here a success.

And finally, I want to wish the Special Olympians much success as they pursue and meet goals. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Davidson Honours Brian Hanson

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise in the House today to talk about one of my constituents who lives in Davidson.

Last Sunday afternoon, residents in the community held an event to honour Mr. Brian Hanson. Mr. Hanson has been a pillar of his community for many years as a caring funeral director, a dedicated ambulance service provider, and an active participant in volunteer community service, including president of the Davidson Legion.

Brian Hanson has maintained a family tradition of loyal service to his community, one that began with his father's business back in the 1950s. Mr. Hanson has dedicated his life to the people of Davidson and surrounding area by providing a level of service that goes above and beyond the call of duty.

His heartfelt attention to the families of loved ones lost is often mentioned, and his calmness and concern in emergency situations has saved many lives.

Indeed, Davidson residents are so grateful for his service that on Sunday afternoon this event could barely be contained in the community hall in which it was held. This outpouring of gratitude for Mr. Hanson's family was a very happy occasion. It was another reminder of how close small communities in rural Saskatchewan are in supporting one another.

I congratulate Mr. Hanson on his life's work and hope that he and his family will continue to provide the quality of care to the people of Davidson and surrounding area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

School Inducted into League of Peaceful Schools

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was just last fall during Education Week that this government launched Saskatchewan's Education caring and respectful schools initiative. Yesterday the success of the caring and respectful schools initiative was recognized when St. Theresa School was inducted into the League of Peaceful Schools.

The League of Peaceful Schools supports and recognizes schools and communities that are committed to fostering safe and peaceful environments. The criteria for membership in to the League of Peaceful Schools is consistent with the goals and framework of the caring and respectful schools initiative.

Some of the goals are to: end bullying on the playground; teach responsibility and respect; and refocus from crisis response to planned prevention, Mr. Speaker.

This government believes that schools and communities should

be safe places to live and work. That is why we are committed to working to help children develop the social and behavioural skills they need in order to live successful, happy lives right here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And the Premier taught the students a very special lesson yesterday as well, Mr. Speaker. He taught the students that by working together that they can achieve things that they cannot achieve alone.

He did this by placing a chair in the middle of the school auditorium and sitting on the chair and asking a young kindergarten student to see if they could lift the Premier. They couldn't. He asked another student to come forward so there were two. They couldn't.

Then he asked five grade 8 boys to come and help, and lo and behold, working together they could lift the Premier off the ground and hold him high above the students, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskEnergy Rates for Natural Gas

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For several days the official opposition has been asking very specific questions about the cost of natural gas and the price the NDP (New Democratic Party) is charging. Mr. Speaker, we've asked for any basic explanation from the government as to why they're charging people \$6.30 a gigajoule for gas, when they've admitted to buying on the spot market and the spot market price, including all the attendant costs, is only \$4.50 a gigajoule.

Mr. Speaker, in a recent editorial in *The StarPhoenix*, *The StarPhoenix* editors called the government's response to these important questions, and I quote:

... asinine posturing that has been the response by cabinet ministers Maynard Sonntag and Eric Cline.

The editorial goes on to say:

Instead of providing a direct answer to Wall's question on how much gas SaskEnergy has locked in for the coming year and at what price, Sonntag blathered on about the utility's investment strategy.

Mr. Speaker, the editorial comments in the editorial in *The StarPhoenix*, Mr. Speaker, go on to say and I quote:

In response to the question, Sonntag was swaying in the political breezes, seemingly unable to provide facts pertinent to the hottest political issue on his plate.

Like the vast majority of Saskatchewan people, *The StarPhoenix* expressed suitable indignation at a government that refuses or can't answer the question. But the question remains, Mr. Speaker, in light of the government's commitment that the cost of gas is not marked up to Saskatchewan consumers in any way, why is the NDP government charging people more for natural gas than it's buying it for today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Booming Economy in Yorkton

Hon. Mr. Serby: — A few days ago I said that I would be back with good more news for Yorkton and here I am again with another two good stories from Yorkton, Mr. Speaker. This time the news is about the booming Yorkton economy in spurring the Yorkton's housing market in a very healthy situation.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in my hometown paper, *Yorkton This Week & Enterprise* ran a recent article that said, that pointed to 1,400 new jobs were created in Yorkton area in 1999-2000 which led the housing stabilization at 75 per cent above what we've seen in the 1990s.

And as Mr. Paul Caton of the Canada Mortgage and Housing said, quoting:

The healthy economy is helping . . . the migration to Yorkton, and all . . . these families coming into Yorkton need a roof.

And a healthy economy, he said, results from the growth in Yorkton because of the good business climate and the human resources and construction-manufacturing sector.

And speaking about jobs, Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday — in spite of the Saskatchewan Party's negative attitude and the member from Swift Current's attack on SecurTek — on Wednesday of this week, SaskTel and SecurTek announced the moving of the SecurTek head office from Regina to Yorkton, Mr. Speaker.

This now means that 40, Mr. Speaker, 40 new jobs in Yorkton in just two years, and the head office to Yorkton, of which they'll now be monitoring, Mr. Speaker, 40,000 businesses and homes from British Columbia to Ontario. SecurTek projects another 25 to 30 more jobs in the next 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, this is a community and a province on the move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Accountability of the First Nations Fund

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, for four years the taxpayers of Saskatchewan have been asking for the First Nations Fund to be opened up to access by the Provincial Auditor. Finally that has happened, and what did he find? He found three things.

First, that the trustees of the First Nations Fund are not complying with The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act. Second, that the trustees have no rules, no procedures, keep no records, and cannot account for \$34 million of taxpayers' money. And third, the trustees have made improper transactions worth over \$280,000 that are not permitted under the law.

Mr. Speaker, these are very, very serious findings. What specific actions is the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs taking to

ensure the trustees of the First Nations Fund begin operating within the Act and within the law?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I answered this question yesterday but I am more than pleased to answer it again today.

Mr. Speaker, good governance is about co-operation and accountability. Our government places an extremely high priority on accountability. Bearing that in mind, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member opposite's question about what specific actions are we taking, I will tell her once again that the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) has been advised of the auditor's findings.

I have instructed my officials to meet with the FSIN and the board of trustees of the First Nations Fund to work out expeditious processes to strengthen the rules and procedures that will safeguard and control the assets of the First Nations Fund. Those meetings will begin next week.

I have also asked my officials to report progress to me on a regular basis as the meetings happen.

I can carry on and give you more specific actions, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, but over the past four years the provincial government has provided \$34 million of publicly funded casino revenues to the First Nations Fund that was targeted by law for the economic and social development of First Nations people. Yet the Provincial Auditor says he has no way to determine if money was actually spent for the purposes outlined in legislation.

Mr. Speaker, it is the minister's responsibility to oversee the fund under the Act. She either doesn't know how the \$34 million was spent or she doesn't care to find out.

Mr. Speaker, it is crystal clear that the NDP government has abdicated their responsibility for overseeing this fund to the point that \$34 million is unaccounted for.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan and to First Nations people what she is doing to determine where that \$34 million was spent?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:30)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to say that my department assumed responsibility for this fund last August and we worked very aggressively and very diligently to ensure, to ensure that the Provincial Auditor would have access to the First Nations Fund books.

As a result of that, we have this report before us that was tabled by the Provincial Auditor yesterday. Mr. Speaker, members will note that the Provincial Auditor's report speaks to improving

rules, procedures, and reporting for the fund — and that will happen, Mr. Speaker, as we work with the trustees, as we work with their auditor.

And again I want to point out that that fund has been audited for each of the last four years. It's been audited by a private auditor, not the public auditor.

We will work with the trustees, their auditor, the FSIN, and the Provincial Auditor and we will explore ways to assure the public and First Nations people that the money from the FNF (First Nations Fund) has been wisely spent.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister told the media that she was confident the First Nations Fund had adequate financial records. But the Acting Provincial Auditor says there were no records to show him how the \$34 million was spent according to the law.

Mr. Speaker, if there are no records, according to the minister, why did the Provincial Auditor have such a tough time verifying expenditures? Has the minister seen records that the auditor hasn't? And if so, maybe she should open the books on the First Nations Fund once and for all.

Mr. Speaker, if the minister is so confident that there is good record keeping with the First Nation Fund, will she stand today and explain to all people of Saskatchewan how this \$34 million was spent?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, I'm going to reiterate. The Provincial Auditor has said there were inadequate rules and procedures in place. We agree with that finding and, Mr. Speaker, we are taking steps to fix the problem.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the minister told the media that if the Provincial Auditor requested an investigation into how the \$34 million was spent, she would do just that. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not the auditor's responsibility to call for an investigation; it is the responsibility of the NDP government who created the First Nations Fund under The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP Premier, this Premier here, led protests against gambling in this province, yet it was his NDP government that brought in legislation to legalize gaming.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. The NDP government is responsible for the First Nations Fund and for ensuring gaming proceeds aid the economic and social development of Aboriginal people. Will the Premier, will the Premier launch an immediate public inquiry into why the First Nations Fund cannot account for \$34 million of taxpayers' money?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Speaker, it is important to emphasize once again our government believes in accountability. We not only believe in it, we act to ensure accountability.

Mr. Speaker, we are fixing the problem the auditor has identified. We agree with him that there are inadequate rules and procedures in place. We will ensure that there are adequate rules and procedures in place.

Mr. Speaker, we are fixing the problem — quickly, effectively, and co-operatively.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, this government is a joke. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan), he won't take responsibility for the business activities of his Crown corporations.

The minister of Liquor and Gaming takes no responsibility for her department when her department breaks the law and meddles in a police investigation of SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority).

The Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) takes no responsibility for the fact that he knew a water crisis was imminent in the province months before people in North Battleford were infected with the parasite.

And now the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is not taking responsibility for \$34 million that can't be accounted for in the First Nations Fund. It's as though this government, Mr. Speaker, believes that they are above the law.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier take responsibility — will the Premier take responsibility for his government and his ministers? If the Premier won't launch a public inquiry, will he explain to all Saskatchewan taxpayers and First Nations people why the First Nations Fund can operate outside of the Act and where \$34 million has gone?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to say once again this government believes in accountability. This government has received the provincial . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm going to say this government believes in accountability. This government has received the Provincial Auditor's report that says there are inadequate rules and procedures in place.

Mr. Speaker, we are working to fix the problem. Unlike the members opposite, we are working to fix the problem, not the blame.

What we are doing is meeting with the FSIN officials, we are meeting with the First Nations Fund trustees, and we will fix the problem. We totally endorse, support, and believe in accountability and we will fix the problem.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Latest Unemployment Numbers from Statistics Canada

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, the new employment numbers just released today by Statistics Canada paint a picture of a province in economic chaos. From May 2000 to May 2001 Saskatchewan lost 21,000 jobs. That's lost . . .

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

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, 21,000 jobs lost. That's by far the worst record anywhere in Canada, and it's the worst one-year job loss in Saskatchewan's history.

Mr. Speaker, 21,000 jobs have disappeared in the last 12 months. Why is the NDP driving so many jobs out of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the StatsCanada job numbers that were released today very much reflect the difficulties that we're facing in agriculture in this province. I think there's no secret that we have major economic challenges as it relates to the agriculture community.

What I also want to say to the member opposite is the numbers — May over May — last May, we had the largest number of jobs on record for May at any time in the history of this province. Of these jobs there are just under 17,000 that are directly related to agriculture.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, just yesterday we . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, we just yesterday released our economic development document, Partnership for Prosperity, that we put together working with the business community, with business leaders, with the FSIN, and with people across the province, that shows a great deal of optimism, a great deal of enthusiasm with respect to future growth in this province, which we will see.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, we're talking about jobs in 2001. We're not talking about in the past.

In the last election the NDP promised 30,000 new jobs. Yesterday the promise was made again — more new jobs.

Last year alone the NDP killed 21,000 jobs in this province. In fact there are fewer people working now than in 1999. Mr. Speaker, that is an economic crisis.

In the last year alone Saskatchewan lost over 4 per cent of its workforce. In the last year alone the entire working population of Moose Jaw or Prince Albert has just disappeared. In the last year alone the NDP has killed 21,000 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, where are the jobs that the NDP promised?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, this province has seen year-over-year growth because there have been economic development strategies that have been put forward with targets, working with the business community, that have been reached.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we make no apologies for the strategy that we put forward because it very much reflects what the business community believes and says can be done.

Now that might be a little unconventional to members opposite, to put together a game plan. After all their strategy is, as I understand it from the Leader of the Opposition, based on the weather. Now he tells us that under his government and his charismatic leadership, if the weather and the national economy co-operated, they could make some things happen.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit today about his economic strategy. In Saskatoon, in his speech, he talks about removing the barriers to growth and he refers to high taxes and regulatory quicksand. We have reduced the number of regulations in this province by 22 per cent and the largest tax decreases ever in the history of this province. We've got nothing to be ashamed about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, this is the worst, this is the worst job loss in Saskatchewan history, and the NDP are saying everything is just fine. Well everything is not just fine, Mr. Speaker. The NDP economic policies are killing jobs and at a record rate — 21,000 jobs in last year alone. And the NDP says everything is fine.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. Manitoba . . .

The Speaker: — Order please.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, let's look at those numbers: Manitoba, 1,000 new jobs; Alberta, 45,000 new jobs; Saskatchewan, 21,000 fewer jobs thanks to the NDP. And that's because of high taxes, overregulation, unfair labour laws, Crown corporations competing with the private sector. The NDP policies are poisoning this economic climate and they're driving business investment and jobs out of the province.

Mr. Premier, very simply, if the NDP policies are working, why is Saskatchewan losing jobs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to that member opposite that the economic plan of this government is working. We've had consistent growth year over year. *The Globe and Mail* reports Saskatchewan has having emerged as

the star of the '90s. Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say: the member over there, you listen to what he's saying. He talks about chaos. He talks in negative terms with respect to this province and I want to say . . .

The Speaker: — Thank you.

(10:45)

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say not everyone in this province has a negative attitude about what we have been able to achieve. Because the business community support the development plan that's been put together, the First Nations people support with a positive attitude . . . Yesterday there were hundreds of people at the launch of the new economic development strategy that was endorsed by the business people of this province. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the overlying theme of that document was improving the attitude of this province.

And I want to say that they are very much in isolation because the only people believe that things can't happen here, are them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, these just aren't our numbers. These are StatsCan numbers that we're talking about.

But they're more than just numbers. We're talking about real people. There are 21,000 people who have had a job in Saskatchewan a year ago that do not have a job today. And if they are working, they're probably working in another province — 21,000 people with families to support, with hopes and dreams into the future, who must now go somewhere else to fulfill those dreams because there is no jobs here for them. That's the NDP record and that's an absolute disaster.

Mr. Premier, if the NDP policies are working, why are 21,000 people not here? Why do they not have a job in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to ask that member if he will admit that the last years May figures for employment were the highest ever in the history of this province? I want to know if he'll admit that.

And I want to know if that member will also support the initiatives in the Partnership for Prosperity document. I want to know if he will support concentrating on youth employment. I want to know if he will support concentrating on innovation. I want to know if he'll support concentrating on developing our rural economic economy. That's what I want to know. Will he support those initiatives?

Because, Mr. Speaker, that's the plan that's put forward by this government. It's supported by the people of Saskatchewan. It's their document. It's their direction.

We're going to succeed in this province in spite of the attitude, the political attitude I might add, of members on that side of the House. I said they're very much in isolation. I believe that to be the case.

Mr. Speaker, people believe in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Federal Initiative to Overhaul Agriculture Policy

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. And, Mr. Minister, according to a number of media reports over the past few days, the federal government is in the planning stages of what could be the most comprehensive overhaul of national farm policy in Canadian history.

Federal Minister Lyle Vanclief is saying he will be discussing his new plan with provincial ministers later this month and again in September. And any time that the federal Liberals start overhauling programs, Saskatchewan farm families get nervous.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan farm families expect the provincial government to play a lead role in developing any new agriculture program for this province and for our country. What specific proposals does the Minister of Agriculture plan on taking to the federal government in the meetings upcoming when he meets with the federal minister, Lyle Vanclief later this month and again in September?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I appreciate the member from Kindersley asking me the question. Because he and I had an opportunity this past week to be in Ottawa together and make a presentation to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and talk to them about what we think our vision for Saskatchewan and Canada should be.

And we painted, Mr. Speaker, three frameworks. One is that we said emphatically to the, to the federal representative body that we want to see, in the future, an insurance that we're going to have an emergency aid envelope for farmers and Canadian farmers across the piece — that the federal government shouldn't abandon it.

We said to them that they should review and readdress their safety net piece. And we said, Mr. Speaker, that as they work towards a new strategy and envelope as it relates to transition adjustment, food safety, and environmental stewardship that we're going to be making an investment in that piece. And, Mr. Speaker, in this budget we did.

We're leading the country today in investment in the brand new envelope: 6 million brand new dollars of forage conversion program, Mr. Speaker. We're leading the country in some of the initiatives today of which the federal government is talking about.

And that member opposite and that group of politicians didn't support the budget, Mr. Speaker — did not support the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Problem with Job Creation Initiatives

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I apologize at the outset because I know the government doesn't like to hear bad news about their

economic policy. But I think it has to be said that the real prophets of gloom and doom on the NDP's economic policy are not opposition members but Statistics Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Today it was revealed that Saskatchewan lost another 5,400 jobs — the worst record in the country. Doug Elliot now says that for the second straight year he anticipates Saskatchewan will post employment loss.

Yet the same week as we learn of this job loss in Saskatchewan, the government spends 8.2 million to buy a Toronto insurance company in order to protect Ontario jobs.

My question for the Premier: if your plan to create 30,000 Saskatchewan jobs is to turn out to be anything more than a Grimm fairy tale will you finally say this policy is . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The member knows full well he ought to address all questions through the Chair. Would the member please rephrase his question through the Chair?

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier: will you stop this insanity . . . (inaudible) . . . Will the Premier stop this investment to protect Ontario jobs and say the priority . . . will the Premier say the priority is finally Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I would be very pleased to answer on behalf of the government, but I want to begin by saying the best positive initiative that could have happened with respect to the development of our economy was the day he decided to sit over on that side of the House.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that member full knows that one of the Crown corporations, as an example, just as an example, brought — out of \$90 million in profits to this province — \$30 million from investments outside of this province. That member also knows that there are 40 people now working in Yorkton; that if it hadn't been for the investment of a Crown corporation would not be working.

And I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, as well, that member also knows understanding rural Saskatchewan that when you lose 17,000 jobs in a sector over a period of a year, and you get no support from the people in Ottawa who should be supporting us in those initiatives, you're going to have to work extra hard to compensate for what happens in that regard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 56 — The Tobacco Control Act

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 56, The Tobacco Control Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely pleased today to stand and respond on behalf of the government and table the responses to written questions nos. 221 and 222.

The Speaker: — The responses to 221 and 222 are tabled.

Why is the member on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — With leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the gallery opposite yourself, I'd like to introduce Fred Soofi who is a respected Regina businessman. One of the things that makes Fred so special is that he not only is one of the best examples I've ever seen of entrepreneurial enthusiasm and success, but as well is a very strong supporter of human rights and other issues in the community.

So I want everyone to welcome Fred to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 49 — The Land Surveyors and Professional Surveyors Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Land Surveyors and Professional Surveyors Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, in today's economy there is much co-operation amongst engineers, geoscientists, land surveyors, applied science technologists and technicians, surveyors, and community planners in performing services for the public.

Because of this co-operative approach to their work, it's difficult to describe in legislative language the lines to be drawn among their respective responsibilities. However, to protect the integrity of the survey system in Saskatchewan, it's essential that the exclusive scope of practice granted to land surveyors be performed only by qualified land surveyors.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill before the Assembly today implements an agreement between the Saskatchewan Land Surveyors Association and the Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians to refine the exemptions to the exclusive scope of practice of land surveyors.

These amendments are also supported by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan. All affected groups, Mr. Speaker, are satisfied that these new provisions will ensure that each of them can continue to practise their professions in the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act to amend The Land Surveyors and Professional Surveyors Act and make a consequential amendment to The Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill No. 49, the professional surveyors amendment Act is really quite a brief Bill. There's not much to it at all, but it does look at broadening the definition of professional land surveying.

And, Mr. Speaker, from . . . I think from our first glimpse is that it looks like it's a very positive step to take into account land surveying, professional engineers, and geoscientists. So it, Mr. Speaker, is as I stated, it looks like its broadening and moving in the right direction. But there are a few groups that we would like to consult with and make sure that it's not maybe going too wide or it could maybe go wider, whatever.

So, Mr. Speaker, until we get feedback from the different groups that we need to talk to on this Bill, I would move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 52 — The Railway Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move the second reading of a Bill to amend The Railway Act. This Bill contains amendments that will provide several changes to improve the current Act.

The current Act was first proclaimed in our province in 1989. Given the dependence of rural Saskatchewan on railway service, this is an important piece of legislation. Rail lines provide an essential transportation service for the producers and their communities, and also are an essential element in the economic development of our province.

There are four main issues included in the amendments we are introducing today with this Bill. These changes are a result of requests made from Saskatchewan communities, grain shippers, and short-line operators in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the first amendment deals with entrance provisions. If a railway goes out of business it hurts our local communities, it hurts our farmers, and it hurts our economy in general. Farmers have to haul further distances at considerable expense. Municipal roads and provincial highways are exposed to the wear and tear of more frequent and larger trucks. And communities also lose an important part of their tax base and they lose jobs.

Our government raised this as a major issue during the Kroeger-Estey process. We were successful in getting the federal government to introduce legislation that made railway companies more accountable to rural communities.

(11:00)

Federal railways must first make available rail lines they no longer need to commercial operators or to communities to operate short-lines. If there is no interest in operating the track, the railways are required by law to provide \$10,000 for each mile of abandoned track for three years to the affected municipalities. As I stated the class 1, or federally regulated railways, have the option of selling track instead of abandoning it. If the new owner operated under provincial jurisdiction, CP (Canadian Pacific) or CN (Canadian National), as the case may be, would no longer have any responsibilities to our communities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, most rural residents would far prefer a viable operating railway to a compensation payment. But what if the sale is to an operator whose objective isn't to provide service in the long term? What if the real outcome of the sale will be a loss of service after only a few years of operation with no recourse to the transitional funding.

Our government believes it has the responsibility to determine if a sale is legitimate and in the best interest of the public. Provisions are being introduced today so that government can investigate and provide approval for an acquisition.

In cases where the intentions of a company are found to be in question, the acquisition would not be approved. Ownership would stay with the federal railway that would then have the option of continuing operations, finding a bona fide operator to sell the line to, or proceeding through the normal abandonment process. Mr. Speaker, this provision will help protect the public and legitimate short-line operators.

Mr. Speaker, the other . . . (inaudible) . . . entrance provision deals with creating a more predictable entry process for potential short-line businesses. Short-line operations require some predictability as to when they'll be able to start up their business. They need to acquire locomotives, hire staff, set up their business processes, and so on.

At the moment there are no timelines so a potential short-line owner can't predict how long the process will take. We're introducing provisions that have firm timelines so that a new operator can expect the process to take a certain number of days. This would allow the operator to better plan for acquisition.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to outline some of the new exit provisions in The Railway Act. The current legislation requires a short-line railway to prove to the Highway Traffic Board that it's uneconomic before the operator can discontinue service. The rail service provider must prove to the board that the service can't be provided in a manner that is economically viable.

Financial institutions have identified this provision as a concern as there are no assurances that they will get their money back if a deal forecloses.

The situation is different for lines that follow under federal jurisdiction. The federal government has changed their legislation so that rail companies are free to get out of the business if they so choose. Rail companies must first offer the line for commercial sale, then to the province, and finally to

local governments before dismantling the line.

The federal government has provisions that establish the sale price to the province or to the affected municipalities at the net salvage value. With this Bill we'll be harmonizing our process with the federal legislation, making the same rules available to interested parties for rail lines under provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, there is a second issue we need to address with respect to abandonment of service. Rail dependent shippers who suddenly discover they no longer have rail service could find themselves in a position of being out of business. Our government respects the right of any business, including a short-line, to get out of the business if they so choose. However with respect to short-line railway, we believe the parties most affected, our rural communities and our rural shippers, must be given a period of time for adjustments.

This Bill provides that 180 days notice must be given before an operator can exit. This transitional time will allow shippers and our communities to recruit a new service provider or make alternate transportation arrangements.

We believe that this is a reasonable balance between the interests of short-line operators and the users of the system.

Mr. Speaker, there's another important issue that's important. Many of our communities have expressed a concern about federal railways dismantling track suitable for loading producer cars. The right to load producer cars is extremely important to our Prairie farmers and the importance of this has been recognized nationally and is enshrined in the Canada grain Act.

Mr. Speaker, this right is of no value if there's no track to load cars. This Bill ensures that the province, our province, has done everything within its provincial jurisdiction to protect these rights.

We're changing our legislation so that we as a provincial government can give our producers the opportunity to acquire tracks if it's important for their operations. Any track suitable for accommodating traffic which falls under provincial jurisdiction will be subject to the dismantling provision in this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the next provision deals with rates and service. Farmers were concerned the rights they had under federal jurisdiction were being lost when a transfer was made to a short-line operator under provincial jurisdiction. In the farmers' view, it should make no difference whether the carrier is under federal or provincial law. The grain is starting from and going to the same destination it did when the railway operated under federal jurisdiction. And, Mr. Speaker, we agreed.

We've included these provisions that mirror the rules under the federal legislation. We're cautiously optimistic that the federal government will make the necessary changes to effect a seamless system for our Prairie grain producers.

Mr. Speaker, my final provision deals with safety. Improving our provincial economy is extremely important. An excellent rail line service is also important. Nevertheless, we have to insist on safe railway operations.

We have several new provisions that reinforce safety for our travelling public and all others affected by railway operations. Every railway operation will be required to put forward a safety management plan and this plan will be subject to approval of the province. It is the responsibility of each short-line carrier to keep this safety plan updated.

Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely pleased to answer any questions during our committee stage, and I would move second reading of the Bill to amend The Railway Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand today in the House and speak on Bill 52, An Act to amend The Railway Act.

Mr. Speaker, short-line railways are one of the pieces in the puzzle that many rural people and organizations feel are important to the survival and revitalization of rural Saskatchewan.

This Bill, as you can appreciate, we've just received and haven't had a lot of time to look into the many aspects of it. But it raises many concerns, and we definitely do want to study this and speak to many of the stakeholders in the industry and in rural Saskatchewan about the Bill.

We want to make very sure that the many changes in this Act does not really defeat the purpose and discourage short-line railways. And some of the comments the minister made appears to be directed towards that area.

Any business that's starting up in any type of enterprise has to be very concerned about profitability and giving proper service to its customers. And as we know, in every community infrastructure, highways and railways are very important. As the minister stated, the loss of railways in communities really puts a heavy burden on highways.

And I'd like to take this Bill back to the stakeholders and discuss any concerns they have with it. And at this time, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 33 — The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 33, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, as it currently exists, does not take into account the present or future potential for coalition governments in the province of Saskatchewan.

Under the current legislation, a third party that sits in the coalition is unfairly discriminated against. The legislation restricts certain funding to only those circumstances in which the third party sits in opposition to the government. In the interest of fairness and equitable treatment, there is no reason

why these resources should be limited to a situation in which the third party sits in opposition and not available when the third party sits on the government side of the House.

This amendment brings the legislation up to date by removing the current provisions that unfairly limit the allocation of resources to a third party in this Assembly. Under the proposed amendments, the third party would be entitled to the same resource allowance for staff, supplies, stationery, and services for the Leader of the Third Party whether in opposition or in coalition. If the third party caucus includes additional duties of whip and deputy whip, then the appropriate allowances would also be available whether or not the third party participates in a coalition. The proposed amendments also authorize provision of an additional salary allowance for the Leader of the Third Party should the leader not have additional duties and responsibilities.

Under the current circumstances where the Leader of the Third Party sits in cabinet and receives the additional allowances related to that position, the Leader of the Third Party would not be entitled to this additional allocation. This amendment does not change the role, responsibilities, or funding allowances which are currently provided to the official opposition. Those remain as they have in the past.

The official opposition continues to receive significant funding for their caucus office for their additional duties assigned to the whip and deputy whip. The Opposition House Leader and the Leader of the Opposition continues to receive the same allowance as a cabinet minister. And the allocations to the third party, as determined by the Board of Internal Economy, represent 50 per cent of the allowances set for the official opposition.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have always been leaders here in Saskatchewan. We've always been leaders in social and economic progress, but we've always been leaders as well in the reform of our democratic process.

When we took the unprecedented step of moving to a coalition arrangement, the people of this province welcomed that move and it was seen to be new, innovative. It set the stage for an effective, co-operating, working relationship between two parties that will continue to have, on occasion, legitimate political differences in terms of public policy, public administration, and management of government issues.

Mr. Speaker, the coalition has provided good, stable government for this province, and it has shown that co-operation does work.

In a province of a million people we have demonstrated that co-operation can achieve positive results and it does not require our legitimate, partisan, political interests to be subverted or undermined.

This legislation eliminates the existing disincentive to co-operation and ensures that a third party in Saskatchewan can continue to function as a legitimate political interest while making real and substantial contributions to stable, progressive government.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 33,

The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2001.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to enter into this debate, but I must say at the outset that I am somewhat conflicted.

I have to say that I actually agree with the principle of the Bill as outlined by the Government House Leader. I agree that in principle a third party can sit on either side of the House and remain a third party. So I agree that the present legislation is an anomaly in saying that a third party can only be a third party, in effect, when it sits on the opposition side.

It just happens to be in the British parliamentary tradition that we are very familiar with oppositions being composed of more than one party. We are not as familiar as other countries are of the situation where the government is composed of more than one party.

Although I must say the Government House Leader was wrong in his history when he said the present situation is unprecedented. This is in fact the second coalition government in Saskatchewan. The first coalition government was formed in 1929. It ended in 1934 when every single solitary member of that government was defeated.

That election, by the way, Mr. Speaker, was also the election which saw the birth of the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation), the forerunner to the present NDP.

(11:15)

So it's not correct to say that there has never been a coalition government in Saskatchewan. There has been a coalition government in Saskatchewan. It's largely passed from memory because, as I say, not one member of that coalition government was re-elected.

But I do agree with the principle that third parties may be in opposition or may be part of government. And therefore the principle of this Bill, it seems to me, is correct. And although I have left the coalition personally, I still wonder whether the coalition was of and in itself a bad idea for the Liberal Party or whether it was badly executed.

I accept in principle that a government can be composed of more than one political grouping and that the minority grouping can be given direct input by being in a coalition, direct input into government policy. It can be seen by its members to have an agenda, to have a program, to have a plan, which is being forced on the larger party as the price of survival.

An Hon. Member: — Hypothetically you're right.

Mr. Hillson: — And certainly as we look at examples such as Israel or the Green Party in Germany, we know that that has happened elsewhere. Sadly, I have to admit that did not happen in Saskatchewan. And to the people of Saskatchewan and to Liberal members generally, they simply saw no evidence of Liberal input into government policy.

One small example probably serves to suffice. In the 1999 election the Liberal leader campaigned against forced municipal amalgamation. Then when the debate was on last year, he said he was inclined to vote in favour of it. Then when it was scuttled he took credit for it being scuttled.

It is little wonder that to Liberals and to the people of the province generally, this was more than they could comprehend or understand.

So I do not . . . if it wasn't for cabinet confidentiality, I could certainly tell you where we stood. However, it is a matter of public record that when I became Municipal Affairs minister I said on the first day that forced amalgamation was DOA (dead on arrival). So that's where I was if the hon. minister of Rural Development wishes to know.

So I ask myself if coalition is wrong in principle or it was merely badly executed by ourselves.

Coalitions, as we know, exist in many parts of the world and operate successfully. They are less common in the British parliamentary world and that may be because in a parliamentary democracy there is the principle of cabinet solidarity and cabinet confidentiality which precludes members of the cabinet for saying, I am taking this position in the cabinet room and my support for this government depends on my colleagues accepting these positions. That is really not allowed in the British parliamentary system, in the cabinet system, because of cabinet confidentiality and cabinet solidarity.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, the new Government of British Columbia has said that they will have cabinet meetings before the television cameras. That will be an interesting experiment.

I have to say I'm skeptical because I accept that it is important for a cabinet to be able to speak frankly, to air differences thoroughly in the confidence that these divisions will not become public. And I frankly do not really understand how cabinet ministers will be able to speak frankly and forthrightly in the cabinet room if there's a television camera present.

However, this is nonetheless an experiment being tried by the new government of British Columbia that will be interesting to watch to see if in fact there is room for breaking the system of cabinet confidentiality and cabinet solidarity.

More to the point, it seems to me that we in Canada have taken the issue of votes of confidence far . . . much further than was intended in the parliamentary system. We know that in Great Britain, the Mother of Parliaments, it is reasonably common for members of both the government and opposition parties to vote against the majority of their members on matters which do not involve confidence.

In Canada this is almost unheard of. And indeed any Member of Parliament who does not vote the party line; it creates headlines in this country. It does not create headlines in the United Kingdom.

It is my view that the principle of confidence — in other words the life of the government — was intended only to include the address and reply to the Throne Speech and the budget. We

have expanded the concept of confidence to involve almost all votes.

We see on our Tuesday afternoon private members' debates, even there the votes almost invariably come down solely on party lines. Clearly the life of the government is not at stake with those private member's resolutions.

That should be a time for private members to tell constituents how they stand and what they believe on the issues of the day. However, sadly we have to say that is not happening at present. What is happening is we see the government moving a motion, congratulating the government for being the most marvellous institution ever, ever to govern a province or state on the face of the earth. And we see an opposition taking the, of course, obviously the opposite point.

So even on private members' day we simply don't see the flexibility for members to bring to bear their views, their judgment on the issues of the day.

Well I said at the outset, Mr. Speaker, that part of me favours this Bill because I accept the basic principle that a third party may sit on either side of the House. And my view: on the face of it, that's all this Bill does. And that is sensible.

But in the specifics of this situation, I have some very serious problems. I again looked up the Liberal caucus Web site this morning. And what did I find? Well under the heading, current news — current news, that was the heading — there was a news release put out by myself dated October 3, 2000 — before I was kicked out of caucus of course.

The next item I came upon under current news was another news release dated September 29, 2000. And again, I had put that one out.

Well there was also a large, a large section criticizing the Saskatchewan Party's position on the budget — the budget a year ago, not the budget this year, the budget of 2000.

I looked to see if perhaps the Liberal leader had something to say to party members and to the people of the province. And I found that the last word from the Liberal leader to the people of the province on where his party stands was dated June 1, 2000 — June 1, 2000 — more than a year old.

Now of course I mentioned this last week in the legislature and the member from Melville jumped up with not one, but two news releases which were literally hot off the press. He jumped up the next day to say that the caucus office had in fact issued two news releases since I had made my comments. There was more activity in those few hours after I made my statement than there had been literally in the preceding year.

The situation we now have is that of course most of the staff has been dismissed from the Liberal caucus office. And of course last week the member for Canora-Pelly accused the government of using the \$65,000 that will go to the Liberal caucus as being a payoff. Quite correctly the Liberal leader took offence at this. The member for Canora-Pelly was forced to retract his allegation that this was a payoff to the Liberal members of the coalition. I agree with the Liberal leader's position on that.

However, the question still has to be put. If it wasn't a payoff, what is the money for? What is the additional \$65,000 for? We're told it's for staff; well the staff has been mostly let go. We're told it's for communicating; there is no communicating. The last little bit of communicating ended when I left the . . . when I was kicked out of the caucus. So we need 65,000 for communications but there is no communications. We need 65,000 for staff but by and large the staff is gone. So what is the money for?

I have already said, Mr. Speaker, that the principle of this Bill I happen to support. I support, not just for the present situation but for the long-term — as the member for Prince Albert Northcote correctly said — I support that a third party may be sitting on either side of the House. That is a correct principle.

But seeing as there is \$65,000 . . . \$65,000 that is entailed in this Bill on top of, I think the figure is \$165,000 already going to we don't know what, I believe there is an onus on the government and on particularly the coalition Liberals to tell us what that \$65,000 is intended to be used for. And I don't think it's an answer to say it's going to be used for communicating when we all know there is no communicating going on.

Mr. Speaker, I accept that members of this legislature need to communicate first of all with their supporters and party members, but also with the broader population so that the people of the province will know where we stand on the issues and so that we can in turn, of course, get feedback from the people and they can respond to us and they can tell us what is of concern to them and what they want to see us doing.

So of course communications is the lifeblood of politics.

I, myself of course, receive as . . . now in my present situation, \$21,000 for my communications. I maintain regular communications, regular reports to my constituency, and of course, on my Web site which has a few entries added to it every month.

An Hon. Member: — What does that cost Jack?

Mr. Hillson: — It costs a few hundred dollars so it's minimal cost.

And this is certainly part of the job. This is important. And if one is going to lead a party in particular, it is important to speak to party members and to the province in general on a somewhat more frequent basis than once a year.

So I acknowledge that that should be done. But they must acknowledge it's not being done. It hasn't been done. One of the reasons for the failure of the coalition, for the repudiation of the coalition by Liberal Party members at our annual convention last March is because nobody was saying to them where the Liberal Party stands, what it is working for, what our position is.

Nobody was telling Liberal members that we haven't simply been subsumed into the NDP, that we haven't merely accepted cabinet positions and cars and travel in return for not having any Liberal policy to put before the people of this province.

And our party has responded to this with a massive vote of non-confidence, the by-elections which have been held have also shown that we simply have not succeeded in convincing the people of Saskatchewan that we can sit in coalition and have an independent voice and be a force in Saskatchewan politics for the things which matter to us.

May I say, Mr. Speaker, that as a Liberal there are many values I hold in common with the New Democrats, and I think that they are the right track in saying we have to end the marginalization of Aboriginal people — something I was most concerned with.

(11:30)

However, increasingly I see this province is in a crisis in terms of economic development, in terms of giving hope to our young people, and I think it is fundamentally wrong to think that the only engine for economic development in this province must be through state-owned enterprises. And that has and will continue to hold us back. And I would really ask the NDP to review that because state-owned enterprises have largely now been excluded as an engine for economic development everywhere else in the world but here.

Well I will at that, Mr. Speaker, say that I am not convinced yet how I will vote on this Bill. The principle I actually happen to agree with, but I will not vote for the Bill unless we hear in some detail what the Liberals plan to do with the extra \$65,000. I think they owe that much to the taxpayers of this province.

They have \$165,000 now; they're going to get an additional 65,000, presumably to do communicating. There is no communicating, and I do not think that we can justify voting these additional funds unless we hear some detailed plans as to what this money is going to go for.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are others who will want to participate in this debate but at this time I will move that we adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

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. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today on Bill No. 30, an amendment to The Labour Standards Act. In particular, this piece of legislation deals, Mr. Speaker, with changes that occurred at the federal level. This is companion legislation to Bill C-32 at the federal parliament that deals with maternity leaves in the cases of Unemployment Insurance, Mr. Speaker . . . or I guess it's now called Employment Insurance, Mr. Speaker.

The changes are being made to extend the number of weeks that a woman is entitled to and the number of weeks, Mr. Speaker, that the father is entitled to, in the case both of a natural birth and in the case of an adoption, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, families, as we know, are very, very important. They are the bedrock of our society, and, Mr. Speaker, how a family operates and the interaction between the family members, parents, and children really mould our society for the future, Mr. Speaker, and how our society is going to be structured, how it's going to operate. Actually what kind of a society we are going to have in the future is being established today by families, Mr. Speaker — how they interact together, how they interact with the community, Mr. Speaker. So anything that can be done that enhances families, that benefits families, is worthwhile, Mr. Speaker.

In fact we have seen a number of pieces of legislation over the last number of years that have been detrimental to families. And I think of some of the items in The Income Tax Act, Mr. Speaker, that are more beneficial to people being single than they are to being in family units, Mr. Speaker; where there is better deductions for individual people rather than for family units. And those kind of items, Mr. Speaker, are detriments to families and need to be amended.

Now I'm not sure that any government . . . The federal government is the one that has to deal with that. I'm not sure that they're even looking at that but that's one of the areas that they should be taking a look at, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is moving things to a total of 89 weeks, Mr. Speaker, on this particular Bill. We will deal with it — excuse me — not we will deal with it. The total amount of leave available to parents on a pregnancy, on a birth, or an adoption, Mr. Speaker, totals out to 89 weeks. That's 52 weeks for the mother and 37 weeks for the father. That is very important, Mr. Speaker, as it gives the parents time to bond and to spend that very important initial year with their child.

Mr. Speaker, though, there are some concerns to be raised with this particular Bill. Concerns on how it's going to be . . . how it's going to affect families, how it's going to affect businesses, Mr. Speaker, because we're talking about the interaction of the family with their place of employment, with the business involved.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need the opportunity to learn and see and access how this will impact on those businesses; just how it's going to have an effect on this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, some of the things that happen when maternity leaves are in place is, is it possible to extend from one maternity leave to another maternity leave without any employment in between? Can you run maternity leaves consecutively?

I don't know, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible? Does the legislation deal with this? I know that it's physically possible to have two pregnancies within a 12-month calendar year. But is it possible to extend maternity leaves consecutively? I don't know. That's one of the questions I think that the minister needs to address, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what happens to the replacement workers that are coming in to replace a person who goes off on maternity leave? What kind of security do they have in place for their employment if it's possible to have consecutive maternity leaves, Mr. Speaker, because obviously the person who is hired, Mr. Speaker, to be the replacement worker is there as a temporary employee.

As a temporary employee will they receive increases in salaries that the rest of the employees may receive? I know that they receive benefits, Mr. Speaker, but do they receive all of the benefits and all of the increases in the benefits that may occur at that work site? Again, those things impact on the employee that is replacing the employee that's off on maternity leave, Mr. Speaker. So again that causes a great deal of difficulty and the minister needs to be able to respond to those kind of questions.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we need to determine what is happening in other jurisdictions across Canada. I know that in some cases that employees need to give notification prior to going off on maternity leave. What kind of time frame is required here?

In Alberta the notification period is six weeks prior to leaving. That gives the employer the opportunity to find a replacement worker, Mr. Speaker.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in another jurisdiction, an employee has to have worked at that location for 12 months — one year — prior to qualifying for maternity leave.

The Speaker: — I would ask why the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood is on his feet?

Mr. Hart: — Leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague, the member from Cannington, for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, a group of grade 4 and 5 students seated in your east gallery. They are the students from the Kelliher School. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Phyllis Bigalky, and a number of chaperones.

I'll be meeting with the students shortly. We'll go and have our pictures taken, and we'll meet in room 255 and I'll be happy to answer their questions. So I'd ask all members to welcome the students here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

**Bill No. 30 — The Labour Standards
Amendment Act, 2001
(continued)**

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at what other jurisdictions are doing, Mr. Speaker, in relationship to this Bill, what other thoughts have been given to this, what other avenues have other jurisdictions explored to come into not necessarily compliance, Mr. Speaker, but into companionship with the federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that the minister take note of some of the questions that I have raised.

I know that the government is anxious to have this Bill moved through the House. But in that anxiety, Mr. Speaker, I wonder why it is, though, that this Bill was not brought forward earlier. The Bill was presented no more . . . initially, Mr. Speaker, was laid on the Table, given notice, three weeks ago. The legislation, Mr. Speaker, passed the federal parliament over a year ago. And fact is it came into force on January 1, 2001, Mr. Speaker. We could have been looking at this Bill much sooner had the government brought it forward.

This legislature started sitting, Mr. Speaker, on March 20, two months prior to the government introducing this Bill. Mr. Speaker, if there's any concerns about the timeliness of this Bill proceeding through the House, the government should have given consideration to that when they first called the session back in. We came back in to session, Mr. Speaker, a month later than normal. This Bill was not presented for the first two months of this sitting.

Mr. Speaker, the government has had a year to look at the federal legislation and make the determination on what kind of things they wanted to do with this Bill before presenting it to the House. The opposition, Mr. Speaker, and the public have had less than three weeks. I think it's very presumptuous of the government, Mr. Speaker, to believe that we should immediately pass this piece of legislation because of their ineptitude in presenting the legislation to the House in a timely manner.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that there are members of the House that want to be able to address this Bill. We are prepared to give them the courtesy of doing so today. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important though that the public be given the chance to know what is in this Bill and to make an evaluation of how it's going to impact their lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise not so much to explain what the Bill is about, although I will review it briefly, but on . . . I rise to speak about the urgency in having the Bill passed.

As we've heard previously, as a result of these amendments, a birth mother or primary caregiver would be entitled to a maternity leave of 18 weeks and a parental leave of 34 weeks for a total of 52 weeks of job protected leave. And I think job protected is an important thing that we need to consider when we are explaining why it is that it's a matter of some urgency that we get this Bill through.

Birth fathers and spouses of the primary caregiver would be

entitled to 37 weeks of job-protected leave, and together the combined maternity and parental leaves a family is entitled to would be 89 weeks.

We've heard before, and we certainly agree and support the idea, that those first few months of a child's life, indeed, the first few years of a child's life, are very important formative years and it's very important for families to be able to bond early.

And as the member from Cannington said, we have known that the federal government passed this legislation a year ago, even a little bit more than a year ago. And in a nutshell, Bill C-32 extended the number of weeks of maternity and family leave benefits payable through employment insurance to 50 weeks per family — 15 weeks of maternity leave and 35 weeks of parental leave.

And I'm disappointed to hear that he's taking further shots at the government, saying that we should have introduced it earlier. But they could have consulted earlier as well, Mr. Speaker, because they knew, they knew that we were going to be introducing this legislation. It was contained in the Throne Speech. I think it was in every one of our leadership platforms.

(11:45)

And so I'm disappointed and I'm asking that the members opposite co-operate. I'm not trying to be argumentative in any way. But I am disappointed that they would take yet a further opportunity to take another poke at us.

Mr. Speaker, like other provinces and territories, Saskatchewan is increasing its parental-leave provisions to provide job security for families while one or both parents receive the increased level of Employment Insurance benefits. We're doing it because it's good for families; we're doing it because it's the right thing to do. And I really . . . I think that we can all agree on that on both sides of the House.

Mr. Speaker, passage of this legislation is rapidly becoming a matter of urgency for many Saskatchewan families. In order for people to be able to take the full advantage of this legislation, under the current legislation they must give a minimum of two weeks notice of their intention to return to work. That will not change to four weeks until after the legislation is passed.

And so in one week it will be June 15 and they will have to give two weeks of notice in order to return to their jobs on July 15. If this legislation is not in place by then, people will not be . . . although they will be entitled to the Unemployment Insurance benefits, they won't be able to access them because they will be back at work as a result of having to give two weeks notice. If they don't return to work, then they're not guaranteed their job back if they take the additional time.

And that's the whole problem that we have and that's the situation that I ask the opposition to understand and co-operate and allow this legislation to go through.

Under the current Act, new mothers are allowed job protection for a total of 30 weeks, including both maternity and parental leaves. Many mothers will soon be required to give the two

weeks notice to return to work under the required legislation and they will not be able to access and stay home for an additional 22 weeks that will be allowable under this new legislation.

And I see that there isn't a lot of attention being paid and that's disappointing too, because all of the members of their constituency I'm sure have families and would want to access this legislation. I understand that the minister's office is receiving 12 to 15 calls a week of people that are urgently awaiting this legislation and time is closing on them.

The amendments we have will grant new mothers and primary caregivers, as I've said, a total of 52 weeks of job-protected leave and 37 weeks for spouses or secondary caregivers. These extended leave periods will be available to parents who are currently on leave when this legislation receives Royal Assent and whose child is born or came into their care on or after December 31, 2000.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would not want to be the person responsible for holding this legislation back a week or two weeks so that someone whose child is born on January 10 is not eligible and somebody whose child is born on January 3 is eligible. So I would ask the members opposite to please take that into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, hundreds of Saskatchewan people are waiting for this legislation to be passed so that they can be assured of retaining their jobs while they access the extended benefits under federal employment insurance programs. I urge the members opposite to stand with us today in support of this legislation and in support of the families of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan families have been asking that they be able to enjoy the same level of EI (Employment Insurance) benefits as those in other provinces. It's up to us to ensure quick passage of this legislation so that they can do so. And, Mr. Speaker, I ask the members opposite to please give this Bill their support and let it pass on. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to raise a few comments or bring forward a few comments regarding the legislation, Bill No. 30, The Labour Standards Amendment Act, and just reiterate some of the points that some of my colleagues have already raised in regards to this legislation.

Pointing out the fact that, Mr. Speaker, our caucus certainly isn't opposed to parental leave and the opportunity to spend some time with a young child. But I guess, Mr. Speaker, I would have to say I am somewhat concerned a bit when we basically have to put in legislation the opportunity for parents to spend time with their children, especially when they're very young.

Mr. Speaker, I think a lot of parents through the years have made a choice. A lot of parents, when they chose to begin a family and if both spouses happen to be working, one of the spouses made a choice to take some time to spend with their family.

And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, in the case of our family, my wife was a teacher but she felt very strongly that it was important for her to be at home and to spend the time with our children when they were very young, with the feeling that when they reached school age, she would then look at the option of going back into the educational field.

And, Mr. Speaker, if there's something I hear it's the fact that we seem to be putting less and less of an emphasize on the family relationship, and on the importance of providing that necessary care. And, Mr. Speaker, I would add that one of the major issues that needs to be debated is the fact that when a child is very young, those early years of a child's development are very informative years, and very permittable years, and, Mr. Speaker, what I hear from a lot of parents is the fact that they want to have the impact of creating and giving the sense of direction for their child in those formidable years as they're developing, versus going back into the workplace, Mr. Speaker, and letting somebody else raise their children, and actually train their children, Mr. Speaker.

So while this Bill in many respects is saying to, I guess, to the families who have . . . the two-income families who just feel they don't have the opportunity economically or the time to spend time with their children, so we're going to give it to you through legislation. We're going to give you rather than six months, now we're going to give you a year, following the federal legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also encourage members and parents to realize the importance of not just the first year, but even up to the school age years, Mr. Speaker, the importance of being there. To be with your children, to watch them when they begin to walk, take those first steps. To be there when they begin to say the first few words that would come out of their mouth. Because there's nothing — nothing — can replace that, Mr. Speaker, to see your child take those first few steps, or to say those first few words, whether it's mommy or daddy.

And just by legislating the fact that we're going to give you that opportunity, I think diminishes the responsibility and role of the parent. And, Mr. Speaker, also there are many parents are offended by this type of legislation because they feel it's . . . when they chose to become a parent, they made that choice because they wanted to have the joy of having a family and watch that young child, son or daughter, begin those few early permittable days in their lives, and watch them begin to develop as they developed into that young boy or girl in their family.

So, Mr. Speaker, the government members are talking about the fact that this legislation is needed by a certain period in time. My colleague, the member from Cannington, mentioned the fact that the period . . . for more than a year the government has had the opportunity to bring this piece of legislation forward. It could have been one of the first pieces of legislation on the order paper if it was that important.

And, Mr. Speaker, and the member from Regina South says it's standard legislation. Well I think the member from Regina South should remember that yesterday . . . or I believe on Wednesday on the introduction of a Bill, and why are you holding up the Bill, I think the member said.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think if indeed there's a process, then we're suggesting to the government there was a process where they could have brought this piece of legislation forward much earlier as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to suggest to you that I think when we talk about families, the importance of the family, and the recognitions of the role of the family, one way that we could certainly look at recognizing that fact is a tax credit for parents who choose and would love to stay home. Maybe they'd love to stay home longer than the first year. Maybe they'd like to spend those . . . maybe that first five or six years at home with their child to give them that education process.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — And, Mr. Speaker, maybe this legislation should have gone beyond that. Maybe this legislation should have offered the tax credit to that parent so they could make that choice and it doesn't affect them, their family, that much financially, Mr. Speaker. I believe that is another avenue that certainly can be looked at.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I believe there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in this piece of legislation. I know that my colleagues and I have much more we would like to raise. However, at this time, Mr. Speaker, I believe it would be appropriate to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Health Vote 32

Subvote (HE01)

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'm pleased to have with me the deputy minister, Glenda Yeates. And then to her left is Bert Linklater, who's the executive director of district management services. To my right is Lawrence Krahn, who's the assistant deputy minister. Immediately behind me is Marlene Smadu, who is the principal nursing adviser. To her left is Duncan Fisher, who is the assistant deputy minister. And to his left is Rod Wiley, the executive director of finance and management services. And behind Mr. Krahn is Kelly Kummerfield, who is the executive director of human resources. Thank you

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. And first of all, welcome, Minister, and to your officials. And especially welcome Deputy Minister Yeates. You had missed our last opportunity to talk and so it's a pleasure to be here.

And certainly to some of the other officials, Minister, we had an opportunity in the past Public Accounts meetings to talk about some issues there and I appreciate their openness and candour

when we discussed those issues in that format.

Mr. Minister, today I want to begin at least by talking about in general the issues surrounding the health care professionals recruitment and retention and training and those issues.

And, Minister, I guess by way of a bit of a preamble to this whole topic — because I think it's an absolutely critical one — I have to say that I want to go on record as expressing my concern about the fact that the demographic realities of our medical professionals, the increasing need for their services, and the disproportionate low numbers of people we're able to bring in from other jurisdictions because of the competitiveness in the health care world. I'm very concerned about the level of internal training that we're doing in this province because I think we're facing a ticking time bomb when we look at the demographics.

(12:00)

Certainly when you look at the absolute numbers, it could be argued that indeed we have enough registered nurses, adequate licensed practical nurses, enough technicians, etc. But I think if you look at the demographic reality of that population, there is a disproportionate curve getting up into the more senior years of their careers. And we are going to face a reality in very short order of being in a very significant shortfall on those numbers.

The second thing I want to say that I think increases my concern about this whole issue is I had the pleasure last Friday, I believe, to attend a presentation by David K. Foot, the author of *Boom Bust & Echo*, who does a lot of work and is fairly renowned at making some pretty significant projections in terms of the population changes over time.

And it was interesting that he said there is only one fundamental assumption that he makes, and that is each year each of us gets one year older. And I think that is a safe assumption.

But it also indicates that when you look at the bell curve, if you like, and the disproportionate number of people that are approaching the end of their careers, there is going to be no escaping from that. It is going to be an absolute inevitable fact that these people are going to move inexorably forward to the time when they're going to either have the option or choose to retire. And so we are facing some really significant problems.

Mr. Minister, I want to start by asking you for your general comments on this topic and then I will move into more specific questions.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I very much appreciate your comments and your question and the opportunity to talk about this.

It's very clear that we have to work together with the professions, the various professional organizations as well as the employee organizations and the unions, because it is a concern for them as well as us in the whole system.

We also have been doing pretty careful analysis each year of the demographics as you've pointed out. We know that the sort of baby boom bubble of people, which we're all part of, has been

moving through the system and has had some fairly dramatic effects on the health system.

And what we do know is as this group moves closer to retirement ages and some of the higher health cost ages that we are having to do a number of different strategies. Hopefully one of them is to have healthy lifestyles and many of these things as part of that.

But as we look at where and how we get the health care workers for the next generation, we're looking at the demographics, we're working together with the professions. We're also working very closely with the First Nation and Métis people, the Aboriginal people of Saskatchewan because they have many capable people who are quite interested in longer-term careers. And so a number of our initiatives actually are working together with SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College), the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and with our colleges throughout the system.

So there's a whole broad array and I will let you ask some further, more specific questions. Then we can answer those.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, there are a number of statistics that are available from different sources. And you know, I think that your comment about the baby boom phenomena if you like, is both at this time a comforting thing because these are the people that are . . . the people, I believe Dr. Foot said, born starting at about 1947 or so till '56, '57, and they're the people that are in a large majority of their professional careers at this stage.

So because there is that phenomena, this boom if you like, we now have a disproportionate number of people available as professionals to look after the generation not only in the system right now, but the heavy demand generation which is the generation older than us at this stage.

And so if you like, we are living in a bit of a false sense of security right now because we have more people of the contribution age, of the age of professionalism that are participating as practitioners in the health care field looking after a disproportionately smaller number of older people. In not too many years, I'm afraid, for my instance and many of us in this House, we're going to be of the generation that's going to need support.

And following us is a much smaller demographic reality that there are fewer people in the upcoming generations available to start with.

And so if we're going to start dealing with that phenomena we've got to start making some pretty significant initiatives in the training fields starting now. Because as you know, Minister, this doesn't just happen tomorrow. If you said to the College of Nursing tomorrow, we're going to give you another 100 seats, literally I think they'd have to move ATCO trailers onto the campuses in order to find the physical space in order to accommodate those programs. That's the first problem.

The second problem is finding in this competitive medical world right now qualified instructors and things of that nature in order to provide the courses.

So the point I'm trying to make, this isn't something that we can make on a spontaneous decision and expect results in almost an immediate fashion.

As you know, Minister, I mean licensed practical nurses are on, basically, almost a two-year program; registered nurses is a degree program — three years if you fast track but basically a four-year degree program. Medical doctors, family practitioners — it's basically what, seven years? You know, it's a long-time training program and there's going to be a fairly significant lead time that's required even to ratchet up to anticipated educational requirements. We're almost looking at anything from five to 10 years lead time in order to make this happen.

And when you compound it with the reality that the professional colleges, the College of Nursing for example, is saying at the University of Saskatchewan we're bursting at the seams for available space, then all of sudden we make this problem even worse because we've got to make some commitments to space. So I mean we're talking a fairly long lead time.

And the principle that Dr. Foot talked about is that each of us are going to get a year older one year at a time; it's sort of a very strong initiative for us to do this.

Mr. Minister, I have in front of me some information from the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, their membership count and method of registration over the last, I guess, 15 years from 1985 to the year 2000. And in that statistical information it shows, for example, going back to 1988 where there were . . . and maybe it was a part-year so that's probably a poor example. But in 1989 there were 308 graduates as registered nurses that were then registered with the SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association). That dropped to a low in 1994 of 85. And that seems to me that it was a pretty short-sighted thing because now everywhere we go, we're talking about a critical shortage of registered nurses.

I saw the other day, I think last week, on the recruitment Web site for the Health department or that facility, there was something like 23 full-time permanent registered nurse positions for the Regina Health District. And so obviously there are full-time permanent positions that are going unfilled.

In the year 2000, which is the last year that there was information for, it had gone to 149. Now I think out of a total practicing enrolment of 9,000, you know, 149 are not going to keep up to our needs as the demographic curve shifts. That's just not going to be enough. And so, Mr. Minister, in total, in the year 2000, practicing registered nurses were 8,987. That's the lowest that has been recorded since 1985.

So, Mr. Minister, I wonder, with those realities what concrete steps is your department taking to dramatically increase the graduation and potential availability of registered nurses in this province?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you for that question. Basically what's happened is that this is an issue that's been examined by the Department of Health over a number of years.

In 1999, the Provincial Nursing Council and people who are

concerned about this started looking at it and commissioned some work done by Doug Elliott from Saskatchewan *Trends Monitor*. And his information . . . and this was basically projected from 1998 to the year 2008, so it would be going to another seven years from now, is that the worst-case scenario — these are based on exactly the figures that you talked about — would be about 331 RNs (registered nurse) and RPNs (registered practical nurse) each year to meet the supply. Sort of a status quo number would be about 235. And sort of the least required of that, I mean basically if everybody could stay in the profession, was about 105.

This was the information that was used by the Department of Health and the Department of Post-Secondary Education when they increased the number of nursing positions from 180 up to 260. And it's also working from this base of information that we're looking at further expansion of the nursing positions to get up closer to that 331 worst-case scenario.

So I guess what I would say is that exactly what you've been asking about is the kind of questions that are being asked by the Department of Health, by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, by the Provincial Nursing Council people, and by the various professional groups that we work with, because you're very correct that if we don't do this in advance of the problem arising, we'll be in even a bigger difficulty.

You add into all of that the whole question of making sure that our compensation packages and benefits aren't too far out of line with our neighbours. That also becomes a factor.

And so all of these things are included in the discussion. But I think the specific question around the demographics is something that's been very carefully looked at and has informed some of the plans that have made over the last number of years.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Minister, a couple of days ago I believe, and I'm not sure exactly when, but there was a letter read on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) *Morning Edition* by Sheila Coles. And it talked about, it was a letter from an individual who had received some long-term care, I believe it was respite care in Saskatoon.

And as part of the medical practitioners that were dealing with his needs were many nursing students who, as part of their program, are available for health districts to work, in the last year of their program, I believe, specifically.

And this gentleman in his letter that was read over the radio said that . . . he made a point and he said he really appreciated the quality of care, first of all. That it was, you know, he was really well looked after, and he appreciated that.

But he said, as part of his curiosity, he made a point of asking every single one of these nursing students that came to him or was in contact with him . . . and it wasn't a scientific poll by any means, he just wrote this letter and said that he had done that. And he said that the high percentage of people that he talked to were asked this question. After you graduate as a registered nurse from your program, is it your intention to stay and practice in Saskatchewan or to go to another jurisdiction?

And it's a pretty simple fundamental question. And he said that

the majority of people in his experience on that little survey he did, were going to . . . had indicated they were going to leave this jurisdiction; they were going to leave this province to practise.

And he asked them further why that was going to be their choice. And he said the practical reality for these young people was, first of all, I think universally they were carrying student loans and some of them significant student loans. And so job security and the ability to count on a job to meet their needs once they graduate is going to be a big one.

And I, Minister, have had three daughters go through university programs and I know pretty well what each of them were facing. I have one daughter that is a registered nurse. And when she graduated with her degree, she wanted to practice in Saskatchewan and, thank God, she is.

(12:15)

But I remember her sitting by the phone, literally trapped by the phone, waiting for a casual call. And the problem with that is if you're a young student is that you have no life. You can make no plans, you have no assurance of stable income.

So when you go to your lending institution to set up yourself in an apartment and buy some modest furniture — maybe to arrange to make payments on a vehicle or to make payments on your student loans — lending institutions don't want to hear you say, well I'm not sure if I'm going to have stable income or not; I think I am because there's a shortage of nurses that surely that'll be okay. They want something more concrete than that. They want somehow to know that there is a long-term, stable, permanent full-time job and that there is some prediction then, based on the salary grid that's appropriate, that you're going to be able to maintain that program.

So, Mr. Minister, it is important firstly that we get the appropriate number of training seats. I agree with you and I still think that we are not there yet.

The SRNA, in recent documents that I have seen, I think are talking about a target of about 400 training seats — 350 to 400 — so something in the magnitude of a hundred more registered nurses. And I know . . . And I want to talk to you a little later about registered psychiatric nurses' programs.

But what is in place to try to make sure, first of all, that there is a sense that these young people are going to have jobs here, that they're going to be full-time permanent? And what are we doing to make sure that those are offered to our graduating students and that they know when they're in their training program that indeed there's going to be a job for them here in this province? And I think there might be some contractual and seniority problems and all the rest of it, but what's your department going to do to try to address that issue?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you for allowing me to talk about this particular area. Just first a bit of information about the nursing graduates. We know that from the classes of nurses that graduated December '99 and April 2000, that about 75 per cent of the graduates stayed in Saskatchewan. Another class completed their studies the end of April or end of September

2000, and there were 14 graduates and 12 of those or 86 per cent have remained in the province.

The particular issue around what are the opportunities and how we can make the work opportunities in Saskatchewan friendly for these new graduates is a very specific topic being discussed by the Provincial Nursing Council that I've talked to you about before. That group includes members from the various professional groups, from the labour groups, but it also includes student representatives — people who are in the process of studying to be nurses.

And I actually had the opportunity to talk to some of them at the SRNA convention. And they are bringing forward exactly the points that you are making here, about how do we get jobs that allow us to make some plans for our life.

So one of the things that is happening right now, is that in this year's budget the Nursing Council has money — \$150,000 — where they're working together with the Regina Health District, SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses), SRNA, and the students to research and develop strategies to address the issues of the casual workforce.

So they're going to be looking at sick time, hiring practices, overtime costs; and also what is it that needs to be done to address the issue of people making a plan to make a career and knowing that they've got a long-term job without going through some of the casual lists that you talk about. So these are problems that have been identified by the nurses themselves and our goal is to listen to them and work with them to solve the problems.

What we know is that it's a complex solution given the fact that there are various contracts that are signed. There are also staffing requirements that the managers require. And what it takes is all of the people working together and looking at some new models or just making sure that some of the plans that they have had, work to their full effect.

And any suggestions that you may have over the time that I know that you work in this area, well they'd be very much appreciated. And I know the Nursing Council would be happy to hear from you as well.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much, Minister. Minister, you know I'm sure you get calls and there's always some discrepancy between anecdotal type of stories and statistical evidence. And I do appreciate the fact that a majority of our graduates are staying in this province. And I know that the recent statistics from the College of Medicine are similar. And that's very good.

Minister, the other day I talked to a nurse in Saskatoon, a registered nurse with some experience who was concerned about the fact that nursing students were being hired at LPN (licensed practical nurse) rates to fill positions on units and registered nurses, who are looking for more than casual hours, were only getting one and maybe two shifts in the week.

And I wonder, Minister, when I think of the good idea of hiring nursing students and to get them familiar with the system and get them oriented, and get them knowing a sense of worth — I

think that that's a good program. But I am concerned when I hear that these hands should be extra hands. They are learning hands. They shouldn't be hands that are substituting for the hands of professional, fully trained registered nurses.

And, Minister, I wonder if you have any communications with the health districts in terms of setting up some policies so that the nursing students that are hired by districts — and I want to make sure you understand I support that idea — but they should be the extra hands.

They should be the hands that make the workplace issues a little less pressured and those sorts of issues instead of replacing people who are really qualified and trained and looking for more shifts. Is there a policy guideline in place for health districts that takes care of this danger?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you for that question. I think what you are referring to is the student senior assist program, and these basically are paid summer jobs for these RN students to get experience in the system. They're additional to the RN complement. They can't replace that. They're not there to replace the LPNs. They are there to learn.

Often what happens is that during the regular year, these people are the precepts — I think is the term, but the students working in clinical areas — and at that point they're not paid because they're students, and then when the summer comes, they can apply and get some of these as summer jobs.

I think it's probably no different than what I did when I was in law school and worked after my first year of law school in a law firm. And I don't think I replaced any lawyers but I learned lots of things about that.

And I think it is a very good program. The intention is not to replace other workers but it's to train them. So that's the basic policy around that. And it's something that the students themselves have asked for because it's a very key part in their learning experience.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister, and I concur. The question that I'd ask you specific on this: is there a clear direction to district health boards so that they do not schedule these individuals in replacement of registered nurses, particularly when schedules are tight? And sometimes into the summer, as you know, every health district virtually in the province reduces to some extent services, some more significantly than others, because of holiday time and all that sort of thing.

Is there is a specific direction from your department that says to district health boards that this program is not intended in any way to replace registered nurse shifts, but to supplement and augment them?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think there are two factors that explain . . . or answer your question. First thing is that they are not registered as nurses, so they can't work in that role. The other thing is that when they take these summer jobs, they become members of the unions, whether it's CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) or SEIU (Service Employees' International Union), like the other people within the hospital. So that they

have their role within the normal labour structure in the hospital.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Okay, thank you, Minister. Minister, I would like to speak now about the registered psychiatric nurses. In discussions with this profession, I find that they are very concerned about their demographic future as well. I believe in broad numbers there are about a thousand registered psychiatric nurses practising in the province. And their concerns are many.

First of all, they're concerned about the role and the recognition of registered psychiatric nurses and how they're used in the health system. There are many instances and there certainly are instances of improvement where registered psychiatric nurses are used very effectively. But I think they make the point as well that mental illness and the issues surrounding mental illness and their particular expertise is sort of a silent, quiet issue that many times gets overlooked in terms of its seriousness.

And they are very concerned about the current configuration in terms of how many people are coming out of the NEPS (Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan) program, which is the integrated Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan. And I believe they've told me is that they're only finding that of the number of graduates coming out of the program, that very, very few, like under . . . in single-digit numbers are coming out graduating as registered psychiatric nurses.

And I would like you to comment if you have any concerns about the effectiveness of the NEPS program of meeting anticipated future needs for registered psychiatrist nurses?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The whole area of the role of the psych nurses in Saskatchewan is one that I think we will continue to have some discussion around. I'd like to give you a little bit of good news about the psych nurses in the fact that, you know, we have a bursary program for re-entry of people to come back and work in the profession after they've been out. And of the bursaries that have gone out, there are 13 of them that have gone for psych nurses to come back into the profession. So that's a positive sign.

Now one of the difficulties obviously is that there are equivalent . . . equivalencies between the psych nurses' jobs and the RN jobs, and there's slightly more mobility with an RN designation than with an RPN designation.

But what I think is happening, —and I was at the convention for the registered psychiatric nurses — it's very clear that they have some very key skills for use within our whole medical system. And they are working together with the Nursing Education Program to make sure that their skills aren't lost in the process. The continued discussion I think between SRNA and the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association has allowed them to identify the kinds of strengths that they bring together and we're, as the department, part of that discussion.

(12:30)

I would just say that I have a special interest in this area of psychiatric care in that my mother — who I've mentioned before is a dietitian — worked for many years at psychiatric

hospitals providing dietetic advice. And so I've had this as part of my growing up experience to hear about the key role that psychiatric health care workers provide.

And so I think that I know that the mental health field and the psychiatric nursing field is an extremely important one. And what we want to do is work together with them to bring this unique Saskatchewan gift that we have of the psychiatric nursing profession, a very strong psychiatric profession, on into . . . as we look at the health care for this century.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, in just broad-rounded numbers: there are about 1,000 registered psychiatric nurses registered to practice in the province at this time; there are approximately 10,000 registered nurses registered to licence at this time. If you look at a 20-year career cycle you'd need approximately — just on an average replacement number — somewhere in the magnitude of 50 psychiatric nurses and 500 registered nurses on an annual basis, if you had everything levelled off and real smooth in terms of training.

We certainly are not going to be able to get by, by talking about 260 registered nurses training positions and then being really pleased about an 80 per cent retention rate, because that just takes the numbers down to under 200 that are staying in the province instead of the 500 of registered nurses.

And on the psychiatric nurses side, I mean if we need an average number of 50 a year, if we're only in single digits — and I'm pleased that there are 13 people came back into the profession — but again that doesn't come anywhere near an average number of 50. And that's ignoring the demographics of the situation that's calling for even higher numbers.

The registered psychiatric nurses have voiced serious concern about the NEPS program, the Nursing Education Program of Saskatchewan, in terms of the result at their end — of graduating registered psychiatric nurses.

And I believe, Mr. Minister, that they have actually made a proposal to your department about saying that we need to look at a specialized training program that focuses more individually on psychiatric nurses. And I believe that they were looking at a program that's available from Brandon College, or whatever, that they felt really met their needs as psychiatric nurses.

And certainly both issues I think are important ones. There needs to be a methodology of helping the registered psychiatric nurses replenish their supplies of graduates so that the profession will continue to at least offer the level of service that they do right now. But the way the demographics are working in terms of the output from the NEPS program, it is entirely possible that this profession is going to be in serious jeopardy not many years in the future as their more senior members are approaching retirement age.

Are you looking at specifically the issues that the registered psychiatric nurses are raising in terms of their concern about the outcome from the NEPS program that's currently there? And are you considering looking at a special program for registered psychiatric nurses?

The Chair: — Order. We've had quite a bit latitude in the committee as to putting the direction to the Chair or not to the Chair. But I think we're trying to bring it back so that the questions are directed to the Chair and through the Chair and answers are to the Chair and through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The specific question that the member has raised has two aspects or two answers that I can give here and possibly further with more questions.

Basically with the Nursing Education Program, the NEPS program, the registered psychiatric nurses are part of a process that's going on now together with the Post-Secondary Education people as they evaluate that program and look at its strengths and its various places where there are things that could be improved. And so we are strongly encouraging the registered psychiatric nurses to be part of that process.

But we're also looking at the whole provision of mental health services in Saskatchewan. And we anticipate doing a broader review of provision of mental health services in Saskatchewan where the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association will be involved as one of the key players, along with obviously the psychiatrists, psychologists, and other workers that are working in that field.

So practically, at that point, there will also be discussion around the unique role that psychiatric nurses have provided and also the . . . kinds of roles that can be in that area.

So there are two parts to my answer. One is that there is an ongoing evaluation of the nursing education program, and I am aware of the discussions around possibilities of having a connection with the Brandon program. But I think that practically, the discussions need to take place around the overall nursing education program in Saskatchewan which is continuing, and then also we need . . . we're looking more broadly at mental health services.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Through the Deputy Chair, will the minister undertake to address the issue of the fact that the registered psychiatric nurses are saying we've had this discussion, we've looked at the NEPS program, and it simply isn't working.

I mean it's all well and good, and I think that consultation and discussion and dialogue is fine, but it can't go on forever. And quite frankly, the registered psychiatric nurses and their professional association are saying this isn't working.

I mean having further discussion about it is just going to sort of prolong the issue. They're calling for specific initiatives and action from the Department of Health and Post-Secondary Education perhaps, of saying that the program as it's structured now clearly is not meeting their needs nor is it likely to.

So I appreciate the fact that discussion occurs, and it has occurred I believe, from the registered psychiatric nurses' point of view. What is the department . . . And I would like to ask the minister, of what are going to be the specific and concrete responses to the psychiatric nurses who have identified the fact that this program is not meeting their needs?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The simple answer to the member's question is that the legislation — the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan legislation — has specific provisions in there whereby the professional organization approves the education programs for qualification into the profession. There is a specific process of how they do that.

They are in the midst of that process of evaluating the nursing program in Saskatchewan and when the process is done, they will say well it's good in this area, there's some inadequacies here. The department is waiting for them to complete that process and then give a report and then we can work together with them to correct the inadequacies, change the whole program, do whatever kinds of things that might be necessary.

So what we are now in the midst of is a process which is part of the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Saskatchewan legislation and we're planning to work together with them in that process.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, last session there was legislation that was passed by the House unanimously that licensed practical nurses would operate as an independent, self-regulated profession.

I think that the initiatives between the licensed practical nurses, the registered nurses, and the registered psychiatric nurses in terms of mitigating some of the competitive misunderstandings, let me call them, across the nursing field in practice were being resolved in terms of a document that came out and talked about collaborative practice.

And there was the commitment that a committee representing these three professions or these three categories of nursing were going to go around the province into different workplaces and talk to the local workplace individuals to sort of lay out how this collaborative practice was going to function, to hopefully mitigate some of the hard feelings and suspicion, and competitive tradition that has been developed would be moved to a more comparable one, to a collaborative practice.

Can you update the Assembly and the people as to where that process is at and how many individual workplaces have been visited today?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm very pleased to give the member an update on this process. There's been at least 10 of these visitations. I think they're going to Swift Current next week and North Battleford the week after that.

There also was a presentation at the SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) meeting where many of the people were together. And I know it is also a topic of discussion at the SRNA meeting, the LPN meeting, and the registered psych nurses meetings that have been held over the last number of months. So this is an ongoing process and they're working at it and that's what's happened so far.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. Minister, I would like to turn my attention to the area of technologists a bit, in terms of training, etc. From the information that we have, I believe from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), it outlines the number of seat capacity, the

number of applications, those enrolled, how many have graduated, and how many have left and things of that nature, and it's kind of small.

But I see, for example, that on the medical laboratory technician program and the medical radiology technician courses, there are 16 seats allocated in each of those programs. Now if I'm not mistaken, Minister, very recently there were comments made from the Regina District Health Board that there was almost a dozen people that they needed as an ongoing replacement for their personnel.

And I wonder if you would comment on, first of all, are these program numbers that I'm looking at correct; and if they are, do you think that they're adequate?

(12:45)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank the member for that particular question. Basically I have information around the medical laboratory technologists which has been a recent issue.

In the fall of 2000 — which is just eight months ago, I guess, or nine months ago — SIAST increased the number of positions by 100 per cent. Basically the plan was 16 positions every second year, and now there's 16 positions every year. So basically we doubled the numbers of positions in the last eight or nine months.

We also know that this shortage of medical lab technologists is a national concern. And there's a national committee called the Advisory Committee on Human Health Resources that actually has a specific subcommittee to work on a national strategy for allied health personnel, including the medical lab technologist.

This initiative is one that is part of the deputies' meetings that you were asking about the last time we were together and the . . . also does relate to some of the national questions about how do we provide the technologists that we need within the health system.

But I guess I'm pleased to say that this problem was identified here; we doubled the number; we're continuing to monitor the situation. And if we need more places, well then we're going to have to look at how we can get more places and that will be done together with the Department of Post-Secondary Education's skills training.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. One quick question before my colleague from Swift Current would like to ask some questions. Minister, how long ago was it that indeed that the technologists' programs were cancelled completely in this province? Was that from '93 to '96? Or when was the program virtually cancelled entirely?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The member asked a question about the history of the programs over the last number of years.

We, in Saskatchewan, ended up limiting the people entering the program for a couple of years while curriculum was redeveloped, but we didn't shut the programs down. We kept the . . . the staff kept them working. And then we went to a every-other-year entry point, which was the 16 people every

other year, basically because we didn't want to shut down the program. Other provinces completely closed everything and lost the resource that they had.

We, in Saskatchewan, didn't do that. We're very happy that we didn't. And now as of last September we basically doubled the program and so we have 16 people going into the program each year. We're going to continue to monitor that and basically if there's a greater demand, which it appears that there is, we'll look at some more positions.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Minister. And in passing the questions to my colleague, I would like to thank you and the officials for your attendance today.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Through you to the minister, a question regarding the Swift Current Regional Hospital.

The minister will no doubt be aware that daily I've had the opportunity to present some of the 6,000 petitioners in this House from Swift Current and southwest Saskatchewan who desire a new facility. The prayer of the petition, I think, is reasonable. It asks the government to carefully consider Swift Current's request.

And while I know that maybe no formal request has been presented, I guess this question I would ask of you relates directly to the estimates we're considering. If the city of Swift Current, if the community and municipalities in the southwest, along with the health district came forward to the government and met its 65/35 per cent funding requirements for capital facilities, what would be the response of the provincial government as regards to the Health budget that we're dealing with today?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I appreciate the member's question. Basically what happens is we have a whole process that's required to spend money of a capital nature, which then requires ongoing operating costs. And it is very much a process where you work together with the local community.

And what I've discovered in this job, as we go and see projects that are at various stages, is that it's very much a community effort over the longer term. But it is a positive process which results in some very good projects. And I know that the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood and I saw the results on Wednesday of this week of a project up in Wynyard.

I think where Swift Current is at, is they're in this process of trying to work with the department officials and the local community around the scope of the project. And it's very difficult to make comments of sort of approving or not approving around a total project until you know, kind of, what the scope is. And that includes the local people obviously doing an assessment of what they see their needs are. And then getting all the statistical information over the last number of years. And then also looking at the demographics of the . . . that the member from Melfort was talking about where, where you project what kind of a community . . .

Practically, we know Swift Current is a thriving, growing community and they have some needs that will have to be

addressed. And our plan is to work together with them to get the scope part sorted out so that we can look at the longer term.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, just to say to the minister that his, I think his . . . I think there's some . . . quite a reason for hope in the response that he just gave. And I would urge him to be, to be aware that I think that kind of proposal may be coming soon from the community. I think it would be very much a community-based approach.

And when it comes across the minister's desk, I ask him to consider the fact that the hospital, the hospital was built in 1948. It hasn't seen a major capital improvement since '71. And I think some of the issues that my colleague, the member from Melfort-Tisdale, has raised with respect to the shortages of staff and utilizing what staff we do have better could be addressed in a new, integrated facility.

And so I don't really have additional question other than to urge the minister to really consider favourably community . . . a community proposal for a new hospital for Swift Current and the southwest.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I thank you for that comment and I thank both the members for their questions. I move that we rise and report progress.

The committee reported progress.

The Deputy Speaker: — Have a good evening and a good weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:55.