

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, today I present a total of 10 petitions from residents of the southwest concerned with the condition of Highway 43. The prayer of relief reads as follows:

That your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on the Saskatchewan government to repair Highway 43 from the village of Vanguard to its junction with Highway 4 in order that area residents may have access to necessary services without endangering life and property.

I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that reveals that commercial greenhouses in Saskatchewan are classified differently than agricultural enterprises under the current labour standards legislation. The prayer of this petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary amendments to The Labour Standards Act to recognize the needs and realities faced by commercial greenhouse proprietors and employees.

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

Mr. Speaker, I present this petition on behalf of petitioners in the Biggar area. Thank you for this opportunity.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions to present again today from people in my constituency who are concerned about the Fyke report. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Kelvington health care centre be maintained at its current level, offering 24-hour acute care, emergency and physician services, and that laboratory, physiotherapy, public health, home care, and long-term care services be readily accessible to users from Kelvington and district.

The people that have signed these petitions are from Kelvington, Porcupine, Lintlaw, Rose Valley, Okla, Hendon.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, 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 Glasnevin, Avonlea, and Kayville.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of residents from across Saskatchewan that are concerned about the hospital in southwest Saskatchewan, in Swift Current. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, petitioners today on these petitions are from the city of Swift Current, Nipawin, Morse, Regina, Wymark, and Waldeck.

I so present.

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed today by the good folks from Preeceville and Sturgis, Saskatchewan.

I so submit.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about the EMS (emergency medical services) report. And 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 intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And the petition is signed by residents of Radville, Lake Alma, Saskatoon, Kamsack, and Ceylon.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition that is very similar to the one that was just presented, on behalf of the people of the Saskatchewan. 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 together to improve community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Redvers, Wakaw, Antler, Storthoaks, Gainsborough, Redvers, and Reston, Manitoba.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition dealing with health care.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitioners must have been the same ones that signed the last one because they also come from Redvers, Wawota, Antler, Storthoaks, Gainsborough, Carlyle, and Reston, Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition from citizens concerned about high energy prices. The prayer reads:

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

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

Signed by the good citizens of Meota, Battleford, and North Battleford.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, 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 communities of the signatures, Mr. Speaker, are Melville, Bangor, Bredenbury, Esterhazy, Kamsack, Pelly, Stockholm, Atwater, and Churchbridge, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by the citizens concerned about the high rates that the Crown corporations are charging, SaskPower and SaskEnergy.

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by citizens from Elbow, Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again I rise in the Assembly to bring forth a petition with concerns regarding the cellular telephone coverage in the Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency.

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

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

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

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise again with a petition from citizens concerned about the high energy rates. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks of Cadillac.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to increase funding in all areas of speech and language services for preschoolers; and nine other petitions that are hereby tabled as

addendums to previously tabled petitions.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of my colleague, the hon. member for Regina Wascana Plains, to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of seven young people — students who are enrolled at the Ranch Ehrlo Society in Pilot Butte. And they're accompanied here today by their teachers, Everett Agopsowicz and Todd Frei.

These young people are aged 14 to 17 years of age. I believe it's their first visit to the Legislative Assembly and I would ask all members to accord them a very warm welcome today. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the House two young ladies seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. These two ladies represent businesses here in the city of Regina and they've come today to bring to the government's attention a very serious concern facing all businesses in the province of Saskatchewan.

I'd like to introduce Ms. Wendy Hernandez. Ms. Hernandez is the owner of Synergy water consulting, a business here in the city of Regina. And the second lady is Ms. Tamara Fiorante, who is also a business owner in the city here.

And I would ask all members to welcome both Ms. Hernandez and Ms. Fiorante this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature some guests who are from Regina, North Dakota, and Minnesota. And I'm talking about the people in your gallery.

Ken Stalwick is here, in the middle. Ken is a teacher at Luther College in Regina, the high school. And he has with him his parents Harvey and Margaret Stalwick. Many of you will recognize both Harvey and Margaret as long-time Regina residents. Harvey was the former dean of the School of Social Work here in Regina. He's now a professor at Concordia in Moorhead, Minnesota. And Ken's especially pleased to have with him his brother Trevor's children, Ashley and Michael. And they live just south of Fargo, North Dakota.

I'd ask all members to welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party official opposition I too would like to welcome the students and the staff from Ranch Ehrlo. I had the opportunity to visit there a little while back. And I can certainly appreciate the work being done.

So welcome here today and I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly, two young people sitting in your gallery.

They are Cameron Broten, and Julianne Broten. They are from Saskatoon. And Cameron is a student at the University of Saskatchewan who has spent some time in the last year in Guatemala and is now tree planting in British Columbia but plans to complete his degree at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan).

Julianne is a political studies student at the University of Western Ontario. And she is working in my office for the summer and then she is going to return there to complete her degree.

And I might add, Mr. Speaker, that their grandfather, Mr. Broten, served in this legislature I believe in the Douglas government. And I've had the opportunity to meet both of these young people, and I'm happy to report to you that they're very astute observers of politics.

And I'd like to ask all members to join with me in welcoming them here to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all the members of the House, three very good friends of mine and the member from Coronation Park.

Seated in your west gallery is Miles Pelletier, Vince Folk, and Mick Ryan. And I know the gentlemen are down here in Regina today on some business and they've taken some time out to take in the proceedings of the House.

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

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Generous Gift to Government House

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week at Government House, the Premier, the Provincial Secretary, and 125 others were guests of the Lieutenant Governor for a presentation of a very generous gift to Government House, and for a warm tribute to the couple making the donation.

Mr. Speaker, friends of Government House have been working for years to restore the house and its furnishings to the conditions resembling those that were in place at the time when Monsieur Forget, our first provincial Lieutenant Governor, assumed office in 1905. At that time Madame Forget brought with her a grand piano which, unfortunately, no longer functions.

But at this gathering the problem was remedied as Dr. Morris and Jacqui Shumiatcher presented a new Yamaha grand piano to replace that of Madame Forget's. If you have priced a grand piano lately, Mr. Speaker, you will appreciate the magnitude as well as the appropriateness of this gift to the people of Saskatchewan.

On its first evening the piano was given a proper and excellent workout by some of Regina's finest musicians including Carolyn Speirs, Ed Willett, Barry Robins, Pauline Minevich, David McIntyre, and our Premier, Lorne Calvert, who led them in a rousing rendition of "For They are Jolly Good Fellows" to thank Jacqui and Shumi.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor thanked the Shumiatchers on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, and I would like to add my voice to thank this very generous couple as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would like to remind the members they are not to use first or last names of members seated in the House except in the case of quotations, and I do not believe that that was a quotation.

St. Gabriel School Graduation

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the pleasure of attending St. Gabriel School graduation.

The grade 9 graduates entered the auditorium to the music "Wide Open Spaces" sung by the Dixie Chicks.

After the singing of "O Canada" the audience and students heard remarks from the principal, Mr. Julian Slywka.

Presentations to the grads included pins from the St. Gabriel's Home and School, and each grad also received a bible from the local Catholic Women's League.

Mr. Julian Slywka and Mr. Garchinski presented scrolls. Mr. Garchinski commented on the high level of stress students and young people must deal with in today's fast-paced world.

One of the grade 9 graduates, Lisa deBussac, sang the song "Voices of the Future" written by her sister, Eboni.

There was a number of awards presented but the hands-down winner was a young lady named Clare Webster, winning a total of six awards.

The St. Gabriel Home and School Award is given to the student in each grade that shows a positive attitude, is co-operative and respectful to others, as well as being a hard worker. The homeroom teacher selects the winners.

This year's winner for the grade 6 class was my daughter Alexandra; grade 7 winner was my son, Marshall, who has won this award on three other occasions.

Most improved student award for the grade 9 graduating class

also went to my daughter, Lacey. Lacey and her friends, Lisa deBussac, Tanya Guran, will be attending St. Angela's Academy at Prelate this fall, and we wish them well.

The graduation ceremony ended with the graduates leaving to the song "Smoke on the Water." Graduates, their parents, teachers, and guests attended a barbecue later that afternoon.

I'd like to congratulate students, staff, and parents on a very successful year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Companies Expand Operations

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like highlight some good economic news from Saskatoon. Mitchells Gourmet Foods is expanding its operation by a \$42 million processing facility which will create 155 new jobs and Mitchells is working with the Muskeg Leg and Whitecap reserves to recruit production line workers.

Centennial Food of Calgary will be constructing a plant in Saskatoon, an investment of \$34 million to employ 190 people.

CNH-Saskatoon, which was Flexi-Coil, is hiring 300 additional production workers. And in high-tech, Mr. Speaker, PMC Sierra is hiring an additional 20 full-time employees in the coming year.

SED Systems has three new contracts for design, construction, and installation of high-tech gizmos with a value of \$12 million.

Two more, Mr. Speaker: Digital Environmental Management and WaveCom Electronics are expanding to make new contracts and satisfy growing demand.

There's more, Mr. Speaker, TGS Properties had first quarter revenue of \$6.2 million — up 65 per cent from one year ago. Fytekem Products is selling products from Saskatchewan herbs and plants to L'Oreal and Jergens for the cosmetic market — that's if the opposition haven't trampled them all from hiding in the bushes.

And in a list compiled by cashless Economic Development department, there were 10 other small businesses opened in May.

So don't be fooled by the doom and gloom of the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker, we're doing fine.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Goalie Drafted by Los Angeles Kings Hockey Team

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, 20-year-old Terry Denike, goalie for the Weyburn Red Wings was drafted on the weekend by the Los Angeles Kings in the fifth round of the NHL (National Hockey League) draft.

Denike's coach, Dwight McMillan, had great praise for the young hockey player. He said:

God gave him talent, but Denike works hard every day and he gives it everything he's got.

McMillan says he's also impressed with Denike as a community person and he's helped extensively with the young people in the schools. Denike played for the Weyburn Red Wings starting three years ago when he was 17, and he backstopped for them to win the league championship this year. And they made it to the Anavet Cup and then onto the Royal Bank Cup.

Denike says the Weyburn Red Wings are the best organization he's ever been part of.

Congratulations Terry. I'm sure you'll make the community of Weyburn and the Weyburn Red Wings very proud.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Workers' Compensation Benefits for Widows

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, a sad fact of Canadian history is that workers' compensation benefits for spouses of workers killed on the job were terminated when the widows remarried. This is why the government chose to correct this wrong in 1999 by choosing to make a one-time \$80,000 payment to these widows, and Canada Customs and Revenue Agency assured us that the \$80,000 would be tax free. Many widows accepted the payment only to have some of the workers' compensation money clawed back through the old age security.

The federal government have twice refused our request for a remission order. Now in order to overcome this setback, the widows and this government are working together on a number of fronts to put pressure on the federal government to issue a remission order that would allow the widows to keep the money they are entitled to — the full \$80,000 they received from the Workers' Compensation Board.

Part of the criteria for getting a remission included demonstrating that financial hardship, coupled with an extenuating factor, has been caused.

Mr. Speaker, these widows have suffered a hardship, a hardship caused by the federal agency. This clawback is wrong and unfair and we are going to work together to resolve this issue.

I would ask all hon. members to join me in urging Ottawa to issue a remission order so that these widows can receive the money to which they are entitled.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Shortage of Speech Therapists in Saskatchewan

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I delivered to the minister responsible for disabilities, letters from parents of children with speech and language difficulties.

Communications disorders affect 10 per cent of all children. Research shows that children who receive early therapeutic

intervention can improve their language functioning, thus reducing the need for special help in the school years.

There is a severe shortage of speech therapists in the province and many positions are vacant. Speech pathologists and therapists are being lured to Alberta. This means that parents here oftentimes cannot access services for their children.

One mother wrote that her son, who is autistic, has been diagnosed three times but has yet to receive any therapy. Private therapy costs between 55 and \$80 an hour, which puts it beyond the reach of many young families. This is another example of the two-tier health care system the government claims to oppose but which in reality is already here.

The sad truth is that unless families can afford private therapy sessions, their children will receive service on a very infrequent basis. One letter I received said it best:

All of the children of our province deserve the right to communicate to the best of their ability so that they can achieve their academic and career goals, establish social relationships, and lead healthy, productive lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Saskatchewan Urban Parks

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the proudest achievements of past NDP/CCF (New Democratic Party/Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) governments has been the establishment of an extensive urban park system. This was the legacy of both the Douglas and the Blakeney governments. They believe that everyone should be able to enjoy and to access parks, whether they live in a city or not.

And on Tuesday, this government continued the commitment shown by these previous governments by announcing a significant new investment in urban parks. With the help of the Centenary Fund, the government provided \$1.5 million to six urban parks. The new investment will be provided over three years, and it will be divided between the six parks that make up the Association of Saskatchewan Urban Parks and Conservation Agencies.

These parks include Chinook Parkway in Swift Current, the Battlefords River Valley in North Battleford, the Meewasin Valley Authority in Saskatoon, the Wakamow Valley Authority in Moose Jaw, the Wascana Centre Authority in Regina, and the Tatagwa Parkway in Weyburn.

Mr. Speaker, these parks play an important role in their respective communities, and indeed right across the province. These urban parks not only add beauty to their communities, they help to stimulate tourism, encourage environmental awareness, and support economic development.

The new funding provided by the Centenary Fund will assure that these parks continue to contribute to the recreational opportunities of the citizens of Saskatchewan and the tourism and economic climate of the province. It is important that we build upon the legacy left by the previous governments and preserve this legacy to make sure that future generations will be

able to enjoy Saskatchewan's urban parks. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Legislation to Protect Children in the Sex Trade

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Yesterday, The Special Committee to Prevent the Abuse and Exploitation of Children Through the Sex Trade introduced its final report. After months and months of very serious work, the committee believes the recommendations we have put forward will allow for the development of the some of the strongest laws in the country to prevent the involvement of children in the sex trade and punish those who prey on these children.

The government has put The Highway Traffic Act on the order paper for Tuesday. Mr. Speaker, to the minister, are the changes proposed for The Highway Traffic Act going to address any of the recommendations in the report, and if so, will you please detail the changes the government is preparing to make.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would just ask the . . . remind the member to direct her questions through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question.

Notice was given yesterday, I believe within an hour or two of question period, of changes to The Highway Traffic Act. I'm at a loss to explain to the Assembly as to how we can anticipate legislation that isn't yet before the Legislative Assembly. Suffice it to say, Mr. Speaker, that this matter will come up on Tuesday. But we can consult with the member to advise her of the specific amendments in The Highway Traffic Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am very excited about this and I am very pleased. The children of the province have waited a long time and so have every person in this province. So I am pleased to hear that the government will be taking some very quick action to deal with certain items that the special committee has identified would act as a deterrent to those who prey on children through the sex trade.

I want to make it perfectly clear that the Saskatchewan Party will certainly support legislation based on the recommendations put forward by the committee because we believe the protection of our children is of utmost importance to our province.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition would be pleased to give leave today for the government to introduce changes to The Highway Traffic Act today. Will the minister accept this offer and bring this legislation forward this afternoon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — I, as one member of the

Assembly, would certainly be willing to do that. But these are matters that the House leaders decide on, and it's up to those two individuals as members of the House. If they want to do that, Mr. Speaker, I think I would be delighted with that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee the minister that our House Leader and our entire caucus will certainly be more than pleased to give assent to this happening today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that the provincial government now prepare to move as quickly as possible to implement the recommendations brought forward by the special committee. If some of the recommendations are made during this session, it will be a great start. But to wait another year for any other action would be inexcusable.

(14:00)

There are children on the street today that need our help. There are johns preying on these children. And I ask each and every member of this House to stop and to think, right now, how many children on the streets in this province will be sexually abused in this province over this long weekend. Surely something can be done so that it doesn't continue for a whole year.

Mr. Speaker, will this government commit to a fall session of the legislature so that more of these recommendations can be implemented in legislation, or are they prepared to allow the abuse and exploitation of children in our province for another year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to the comments made by the member opposite with respect to putting this piece of legislation through the House this afternoon. If the member was interested in that, they had a list of the agenda items for today, they knew that we gave notice of motion for the legislation, and we could have had it on the agenda for today. It would have been as simple as a phone call if they disagreed with the agenda.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, let me say to the members of the opposition that this legislation will be before the House before it adjourns. If they are interested in giving speedy passage to it, we would be more than willing to see the Bill passed in a couple of hours, because that's very possible to do.

I want to close by saying, Mr. Speaker, that I want to commend members on this side of the House who chaired and who sat on that committee and who did so much work over the past years to ensure that we could put in place rules and processes where children in this province can be protected.

I do take though, however, a little bit of offence to that member, knowing that the members from this side of the House who sat on that committee are every bit as concerned and every bit as convinced that we need to find solutions and worked every bit as hard as she did on initiating these initiatives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Remission Process for the Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NDP's economic development plan is a massive failure, thanks in part to high taxes and bureaucratic red tape that buries small businesses and kills jobs. That's why the NDP has just posted the worst job loss record since the Great Depression. That's why more than 30,000 people have left Saskatchewan in the past 12 months. And that's why people are giving two thumbs down to this incompetent, arrogant, and tired NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, Wendy Hernandez is a small-business owner in Regina, and if the Finance minister took the time to read his mail last week, he will be familiar with Ms. Hernandez's concern. She says the way the NDP is collecting the PST (provincial sales tax) is killing her business and many other small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP government forcing small businesses to pay the PST to the government before the business even collects the PST from its customers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, for the information of the House — yes, I did read the letter from Ms. Hernandez and I think I have also responded to her.

I want to tell the House, Mr. Speaker, that PST remissions are due by the 20th of the month following the purchase of any product or service, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say to the member opposite who's suggesting to the House that we're not concerned about small business, that I have a letter from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which is the spokesperson, Mr. Speaker, for small business. And what they have to say about our recent changes to PST is this. They say, this is from Marilyn Braun, the director:

CFIB is therefore pleased that improvements are being made to make it easier for businesses to report to government. This is indeed good news and will encourage entrepreneurial activity and job creation in the small business sector.

And if I have to choose who to believe, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business or that member, I'm going with small business, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, Wendy Hernandez owns a small business here in — called Synergy water consulting — in Regina and she wants to grow her business here in Saskatchewan. But she is considering leaving this province because of the NDP government.

The problem is that every time she turns around, the government is throwing up another roadblock to her success,

like forcing her small business and thousands of businesses in this province to pay the PST on sales they make, before they collect the PST from their customer. Not only is that unfair, it also adds to the operating cost of the business and makes the business less competitive.

Mr. Speaker, small businesses collect millions of dollars of PST for the NDP (New Democratic Party) government. Will the minister listen to the concerns of Wendy Hernandez and thousands of small businesses like hers? Will the minister stop punishing small businesses simply for collecting PST on behalf of the NDP government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated to the House that PST is due on the 20th day of the month following the purchase.

But I want to say to the House and the public, Mr. Speaker, that not only have we cut red tape for small business, as indicated by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, but I can also report that in this budget, Mr. Speaker, we cut the small business corporate income tax rate from 8 per cent to 6 per cent and raised the level at which the lower rate applies. And do you know what the opposition did, Mr. Speaker? They voted against it.

So it's one thing for this member to stand up in this House and say that he wants to support small business; when it actually comes to doing anything for small business, Mr. Speaker, they oppose it, Mr. Speaker. That's their record.

Their record is one of complaining; our record is one of making changes that benefit small business, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — The minister I think talks about a world that doesn't really exist. And I wonder if Mr. Hernandez's concerns about collecting of his PST are indeed interpreted the same way by this minister.

The NDP, as government, is not putting more money in the pockets of Saskatchewan families. Families are paying more. They're paying more PST, more for SaskPower, and more for SaskEnergy.

This NDP government is not creating jobs. The NDP has killed 21,000 jobs in the last . . . the worst job record in the last 70 years.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP is using every business in Saskatchewan as a tax collector. In many cases the businesses are required to pay the government before the customer pays the business. Typical NDP business plan — the government gets fatter and the businesses get poorer.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister do the right thing today and extend the payment period for business to pay the PST, or is the NDP content to keep gouging small businesses and chase them out of the province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, they get up and talk about business having to collect tax. When they were in office, what did they do? They harmonized the PST with the GST (goods and services tax). That's what they did. They wanted everybody to be their tax collector. And when we got into office, we cancelled harmonization, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say this too. They say they're concerned about business. What did they do this week in the House? They voted to give no funding to the Tourism Authority, no funding to the Small Business Loans Association, no funding to the Trade and Export Development agency, Mr. Speaker. That's what they did. No funding to the regional economic development authorities.

Because when it comes to complaining, they deserve an A, Mr. Speaker; when it comes to actually supporting any measure to help small business, Mr. Speaker, they deserve an F and that's exactly what they're going to get from the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the Finance minister what is happening out there to small business. And I want to read a quotation from Ms. Wendy Hernandez in the letter that the Minister of Finance has indicated he has received. I quote:

The message is clear from you and your government, it is not profitable to do business in Saskatchewan.

That is what she wrote in a letter to the Finance minister last week.

Ms. Hernandez also goes on to give the NDP the following warning, and I quote:

In speaking to other business owners, many are beginning to vote with their feet by leaving the province.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Hernandez is confirming what we have been saying for months. The economic development plan of the NDP government is failing miserably and it is chasing people and jobs out of this province.

That's why the Saskatchewan Party voted to defeat the NDP's Economic Development budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP government has a chance today to do something that will actually help businesses. Will the minister announce that he will extend the due date for submission of PST by 30 days, effective July 1 of this year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, we're cutting small-business taxes; they voted against it. We're investing in technology to cut red tape for small business, congratulated by the Federation

of Independent Business; they voted against it.

But what I find the most galling in all of this, Mr. Speaker, is they talk about wanting lower taxes. That member, Mr. Speaker, files a report with the media from their economic adviser, WEFA. What does it say? On page 10 it says this; their adviser says:

Consider the experience of the federal government. They are refraining from further commitments to tax reduction.

And that's what they say we should do in this report. They say we should not cut taxes, even though day after day they say the taxes are too high.

Well I've got news for them Mr. Speaker. We're cutting taxes in this fiscal year. We're cutting taxes in the next fiscal year as announced in last year's budget. And we're going to cut taxes the year after that for small business, for individuals, and everybody else, with or without the support of that sorry Tory opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskEnergy Rates

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, all of the rhetoric in the world from the Minister of Finance doesn't change the fact that this government's policies are hurting small business in this province.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of SaskEnergy. High taxes and PST policies are certainly hurting small business but so are rising utility rates. Meanwhile, the natural gas price continues to fall dramatically. Today's spot price, \$3.78 a gigajoule. Today's one-year price, \$4.58 a gigajoule. Add the 50 cents that SaskEnergy says it costs to land it here, you're still barely over five bucks. And what do we all have the privilege of paying to the NDP for gas: \$6.30 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker.

Natural gas prices are going down; SaskEnergy rates are going up. Mr. Speaker, why is SaskEnergy gouging Saskatchewan residents? When will the minister direct SaskEnergy to take the necessary steps to pass on the falling price of natural gas to the people who deserve it — the customers of SaskEnergy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, day after day this member rises in the legislature to ask why SaskEnergy won't pass on the savings. Mr. Speaker, day after day I rise in the legislature and respond by saying the process that SaskEnergy has, Mr. Speaker, will ensure that lower prices will be passed on to Saskatchewan energy customers, Mr. Speaker — will be passed on.

Mr. Speaker, I wish the member would listen to what I'm saying because the savings will, will, will be passed on to SaskEnergy customers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, supplementary question to the

minister. How will those savings be passed on and when?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I have tried to explain this and I give the member credit by acknowledging he said he's not an expert.

There is a very different process, Mr. Speaker, of the buying policy that SaskEnergy has in place versus many of the private utilities that member chooses to quote from, Mr. Speaker.

As an example he says why don't we buy on the spot? Well let's look at Calgary or let's look at Edmonton where last year most of those folks there purchased from companies who were buying on the spot price, Mr. Speaker.

Here in Saskatchewan, through SaskEnergy, we sold at \$4.52 a gigajoule. In Edmonton and Calgary, Mr. Speaker, they paid close to \$10 a gigajoule, Mr. Speaker. We hedge; we lock in prices. The customers and the companies, I should say, that he quotes from, Mr. Speaker, they buy on the spot price. I think that the process that SaskEnergy employs is one that we should continue to stick with.

And again I say, I would far rather live in Saskatchewan here where we have guaranteed low prices, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the minister's confirmed a couple of things. One, we are now paying too much for natural gas and the NDP may return it to the people of Saskatchewan. That's what we're hearing.

(14:15)

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps saying that \$6.30 is the maximum rate and some day he's going to cut SaskEnergy rates. Well every day he waits he's overcharging SaskEnergy customers and every day he waits he's losing SaskEnergy customers. The city of Estevan is now considering dropping SaskEnergy and using a private supplier for natural gas. The city manager of Estevan says he could save 60 to \$120,000 a year by buying it from the other company.

Mr. Speaker, other companies are charging less for natural gas. It's clear SaskEnergy is overcharging. When is the minister going to do the right thing and direct SaskEnergy to take the necessary steps to cut the price of natural gas?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from the *Vancouver Sun* where there was an application made to the BC Utilities. And here is what happened in BC (British Columbia), Mr. Speaker, where they said the volatile . . . volatility, I should say, of gas prices was much too volatile yet. It says

. . . in an application filed Tuesday before the BC Utilities Commission, BC Gas recommended against a rate reduction, saying natural gas markets are still (far) too volatile, (Mr. Speaker).

Mr. Speaker, clearly what SaskEnergy has done by employing a

process of locking in and hedging, buying insurance or collars if you will, has proved to save Saskatchewan consumers of natural gas far more than any other jurisdiction in North America, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to quote, Mr. Speaker, from an article here, from *The Herald* of June 19. It says:

Fact and reality have no place in the Sask Party side of this debate. Swift Current's own MLA, Brad Wall, led the charge with a daily rant in the legislature quoting irrelevant numbers from irrelevant analysts about irrelevant comparisons between Alberta and Saskatchewan.

End of quote, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rates for Ambulance Service

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is the birthplace of medicare . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Hillson: — Saskatchewan is the birthplace of medicare, Mr. Speaker, where universal and equal access to medical care is viewed as a right. The Canada Health Act expressly prohibits policies that result in two-tier access to health care yet this is what is happening in Saskatchewan with rural residents paying the penalty for living greater distances from medical facilities than their urban cousins.

I'm referring to ambulance service, Mr. Speaker. The Fyke report says that:

Ambulance fees should not be based on distance. Rural residents are inherently disadvantaged by their distance from more specialized services. It is unfair that they should also pay higher rates when transport to services is required.

No one is arguing against that recommendation. The Saskatchewan Emergency Medical Services Association recommends a standard ambulance fee.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Health: will you undertake to immediately institute standard ambulance charges throughout the province?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to have this question from the member because this is an issue throughout the province that we're looking at very carefully.

One of the reasons that we commissioned the Emergency Medical Services Review last year, and we received a report about this, was to look at exactly this issue about access to medical care in Saskatchewan.

There was some suggestions made in that report. There have been some very good ideas also brought forward by the associations of the people who work in this area. Mr. Fyke had a chance to look at some of this. We are reviewing that within

the department. The Standing Committee on Health Care will probably receive some information about that as well. It's all included in our overall review because it is a crucial factor in how we design our health system for the future.

What we are going to do is listen to the people. We are going to listen and build on the positive things that we have now so that we can have a better system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the question of ambulance fees has been studied by the EMS development project, the Saskatchewan Emergency Services Association, and the Fyke Commission. They've all come back with exactly the same recommendation, standard fees throughout the province.

Everyone agrees that basing ambulance rates on distance discriminates against rural residents. No one is disagreeing with that.

We have consensus, there is simply no reason to delay further the government acting on all of the reports, which ask for equal service for all Saskatchewan residents.

There is also the 3.5 million the government announced quite some time ago to standardize rates of pay for EMS workers throughout the province. That has still not been paid out. When is that going to be paid out?

Why is the government delaying when everyone is in agreement that standard ambulance charges should be a right of Saskatchewan residents?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amount of money that the member refers to, the 3.5 million is included in this year's budget, and I assume that it will be resolved when we resolve all of the budget issues so that it can be paid out at that time. So I'm looking forward to that happening very soon.

What I would say to the member is that we need to work with the providers of the emergency medical services. We need to work with the local communities as they define and decide on what kind of care they need. And we also need to look at the total picture in the province, because all of the factors that are there from all these different parts will help us build a better system for the people of Saskatchewan.

The people of Saskatchewan have a great deal of faith in the people on this side of the House for how we run this system and we're going to continue to build on that strength.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was on to another item on the agenda already. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Excuse me. Would the Assembly give leave to revert back to ministerial statements?

Leave granted.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Tabling the Report on the Disability Action Plan in Saskatchewan

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great satisfaction, as Minister Responsible for Disability Issues, to table with this Assembly a significant report, the *Saskatchewan Disability Action Plan*, prepared by the Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues. This Council has worked for the past two years consulting extensively with the public and the disability community to produce this document.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the House to read and consider this report. It represents to us the thoughts and the feelings of people with disabilities and particularly what action we, as government and as a community, can take to help people with disabilities achieve greater inclusion into mainstream society.

Mr. Speaker, one in five people in Saskatchewan reports having a disability. This is a huge population which is too often marginalized and living on the edges of society. The central theme to the *Saskatchewan Disability Action Plan* is citizenship, the concept that individuals with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens to be included and to participate fully in society.

This government supports that philosophy and will be working with the disability community and with this Assembly to respond to the many thoughts and ideas put forward in this report within the concept of citizenship.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to summarize the seven areas the report focuses on because they illustrate the diversity of issues facing this community and facing this Assembly. They are: health, education, employment, disability supports, safety and security, income support, awareness and understanding.

Mr. Speaker, this document provides a framework that will enable this Assembly to consider new programs and policies that will help this significant portion of our population live a better life and to contribute more to the life of the province.

I urge all members, Mr. Speaker, to give it their full and thoughtful consideration and to incorporate this report into all our future actions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment firstly to thank the minister for sending me a copy of the statement he gave this afternoon. But as well to compliment all the individuals who have taken the time to address this issue in regards to disabilities and how people with disabilities live in our society, how they're treated, how society treats them.

And putting forward a number of ideas, Mr. Speaker, that I'm sure, as the minister has indicated, will be looked over and discussed very carefully so that we indeed can begin to look very carefully at how we treat individuals with disabilities; how we take the time to understand the problems that they face just in their everyday lives, Mr. Speaker.

And as the minister indicated, just some of the significant hurdles that they face, whether it's a health problem or whether it's education, employment opportunities, Mr. Speaker, and disability supports.

And certainly my colleagues and I have had representation from individuals themselves who have disabilities regarding some of the issues they face such as . . . One of the major factors that many people with disabilities face right now, not only in our large centres but in all centres across this province, is the ability to travel around or have access to public transit and times when they could use it to provide, especially when you look at employment, Mr. Speaker, having public transit available so that you can get to a job and back from a job and have access to a public transit that does provide that opportunity.

And I know, Mr. Speaker, in consultation with the minister . . . And I look forward to discussing this a little further as well when we get into further discussion in estimates.

But I believe, Mr. Speaker, as we review this report and the fact that it's come from a number of individuals who do face this problem, and they have taken the time to put down the concerns and to raise the issue of the things they have to deal with, I think it would be very appropriate that this Assembly and all members of this Assembly do take the time to review the report very carefully in order that we may as a society really show individuals, who unfortunately through circumstances beyond their control end up . . . have disabilities — or have to face the fact that they have to live with them — that they are just as important a part of our society as anybody else in our society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Yes, leave to introduce a Bill with respect to the Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — The Government House Leader has requested leave to introduce a Bill . . .

An Hon. Member: — A motion.

The Speaker: — A motion. I expect he's consulted. Is leave granted?

Leave not granted.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand and provide a response to written question no. 237.

The Speaker: — Response for question 237 is tabled.

(14:30)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

Subvote (HI01)

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

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my left is Ron Styles, the deputy minister for the department. Directly behind me is Don Wincherauk, the assistant deputy minister in charge of corporate services. And beside Mr. Wincherauk is Terry Blomme, the executive director of southern region, and he is sitting directly behind Mr. Styles.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to the minister and her officials. And, Madam Minister, may I just begin by asking, you could extend to one of your officials our best wishes. I understand his parents were involved in a significant accident. I just heard this morning. So we want to extend those best wishes to Mr. Martin and his family at this time.

But, Madam Minister, the last time we had an opportunity to address the issue of Highways in this Assembly with you and your officials, we just nicely got onto the Highway 48 in the southeast part of the province of Saskatchewan. Since that time, I've had a number of rural municipalities and towns consult me in regards to the condition of Highway 48. And as I indicated, certainly as a result of a lot of heavy traffic and significant traffic on Highway 48 due to the terminal at Fairlight, the highway is in fairly rough . . . a rough situation at this time. Specifically from No. 8 through to the Manitoba border and it improves a little bit, as you get closer to Wawota. But as we've discussed in the past, it's a highway that needs a fair bit of work.

And what I've discussed in the past is where this highway is prioritized in your department. What I have found since then is that there's been a fair bit of discussion with rural municipalities and towns, discussion that suggests that these communities feel that this highway is of significance in their area, economically, and for the tourist traffic. And they're not prepared just to sit idly by and they've proposed a potential solution for the highway to have the highway upgraded and working together with the federal government on their grains program.

And I believe, Madam Minister, you're probably fairly familiar with this proposal, where the RMs (rural municipality) are suggesting that they become partners, that they put modest finances toward the project, that they become contractors, and as a result of their ability to contract to some of the services, a substantial savings to the highways, to the department, and potentially down the road maybe the improvement to some of

these thin membrane surfaces, bringing them up to a fairly significant road haul-ability whereby we might be able to have a . . . rather than going on . . . moving the traffic onto some of the grids.

And, Madam Minister, I can certainly personally attest to what heavy traffic on grid roads is doing, as we've seen just outside of Kipling on Highway 709 . . . or the grid road 709, the significant work that had to be undertaken by the Rural Municipality of Kingsley. And as I was talking to the reeve the other day, he indicated that your department again realized that what had been originally agreed to would not cover the costs of the damage to that road.

So, Madam Minister, I'm wondering where the Highways department is in regards to the suggestion coming from RMs, how far you have pursued it, and is this an avenue that could be pursued in order to upgrade some of these thin-membrane surfaces into a heavier-haul surface?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that in that region of the province we have the Southeast Area Transportation Planning Council. The council has agreed that this is a priority highway, that it needs to be upgraded, and so it's their top priority.

The second point I want to make is that we, the department, and the RMs and the Area Transportation Planning Council acknowledge that it's very difficult to have alternative truck routes in that area.

What we are doing is we are jointly applying to the prairie grains roads fund to see whether or not we can leverage some money to improve the highway. And what we would do is take their money, the prairie grains roads money, which is our money and the federal government's money, the RM money, and try and put together a partnership in order to begin to upgrade this particular transportation corridor.

So it's certainly on our agenda. I can tell the member that it is . . . it will not proceed this year. It's unlikely to proceed this year. But it's something that we may be able to move forward with in the near future.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. And that was part of my next question. And certainly when . . . if indeed you are able to access funds under the grains transportation program, when would it be possible to see some work done?

Would it be possible to see something like that even take place, like even some of the engineering and the surveying, this fall or early next year?

Madam Minister, as you indicated the southeast regional corridor — and I believe in your discussion with our Highways critic the last time you were up — indicated that the Department of Highways is certainly trying to work together with different transportation authorities to have them sit down and evaluate the needs for their area. And as you've indicated, certainly the southeast region has put forward a very strong proposal in regards to Highway 48.

So, Madam Minister, I wonder if you could indicate what you

think the potential is of accessing some of the federal funds; when you might know whether or not . . . when those funds might be available; and possibly when an upgrade of this road might be able to take place?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The application would be made in the fall. We would hear later in 2001. And then if it was successful, then we could start our work next year.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, one final question to the minister. Madam Minister, is this type of discussion taking place in other parts of the province? Are other transportation authorities and through their local governments entering into this type of discussion to address some of the many numbers of thin membrane surfaces that certainly we have to find a way to address? Is that going on?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, I can tell the member that this discussion is taking place in every area of the province.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Madam Minister, and welcome to the officials. I've got a few questions that I would like to ask.

And it was with a great deal of interest in the previous sittings of estimates for Department of Highways, I heard how much money is going into all different areas of the province for roads. But I did not hear any about in my particular area; so it's pretty, it's pretty natural that I would ask that question.

We have, Madam Minister, as you're probably aware three prime corridor routes from the United States into Canada, which are . . . which used to be very high tourist routes, namely Highway 2, 4, and 37. And the condition of these roads right now is so deplorable that we are turning back traffic . . . or traffic is turning back on all three of these routes.

Highway 13 is — I'll have another question about that later — is in an absolute deplorable condition . . . (inaudible) . . . sections of it at least. And I surely don't have to tell you about Highway 18 because that had enough notoriety in the last year to last for a long period of time.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the minister, if I could ask what kind of a plan there is for the Highways 2, 4, 37, 13, and 18 in the Wood River constituency?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that we are going to be spending \$4,321,728 in your constituency this year. I'll give you a description of what we're spending the money on.

Cadillac to south of Junction No. 43, there's a paving project for 21.4 kilometres of surface at a cost of \$2.764 million.

As well, on Highway 13 from Assiniboia to 16 kilometres east, there's 16.1 kilometres of paving work that's going on for a total of \$1,557,728. So the total, as I said, is \$4,321,728 and the length of the kilometres in your constituency is 37.6 kilometres.

What I can also tell you in last year, 2000-2001, there was 40 kilometres of work done for a cost of \$4,570,890. And in the previous year there was 68 kilometres of work done. Now that

would be spot improvement, a full seal, and resurfacing for a total of \$2,160,389.

So for the last four years, to the member, I can tell you and I've only given you the totals for three years but I have a four-year total for your constituency. The length of work done in those four years is 145.6 kilometres of work at a cost of \$11,053,007.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. That really sounds good until you travel the roads and they're in absolutely terrible shape.

I guess the follow-on would be is the out-year plans for our key border crossings, which I've mentioned, 2, 4, and 37. We can talk about tourism all we want and the rhetoric that goes along with it all we want, but this actually is turning back tourism.

And in what you've already given to me, there's absolutely no plan that I've heard for this year and I'm wondering if you have an out-year plan for these roads? Unless we have another huge plan for tourism to come into this province via some other means like air because it actually is affecting tourism to a great deal right now.

So is there any out-year plan or future plans for 2, 4, and 37 from the border north?

(14:45)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member, and I had a very good discussion with your critic, and this is my observation as our new Highways and Transportation minister in the province of Saskatchewan, the province of Saskatchewan will spend a billion dollars in the next three years, close to a billion dollars on our highways. We have over 12,000 kilometres of road in the province. We have close to 8,000 kilometres of thin membraned surface roads.

We have so much money in the province and every day I . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . We have so much, we have so much and it's not enough to deal with all of the things that need to be dealt with.

And what we have is we've decided, before I became the minister, that we were going to invest in strategic corridors, corridors where we have a lot of high volume truck traffic. We're trying to ensure that those corridors leading into some of our high throughput elevators, those corridors where there's a lot of grains and oilseeds that are coming off the farm, that those are the places that we're going to invest in first.

It does lead to the question you raise because there's no doubt that if you look at the amount of volume that's going over our roads, I believe there's about 245,000 tonnes of volume that went over our roads in the '80s and today it's over a million tonnes of volume that goes over our roads and we expect it to go much higher.

But if we are to improve tourism in the province, we are going to have to take a look at that whole area as well. Because right now our strategic plan is to deal with trucking and high volumes of traffic and loads of traffic, but there is certainly an argument — and I said this to your critic — to take a look at what does

this mean. If we're putting all of our money into those strategic corridors, what does it mean in terms of some other activity, economic activity we could generate in the province through tourism?

So what I wanted to say to the member from Assiniboia is you raise a valid point. It's been raised by your colleague. But it's something our government is thinking about.

We have just dual-named Highway 11 between Regina and Prince Albert as the Louis Riel Trail. We did that as a result of communities along the corridor, non-Aboriginal communities asking us to dual-name the highway because they think that they have an opportunity to develop the tourism industry along this particular strategic corridor. They think that they have an opportunity to create jobs and grow business and that's certainly something that we will be pursuing.

All of our money has been determined for this year, but it's something that we need to take another look at when we come to allocating next year's budget, which has already been determined.

We're the only department that has a multi-year budget. We know what our money is going to be for next year and we need to determine whether or not all of that money goes into our roads for grain haul or will some of it be redirected into those roads that will promote tourism.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I used tourism as an example because that's where I get a great deal of my calls from.

The industry corridors I totally agree with because we've been driving some industry, as we know, out of the province because of a lack of roads or poor roads. And doing it right and doing it properly off the bat, I think there's some light at the end of the tunnel, and I totally agree with the member from Cypress Hills. Let's do it and do it properly so we're not having to pothole fix every year.

Which brings up the question — and I know we debate it on occasion — is do you fix roads to preserve industry or do you make roads to create industry. And I know that's, well it's a tough one and you explained, there's money not to do everything.

And when I see industry corridors that are not springing up because of a lack of road, it begs the question, is, what our long-range plan is going to be.

It's interesting to note the Louis Riel Trail you name because in my area it's the Red Coat Trail, and it's hard to tell which is the road and which is the Red Coat Trail because that's how bad roads are in some of areas of Wood River.

I do have a question though when we talk about this. When we repair roads or fix them, sometimes they last for a little while and I'm not sure to what standard . . . I know some of them are TMS (thin membrane surface) roads. But even some that have been fixed recently, they're shot again. And I don't know if you have the experience or coming back to you . . . or if people come back to you with the questions on this. But even some of

the recent construction is starting to break up and I don't know if you've received any complaints about that or not.

But my question really goes a little bit deeper and I have to ask this one question because there are so many potholes in the area of, as we know, 18. And I don't want to belabour that point because we know what happened.

But has any direction ever been given from your department to the Department of Highway crews to seal potholes and not fill them?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — On those roads where we believe it's an effective treatment, we will fill the pothole and we will seal the pothole. It's hard to understand but I'll try and explain it as it's been explained to me, because I had the very same questions that you're asking me, and many members have asked me when I came to the ministry.

The TMS roads were never built to the kind of standard that is required to take the kind of truck traffic that they're presently enduring. Every truck that goes over a road — I'm talking about the big trucks — represents about 9,600 cars. So when you think about the TMSs, they were built for light traffic. They were not built for the kind of volumes and weights that are presently going over those roads.

And as I said earlier, we have close to 8,000 kilometres of that type of road in the province.

Some TMSs are better than others. And I don't know if you recall the history of how we came to have thin membrane surface roads, but they were basically roads, they were gravel roads, and in this . . . I think it was the '60s and '70s or late '60s people wanted dust-free surfaces and so they were coated with a thin membrane of asphalt and oil. So these things are very thin and they don't have the kind of sub-base that's required to withstand the kind of pounding that trucks do to our roads.

And that's why we have primary roads, like between Saskatoon, P.A. (Prince Albert), out to Moose Jaw. Those roads are built to withstand the kind of truck traffic. But the kinds of roads that you're talking about were never built for that kind of volume. And those roads are presently taking that kind of volume.

And the problem that we have as a department is that — and I'll just give you an example — depending upon the design a typical paved highway costs, if you were to build it to standard, between \$325,000 per kilometre to \$535,000 a kilometre. A typical thin membrane surface would cost about \$90,000 a kilometre. We don't build those kind anymore but that's what it would cost.

A typical gravel road costs between 50,000 to \$150,000 a kilometre. And surfacing costs, which I find absolutely amazing . . . And I was out visiting a site in the member from Weyburn's constituency yesterday. You know, one little truckload of asphalt is \$700. And that's just the cost to the contractor. That's not the cost if you wanted to have a bit of a profit.

But a typical resurfacing project costs anywhere from \$70,000 a kilometre to \$130,000 a kilometre.

And to strengthen, to build up the TMS highway to a granular strength road, which isn't primary weights — you'd still have to have winter weights for the spring season where they can't go on the roads — just to take those TMSs up to granular strength, which isn't primary weight, anywhere between \$100,000 a kilometre to 140,000.

So when you think about all of the kilometres we have in the province, and we have our budget of 312 million, which is a significant increase in this year's budget, we simply need more money. We simply need more money.

And the question becomes: how do you balance that with tax reductions which reduces your revenues, increased costs in health care, people want more money towards revenue sharing. People want more money towards post-secondary education, K to 12, and how do you balance that.

And that's one of the challenges of being in government, for the member opposite.

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

Mr. Wartman: — To ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two people in the Speaker's gallery, Dave Abbey and Darlene Clevin. Dave is retired, was a staff person with the Department of Highways whose duties were legislative officer for Highways and Transportation.

Dave is now retired and Darlene has taken over those responsibilities. Darlene is also married to Allan Widger, who is one of the officials who is here with us today. And so we get a lot of good family work in this area.

So I'd like all to welcome them to this House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McMorris: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Also to all the members, I would like to say a few words about Mr. Abbey that's in the gallery. I had the opportunity of working quite closely with him for a number of years for the Safety Council, which I see he's got a Safety Council shirt on, which is great that he's still carrying the cause.

We've had the opportunity of working on a number of committees. And he was the president of the Safety Council for a number of years and was truly committed to the, to really the . . . especially in the traffic area, in the traffic area to the safe transportation of people throughout the province.

And it's very fitting that you would come on a day of estimates when we're talking about highways and some of the concerns that we have from this side of the House dealing with safety issues and highways.

So I would like to welcome Mr. Abbey and say that I hope he enjoys the proceedings, although I'm sure he's seen them many, many times before.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

Subvote (HI01)

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I find it kind of . . . intrigued by the minister's answer. It was a relatively simple question. It's like asking for the time and getting told how to build a grandfather's clock.

My question is very simple: has anyone from your department ever sent word out to the Department of Highways to seal potholes, not to fill them?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The answer to the member's question, which I said earlier, is: there are occasions when we . . . it depends on the situation, the conditions of the road. It depends on whether or not the road is wet and so on.

But there are many occasions when they seal. There are other occasions when they fill the pothole they seal. And then there's other occasions where that doesn't make sense.

So the crews have a work plan and it depends upon the condition of the road.

(15:00)

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I guess that's part of the question that I would have. There was a highway crew that informed me that they got direction that they are not to fill potholes; they're to seal the edges so the potholes do not get bigger. I wouldn't want to get the highway crew into trouble but that seemed totally ludicrous to those that drive the highway, when the holes are so deep that they're scraping the bottom of cars and the highway crew is saying we have direction not to fill it, just to seal the edges.

So if in fact there has not been direction, then I will go on to my next question is: why are some of these potholes not filled? And I'll give you just a couple of examples in . . . I live through this on a daily basis when we're not in session because the highways that I've mentioned I drive on.

To the former minister, a letter recently went — and I'm not sure whether you've seen this letter, Madam Minister — but it's east of Meyronne, there's a huge hole in the road surface, more

than half the width of the road and approximately eight inches deep. And this letter came from an individual from Alberta and it goes on quite extensively, if you've seen the letter I won't bother. But he has a very good point. Now here's a visitor that has come from Alberta and had the misfortune of this pothole on the road.

And I think there's two on that stretch of road that are catastrophic and they've been that way for 8 to 10 months. Now I'm certain that that highway crew even drive over those holes.

It's hard to explain . . . for you to explain to me, but me to explain to the constituents, why can't those holes, rather than driving over them with the heavy equipment, why can't they stop and fill them? And they are, they are a serious hazard.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The department officials here know exactly which area you're talking about. The department believes that there is a spring that goes under that road. That particular area that you're talking about has been repaired and if a heavy haul goes over, it breaks up again within about a 7- to 10-day period. So there's a . . . we believe that there's a problem with springs going under that particular piece of road. Springs meaning there's water under the road.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm not sure if there's a spring because it was that way in the wintertime also. And I know the one . . . in fact if it's been filled as recent as two days ago, there is a senior citizen that lost control of her car, and I don't know if it was this particular one or one about 12 miles or 14 miles to the west of there, and it's been there for at least eight months and I don't think it's ever been filled.

So I would encourage you and your department to at least have some of these things filled even if it lasts for a couple of weeks because we're going to write somebody off on these.

And it's very interesting. I know when we debate . . . These roads weren't made for trucks. We understand that and that's a totally different question as to why. Like why are railroads gone? So what was the cause and we know the effect now but I don't think it's time to go there and say it's all in the problem of the trucks. There's a whole problem created before that time.

But I am very concerned and I also would like to advise the department that . . . And I realize there's some cost to the product for filling potholes. But a good portion of Highway 18 that was filled by the citizens who supposedly don't have the technical experience as the highway crews, actually that road is still very driveable to this day and that was done a year ago. And I drive that one quite frequently.

So when some of these other potholes that the local citizens did not fill, remain a hole and a huge hole as explained in this letter, I'm wondering if we could provide some direction to some of these crews. And I'd really like to say there are some excellent crews out there. There's some absolutely excellent crews. If you go right where I live we are basically pothole-free, but I can sure tell you where one crew stops and another starts.

And I guess that's an interpretation of direction I suppose and that's why I asked the questions about if there's direction provided about sealing and not filling potholes because it's very

evident. And I would encourage you to come for a ride with me through the constituency and I can show you three different road crews just by the condition of the road.

My question I guess now, Madam Minister, has this letter been answered with compensation to . . . what this individual can do for compensation?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We are just in the process of drafting the letter and it will be responded to.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, I now have a few questions regarding the Highway Traffic Board. Could you please provide the House with an explanation as to what the Traffic Board is, what it does, and how many people are on it?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that the Highway Traffic Board is not in our estimates and we don't have those officials here. I just want to make one point before we move on.

I've had an opportunity to go across the province and see the work that's being done by the people that work in the Department of Highways and Transportation. I've also had an opportunity to visit with contractors across the province. And I just want to say to the member that it's my opinion that these are men and women that take the work that they do on behalf of the citizens of our province very seriously.

And I see that the member from Weyburn is shaking her head; and I see that the member of Weyburn obviously is not as respectful of civil servants in this province as should be. But there are people in this province that work on behalf of the citizens of this province each and every day.

And what I can tell you is just last week our department crews sprayed 687,570 litres of asphalt for patching and sealing on our roads. They used 17,180 tonnes of gravel and 1,620 tonnes of coal mix to repair the roads. They've completed 36,720 metres of machine patching and 339,920 metres of seal coat patching. And they've worked over 8,100 hours repairing the roads on behalf of the people of this province.

And I think if you want to become government, Member, one of the things you will have to learn, that it is important to value the people who work on behalf of the citizens of this province and not shake your head.

The Chair: — Order, order. Would the committee please come to order. Would the member for Saskatchewan Rivers please come to order and the member for Regina South. We'll all have a chance to . . . the members on the opposition side will have their opportunity to ask questions if they so desire.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Madam Minister, the reason I asked the questions, I was not condemning the men and women that are down there. I am condemning maybe the direction they got. That's why I referred to the direction they got about sealing potholes rather than filling them. That is direction.

Now it's interpretation of the direction, but I never really did get the answer. Sometimes we tell them this and sometimes we don't. Sometimes you can't seal them. Sometimes you have to fill them and seal them. There's a whole bunch of direction there.

And I'm more concerned in the direction that these men and women are getting from the department than whether they're doing a credible job or not. I think they really do a credible job; and I know a crew that we've got does an exceptional job.

But, Madam Minister, again I know how to build and finish that grandfather clock because I did not get an answer to the question about the Traffic Board.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Highway Traffic Board does not come in the estimates of the Department of Highways and Transportation.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Deputy Chair, is the minister suggesting that the Highway Traffic Board does not come under the Department of Highways?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — That's correct.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Just to confirm that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Highway Traffic Board does not come under the minister or the Department of Highways.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The Highway Traffic Board does not come under the Department of Highways and Transportation. I am the minister responsible for the Highway Traffic Board, but it is not contained within these estimates.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman of Committees. Madam Minister, and to your officials, just a quick question about some specific issues in my constituency. And I don't have a lot of highways in my riding; for the most part it's mostly urban.

But certainly the No. 4 Highway goes through my riding and there are some concerns there. And of course the Trans-Canada comes through it as well.

My concerns though relate to the No. 4 Highway, and specifically to a portion of the No. 4 Highway that's just south of the bridge at Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park. There is a, there's quite a hill there as you come up through the river hills; and I know that your office and your officials have been contacted by municipalities and people in that area about that road.

And specifically, the concern of course is the request that there could be widening of the road — an additional lane of the road. And every time — my wife is actually a former engineer with the department — and so every time we drive together down the road I ask her about it, about the costs of that particular . . . of doing something there. And of course she can only offer some guesses and certainly I don't imagine it's a nominal cost. I don't believe that at all.

However I also don't underestimate the importance of it. Because I myself have been on that road many times and

followed up semi . . . you know, tractor-trailer units or farm equipment in the spring and in the fall. And as you come around that corner there headed south, it's truly very dangerous, especially for traffic coming down.

And so that's why the areas have been contacting their MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), the member for Rosetown-Biggar, myself. I have many constituents contacting me. And that's also why they're contacting the department. And I believe again the response from the department has been that this wasn't deemed as a priority for immediate work.

And I wonder if you could answer that question, Madam Minister. You know, why isn't it a priority? What about that particular request doesn't allow it to be ranked higher in the department system than it's currently ranked?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Right now in the department we have a rating system. It's called warrants and it determines, when you go to invest in a particular stretch of road, what you need to do in terms of not only rebuilding the road or paving the road but also what you need to do to improve the safety of the road.

And at this particular time this particular stretch of road — and I'm very familiar with the part that you're talking about — would not have enough warrants to merit a passing lane. But we also recognize that there's been . . . that the amount of volume on that road is increasing.

You will know that there is some rutting on that road and the department did some work on the road, I believe, last year. This is a piece of road that we're looking at. There will need to be some resurfacing done on this road in the fairly near future. And if the traffic volume merits a passing lane, and it may because of the increased volume, then it's obviously something that we would put into the design when we go to resurface the road.

(15:15)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I think there's some reason for hope in your comments there. And I agree with you that the road . . . I'm hopeful that the numbers and this warrant system will see an increase in the traffic.

As you may know, there's a golf course currently under construction there and I believe they're going to go right to 18. The residential development of the landing is growing continually, and it's quite a nice place. The marina there is also a very positive development.

And so I guess the only other question that I would have then is the system, the rating system then, is it initiated then by, in some cases, by constituents or by municipalities calling in or . . . and so therefore I guess you can see where I'm going.

Should we continue to be vigilant in writing letters, or is this going to be something that happens as a matter of course every year?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The member will know that north of Swift Current we did build a truck-climbing lane recently based on the amount of volume of traffic and also based upon what

citizens were saying on that.

And we expect that the lobby will continue. There seems to be a very significant lobby. I've received many letters from citizens, RMs, members of the subdivision, and so on. So it's certainly something that I've become aware of. I was aware of it before but since I've been the minister there's been a lobby effort.

You know, there's no question that if the volumes continue to go up, and I know that there have been significant increases in the volumes because of the marina, because of increased tourism. Now with the enhanced subdivision I think there will be more. The golf course. I anticipate that this is a very real possibility that we will have to put a passing lane on that hill.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair of Committees, and Madam Minister, welcome to your officials. It's a pleasure to be able to have a few moments here to just ask a couple of questions about some concerns in the constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers.

Madam Minister, one of the main corridors in the constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers is No. 55 Highway from Prince Albert through to Nipawin. It is a piece of highway that has an extensive heavy haul traffic on it. And I'm not . . . don't want to leave you with the impression that when I talk about heavy haul that I'm talking about normal large truck traffic — the so-called 18-wheelers.

Madam Minister, these are trucks that do extensive amount of hauling for the Weyerhaeuser pulp mill. They also do extensive hauling from Carrier Lumber to The Pas, Manitoba. For 10 months of the year that highway is used extensively. It is supposed to have been originally designed to handle heavier traffic, but we have found out through the last few years, Madam Minister, that this highway falls under a criteria that I'm afraid a large number of our highways are falling under in this province, Madam Minister.

What has happened is that the criteria has needed of course to be changed for what is regarded as a primary highway and what is regarded as a secondary highway. Now those people who live along that highway, those people who use the highway to operate business, there are many trucking companies in the Prince Albert/Nipawin area and in between that use the highway and would prefer to use the highway as a primary highway on a regular basis, on a year-round basis.

Unfortunately, Madam Minister, for two months of the year that is not possible. And what has to take place, Madam Minister — and I'm sure this must take place in many areas of the province — is that then these trucks must reroute for a two-month period of time in order that business may continue in this province.

Rerouting, Madam Minister, brings about considerable expense, and certainly when we're talking about heavy-haul traffic these are trucks that are in general super Bs and even King Bs to a large extent also, Madam Minister. What we're finding is that all of a sudden this province for a two-month period of time is actually going through a period of extensive pollution because, Madam Minister, they are being forced to drive much further distances in order to be able to continue to conduct business.

Madam Minister, the forestry industry in northern Saskatchewan doesn't shut down because there is a spring break-up on. These large corporations, Weyerhaeuser, Carrier Lumber, the pulp mill in The Pas — Tolko — also has to continue to operate. But, Madam Minister, the extensive expenses that are incurred because of the highways that have been deemed to be secondary suddenly can't be used to the extent that they are on the year-round basis that they should be.

What does your department and you, Madam Minister, what do you see envisioning in being able to maintain or upgrade certain secondary highways in this province to a primary status so that business can be able to operate in a much more significant and efficient manner?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Through the Chair to the member, what I can tell the member is our government announced a major forestry expansion in the province. In fact our Premier was involved in an announcement last Friday to significantly expand the value added to the forestry industry in the Meadow Lake area.

Our department is working very closely with the Department of Economic Development and Co-operation as well as the forestry industry in the province to ensure that our roads are at a standard that will meet the economic development initiatives that have been undertaken by the province of Saskatchewan through our coalition government.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, to the minister, what is needed, Madam Minister, is some sense of a time frame. We have talked on this side of the House for several months through this sitting and last sitting as we talk about economic development taking place in this province. And of course we have expressly voiced our displeasure, as you will recall Tuesday evening, the economic development plan for this province that we feel is significantly lacking.

It is certainly positive when we see corporations such as Tolko from British Columbia wanting to establish themselves in Saskatchewan. They see some . . . great deal of possibilities here. And certainly those of us on this side of the House, Madam Minister, also see those possibilities.

But, Madam Minister, if we're going to be a 10-month province, this is a significant reduction in the opportunities for business to be able to create a positive bottom line so that they'll want to stay here, Madam Minister, and create the job opportunities that are desperately needed.

We're all quite well aware on this side, Madam Minister, that last year the policies of this NDP government cost job losses of 21,000. We've also seen that because of the policies of this NDP government, that 9,000 people . . . we had a net loss of 9,000 people in this province, Madam Minister.

There are some infrastructure changes that are going to have to be taken on in short order, Madam Minister. And we see very clearly on this side of the House, that your department and you as the minister, in all likelihood should have and maybe even do have the vision that is necessary in order to promote the continuation of this kind of business expansion, Madam

Minister.

So we're wondering on this side of the House, Madam Minister, those secondary highways that are very, very crucial . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order. If the member from Arm River and the member from Elphinstone wish to carry on a conversation they may do so behind the bar but not across the floor.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees. And I am pleased that you took the opportunity to intervene. It's of course very important that the minister be able to hear the question so that she may be allowed the opportunity to respond in an appropriate manner.

So, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, to the Minister of Highways, Madam Minister, what kind of a time frame do you see for your department in taking on the extraneous load of being able to upgrade secondary highways in this province to a primary level so that businesses that want to move into this province will be able to operate in a more efficient manner on a 12-month rather than a 10-month basis.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that we're working on 951, 155, 55, west side, and we're planning future work on 106 and 135.

I can also tell the member that we work very closely with the forestry industry, Weyerhaeuser in particular, and their priority road was a road that we've constructed in the last two years that takes them over to No. 2.

I know the member is trying to . . . I know he'll be sending out his comments to his constituents in Sask Rivers. But I just want to tell his constituents, because I know you'll be sending out *Hansard*, that our government has worked very closely with the forest industry — that's why we've expanded the forestry industry in the province; that's why the announcement was made on Friday with the Premier of our province and Tolko and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council for an expansion in the Meadow Lake area.

And not for the edification of the member, but for your constituents — and your constituents are aware of this — we realize the importance of the forestry industry in the province particularly when it comes to job creation and economic development.

I know the member has launched into his political rhetoric in the last several minutes since I was sitting here listening. I do want to get through my estimates and I have answered — I'm not going to respond to each of the points you have raised — but each of the points that you raised are blatantly partisan and it's the most partisan discussion that I've had from any member in the legislature when it comes to the specifics of our spending estimates.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, or Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, to the minister, I believe the . . . I had a very simple question and I will repeat it. And maybe what I should

do, Mr. Deputy Chair, is repeat it in a much slower tone of voice so that the minister will be able to keep up to it.

Has your ministry set forth a time frame to upgrade secondary highways in this province so that businesses can operate in a more prudent manner from secondary to primary?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We are upgrading highways constantly. We're upgrading thin membrane surfaces to structural pavement, structural pavement to primary weight roads. So the answer to your question is yes.

And I answered it in my previous answer when I talked about the work that we're doing with the forestry industry when you launched into your whatever it was on forestry.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. My questions will be, hopefully, maybe a little tighter and maybe I won't go on to the issues that my colleague had.

But I guess my questions are, and we seem to as the Highways estimates are wrapping up, probably going back into our own constituencies and asking questions on that very thing. And I know every so often as we've gone through each constituency where it talked about highways, I have thrown out Highway 35 and mentioned Highway 35 and you've always kind of sat there and just shook your head like, forget it, there's not a chance; it's not going to be repaired.

And so I guess formally, can I ask you what intentions Department of Highways has for Highway 35? Not necessarily from Weyburn south but from Weyburn north, which really transverses my whole constituency right from the south border down around Weyburn to the north border on the other side of Fort Qu'Appelle. So Highway 35, what are the Highways intent?

(15:30)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well to the member of Morris . . . or the member from Indian Head-Milestone — sorry — the departments say that this is a troubled highway. And it has a lot of trouble on it.

I don't know if I gave you all of the information with regard to your constituency. Would you like to hear about what's going on in your riding?

But I can say that it's not a road that we have in our horizons in the next year or two. But there's a lot of work that is being done in your constituency, and I don't know if you want me to put it onto the record. If you do, I will. If you don't, I can send this over to you.

Mr. McMorris: — I think probably just sending it over to me would be fine. I'm certainly aware of a couple of spots that some work is being done on. And you made the comment that there's going to be so much highway construction that we're going to be sitting in our vehicles in the summer waiting to get through certain areas.

And I do have to admit that I was about 15 minutes late going to a Lang Credit Union 50th anniversary because of highway

construction. But when I got there I said, how can I complain; sorry for being late, but how could I complain.

But I'm not really, I mean a lot of the highways in the constituency I will admit are in pretty good shape. I have some fairly major highways running through my constituency — be it No. 1 or No. 6 or 48. But where we run into the trouble is on the north/south routes as opposed to the . . . some of the other routes.

And some concern . . . I guess I'm interested when you mentioned that it's a troubled highway. I know of a number of constituents that have had trouble on that highway, including one person — and I talked about it in my debate, my Throne Speech debate — where one person who . . . their daughter had rolled a vehicle, and she went up the next day to find out where it was rolled. And the ditches hadn't been mowed, and lo and behold — she borrowed somebody's car — the daughter had totalled off the first car the night before, she totalled off the friend's car as she hit a deer on the way up to see, about a mile from where the daughter had rolled.

So there is some troubles on that highway. The highway is a troubled highway by the sounds of it. Maybe if I could get you to briefly explain — and I don't want to get into the whole substructure of the highway — but what are some of the concerns? And because it's troubled, does that mean it's written off?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As you'd know, we only have so much money and we have to go to priorities. And in your constituency it's 56, Highway No. 56. We've done a lot of work on that highway in the last couple of years; we're strengthening the road, creating a granular surface on that road.

The other thing I can tell you is that we've increased our mowing, the money for mowing, in this year's budget by 24 per cent. So we want to see more ditches mowed before we get into the kind of situation that you're talking about with your constituent.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you. Yes, I'm certainly glad that Highway 56 was repaired. I know the thought around the constituency many times has been maybe we should have another contest on the worst highway, because I believe during the campaign of 1999 we did a little bit of a spiel on that, and Highway 56 was, in our eyes, voted as the worse highway. But now of course that's taken out of the competition. Thank you very much.

But I believe we could just move a little bit further west and go onto Highway 35. I've had a number of constituents ask me and I guess I would like to hear it from the minister. That No. 35 Highway, we feel, in our area is a fairly major north/south route from the US (United States) border all the way up to Tobin Lake. Lots of lots of tourism traffic.

But there's some concern and rumour around the area that perhaps Highways are not as interested in fixing that highway. Certainly from the border to south . . . or north to Weyburn is in pretty good shape. And then is it maybe the Highways' idea to angle all the traffic up into Regina and then take 10 north? Because there's about a 30- or 40-mile stretch in there that

hasn't had much work, doesn't get much work, and I mean you can get to the North. You do have to kind of zigzag around that area. And it just so happens that that zigzagging sends all the traffic into Regina.

And I know some of the people along that corridor have had concern with that. Is there some sort of an ulterior plan of Highways to try and divert around some of those communities . . . not to try and divert, but certainly to push some of the traffic into the cities on its way up to the northern part of our province.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What we do is we respond to traffic pattern and truck volume. And right now the place that we're having the most traffic is Highway No. 6, and that is from the Port of Regway up to Milestone . . . or just outside of Milestone. That's where our truck traffic is and that's where our volume is. So that's what we're . . . when we try and prioritize where we're spending our money, that obviously is a road that needs to have some work done on it. Because we get a lot of complaints about it and it's got the high volume.

Now once we get through with that road, then I think we can look at the road that you are talking about because we realize that there is traffic on that road as well.

But we don't have as much traffic on that road as we do on 6, so what we're doing is we're trying to improve 6 as our north/south . . . one of our north/south corridors.

Mr. McMorris: — I guess to the minister then, and I don't want to get . . . I'm sure you've gone through, in the many hours of estimates that you've been in here, how you prioritize the work that you're going to do. And I know you've talked about a rating system and all that.

But just from that answer I guess . . . it really did seem to indicate that your main priority is the truck traffic, and you're looking at those roads and maybe the tourism aspect isn't as a high priority on designing the roads especially. Because you know, I certainly do feel like the north/south route being the most direct — 35. And certainly a lot of the people coming from the States are going up to the northern part of the province for fishing, hunting, and that type of thing.

So I guess is that it's maybe more of a comment than it is a question, but a lot of the priority is put on then where the truck traffic would go as opposed to possible economic development and tourism.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I just want to tell the member that we have a truck traffic volume map, and this is the average daily traffic. And on the route that your Highway No. 35, we've got about 265 traffic count, and on No. 6, 670. So you can see that there's quite a difference so that's why we're . . . the money we do have we're investing in 6 over 35, because we're looking at volume right now.

But I take your point. It's a good argument. Because I do realize that people coming out of the States take that road up to Tobin Lake.

Mr. Hart: — Madam Minister, I have a letter from the town of Raymore which is just inside my constituency, located at the

junction of Highway 6 and Highway 15. And their concern is with Highway 15. I'll just read a couple of quotations from the letter:

Raymore town council would appreciate consideration of identifying No. 15 Highway as a major economic corridor across central Saskatchewan.

They go on to say that there are three grain terminals located west of Raymore. One in between Raymore and Semans. One at Nokomis, and then further west on Highway 15 at the Mid-Sask Terminal south of Watrous.

And I'd guess . . . there's also some other economic proposals on the table, I guess, out there. One is a feedlot, and the lack of a major highway in that area is certainly a deterrent. Apparently there's a liquid fertilizer storage facility being considered for Nokomis and again the highway is a problem.

So I wonder, could you just tell me what your plans for that section of highway, Highway 15, west of Raymore, I guess, all the way to No. 11 Highway.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I believe the member from Watrous has already been onto this question and we had quite a discussion initially in estimates . . . the member . . . your Sask Party member from Watrous, where I went through all of the detail to that road and you might want to refer to *Hansard*, if you care to do that, instead of having me sort of repeat what I've already told her.

Mr. Hart: — Oh. I guess we could do that. Could you just summarize it very briefly, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Just so you know, we don't have Barry Martin in the legislature today as his parents were in a serious accident. But what I will do is give you what the officials here recall. Two years ago under the CAIP (Canada/Saskatchewan Agri-Infrastructure Program) program we did some strengthening of the road from Raymore to Semans, and this year we're going from Nokomis in the direction of Kenaston. And we think it's to No. 2 but we're not absolutely sure.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Madam Minister, for that executive summary.

I guess the only other suggestion I might have, I heard you in an answer to a previous question, you talked a bit about mowing and some budgets for mowing for some constituencies. I would maybe perhaps . . . it's more of an observation and a suggestion to pass along.

This year with the drought in certain parts of the province and so on, I know there'll be a lot of livestock producers will be salvaging hay wherever they can find it. I know from past experience that your mowing crews weren't out too early and I would suggest that's a good thing, particularly in the view of recent rains. If you have any thoughts of getting out there early, I would just maybe not do that. Give the cattle people a chance to salvage some of that roadside hay.

And that would be the only other suggestion that I'd have at this time. Thank you.

Subvote (HI01) agreed to.

Subvotes (HI02), (HI04), (HI10), (HI03), (HI06), (HI11) agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

(15:45)

**General Revenue Fund
Lending and Investing Activities
Highways and Transportation
Vote 145**

Subvote (HI01) agreed to.

Vote 145 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 2000-01
General Revenue Fund
Highways and Transportation
Vote 16**

Subvotes (HI04), (HI03) agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Rural Revitalization Office
Vote 43**

Subvote (RR01)

The Deputy Chair: — I'll invite the minister to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — To my left is Harvey Brooks, who is the deputy minister for Rural Revitalization. Behind me is Dion McGrath, our director of policy. And to Dion's left is Patricia Alcorn, who is our new director of communications.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a couple of brief questions, Madam Minister, and I know this is . . . we all know that this is a new unit or department that's been set up.

And I guess we have some questions as far as the qualifications of the people you have put in place to deal with this very important area. And I know . . . I certainly know about Mr. Brooks' qualifications. I've been at many Wheat Board meetings in the past where he's been there.

But I wonder, could you just briefly outline the qualifications of the staff members you have here with you today. And again, just the executive summary will be quite sufficient.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well as you said, our deputy minister has impressive credentials — a Ph.D. in Economics. Dion McGrath has a master's degree in History. He's been an analyst in Economic Development Corporation for the last four years. And his work is in community, rural, and regional economic development. Patricia Alcorn has a master's in English. She has been the manager . . . she was the director of communications for Tourism Saskatchewan so she comes to us with a

background in tourism. She was there for I believe . . . how many years? Five years. And prior to that she was the manager at SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) for corporate relations. So I think we have people who have some significant credentials.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Madam Minister, for that information.

Madam Minister, I have a situation in my constituency and you may not think that it's Rural Revitalization but it does in fact, I think it is related. It's a business in Strasbourg, Saskatchewan that sells electronic equipment and so on. They recently . . . you may not know but SaskTel put up a new tower and it came on-line in January and the residents of that area are very happy with the cell service they are getting in the area. But the owner of D & D Appliances has a problem and he cannot sell cellular telephones directly. He tells me that SaskTel has directed him to go through another supplier and he presently has to go through Audio Warehouse in Regina.

Now I realize this doesn't necessarily fall within your area but what it is, it's really hampering his business ability in rural Saskatchewan. And I think in these times we have to do everything we can to make sure that these businesses . . . It's a family-run business; he's been in business for a number of years and this really means a lot to their business if they could be the primary seller because at this point in time they don't receive any commissions. They get all their information second-hand through Audio Warehouse. He says it's hampering the level of service he's been able to provide to his customers and he asked me to bring this to your attention. And I would hope that the minister of Crown corporations would also take note of this situation.

And I would just, as I said, bring this to your attention, and perhaps could you comment on that situation.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have many, many people coming through our office now who are having difficulty with various government agencies, departments, or Crowns. We don't believe that the person who owns this business has come to our office yet but if they would like to contact our office we could see what we can do to maybe assist this merchant with his difficulties with SaskTel.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Madam Minister, because I think what this is is an example of is one arm of government working . . . is counterproductive to efforts of another arm and I will certainly pass that along to him and I'm sure you will be hearing from him shortly. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, I'm not sure if you're aware that I asked a question of the Minister of Education a while ago about CommunityNet program and the fact that there are many businesses that are in rural Saskatchewan that feel they could benefit very much from this program.

Doepker Industries in Annaheim was quite concerned that although the CommunityNet is coming to the school, they could use it, and it's not available to them.

Have you heard these concerns, and what are you doing to address them?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that we are aware of the issue that she raises, particularly in those centres where there may be one very large business and not the numbers of other users that would allow SaskTel to go forward with high-speed Internet.

There is a broadband task force that is working on this issue, and I think we're optimistic that we'll be able to work our way through this.

As you know, SaskTel is a competitive Crown. It has to deal within a competitive environment. It has some rules that it has to follow under federal legislation. And . . . but we think that we can make our way through the issue that you raise.

Mr. McMorris: — I just, and I know it may have been dealt with before in estimates, but just so that I'm clear. I know I've had lots of people ask me . . . and when it came out in the budget, rural revitalization, and as most of our MLAs are from rural Saskatchewan, I'm sure we've all had phone calls on it — now just what exactly is rural revitalization going to do for rural Saskatchewan?

And just a couple of the questions that were asked here today already. To me it sounds like you're just trying to be a bridge. You're going to take the complaints from rural Saskatchewan and then go to the department and complain on behalf of rural citizens.

And so I guess, maybe I'm giving you a — I don't know how long this commercial is going to take — but I'm giving you some air time here to then once again explain to me so that I can then explain to people that have been questioning me on just exactly what the heck is Rural Revitalization department going to do.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well this question has been asked before and I will answer it again.

The purpose of our office is to ensure that all parts of government are properly focussed on rural economic development. So when people raise their individual issues — as the member from Kelvington did, as the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood did — our job is to make sure that government departments are not working at cross purposes with each other or inside government departments to impede rural economic development.

So what we try to do is to get people focussed in government on rural economic development. Because there are many issues that government departments are focused on, but we're trying to get people to focus on rural economic development specifically.

Our office does not have direct responsibility for any programs or services. Those program delivery and services are delivered by other government departments. We're not going to duplicate delivery systems. But our challenge is to ensure that all of these agencies, departments, Crowns are adequately focussed on rural economic needs.

Now what we're going to do as well, we need to . . . we want to . . . one of the problems that has been identified by the Action Committee on the Rural Economy is the difficulty that rural enterprises have in attracting investments into their businesses. And I'm now talking about some larger businesses. So one of our jobs will be to focus investment vehicles on rural economic development.

People have wonderful ideas but they have difficulty accessing capital or pools of capital. So one of our key challenges will be to focus investment vehicles on rural economic development.

As well we're going to . . . Our government has gone through a whole process since 1995 of dealing with regulations, trying to get rid of unnecessary regulations that aren't really . . . that are impeding, can be impediments to development.

(16:00)

Not that you want to do what some governments have done in other parts of Canada where you totally deregulate — I'll just use the Government of Ontario — and then you get yourself into some difficulty. But we want to ensure that our regulatory regimes are there to do what they're supposed to do, not to impede economic progress.

Our other mandate will be the whole area of education and training in terms of rural economic development. And the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, through the regional community colleges, is providing a real focus so that through the Internet, through technology, rural people can have access to skills development and educational opportunities.

As well we want . . . we're involved in identifying those key sectors of rural Saskatchewan where there are development opportunities. You know you raise the issue of — and obviously we're very concerned about it — if you look at the jobs that have been lost, most of those jobs have been lost in agriculture.

So the question becomes what do we do to ensure that there are job opportunities in rural Saskatchewan? So what areas of the economy can we develop so that people can have access to job opportunities, business opportunities, education, and what kinds of skills do we need in order to have access to those opportunities?

And then that sort of gets to the issue raised by the member from Kelvington — the high-speed Internet — because we know that there are companies, businesses that are locating in rural Saskatchewan and they want access to that kind of technology in order to do the work that they are doing, and I'm talking about information technology companies. So that's basically the work that we're focused on and have been focused on in the last couple months.

Mr. McMorris: — I guess just a follow-up then is that . . . I mean I kind of gathered then that there's probably four or five areas that you're really working on economic development more geared for rural even though you have a Department of Economic Development . . . Co-operative Development, the capital and trying to attract capital for rural Saskatchewan,

different things, the four or five different areas.

The ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) committee though, I guess then if I can just question, is there not some overlap with ACRE as far . . . are they just strictly agriculture and then you're going to stay away or are you going to work with Ag or how is that? Is there any overlap there at all?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — First of all, I don't know if you're aware of this, but I am the Co-Chair of ACRE so one of my jobs, as well as being the Minister Responsible for Rural Revitalization, is to work with ACRE. And ACRE is a . . . it has a four-year mandate. And ACRE has many subgroups that go beyond agriculture, so there other subgroups of ACRE that are working on economic development strategies that go beyond agriculture specifically.

ACRE has a number of subgroups that are now reporting progress and they have presented some interim recommendations. The final reports of the subgroups are going to be submitted in the fall, this fall, and then there will be a consultation document that will be finalized in the fall. And then they're going to go out and do consultation across the province and have town hall meetings.

That's not our job. That's the job that they're going to be doing. And then next spring they're going to deliver their final report to government.

So there is no cross duplication. I'm not going out across the province holding town hall meetings. That's the work that they're going to be doing. But I certainly am meeting with people across the province to develop my own understanding of the issues that people are confronted with given that there has been some fairly dramatic changes that have occurred in this province in the last 15 years that have significantly impacted rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. McMorris: — One real quick question. And again I apologize if this has been asked before, but do you ever look at when you set up the department setting it up outside of Regina?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Absolutely. And one of the . . . that was something that was considered in terms of the Office of Rural Revitalization. Part of the difficulty we have is that all of the Crown offices, the head offices are located here. All of the other deputy ministers are located here. And your member from Saltcoats raised that issue on the day that this was announced in the Throne Speech.

The reason why it's here is because we need to be able to work with the department officials, the senior department officials, the deputy ministers here in Regina. And that's why the decision was made to locate the office here. And the member from Saltcoats understood why and he accepted the rationale for locating the office here.

Subvote (RR01) agreed to.

Subvote (RR02) agreed to.

Vote 43 agreed to.

The committee reported progress.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. To my left is Carl Neggers, the assistant deputy minister in the department. Immediately behind him is Ron Styles, the deputy minister, and behind me is Bernie Churko, who is the policy adviser in the department.

Clause 1

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a few questions with relation to this Bill that I would like to ask the minister, and specifically get right to it.

In terms of the truck routes and weight restrictions, the first question I'd like to ask is who or what groups did the minister meet with in putting together this Bill?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can advise the member is that the department has met with just about every group imaginable around this particular piece of legislation, including the Saskatchewan Trucking Association, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, as well as the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association as well.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. You added the term wrecker in the amendment. In terms of licensing auto wreckers, could the minister please provide an explanation as why the clause under section 2, after clause 2(bb), why is this being added?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — In 1997, during the legislative provisions respecting the licensing of auto wreckers, it was removed. And at the time the definition of wrecker was inadvertently left out of The Highway Traffic Act so it's being reinserted.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, there's a new section here, 14.2, dealing with The Land Titles Act. Why is this included here; and for the record, why is this being added in respect to Bill 53?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It's a consequential amendment, so it's really a housekeeping amendment. It was left out in the past and so it's being inserted.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. We've had a number of concerns brought to our attention, and I know they've been discussed in the House briefly, regarding the downloading of responsibility to the RMs.

My question is what percentage of the total costs will rural municipalities be paying to provide alternate routes or new roads for heavy traffic?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can advise the member with these alternate truck routes, partnerships with the rural municipalities, any money that we save in terms of having to repair those . . . or upgrade those thin membrane surfaces is shared with the rural

municipality. So it's not costing them any more because we are putting our savings into that alternate truck route.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Can the minister give me a percentage of what the cost would be, or is it impossible to give a percentage?

(16:15)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — In order to properly answer the question we'd have to . . . it depends on the materials in the road. It depends upon a whole number of factors. And we would have to . . . you'd have to give us an example and then we could give you a determination.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — I understood that was going to be difficult. It seems to me that as minister you'll have the final say at the end of the day to determine whether or not an RM should provide an alternate route.

Is this in fact true? Is it your office that will have the last say in this?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The legislation says they have to agree. So I can't arbitrarily force a RM into an alternate truck route. There has to be agreement. I don't have that legislative authority in this legislation.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank goodness. Thank you, Madam Minister, because I think there's a bit of concern out there. I know we've been receiving some concern over that.

There's always a concern, even in a partnership deal, with an alternate route when it comes to downloading. And that is very much a concern. Now we have RMs that are in partnership with an alternate route. In terms of upkeep, how will that work and who will be responsible for the upkeep?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The partnership means that they do maintenance on the road. Because we're saving money, our portion that we're saving goes into the maintenance of the road, so we're paying for that maintenance.

And we're saving money because of the reduced wear and tear of our thin membraned surface roads. Like they're not failing. And you talked about a failure previously in our Highways and Transportation estimates.

If we have alternate truck routes, we take those trucks off the roads. The roads aren't failing so we're not having to do all of the maintenance that we would normally have to do with a TMS. And we're taking those savings and diverting it into the alternate truck route partnership. So the RM is in a position where they're doing the maintenance and we're assisting them through financial remuneration.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — So if I get that right, Madam Minister, it's a partnership in the building of it, but you're only going to be a partner in the maintenance of it all, so I gather, is what you just said. And is that for perpetuity? Or is it . . .

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I could tell the member that for as long as the partnership lasts, that's what we'll be doing.

If the road needs to be upgraded, then we assist in the upgrading of the road by providing money. And then once the road is upgraded and it's an alternate route, then we put money into the maintenance of the road. And we will maintain . . . help maintain that road each year of the partnership.

If the partnership agreement ends, then our money will revert back in to trying to keep our thin membrane surfaces as dust free as possible. But we also know if it were to end, then that heavy traffic goes back onto those thin membrane surface roads which can fail and create all kinds of problems for people living in the area but also for the department in terms of maintaining those roads.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. We discussed this briefly in another forum, whether it was QP (question period) or at some other point, and what was discussed is penalties for vehicles that are in contravention of using this alternate vehicle . . . or alternate route. And I know we discussed, briefly, areas where the alternate route only goes X miles.

Now they have to still travel on TMS, and the example that was used in the House was resupply of the small town. And even if there is an alternate route, an alternate route will not go through a small town. And I believe the answer that was given on that particular day is they can get a permit.

Is that what your plan is, is people that are not using the alternate road surface but wish to use . . . a TMS road would have to get a permit to use, and along with going into small towns for resupply, would they have to get a permit?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — A follow-up to that, Madam Minister. What would these permits cost and where will they get permits and who will be policing it if heavy traffic does not use the alternate route?

And we know that that's already fraught with some problems because an alternate route is not necessarily an all-weather route, and so if we get into situations with alternate routes and if we ever get rain, that they'd still have to travel a TMS in order to get to their point of destination.

So that's a multiple question: who's policing it, the cost of permits, where the money is going? There's just a whole bunch of loose ends yet, Madam Minister, that need to be identified.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — In terms of who's policing it, we have compliance officers in the province. We've increased the number of compliance officers in this provincial budget by five.

As well we know that RMs and citizens in the area want to maintain — who go into an alternate truck route — want to maintain their thin membrane surface, so we anticipate that they're going to be advising us if there are people that are not getting the necessary approval from the RMs. And the permits are issued by the RMs that are affected by the alternate truck route and where the TMS runs through particular RMs.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — I want to be fairly quick, Madam

Minister, because I think we want to address the next Bill also. But if there's not an alternate truck route and trucks are having to get a permit to come into a small town, is that not just another form of tax? Why are we penalizing vehicles coming into a town to resupply, if there's not an alternate truck route that's going through the town?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There are trucks that go on thin membrane surfaces which are secondary weights. But if they want to go primary weights, like really heavy weights, that would be the kinds of weights that you see on trucks between the border and coming up out of Estevan and into Regina and then all the way to P.A. — those are primary weight roads — then they have to get a permit.

So if they want to carry primary weight loads, which are heavier than secondary weight, then they have to get a permit. But if a truck is carrying secondary weights, they can go down those TMSs.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 8 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 52 — The Railway Amendment Act, 2001

Clause 1

The Deputy Chair: — And does the minister have different officials? No? All right.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I have a few questions and I'll try and keep them brief, but this is an extremely important issue. And I know we want to get on to other items here in about five minutes, so I'm going to try and make this very quick.

An awful lot of concern has been raised with reference to this Bill and how this Bill may diminish the prospects for growth and development in Saskatchewan's rail industry. It may prohibit future investment.

Can the minister give assurance that those people in the industry that have fears over this Bill are unfounded fears? Because we feel that investment into the short-line railway is going to be very much diminished because of this Bill.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I could tell the member that we have consulted extensively on this Bill. We've consulted with SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), LUSGAR, SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), various community groups like West Central Road and Rail, Wood Mountain Road and Rail, Southern Rails Co-operative, Cudworth Group, the Golden Prairie Short-Line Co-op, South Central Transportation Planning Committee, the Red Coat Road and Rail, the village of Wood Mountain, the Wood Mountain Road and Rail, the Great Western Railway, the United Transportation Union, area transportation planning committees, Prairie Malt, Carlton Trail Railway, the Canadian Wheat Board, the Canadian National Railway, the Canadian Grains Commission, Miller Western Pulp, and the list just goes on.

The people that have the biggest concerns with this Bill are the two class 1 carriers, CN (Canadian National) and CP (Canadian Pacific).

What I can also tell the member is that the legislative amendments are being introduced to assist farmers and rural communities in order to meet their grain handling needs. It's also there to harmonize with the present federal legislation. And it defines timelines for various approvals to get into the business of operating a railway, and conversely to get out of operating.

And I can tell the member that this Bill enjoys significant — and I say significant — public support by people who are involved in the grain handling industry as well as shippers.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well, I guess that's a point that is probably very much debatable. I'm not sure where all of that information comes from that everybody is in support of it because I'm definitely not hearing that. And I would give you just some excerpts of some of the responses that I have received.

And one of the comments that I have received, again, an excerpt from it is:

Based on reasonable business principles, this legislation diminishes the prospect for growth and development in Saskatchewan's rail industry as well as industries associated with the rail.

And that has been our concern all along with people wishing to get into a short-line rail business. I believe that this inhibits the future private investment in these industries just by some of the caveats that are put into the Bill.

In fact one phrase that I had received from a group is that "problems with the Act are so widespread it should be withdrawn and redrafted."

So there are some concerns out there. And the concerns . . . maybe you have not received some of the concerns but they are there.

So again, Madam Minister, there are concerns there, whether you've heard them or not they're concerns about private industry being involved. So I wish we could put on the record that outside investors should not be fearful of this legislation that they should be willing to come in and invest in our short-line industry.

(16:30)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The quote that you, the member, makes is a quote that we heard from CP. So if the member could put on the record who he's heard from that have these significant concerns, that would be very helpful because we have only heard concerns from basically CN and CP. The other groups — and I'm talking about short lines, Member, I'm talking about short lines — they are supportive of this legislation. So I would ask the member to put on the record who you are quoting from because I think that would be helpful in terms of us understanding who you believe has significant concerns.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Well as I explained, they're excerpts from quotes from various people. Probably from rural people.

Is it true that the railways wishing to discontinue operations and dismantle assets will be subject to the Highway Traffic Board's determination of why those . . . of what those assets will be valued at?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What we're doing is harmonizing with the federal legislation. The Highway Traffic Board will act no differently than the quasi-judicial body of the Canadian Transportation Agency. So it's simply a parallel to the federal legislation and the federal quasi-judicial body that deals with the whole issue of salvage once a class 1 carrier gets out of the business of rail lines and there's rail line abandonment, and there's salvage that has to be dealt with and compensation to communities.

So it's simply a parallel to the federal legislation to support communities.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — And that's been one of the concerns again in the investment area that I've been receiving is if you're using the salvage assets as part of your . . . as part of your insurance to get into the railway business, you have to have an awful lot of money. If you can't use that salvage value because you don't know the salvage value of the railroad until after you have actually gone through all the steps in the Bill, which is 180 days or some long period of time.

So that's why I believe it's difficult for investors to get involved, if that can't be used as collateral. Is this a correct statement?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that the asset is available for collateral under the provincial legislation in the same manner that the asset is available for collateral under the federal legislation.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — But, Madam Minister, when is the value determined? I believe in your Bill that the value of the asset is determined following the disbandment of the facility.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Our legislation on this matter is a mirror image of the federal legislation other than our legislation allows for a determination of the value earlier, at an earlier point than the federal legislation.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — I'm really not convinced whether it follows the federal or not and whether it's right to not be able to put a value on the salvage before . . . when you're negotiating a price of the railroad, if you're unable to use that as collateral on an unknown quantity, whether it's with the federal legislation or not, I don't believe this is correct. And if that is the case that the salvage value will not be determined until after the . . . if the railroad goes bankrupt then we determine the salvage value.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have a copy of the Canadian Transportation Act and under it's called Division V, transferring and discontinuing of the operations of the railway line, it's sections 140, 141, 142, and 143, as well as section 145. And it's actually, the net salvage value under the existing Canadian Transportation Act counts . . . it's called . . . it's 143,

section 143(3)(1). So if you want to examine this, Member, you will see that they are similar.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. They may be similar but that doesn't necessarily make them correct.

It also appears in this Bill that there's very wide-ranging powers that the minister has with this Bill in terms of constructing, authorizing certificates, fixing terms of conditions, railway opening approvals. Will there be any sort of a recourse companies may have, such as an appeal board, rather than just having all ministerial powers? Is there some methodology by which companies have that right to appeal?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell the member is that the minister — and it could be any minister — has responsibility for the public interest.

It was very clear, for the consultation that we went through, that the public, in terms of the people that were consulted, wanted to ensure that short lines that were coming were not coming only for the salvage value of those lines. So they'd operate them for a short time, and if there was no legislative authority in the province, they could come, build up the hopes of those communities along the line, you know they decide they're not making enough money, then they could take the salvage and run.

And we wanted to make sure — and the community groups wanted to make sure — that there was due diligence done. So that we knew that the people that were coming for the short-line industry had the financial capacity to run a short line.

So we wanted to be able to do due diligence. And that's why the minister has the kinds of authority that is contained in the legislation.

The second point I want to make is that if the minister does not act in a responsible way, is punitive or whatever, obviously the business that's making application could apply to the courts if the minister is not responding in a way that is within normal business practices.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I hope I'm not sounding like I'm against this Bill. There's a lot of good parts of this Bill. And I'm very much in favour of short-line railroads, as I mentioned in . . . the other day when I spoke. It's unfortunate it didn't start about 10 years ago because a lot of the lines are already pulled, such as my own line. If this would have been enacted some eight years ago or seven years ago, I'd still have a railroad and maybe an operating elevator in my area.

Which leads me to the next question that this Bill does not cover and has been brought to my attention by a number of groups is environmental issues. And there's nothing in the Bill that I can find — and I've read it pretty closely two or three times — on environmental issues.

Did you discuss environmental issues prior to? And this could be a far-ranging question — environmental issues including cleanup?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Environmental issues are usually dealt

with in the Acts that are covered by the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management.

And so what you try and do is to have a piece of legislation that pertains to a particular issue. In this case, it's the issue of rail lines.

In the province of Saskatchewan, it's an issue of trying to ensure — given that there is a lot of interest in short lines now in the province and we have some successful short-line carriers in the province — that in the public interest we have similar legislation to the federal legislation so that communities along those short lines can be protected from circumstances that may not be in their best interests.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I kind of feel that because this is a railway Bill it should be inclusive with some stipulations such as cleanup or restoration of the line, such as even cleaning up ballast.

And I can suggest to the minister that in the railway that's been abandoned at my place, the ballast is still there.

I do not think that's correct. I do not think that should be a SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) issue. I think that should come under The Railway Act.

And I believe that in your Bill that there should be some provisions in the Bill which stipulate to somebody that is going to abandon a track that they just can't pull the rails, pull the ties, sell them at a profit, and then walk away.

So now I understand what you're saying — well that's SERM's problem now. Well I don't believe it's SERM's problem. I think it should be the problem of this Bill. And I'm wondering if you've got anything that you can comment on about if a line is going to be abandoned and sold for salvage. What about such things as ballast and returning it back to its, if you wish, its natural state?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can tell the member that rural municipalities now have the authority under the legislation . . . under their legislation to enact bylaws that would do what the member is requesting be done.

And I'm advised that the courts . . . There was a challenge to whether or not municipalities had that kind of authority, legislative authority. The courts have ruled that they do.

And we have many municipalities that have enacted bylaws that ensure that if a railroad leaves a particular area, they have to restore the area to its original condition.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 20 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(16:45)

THIRD READINGS

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

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Bill No. 52 — The Railway Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

ROYAL ASSENT

At 16:48 Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took her seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

- Bill No. 7 - The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 14 - The Provincial Auditor Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 27 - The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 51 - The Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 23 - The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 24 - The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 25 - The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 6 - The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 31 - The Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 22 - The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 40 - The Teachers' Dental Plan Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 41 - The Teachers Superannuation and Disability Benefits Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 54 - The Education Amendment Act, 2001
- Loi de 2001 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation
- Bill No. 39 - The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 1 - The Partnership Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 15 - The Credit Union Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 32 - The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2001
- Loi de 2001 modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Cour du Banc de la Reine
- Bill No. 55 - The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal (Regulatory Reform) Act, 2001
- Bill No. 9 - The Power Corporation Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 50 - The Mineral Resources Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 10 - The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 11 - The Freehold Oil and Gas Production Tax Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 3 - The Historic Properties Foundations Act

- Bill No. 34 - The Saskatchewan Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (Treaty Land Entitlement) Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 29 - The Student Assistance and Student Aid Fund Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 16 - The Film Employment Tax Credit Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 45 - The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 33 - The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 49 - The Land Surveyors and Professional Surveyors Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 19 - The Land Titles Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 20 - The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 43 - The Police Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 35 - The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 36 - The Public Trustee Consequential Amendment Act, 2001
- Loi de 2001 apportant les modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The Public Trustee Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 44 - The Prairie and Forest Fires Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 26 - The Hearing Aid Sales and Services Act
- Bill No. 4 - The Registered Nurses Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 5 - The Dietitians Act
- Bill No. 13 - The Class Actions Act
- Loi sur les recours collectifs
- Bill No. 12 - The Water Corporation Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 53 - The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2001
- Bill No. 52 - The Railway Amendment Act, 2001

Her Honour: — In Her Majesty's name, I assent to these Bills.

Her Honour retired from the Chamber at 16:54.

The Speaker: — I wish everyone a good Canada Day weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:55.