

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again today I have a pile of petitions from people right across my constituency who are concerned about the Fyke report and the effect these recommendations are going to have on health care in our constituency:

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 who have signed these petitions are from Rose Valley, Archerwill, Kelvington, Lintlaw, and Nut Mountain. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present 19 petitions 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 all over southern Saskatchewan.

I so present.

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, Kelvington, Sturgis, Oungre.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

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

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

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

I so present.

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

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

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

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from Storthoaks, Carnduff, Redvers, Bellegarde, Alida, Wakaw, Regina, Antler, Maryfield, Fairlight, Gainsborough, and a number of places across Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to present a petition from citizens concerned about high utility rates. 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 more substantial power and energy relief to Saskatchewan customers.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Paynton, Battleford, North Battleford, and Delmas, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

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

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

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Bangor,

Stockholm, Churchbridge, and Kamsack.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by the citizens concerned about the high energy costs of 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 the good citizens from Regina, Saskatoon, and Elbow.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again I rise in the Assembly to bring forth a petition for the improvement of cellular telephone coverage in the Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause 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, from Leoville, from Shell Lake, and Mildred.

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.

These are petitions of citizens of the provinces on eight matters that are tabled as addendums to previously tabled sessional papers.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you some special people in my life who are in your gallery today. My mom, Cherry Lackey from Weyburn; and my niece, Dayna Ryan, and her children Brendan, Katherine, and Lauren.

And they're here to visit with us today and see and observe in the House, so I'd like all members to help me welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like

to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today, Mr. Ken Miller who's seated in the east gallery, accompanied by his son Ben.

Mr. Miller is one of our farmers from southwest of Avonlea. He raises cattle, and particularly Belgian Blue cattle. Ken is the past president of the Canadian Belgian Blue Association and presently the manager of that association. One of the fellows who keeps rural Saskatchewan going out there.

His son, Ben, is attending grade 10 at Avonlea High School.

I hope that all members will welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly a constituent of mine sitting in your gallery, Mr. Ken Rauch, who as many members will know is quite a keen and astute follower of Saskatchewan politics.

And I'd like other members to join with me in welcoming Ken to the Assembly here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a guest in your gallery. Mr. Charles Day is the president of Battlefords Community Cablevision.

They employ about 25 full-time staff, Mr. Speaker, and a number of summer students as well. And they provide cable service of course in the Battlefords, Biggar, Kindersley, Rosetown, Unity, Wilkie, Lashburn, Maidstone, and Meadow Lake.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just ask all members to join with me in welcoming Mr. Day to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Big Sky Farms Opens New Hog Operation

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the opportunity along with 500 other individuals to attend the grand opening ceremony of Big Sky Farms latest hog operation near Rama — their fifth such project.

This 5,000-sow operation has six barns in total and it is expected to produce about 120,000 pigs per year. Also this operation will employ 40 people year round in the Rama and Hazel Dell areas, with an annual payroll of \$1.4 million.

Local farmers will also benefit from this operation since about 800,000 bushels of feed grain will be required for a large feed mill being constructed at a seventh location also near Rama. Needless to say, this will be for the most part a benefit for my constituency.

However, Mr. Speaker, such a large hog operation does not come without a great deal of controversy. Since this idea was presented to area residents a few years ago, some have become concerned about matters with health and the environment, many of which I have raised with the Minister of Agriculture. Residents living in the immediate area of the barns are concerned with potential air, ground, and water pollution. It will be the task of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food to ensure that these concerns are addressed with the utmost safety and well-being of area residents in mind, now and in the future.

I would like to extend my congratulations to the members of the Rama Hog Ventures Committee for their vision and commitment to this idea. I would especially like to recognize two members of that committee. Louis Korchenski and Lorne Matsalla are two area farmers who have dedicated much of their time in ensuring that this dream has become reality.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this legislature to join me in congratulating Big Sky Farms on the opening of their new operation near Rama and wish them the best of luck in their future endeavours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Birth Announcement

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell this House and people that are watching us some more good news in Saskatchewan. And I just want to point . . . it's not about health care or highways or economic development, Mr. Speaker but another subject that the opposition likes to talk about and that's the Saskatchewan population.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has all kinds of reports from all kinds of agencies but I would like to tell them about a report I received last night at 10:50 and it came from Melville hospital and not in a brown envelope, Mr. Speaker.

Last night, July 4, at 10:50 p.m. my daughter, Kim Osika-Schick gave birth to my second grandchild, a boy, Colby Ron Osika-Schick who weighed in at 8 pounds and 5 ounces thereby solidifying the city of Melville's status as a city and adding one more to the population of this great province of ours, Saskatchewan.

Needless to say, my wife Barb and I are thrilled and I look forward to meeting the newest member of our family tomorrow.

And you know something, Mr. Speaker, we talked about this, these marvellous events in our lifetime, and it's as if the circle of life in my family has been completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Aurora Karate Club Recognized in *Guinness Book of World Records*

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the enthusiastic applause from the government.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to bring our Hon. Assembly some interesting news of an extraordinary event that took place last Saturday, June 30, in the village of Paddockwood. The village needed their old museum demolished and acquired the services of the Prince Albert Aurora Karate Club for their assistance in this endeavour.

Mr. Speaker, the Aurora Karate Club had already achieved worldwide acclaim for their demolition abilities as they were already recognized by the *Guinness Book of World Records* for their speed of demolition for a 1996 event. Approximately 500 people attended the demolition, Mr. Speaker, but the most notable attendee was a camera crew from the television series, *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* The camera crew from the United States were on hand as the karate club tried to set a new record in the demolition of a condemned building.

Although the walls were built of double reinforced lumber and contained twice as many nails as today's modern structures, the museum did indeed come down in record time.

Mr. Speaker, the old record of three hours and six minutes established in Watson was easily beaten by a new time of two hours and thirteen minutes. The demolition will be aired in October, Mr. Speaker, for the viewing of all members.

But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join me in congratulating the Prince Albert Aurora Karate Club on establishing themselves once again in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

IPSCO Joins Aboriginal Employment Program

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier, Roger Phillips, and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs signed an important agreement on Aboriginal employment. Including Saskatchewan's growing Aboriginal population in a meaningful and constructive way in Saskatchewan's bright future is a goal that this government is committed to achieving. And we want to ensure that Aboriginal people are fully able to participate in and contribute to the social and economic fabric of this province.

The Government of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Employment Development Program is helping achieve this goal. To date, the Aboriginal Employment Development Program has helped over 900 Aboriginal people find employment across Saskatchewan. This program allows Aboriginal people to compete for jobs based on their skills and qualifications. The goal is to have a proportional number of Aboriginals, based on the numbers in the province's population, employed at all occupational levels.

And yesterday, IPSCO Saskatchewan became the 32nd partner to join the Aboriginal Employment Development Program. This new partnership will ensure that IPSCO's workplace will become more accessible to Aboriginal people. IPSCO will also be working with the Aboriginal community to promote employment opportunities and to provide training linked to employment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate IPSCO for becoming involved in such a worthy partnership. Initiatives like this will enable Saskatchewan's workplaces to become more inclusive and attractive places to be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hafford Central Athletes Earn Silver at Provincials

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations are in order for Hafford Central's Wendy Linnell and Joleen Saccucci who returned with silver medals from the Provincial Track and Field held in Yorkton's Century Field on June 1 and 2. This is the first year the provincial track and field meet was held in Yorkton. Over 1,000 high school track and field superstars flooded the hotel and restaurant chains in the city for this two-day event.

Two students were able to represent Hafford Central on the central district team to participate in this final climb to track and field stardom. A grade 9 student in junior athletics, Joleen Saccucci shows outstanding upper body strength and promise for future medals in competitive field events. Joleen obtained a provincial silver standing in shot put and remains in the junior category for another year.

Four silver medals were achieved in each of the track and field events Wendy Linnell participated in. A grade 10 student at Hafford Central, Wendy is another young athlete who shows tremendous promise. Her long legs and endurance do well for her in long-distance running and jumping events. Her ambition and stamina give foundation to her great athletic prowess. Wendy received a silver standing in the 800 metre, 1,500 metre long distance runs, and silver medals in long and triple jump — outstanding.

And once again congratulations to Wendy and Joleen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Star Wars Proposal by United States

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my opposition to the United States government's proposals to build a missile defence shield commonly referred to as Star Wars.

If constructed, the US (United States) Star Wars plan will violate the anti-ballistic missile treaty and has the potential to trigger another round of nuclear weapons proliferation. It also threatens to damage relations between the United States and both China and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Speaker, the position that the Government of Canada takes on Star Wars will be extremely important because if approved the Star Wars technology will become a central part of our NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command) operations.

The former minister of External Affairs, Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, was a strong opponent of Star Wars, and it is important that the federal government be urged to maintain that strong position when a final decision on Star Wars is made.

It is thus urgent that citizens press Ottawa to reject the US Star Wars plan. And I'm anxious to support citizens groups who are working on this issue. Star Wars involves spending tens of billions of dollars on unproven defence shield technology that has failed much of the testing done it so far.

I invite all hon. members to think of the potential that exists to invest that money instead in measures that will genuinely address human needs and build a more peaceful world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Annual Fête Fransaskoise in Willow Bunch

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had a chance to stand and talk about the 11th annual German Sommerfest that's taking place in Humboldt later this summer, and today I'm very pleased to stand today and talk about the 22nd annual Fête fransaskoise that's taking place in Willow Bunch. And if you'll permit me, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, I'd like to read a little bit of a description of the Fête fransaskoise.

La Fête fransaskoise est un événement culturel majeur, où francophones et francophiles se rassemblent pour célébrer et promouvoir la vitalité de la culture fransaskoise en Saskatchewan. Pour cette occasion, la population francophone de la Saskatchewan se réunit dans un climat familial afin de développer un sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté française. La Fête offre une occasion idéale aux artistes locaux et à ceux des autres provinces de se faire connaître. Chaque année, cette célébration accueille au delà de 1000 personnes et quelque 120 artistes. La 22e Fête fransaskoise se déroulera du vendredi 3 août au dimanche 5 août 2001 dans le magnifique village de Willow Bunch.

(Translation: The *Fête fransaskoise* is a major annual cultural event where Francophones and Francophiles get together to celebrate and promote French culture in Saskatchewan. On this occasion, Saskatchewan's Francophones gather in a family atmosphere to develop a sense of belonging to the French community. The *Fête* provides an ideal opportunity for local artists and those from other provinces to make a name for themselves. Each year, the *Fête* welcomes over a thousand people and a hundred and twenty artists. The 22nd *Fête fransaskoise* will be held from Friday, August 3 to Sunday, August 5, 2001, in the magnificent village of Willow Bunch.)

Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, I hope everybody who's in the area would take in the Fête fransaskoise the first weekend in August. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Surgical Waiting Lists

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my question is for the Premier. On March 17, 1999, the NDP's (New Democratic Party) then minister of Health made the

following announcement, and I will quote:

The government will move quickly to shorten waiting times for surgery based on the recommendations of the task team on surgical waiting lists.

Today, which is more than two years later, Saskatchewan has the longest surgical waiting lists in all of Canada and they are getting longer, Mr. Speaker, every day.

Obviously, not only has the NDP not moved to quickly address the growing waiting list, but it's also obvious that the NDP hasn't moved at all.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain to the thousands of Saskatchewan families who are suffering on Canada's longest waiting lists why the NDP has failed to take any action to shorten surgical waiting times and why things are actually getting worse day by day?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's a real honour to have the Leader of the Opposition ask some health questions. We had a whole month of May with questions only on the last day of the month about health. So it's a real honour to have him ask these questions.

What we have been doing is we have been working with all of the provinces in western Canada around the wait list issue because it's a problem in every one of these provinces that has to be addressed.

What we know is that 51 per cent, approximately, of the people on the wait list are for ophthalmology — cataracts — or for orthopedic hip and knee replacements. That's about half of those numbers.

But what I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that if we had followed the plan that those members opposite had set out in 1999, we would have \$292 million less in our health budget right now. If we took that money out of the acute care area, where we spend 784 million that would be a 37 per cent cut in acute care right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the opposition has been asking dozens and dozens of questions on health care. I only remember getting one answer and that's when the Health minister said it was SERM's (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) fault that there was bad water in North Battleford.

Mr. Speaker, the problem with the NDP is that they glibly promise a lot of things, but they don't deliver. The NDP said they would hire nurses. What did they do? They fired nurses. Then they said they would reduce waiting lists. I read the quote. But now, waiting lists have mushroomed out of control. The NDP record on health care is their record, whether they want to admit it or not.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we found out that the surgical waiting

lists in Saskatoon have increased by 50 per cent — 50 per cent, since 1999. Today, we find out that surgical waiting lists in Regina are also at an all-time high.

Will the Premier stand up and admit that his NDP government's management of the health care system has been a complete failure? And will he tell the House and Saskatchewan people how he plans to pick up the pieces of the NDP's crumbling health care system?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we have been working with many of the challenges in the health care system, but we are very proud of the people who work in that system, who have provided good care in this province, and they're continuing to work with us to solve the problems.

What we know from the statistics is that Saskatchewan has the highest rate of cataract surgery in the country. We're providing more of those surgeries than any other place. But I want to remind people that if we had \$292 million less in our budget this year, which is what those members opposite proposed, then we would be not . . . we would not have our home care program — \$86 million. We wouldn't have our prescription . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, \$292 million. Home care, \$86 million that would . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, there's \$201 million just in the prescription drug plan and home care — that would be all gone if their \$292 million was taken.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is pretty shaky on his facts, particularly when it comes to the government record. He will not like the facts, Mr. Speaker, but the truth is that according to the Saskatoon Health District, surgical waiting lists in that city have increased by 50 per cent since 1999.

And now, Mr. Speaker, according to the Dr. Mark Ogrady, chief of surgery for the Regina Health District, waiting lists in Regina have tripled in just the past four or five years — that's a 300 per cent increase. According to Dr. Ogrady, someone needing a hip or knee replacement can expect to wait up to two years, by far the longest waiting time in the entire country and getting worse every day.

Obviously whatever action the NDP has taken over the past two years has been a dramatic failure. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier finally face the facts and admit that the NDP's management of waiting lists has been a dismal failure and hurting people are neglected for far too long?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely pleased that the member opposite asks about hip and knee surgery because that is an area where there is much demand. But what we know

from the CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information report on health care in Canada, they indicate that Saskatchewan's rate of hip replacement surgery is 70.9 for a hundred thousand population compared to the national average of 55.8.

Similarly the rate for knee replacement surgery is 78.2 for a hundred thousand population . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the knee replacement surgery, we provide 78.2 per hundred thousand population compared to a national average of 59.9. So we have the second-highest rate for both of those kinds of surgery in the country as to the amounts.

We know that from 1990 to the year 1999, about a 10-year period, there was an increase of surgeries from 80,000 to 94,000. What we're going to do is we're going to continue to work with the professionals and others who do this work. We're not going to go with the kind of plan that they had which was to cut everything.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Premier. Yesterday when the Saskatchewan Party raised the issue of Saskatchewan's growing waiting lists, the Minister of Health actually tried to argue that waiting lists are improving. It is obvious that the minister is not paying attention because everyone else in Saskatchewan knows that our waiting lists are growing out of control.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP should be embarrassed about this massive mismanagement of our health care system. Long waiting lists hurt individuals and their families; long waiting lists hurt our children and our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, what is the Premier going to do for the thousands of families whose lives are on hold because of ever-growing waiting lists?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we are doing is we are working with the professionals in the system to keep improving the management of the surgical spaces.

We know we have challenges around getting sufficient staff to run all the operating rooms that are available. We know we have challenges in doing scheduling; we know we have challenges in recruiting specialists across the country. But we're not alone. We share that problem with all across the country.

What I would say though is, the members opposite talk about wiping out health district administration. That's only \$50 million. With their proposed cuts of 292 million, you could wipe out all the health districts and still have a shortfall of \$242 million.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the Minister of Health has forgotten his NDP government's promises of two years ago.

In the 1999 election the NDP promised to reduce waiting lists by 30 per cent. Instead, waiting lists have grown in Regina and Saskatoon by as much as 50 per cent. People are suffering. And the problem is getting worse because waiting lists are getting longer every day. And yet the Minister of Health is trying to claim that waiting lists are improving. Mr. Speaker, that simply is not true.

People deserve better than the excuses we keep hearing from the Premier and his NDP government. Families suffering on seemingly endless waiting lists. They deserve better.

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, will the Premier agree that his government has failed Saskatchewan families? And will he share with the House what specific steps he plans to take to fix his government's health care mess?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the proposal that those members opposite made would have resulted in \$292 million less for health care than we presently have. The only result of that would have been a privatization that the member from Weyburn was very much in favour of.

We know that in that . . . in 1999 she said, I think that it should be an option. Why should we continue down the path we are when people are driven out of the province to look for health care? Why are we not looking at having privatized care in Saskatchewan and keeping the money here if that's what we're going to do?

Mr. Speaker, as long as we are here in this government, we're not going down that path because we know that it doesn't work. We want to build on the solid work that has been done in this province for decades. We're going to work with the people who have provided good health care and make it even better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Does this government and the Minister of Health realize the impact and the suffering that they are causing to Saskatchewan families and seniors? And will they start taking responsibility for their actions?

Every day we hear words coming out of the Premier's mouth, but there is not any action to back up all the talk. Saskatchewan families continue to suffer through the longest waiting lists in Canada. Thousands of children, like the 7-year-old boy we talked about yesterday, suffering and waiting.

Is there a family in the province that has not watched helplessly as a parent or grandparent struggled to live with the crippling pain of a knee or hip that just does not work any more.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's growing surgical waiting lists are not just a political problem for this government, but massive waiting lists create unnecessary pain and anguish for families in every community in our province. This government is all about talk with no action.

Will the Premier explain why the NDP has stood idly by while Saskatchewan waiting lists keep growing and families keep suffering?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, what we like to do on this side of the House is provide facts because that's the way that you can answer these questions. What we know is since 1991-92 to the present, the percentage annual increase of the . . . the percentage increase of the volume of hip and knee surgery performed in the province has increased by 21 per cent. We do 21 per cent more hip and knee surgeries this year than we did in 1991-92.

But as it relates to cataract surgery, over the same period, the increase has been 88 per cent — almost a doubling of the amount of surgeries.

So what we are doing is we're doing more surgeries, but we're continuing to work with the professionals because we have more to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel Investment in the Cable Industry

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SaskTel. Last year the NDP announced that SaskTel would be getting into the cable television business in the province of Saskatchewan where they apparently have no qualms about competing with existing Saskatchewan businesses providing employment for Saskatchewan families across this province.

Mr. Speaker, other telephone companies have spent millions of dollars looking at cable TV and they have . . . many have stepped away from pursuing that business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is how much of the taxpayers' money is SaskTel prepared to spend on this risky venture, all to compete with Saskatchewan businesses already in business in the province?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I want to provide the member with some factual information.

It's true that SaskTel had applied to the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) to provide digital interactive video service in our province. They did this because they know that customers want to watch TV and movies, surf the Internet, send and receive e-mail, and participate in electronic commerce such as home banking and shopping all in one bundle and all through SaskTel's Highspeed Internet network, and all on a television because not everyone has access to personal computers.

Mr. Speaker, what I can also tell the member is that SaskTel was involved in the cable industry in this province beginning in 1973, and they provided the network to cable companies in this province up until the PCs (Progressive Conservative Party) came to power in 1986.

But I can also tell the member that Forrester Research predicts that interactive television will become a \$20 billion a year industry and SaskTel is now a competitive Crown, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is right, SaskTel has certainly had a foray into the cable industry in the past, but now they will be going head-to-head, directly competing with Saskatchewan businesses in the province of Saskatchewan.

The minister, at the end of her answer, then went on to talk about how sound the technology is. Mr. Speaker, on May 17, the president of SaskTel appeared before the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations, and here's what he had to say about SaskTel getting into the cable TV business:

The fact of the matter is (he says) this is a murky area. Nobody's quite certain of whether or not there is a sound and valid business case here.

And he goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, “. . . there's a lot of loose ends.” That's what Mr. Ching had to say. But apparently SaskTel is plodding ahead into this murky area anyway.

They will be competing with private sector companies including the Battleford Community Cablevision, which is a co-operative, Mr. Speaker. No doubt the 20-plus families who benefit from the jobs created by BCC (Battleford Community Cablevision) are wondering why their own government would directly compete with their employer.

The question to the minister is this: why does the . . . what does the minister have to say to these families who benefit from employment at Battleford Community Cablevision? Why are the NDP using Crowns to compete with co-operatives in the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'd like to remind the member, and obviously if they care to listen, that SaskTel is the only entity in the province that has the kind of infrastructure that can go to all communities in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, what we're trying to do as a government is to connect Saskatchewan to the future. And in fact that was the theme of our Throne Speech and our budget. We're connecting people to the future in terms of our physical infrastructure, information highway, and highways, education, health care, economic development, and agri-value, Mr. Speaker.

This government is all about going forward and not going backwards, as those members of the opposition would want us to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, if it's the economic development strategy of this government and that minister to compete with Saskatchewan business and co-ops, the only thing they're connecting people to is the highway out of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the question to the Premier, the NDP recently released its so-called economic development strategy, the *Partnership for Prosperity*. As each day pass, Mr. Speaker, it's becoming clear that this document is all walk and no talk. Consider that on page 12, the NDP pay lip service to the importance of the co-op sector.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the *Partnership for Prosperity* goes on to say and I quote:

Crown corporations help existing businesses grow and also attract new businesses to the province.

Mr. Speaker, how in the world can the NDP justify SaskTel getting into cable TV and competing with the co-op sector when it flies in the face of their *Partnership for Prosperity*, their own document, Mr. Speaker.

The question to the Premier is this, who's right in this case? Is it the Minister of Economic Development and his *Partnership for Prosperity* or is it SaskTel who is defying the very statements within their own economic development plan? Who's in charge over there?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as the members will know, our government is investing \$70.9 million in the new CommunityNet. We are connecting community across community in this province to the high-speed Internet.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes that if we are to make progress in economic and social development in this province, our citizens must have access to the information highway and the new knowledge economy.

Now I know the member from Kindersley does not believe in the Internet, because he has said so in this House on several occasions. But we know, from listening to businesses in this province and listening to our citizens, that they want access to this new tool in order that we can compete in an international economy. It's not only for urban Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, but it's for rural Saskatchewan as well.

This is a government that's looking to the future and these members want to take us back to the past, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Drought Assistance

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, with every hot, dry, windy day out there, the drought situation in this province gets worse — 2001 has been the driest year on record in the Saskatoon area, Kindersley has had just 34 per cent of normal precipitation, and Swift Current has had just 36 per cent. The drought has reached the crisis level in many parts of this province and the NDP appears to be doing nothing and has no plan to address this situation.

Mr. Speaker, what is the NDP doing to address the growing drought problem in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I'd answered this question for the member and I answer it again for the member. And I say, Mr. Speaker, that in this province today we just recently announced the kinds of programming that we're going to do for livestock and the cattle people, and we've announced that. And we've received a fair bit of positive response, Mr. Speaker, on that piece.

I want to say to the member opposite that we have today safety net programs for the grains and oilseed side. And yesterday the member . . . and I quote what he said, he said that Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, indeed . . . or Alberta indeed pays the highest percentage per capita of any province in this nation, not Saskatchewan any longer.

And I say to the member opposite that's absolutely wrong. In this province today, Mr. Speaker, when you take a look at the farm income financial expenditures done by Ag Canada, today Saskatchewan leads the nation in province's contributing — leads the nation — making it \$4.36 per capita, Mr. Speaker; leading Alberta by two times as much as what they do, Mr. Speaker — two times as much as what they do, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the fact is the NDP is doing nothing as usual. The minister didn't even raise the issue in any substantive way at Whitehorse when he met with Agriculture ministers. The current safety net programs are inadequate to deal with the problem and the NDP has completely backtracked on the Premier's call for \$500 million in emergency farm aid.

Mr. Speaker, why has the NDP abandoned farm families in this province? Why is the government doing nothing to address the drought crises that we are experiencing in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — To the House, Mr. Speaker. In this province this budget, this government put in 95 million brand new dollars; 95 million brand new dollars that are going to help with the safety net. And also, Mr. Speaker, are going to help Saskatchewan farmers, grain and oilseed farmers, in helping them with . . . through CSAP (Canada-Saskatchewan Adjustment Program).

And I want to quote one more time, Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite said at the standing committee, because he's the guy who said that we have enough money today for farmers.

This is what he said:

Programs have been put into place in our province like AIDA and CFIP and others, and have been in large measure, I think, very well accepted in terms of the amount of money generated.

And, Mr. Speaker, today the member stands up in the House and says why aren't you going to put more money into CSAP, why aren't you putting more money in for farmers, when he goes to Ottawa and talks to the standing committee and says we got enough money, Mr. Speaker. How does that work?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture minister knows full well that when there are dollars coming from Ottawa, either in the form of AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) or CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program), they are very well accepted — yes. The farmers gratefully accept those dollars, gratefully accept those dollars. And that's indeed what I said, Mr. Minister. They accept those dollars gratefully because they have been given to them by the taxpayers of this, of the country of Canada.

The NDP have been promising, Mr. Speaker, a long-term safety net for 10 years, ever since they ripped up the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts. And that minister, along with every other minister you have had in the NDP administration, have sat on their hands and have done nothing, nothing, to put in terms a long-term safety net to replace that. And you know that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Would the member put his question through the Chair.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, this minister has . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Would the member put his question.

Mr. Boyd: — This minister has accomplished nothing to do any substantive help for agriculture in this province. The NDP have not put in place a long-term safety net as they promised they would. Mr. Speaker, what is this minister and this government going to do with the very serious drought situation that farmers are faced with in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that that member has got so passionate about agriculture. And I say this, Mr. Speaker, very seriously. Because this member here today, he supports his leader, the opposition leader. And the problem that we have in this province today is partly due to, with that member who sat in the opposition benches in Ottawa.

Because when provinces, Mr. Speaker, were in Ottawa — when provinces were in Ottawa — saying we need money, more money for Saskatchewan-Canadian farmers, the Leader of the

Opposition says, we're not providing any more money for Saskatchewan-Canadian farmers, Mr. Speaker. And he votes against \$300 million that comes out of Saskatchewan-Canadian farmers in the loss of the Crow.

That's what that leader supports. And then the member opposite gets on his feet today and he supports the member opposite and the leader of that party. Because today, Mr. Speaker, the critic of Agriculture is married to Mr. Day's policies; is married to the Reform policies of the past. And they, Mr. Speaker, are not any different than the people in Ottawa because it's them that have cost Saskatchewan farm families their dollars in this province today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 224 — The Government Accountability Act

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move first reading of Bill No. 224, The Government Accountability Act.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

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

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To assist us in the process of the committee this afternoon, I'm very glad to welcome to the House Mr. Dan Perrins, who is deputy minister to the Premier. Behind Dan, Ms. Bonita Heidt, who is the director of administration and information systems. Just behind me, the assistant director in senior management services and executive assistant to the deputy minister, Mr. Jim Nicol. And to my right, my chief of staff, Kathie Maher-Wolbaum.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I would like to welcome the Premier with his officials into the legislature to account for the entire government, because of course we know Executive Council does oversee the entire government of the province of Saskatchewan.

I'd also like to welcome his officials here today. We have opportunity to bump shoulders once in a while in the corridors of the marble palace here and we're certainly pleased that they

could accompany the Premier to assist him in answering questions today.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to start out with perhaps some general questions of principle and philosophy. I think we all know that it's important that we in elected life strengthen the public trust in elected representatives.

And we also know that the government has a responsibility to strengthen the public trust in governments. And that includes the Premier, the Premier's ministers, the staff of the various departments, and so on right down to the service providers on the front line. We recognize that they all play a very key role, but certainly the buck always does stop at the Premier's desk. And his views on issues of public trust are extremely important.

My first question then to the Premier is simply, does he support and does he agree with the principle of ministerial accountability?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chair, yes, I would support that relatively age-old concept in the British parliamentary system of ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Then simply my next question will be, is, under what circumstances would he demand a resignation of a minister for, in his words, not complying with the principle of ministerial accountability?

What would . . . where would the lines be drawn in the sand, so that the people of Saskatchewan might know when he would call his ministers into question about their performance and in fact would exercise ministerial accountability and ask for the resignation of the minister?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, I think the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, is obviously leading to a conclusion where he'll ask me at the end of this line of questioning to challenge one or other of the current ministers of the Crown in this province. I think that's where we're coming to so perhaps we should just go there right away, Mr. Chair.

Obviously ministers of this government — ministers, I believe, of every government — take their responsibilities very, very seriously. If the Leader of the Opposition has any particular concern about any particular minister or ministry, I invite him to address the concern.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And we may get there, Mr. Premier, but really we need to know first of all where do we draw the lines. I think obviously you must have told this to your ministers.

I think in order to increase public confidence and public trust in government, it would be very good for the Premier to put on the record what he considers to be the crossing of the line where ministerial accountability, or the principle of ministerial accountability, would cause him to request the resignation of a member. I think that's a very appropriate question. No matter where it's leading, I think everyone in Saskatchewan has the right to know the answer to that question.

The Chair: — Order. Would the committee please come to

order for a moment. The Chair's very fortunate to have guests here in the gallery today. And the Chair requests leave to introduce guests, to introduce guests that are in the Speaker's gallery.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much.

It's not very often that I have visitors in Regina and I'm happy to have the most important people in my life. It's the love of my life, Karen Addley, and my sons David, Eric, and Connor Addley. And I'd ask the committee to please warmly welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker or Mr. Chair, I think the member opposite would understand — as all members would — that in the functioning of a government there is the administration and ongoing daily functioning of government. There is the political role in government which is the role of setting of policy. Ministerial responsibility is fundamental in the setting of policy for government; in the assurance that the policy is being adhered to and followed; that the policy is explained to the legislature; is responsible to the legislature to answer for that policy and the expenditure of public dollars; is equally responsible to explain public policy and commitments made to the general public and be available to that general public either through the press or face to face.

Those are very significant components of the minister's role in government. There is a role for the administration of government and for civil servants and for public service who will be charged with responsibilities, and have a responsibility to fulfill those responsibilities in a dutiful manner that serves the public well; that adheres to all the policy and the principle, and the law of the land.

(14:30)

There are areas of government, which we set aside as judicial, and quasi-judicial, where, in the instance of the courts, all decisions will be made by the courts without ministerial or political influence.

There will be issues of prosecutions within government. There will be regulatory bodies within government who are charged to carry out their responsibilities without the political input or direction from the minister of the Crown.

And so I think in this broad range of responsibility, we provide government's responsibility. And then we appear to this

legislature, and are available to answer all of the questions of the opposition. We appear to members of the public, and ultimately we all go before the people for their test.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Premier for starting down the road towards answering the question.

The people of Saskatchewan often ask me, as the Leader of the Opposition, what's the new Premier like. Perhaps he gets similar questions about, you know, what's the Saskatchewan Party official opposition like. And those are fair questions, and I think the public has a right to insight as to what makes us tick, what our values are, and where we do draw lines as far as responsibility is concerned.

I certainly have expectations of my colleagues in caucus, and my staff. And I'm sure they have expectations of myself as a leader. So I think it's very important that the Premier perhaps be a little more explicit. And he's talked about what he considers to be the good proponents that would cause one to have confidence in a minister, but he still hasn't told this Assembly and the people of Saskatchewan where they cross the line.

For instance, if a minister commits a Criminal Code offence and is convicted of a crime, I would expect that he would consider that a matter of ministerial accountability where the line had been crossed and he would demand a resignation.

He can confirm or give a different opinion here in the House. But I'd like to also know what other conditions he would consider to be so serious on the part of his ministers that he would call for their resignation?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, in my experience which has been of some years now in opposition and sitting on government benches, and now this much shorter experience in the office of the Premier, it has been my experience with colleagues that I have worked with that it has never been a circumstance where a resignation has been demanded, because in those circumstances where resignations have occurred, they have been volunteered. Volunteered by honourable men and women who, understanding their own circumstance, will have decided it is only appropriate in that circumstance to tender a resignation. I think that would be the case with any one of my current colleagues. I have no doubt about that. Obviously if there is a breach of law, a significant breach of law, that would be a breach of ministerial responsibility, but not particularly ministerial responsibility but in fact . . . or our responsibility as a member of this House and government.

Mr. Chair, what I do not have is a long list of criteria under which a minister would be obliged to resign. We are, Mr. Chair, mature men and women who are elected to this House who . . . this is not a circumstance of a military organization. We will each, I believe, seek to fulfill our duties with honour, with respect to the institution, and with respect to the people of the province.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. My next question for the Premier is, if a minister is leaving his department, supports or allows his department to have a

communication strategy which misleads the people of Saskatchewan, would he consider that grounds to question ministerial accountability and ask for the resignation of a minister?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I think, Mr. Chair, if the Leader of the Opposition has a particular instance or a particular ministry or a particular issue he would like to raise in the process here of the estimates of the department, please raise it. What I am not going to engage in is a great deal of hypothetical what if, what if, what if.

If there is an if that the member wants to raise, please raise it and we'll deal with it.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. We would certainly like the Premier to be very public with the principles upon which he evaluates his ministers, but I will be specific.

His minister responsible for SERM leads a department who's communication strategy, even though they had knowledge that many residents had unsafe drinking water in Saskatchewan, their communications policy was to say to the public your drinking water is safe.

Now that has an impact on the very health, perhaps even the very lives of Saskatchewan people. As you as the Premier knows, we received the document, it was a cabinet decision item, in which a communications strategy was outlined. And it indicated that there were serious problems with drinking water in Saskatchewan. Many communities had unsafe drinking water, improperly tested drinking water, and yet the communication strategy was to tell the people of Saskatchewan — some of whom were consuming unsafe drinking water — that everything was fine and that their health was not at risk.

Can the Premier condone that kind of misleading communication?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — It is helpful, Mr. Chair, when the Leader of the Opposition comes to the point.

In this circumstance, as I understand the circumstances — and we've discussed this, I think, several times in the course of this sitting of the legislature — what was brought forward to the opposition was a draft document that had some proposals around communication strategies within it. This, Mr. Chair, was not a decision of the minister or the government.

It will be a long time before the Leader of the Opposition has this experience, but if in government he would find that he will be advised by many people, many draft documents will be provided. Ultimately the Premier, the cabinet, and the caucus will decide on the policy. No such policy was ever put in place.

And just while we're on the subject of water, this government, in my view, ever since the issue was raised by the very tragic circumstance in Walkerton, has taken very definitive and very positive steps forward in dealing with concerns about water in our province. And there may be no better example than in the very unfortunate circumstance of North Battleford, where once we were alerted to the circumstance in North Battleford, this Minister of Environment, the Minister of Municipal

Government, the Minister of Health through the Public Health field, the Battlefords Health District acted very quickly, very definitively.

We've established an inquiry to get exactly the truth of what happened in North Battleford. We have since worked with that community to ensure an infrastructure that is safe and secure for the citizens of North Battleford. Mr. Chair, this is a circumstance where I have much confidence in the activities of the ministers who have been involved.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, the document that was released to us did not say draft on it. It did have the name of the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management on it. It was presented to caucus.

If this information is not correct, I would ask the Premier to categorically deny that that document ever was considered around the cabinet table.

It certainly was not a draft. Every indication leads us to believe that the minister actually endorsed sending a document to cabinet that suggested that the communication strategy misleading the people of Saskatchewan. I would have expected that at that point the Premier would have called for the resignation of his minister for even bringing a document that suggested that the people of Saskatchewan be misled in a communication strategy that actually put their health at risk.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, perhaps if the member wanted to be helpful to the debate and the discussion here, he would provide to me a copy of this document to which he refers. Because I would be very, very interested to see if this document in fact had bore the signature of the minister. I'd be very interested to know if this document bore the signature of the minister.

Now the fact of the matter is . . . I can't be sure about this; I was not in the cabinet room at that time. But I'd be very interested to see the document and perhaps he will send his member to go and fetch a copy.

Again, again, Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is this: all sorts of advice will be provided to ministers and to cabinet and to caucus and government. Ministers, the cabinet, the caucus, and government in total will decide on public policy. And of course no such, no such decision was ever taken by this government.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Then I would just remind the Premier that in fact this document indicated that there was potential for a Walkerton-style tragedy or health concern in the province of Saskatchewan. That was contained in the document. The facts, since released, indicate that in fact there are many communities in Saskatchewan that had unsafe drinking water.

Now I'd also say to the Premier regardless . . . And I believe that that was an accurate document. I believe we tabled it here in the legislature; it has the minister's name typed on it. But set that all aside. The actual communication strategy that was espoused by the former associate minister of Health — right here in the House, it's on the record in *Hansard* — states water

quality in Saskatchewan is safe. Residents of Saskatchewan have no need to be concerned about their water. Everything is under control. It's being properly monitored.

Now the facts have come out the water wasn't being properly monitored. So whether the Premier argued that the document was legitimate or not, the facts are that the contents of the document have been the policy of his government. The policy being that there is unsafe water; they recognize that there is unsafe water in Saskatchewan to the point that it could create a replica of the Walkerton tragedy.

And the communication that we've heard from the government, the actual communiqués from the government were that the drinking water in Saskatchewan was entirely safe.

So how does the Premier account for the fact, whether he accepts the document or not, that the policies of his government were to mislead the people of Saskatchewan about the quality of their water? And why doesn't he ask for the minister's resignation?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, it was exactly this minister and this government who very, very publicly spoke of the communities in this province whose drinking water had quality issues. In some of those communities — I forget the exact number; 100-plus — in some of those communities, the quality issues were not health related in particular; they were quality issues related to taste, and smell, and odour. In other circumstances there were some health issues, some public health issues.

It was this minister, it was this government, that made this very public knowledge to the people of Saskatchewan. I don't understand how the Leader of the Opposition stands up and says that we were somehow endeavouring to hide these circumstances.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Premier is making my case for me. This information came to light in September. And yet it was only after the media exposed the problem, and I believe it was December, and consequently we saw further crisis in the year 2001, the current year, that the government admitted that there was a problem.

So in other words, to the Premier, there was a cover-up. There was a denial of a problem for a number of months that could have put the public, and in fact in North Battleford did put the public's lives at risk.

How can the minister condone such action?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the observations of the Leader of the Opposition using phraseology like cover-up is simply not the case. It was this government — it was this government — that after the Walkerton alert . . . and fair enough I think the whole country was given an alert by what happened in Walkerton, and so we should be. I mean we should be.

When this government heard that alert, as did other governments, but when this government heard that alert, immediate steps were taken to work with communities. It was

this government — it was this government — that made that list operational.

It's this government that has worked with the community of North Battleford. And of course the community of North Battleford, everyone in North Battleford, throughout the months leading up to North Battleford, was unaware of the circumstance. As soon as that circumstance was known, this government acted.

Now, Mr. Chair, what I find interesting at best, in this whole discussion, is that to do this kind of work, to do the kind of work that the opposition wants a government to do and a minister to do through his department, requires people on the ground to do that work. And interestingly enough, in the most recent budget, the budget now which debate we're concluding, as we propose to in fact to add resources to the very departments that will protect our drinking water in this province, what does this opposition do? They stand up and they oppose it.

Not only do they oppose this, they criticize us very, very specifically for hiring the kind of people that will do this kind of work to protect the people of Saskatchewan and our communities and our drinking water supply.

So maybe as the Leader of the Opposition retakes his position in the House, he may want to explain his party, his opposition, to this budget, which provides resources to provide people . . . to provide that kind of quality care of our water in our communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:45)

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me just ask a very short question to the Premier. Can he confirm or deny that cabinet was made aware in September of 2000 that there was a potential for a Walkerton-type water tragedy in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, I can neither confirm nor deny; I was not a member of cabinet at that time.

Mr. Hermanson: — I recognize that the Premier was not the Premier when this happened. But does the Premier know . . . I mean the Premier was a senior adviser in the government of Mr. Romanow. Does the Premier know . . . Does the Premier know that cabinet . . . whether cabinet was aware, in September of 2000, whether there was a potential for a Walkerton-type of water tragedy in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I assume that the Leader of the Opposition was present in the House when the Minister of the Environment was here for his many hours of estimates. I assume we had opportunity to ask this question of those who in fact were present for these discussions.

What I know is this, Mr. Chair. After the wake-up call from Walkerton, after the wake-up call, this department through its ministry of the Environment, through its Water Corporation, through its public health work in the Department of Health,

through Municipal Government, have been concerned and have been working on these issues, which culminated in providing to the people of Saskatchewan a list of concern. Working with communities. Communities are always alerted if tests have shown to be of an issue or a problem in a community. There's always an alert provided right away.

When we faced the consequence in North Battleford, this government acted very quickly in conjunction with the community of North Battleford to work with them. We've now worked with that community to such an extent that we've been able to provide the infrastructure funding to rebuild an appropriate treatment facility for the community of North Battleford.

There is no doubt about it, Mr. Chair, that this government has taken this issue seriously. Its ministers have taken this issue seriously ever since last fall.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Chairman, this is our first opportunity in estimates dealing with Executive Council to deal with this issue. The last opportunity I believe was in June of the year 2000.

So in the intervening period between June of 2000 and now July of 2001, it is our responsibility to ask the Premier — who is responsible for Executive Council — whether or not he or any of his ministers were aware in September of 2000 that a . . . that the drinking water in Saskatchewan may not be safe and could lead to a Walkerton-style of tragedy.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Again, Mr. Chair, I repeat. After the circumstance in Walkerton the ministries of this government took this issue very, very seriously. It was this department for instance, Mr. Chair, that when an issue has been discovered in somebody's water supply in this province, it's this department that immediately — immediately — issues the boil-water advisory. It doesn't wait. It doesn't take chances. It immediately issues the boil-water advisory.

And that advisory, Mr. Chair, is not lifted — is not lifted — until there is absolute assurance that the water supply in a community is safe. That boil-water issue is not lifted. I mean it is in some ways I think difficult for communities when these boil-water orders are issued and not lifted until we are absolutely assured that the drinking water is safe.

That is the kind of thing that this government is taking this issue very seriously over and we will continue to do so.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, a brown envelope was received by the official opposition that indicated that in September of the year 2000, cabinet was made aware that a Walkerton-type tragedy could occur in Saskatchewan.

Was the Premier aware of that document prior to it being made public? And if so, will he inform not only this House but all of the people of Saskatchewan when he first became aware that there was a potential for this type of tragedy in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, I want to escape no

responsibility, but please understand — and the Leader of the Opposition knows this — that I was not sitting around the cabinet table last fall.

I became aware of concerns of the drinking water in this nation, as did the citizens of Canada, when the tragedy in Walkerton occurred. As I said, I think that woke us all up to that circumstance.

But I know for a fact that during the period of time following Walkerton, people in the civil service, the public service of the people of Saskatchewan, have been working very, very hard with communities — the very people that the Leader of the Opposition says we shouldn't hire; the very people the Leader of the Opposition says we should fire, in fact.

Now the fact of the matter is, I learn of leaked brown envelopes coming to the opposition when the opposition leaks them. Obviously that's what I learn about them . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member from Swift Current says we released the documents. Fair enough. I mean a letter came to me signed by the Leader of the Opposition. A letter came to me, which would purport that the Leader of the Opposition had been doing something that wasn't correct. It came to me signed . . .

An Hon. Member: — It wasn't signed by him, and you know that.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The member from Rosthern asks was it signed by him. Well I have the copy, it's signed by him. I mean, Mr. Chair, did we rush off to the media? No, we did not.

Now the fact of the matter is that from the time of — and I can read the chronology, if the Leader of the Opposition wants it, of events that occurred that lead up from the Walkerton circumstance, Mr. Speaker — now the fact of the matter is we took this seriously, we take it seriously, we worked with communities, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Chair, I'll rephrase my question to the Premier, trying to make this as easy as I possibly can for him to answer.

Whether the document was a draft or whether it was approved by cabinet, was the Premier aware of the potential for a Walkerton type of water tragedy in Saskatchewan before the opposition made public a document — a government document, a cabinet document — that was leaked?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Again, Mr. Chair, would the Leader of the Opposition please provide . . . he's referring to this document. It's the tradition of this House to provide right now a copy of the document to which he refers.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Chair, to the Premier, the document has been tabled. If he hasn't looked at the document, that's not my fault.

Because the document now is a public document . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. The two members involved in the debate is the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, and let's keep it that way.

Mr. Hermanson: — I would think the Premier knows that this is now a public document because we tabled it. It was a major issue of this session of the legislature.

Surely the Premier knows the answer to the question. If the Premier insists on refusing to answer the question — I'm not going to ask it very many more times, but I talked about whether or not the public would have trust in this government — if he refuses to answer this, this erodes trust of the Saskatchewan people in their government.

So I would urge the Premier — he's building a new record for himself — I would urge the Premier to give a very complete and simple answer to my question.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The member from Rosthern seems to want to ask a question, why doesn't he stand and ask the question?

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Was the Premier aware prior to the tabling of the document in this House that indicated there may be a Walkerton type of water tragedy in Saskatchewan? Was the Premier aware of this possibility prior to that event?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, after the Walkerton alert to the nation, I think we were all made aware of potential issues in the drinking water system. The Leader of the Opposition asks myself was I aware of any particular water quality problem, public health issue in this province, in September of last year. No I was not, Mr. Chair. No, I was not.

I was aware, as I hope we all were, of the potential problems that existed with drinking water in this province, as we were in the nation. But those, Mr. Chair, whose responsibility it is were hard, hard at work with communities and getting water testing done, working with communities.

And, Mr. Chair, as you well know and as everyone well knows, when the department was made aware of any issue, immediately boiled-water advisories were issued. We made public the list of communities where in fact there had been concerns.

When we were presented by the circumstance in North Battleford, we acted quickly with that community, as we continue to work.

But again I ask that Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Chair, how is it he can stand in this House talking about the need for safe water in the province when he and his colleagues will stand up and vote against this budget, when they stand up in question period and actually protest the hiring — protest the hiring — of individuals to help maintain water quality and safety around Saskatchewan? Would he please stand up and explain that position?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. The records show that the Premier didn't even vote for his Economic Development budget so he better be careful about his comments on voting . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . at least not the first

time you didn't.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, we have brought to the . . . the Premier has refused to tell the people of Saskatchewan when he first became aware of the contents of this document. Unless he changes his answer, we have to accept that he will refuse to be accountable to the people of Saskatchewan.

But there is another problem in his government, and this one is the opposite. This time we had a minister of his who wanted, who desired to make information public and hold the government accountable. And in this case it seems like the minister had to step out of the position of responsibility because your government was unresponsive to her concerns.

As you know there was another document leaked that was a memo, and I quote from Janice MacKinnon, minister of Economic and Co-operative Development, and it's two distribution lists, requests for information regarding Saskatchewan Information Services Corporation, also known as ISC. The former minister indicates:

It now appears, however, that ISC is going beyond this original mandate into other information technology areas.

In other words, it was going beyond the scope of its mandate. It goes on to say:

That this apparent expansion is of concern, as there are no concrete opportunities for significant new revenue from sources beyond the marketing of Lands and Geomatics given that:

- (1) SaskTel has the provincial mandate for the development of commercial e-commerce;
- (2) government information technology projects are tendered on a competitive basis, providing no preferential treatments to Crown entities;
- (3) the economic goal of growing the private information technology sector may be put at risk with further expansion of government in this area; and

the Information Technology Office is responsible for co-ordinating and managing the information technology needs and priorities of Executive Council.

I would like the Premier of Saskatchewan to indicate whether he agrees with his former minister, the Minister of Economic Development, who, who indicated that ISC had gone beyond its mandate or whether he agrees with, with the response to that memo from Mr. Fraser Nicholson which basically says that the ministers and the Premier and Executive Council, for that matter, have no business interfering in the affairs of agencies like ISC and should not be concerned if they go beyond their scope.

Where is the Premier's position? What is the Premier's position on these kind of issues?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition raises the concerns that were raised by the then minister. Those

concerns were raised. Those concerns were heard. And those concerns, Mr. Chair, have been addressed.

Mr. Hermanson: — Could the Premier tell us how those concerns have been addressed?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, they've been addressed through the work of that corporation, through the work of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation), through the ongoing work that we're doing with that, with that entity of government.

Mr. Hermanson: — Can the Premier be more specific and tell us exactly what is being done to address that problem?

(15:00)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair, I have had a little conversation with the minister responsible, and again as he has assured this House on many, many occasions, the fact of the matter is the mandate was set; it has been set in legislation and it has not changed.

Now the Land Corporation of course has expanded. It is part of Information Services; it is a broader concept. But the fact of the matter is the mandate is now in legislation and that mandate has not changed.

Mr. Hermanson: — Can the Premier express his comments or would he express his comments on the concern that ISC is going to occur significant shortfalls in revenue simply because they were counting on the sale of their technology to potential consumers who don't seem to be interested since the technology is not even currently up and running here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is a business plan to get this up and going, and it is expected over year . . . over time that ISC will generate revenues. What this is, Mr. Chair, is a very, very good news story, both in the updating of our ability to do land titles' work in this province and our ability to grow an information technology sector in this province. And I take it as quite a credit to ISC that we do in fact have people from around the country, around the globe, who are interested in what's happening in Saskatchewan through ISC.

And I can tell you this, Mr. Chair, the program has now been initiated in the community of Moose Jaw. It's up and running; they're working out the small start-up bugs, but in fact it's working. And this is going to be, I think, an exciting development for the future of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the Premier, in the letter to Mr. Frank Hart from Fraser Nicholson, the response to the minister's memo is:

I have serious concerns about the implication of the latest demand on the CIC's decision-making matrix and the authority of Crown corporation boards. It is my understanding that the boards of Crown corporations are charged with the authority for general superintendence.

Does the Premier subscribe to Mr. Nicholson's view that the, that the cabinet should have no input whatsoever into the decisions around entities like ISC?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No, Mr. Chair, I do not subscribe to that. And in fact the former minister raised some important concerns and, Mr. Chair, I repeat those concerns were taken seriously and those concerns have been addressed.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are just sending another copy of the document over to the Premier and I would just ask him to look at the very first page near the bottom of the second paragraph. It says:

Although some actions that have been taken remain in place on an interim basis, several key problems remain that pose an elevated safety risk and threaten the security of Saskatchewan's drinking water supplies to the degree that the potential for a Walkerton-type situation exists within the province.

That's in the synopsis of the proposal that was given to cabinet.

If you turn farther into the document to page 6 of the communications strategy . . . and I'll give the Premier just a minute to find that. It's about . . .

An Hon. Member: — I've got a sticky note on it.

Mr. Hermanson: — Oh there's a sticky note there so apparently he has found it. Under objectives, this is the communication objectives, first of all, the second bullet says:

Avoid criticism of former cuts to program and lack of provincial action.

So that's the communication plan — avoid criticism of former cuts to the program and lack a provincial action. And then the third bullet says:

Reassure the public that improvements and expenditures in this area are focused and appropriate.

Then farther down under key communication messages, the second bullet says:

The systems currently in place . . .

And this is very important:

The systems currently in place are effective, and further improvements are being made to follow the vision, objectives, and goals of the water management framework.

Now my question to the Premier, one last time, give him an opportunity to restore some credibility, was he aware of this situation prior to the first tabling of this document in the legislature by the opposition?

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — To ask for leave to introduce

guests, Mr. Chair.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank the members of the committee for giving me this leave.

Mr. Chair, in the west gallery I should like to point out two visitors to Regina and to the Assembly. They are my sister Cea and her husband, John Engbers from Edmonton, Alberta.

And I would ask the members to accord them a warm welcome. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I will repeat, I will repeat, I had no knowledge of this document in September of last year or contents thereof. Nor would I have had reason to have knowledge of this, not being a member of cabinet.

But the fact of the matter is the document, sure enough, the document that the Leader of the Opposition sends over here, I have scanned it, I can find nowhere in this document a signature of a minister of the Crown or ministers of the Crown. Nowhere can I find that signature. So the fact of the matter is, this document — I can say this for a fact — this document did not go to the cabinet table. I can tell you that for a fact. No document comes to a cabinet table for a cabinet decision that does not bear the signature of a minister or ministers.

Now here's exactly what happened. On November 20, not September 22, as this document indicates, on November 20, a document was signed by four ministers, each bearing some responsibility in this area, a document was signed. It was sent to the Treasury Board on December 14 of last year. It was dealt with by the Treasury Board.

It was received in cabinet on December 21, and as a result of the work that was done through the ministers in November, in December, and at cabinet, finally on December 21, it become part of the budget process.

It resulted in what this opposition has seen in the budget now under debate which are significant new resources around the infrastructure file for water; new resources for those individuals in the public service who are responsible and do the work of making sure that our water quality is safe and assured. And it's this very thing that these people have voted against and stood day after day protesting in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question to the Premier. The document that he just outlined that he is aware of with the December dates, did it contain the same quotes that I just read into the record regarding the synopsis where a Walkerton-type situation was identified as potentially occurring in this province? Is that same paragraph or a very similar paragraph that identifies the potential for a Walkerton-style crisis in Saskatchewan part of the document he just referred to?

And the second part of my question — Mr. Chair, members of the government side are making so much noise I don't think the Premier can hear me — the second part of my question . . . Do I need to repeat the first part? Did you hear . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay, just a sec.

The first part of my question was in the document the Premier just referred to with the December dates, did that document identify that there was potential for a Walkerton type of water crisis in Saskatchewan, worded similar to the document that we just gave him.

And secondly, in the document he referred to, did it contain a communications action plan or a strategy that also suggested that the public should be told that the systems currently in place are effective and further improvements are being made to follow the visions, objectives, and goals of the water management framework.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well the fact of the matter, Mr. Chair, is that I was neither in cabinet in September nor in November nor in December.

I can tell you for a fact that decisions made by this government, around this file, did not include a communications strategy that was suggested by someone in this document, did not include that kind of communication strategy.

What it did, Mr. Chair, was to establish a program that reflects in this budget, a program of putting money where money should be spent — in the infrastructure to prevent water quality issues in our communities, to enhance water quality issues in our communities. Money to those public servants who are charged with the protection of our drinking water, that's what's been the result of this work. And I'll stand behind that result. I'll stand behind this budget. And I just wish they would too.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it is obvious to every member of this House, and I'm sure to the people of Saskatchewan, that the Premier has tried to sidestep and dodge this issue in every way that he possible can. He's doing the NDP shuffle — one step forward, two steps backwards, and sidestep all the issues.

Mr. Chair, let's move on to the issue of health care. I would like to ask the Premier how many health care workers there are in Saskatchewan today in comparison to how many there were in 1999.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I do not have at my immediate disposal the exact numbers. We're having those brought to us. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to move on

to a broader question, when we get those specific numbers, we'll have them here shortly.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well we'll come back to that then. Let's discuss the Fyke report. Mr. Chair, the Fyke report was completed a few months ago. The Premier's response to the Fyke report was not to suggest whether he agreed with it, disagreed with it, which parts he supported or didn't support, but his response was to set up a Standing Committee on Health and ask that committee to basically just garner the response and the input of the people of Saskatchewan in regards to what was contained in the Fyke report. So it was a bit of a study of study.

And he indicated that it was not to make the . . . the standing committee was not to make any suggestions or recommendations but simply to be a sounding board.

Then we since found out that he and his government have set up a parallel process, parallel committees, to also review health care in Saskatchewan. And then of course we know that the former premier of Saskatchewan is also charged nationally with a health care review.

So I would just like the Premier to state for the record what credence he places on the Fyke report, what attention he'll pay to the Standing Committee on Health, what is the role of this parallel committee and what weight does it carry, and will he be prepared to make any specific comments on our specific positions . . . is he prepared to take any specific positions today on health care, or is he waiting until this process is completed? And if so, will this process, the review of the Fyke study and the parallel committee's work be done before the Romanow committee does its work?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'm appreciative of the questions that the Leader of the Opposition raises in this regard. I think we should have a good discussion about the role of the Fyke report and the future of Mr. Fyke's findings.

Just to rehearse, Mr. Chair, so we all recall. Mr. Fyke was asked to undertake this very, very significant study of the health care system in Saskatchewan, to look to the future, to assure the longevity of publicly funded health care in our province. We know he did a very, very thorough piece of work with health care, with health care providers across this province, with communities across this province, with district health boards. The opposition party took the opportunity to present to the Fyke Commission.

He is well known across Canada for his work in the health care field. He ultimately provided, to the people of Saskatchewan, to government, to this legislature, his report. An extensive report with a long, long list of recommendations and observations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we had several options . . . Mr. Chair, we had several options when this was presented. One could take the Fyke work and implement it holus-bolus. One could take the Fyke work and implement portions and reject portions. One could do what in fact I believe is the appropriate thing to do, which is to take this piece of work and have it not just available to legislators, not just available to the health care system, but available broadly to the people of Saskatchewan that they could

in fact share their views of his recommendations. And that's what we're doing.

(15:15)

And so we established a pioneering process to allow the people of our province — as citizens, as health care providers, as patients and clients of the system, as legislators, as members of political organizations and so on — to have opportunity to shape health care in the future by reacting to the Fyke Commission.

Now this is where it gets very interesting, Mr. Chair. Because once the Fyke Commission was public, his findings, some members of the opposition said, well this is horrible, many of these recommendations are horrible. Others were saying, but implement the report immediately. Don't give it any further study; just implement it.

We proposed therefore, Mr. Chair, that we should allow the public to have some feedback on it. When we suggested to try and raise this a little above the level of partisan politics by establishing an all-party committee, members of the opposition said, no, we'll be no part of it. No, we'll be no part of it. Well they've had a change of heart and they, mercifully, are part of it. But it took a long time to get them here.

Now we're going to listen to the people of Saskatchewan in number who are presenting to the committee, the legislative committee. We'll hear their views. We'll assemble those views. And working through those views, working with the Department of Health, we will develop a plan for implementation of a 21st century model for medicare in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now in the meantime of course, Mr. Chair, the need to provide quality health care services does not cease, and we continue. And the Leader of the Opposition wants to know what we're doing. Well we heard some of that today earlier in this House, where in this budget year we have dedicated fully 11.9 per cent growth in spending to the Department of Health.

Now, as has been pointed out, if we followed the plan identified by the Leader of the Opposition in the last election where he said, you freeze the spending to health care at the rate of inflation . . . That's what they said. You can't deny it. Freeze it at the rate of inflation.

Now I think the rate of inflation this year is about 1.9 per cent. Is that correct? 1.9 per cent. So health funding increase in this budget, had the Leader of the Opposition been in charge of the budget, would have been 1.9 per cent. Compare that, Mr. Chair, to the 11.9 per cent that has come in this budget with this government.

Now we've got challenges in health care. There's no doubt about that. We've heard some of the recent challenges around waiting lists. We've got challenges around securing health care providers and professionals and those who will assist in solving some of these waiting list problems and others. We've got challenges. No doubt about that. But can you imagine, Mr. Chair, what the challenge would be like if, according to their budget, we'd had \$292 million less in the Health budget this year. So

the fact is, Mr. Chair, we are moving ahead in the provision of health care services; we're not standing still. But in terms of reshaping for the long-term the health care system in the province, I tell you, Mr. Speaker, we are going to listen to the people of Saskatchewan, we are going to hear their voices, as we build this plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the Premier knows most of the increased funding for health care comes from the federal government, and the Saskatchewan Party official opposition indicated that any additional funding from the federal government would be earmarked in its entirety to health care in Saskatchewan.

But that being said, Mr. Chair, the Fyke report began by saying that health care in Saskatchewan was in crisis. Now crisis is a very strong word, extremely strong word. And as all members of the House know we've raised health care issues, which reinforced the fact that health care is in crisis in Saskatchewan.

Since Mr. Fyke has identified that health care is in crisis, how can the Premier . . . how can the Premier countenance . . . how can the Premier countenance the delay of the study that studies Fyke but yet makes no recommendations? And what is the role of the parallel group that are reviewing health care as well? And finally, what can the Premier tell the people of Saskatchewan as to any commitments, any new direction they will take in providing health care to Saskatchewan based on the work that has been done thus far?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I want to just return to provide the information that the Leader of the Opposition asked for in his initial question about the role of . . . the numbers of health care providers in the province. And I believe he asked it year over year . . . this year as opposed to last year.

Here are the exact numbers, Mr. Chair. March 2000, the numbers of people providing health care in the province of Saskatchewan were 23,358. These I believe are full-time equivalents . . . 23,358. In March 2001, 23,804. That is an increase, Mr. Chair, of 445.

That kind of development, Mr. Chair, would not happen . . . would not happen if we had in government today a party who believe that you can provide quality health care in this province by freezing the health budget at the rate of inflation. It wouldn't happen.

Now the Leader of the Opposition a moment ago made quite a statement. He got up and he said that the commissioner on medicare here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Ken Fyke, says in his report that health care in this province is in crisis. That's what he said Mr. Fyke says in his report. I have the report here.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to quantify that statement to show where in this report Mr. Fyke says that health care in Saskatchewan is in crisis?

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just in regards then to the number of health care workers, I believe this is . . . the question I asked the Premier was 1999 versus 2001, so I would

like to add the numbers for the year 1999 in comparison to the year 2001. And then would the Premier indicate, of those health care workers and however . . . whatever the adjustment is between the two numbers, what portion of that would be nurses, both registered nurses, LPNs (licensed practical nurse), any type, any kind of nurse.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I do not have here with me the two year from 1999. I can indicate from this which groups the health care provides according to their affiliation, their professional association or trade union, that members of SUN, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, working in March 2000 in the province totalled 5,187; in March 2001, the number is 5,202. And so that would be a growth in the total number of 15. That would be in those nurses who are represented by SUN.

Again, another roll up from . . . well we have the basic numbers from 1999. In 1999 the total number . . . Well again, Mr. Speaker, this is a different criteria — these numbers are not those numbers that are through the organized trade unions and so on. These now provide numbers from all health providers.

I'm presuming the earlier number that I gave did not include medical doctors. I don't see a list from the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association). So I want to assure the Leader of the Opposition we'll get the complete lists to him.

But this information would tell me that the total number of health care providers employed in the health sector, as derived from the SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) benefit eligibility system, in 1999 was 36,074; in 2000, 36,981 — in that calendar year the increase was 900.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the Premier. We would appreciate it if he could give us a consistent basis of the numbers, and probably the final number, which would include all health care providers under that broader definition would be the preferable, would be the preferable measuring stick.

Can the Premier assure the people of Saskatchewan that they have created 200 new health care positions? And these are new ones — these are not transferring people from one health district to another or from one level to another or from one facility to another. But in global terms, can the Premier assure us that they have met their goal, their commitment to increase the number of nurses in Saskatchewan by 200?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there is no question the number of health care providers has grown by well over 200 — well over 200. I do not have here before me the exact numbers from 1999 to date in the nursing profession specifically.

Now I want to get the information correct for the Leader of the Opposition. I want to get this correct. There's no use comparing apples and oranges and so on. So I think I would ask the Leader of the Opposition — so that we're very clear and so we can get the very accurate information — when he speaks of nursing, there are licensed practical nurses, as he knows, there will be registered nurses, there will be registered psychiatric nurses.

We will provide for the Leader of the Opposition all of those numbers engaged in the practice of nursing, whether it's LPNs,

RNs (registered nurse) or psych nurses. We will get the total number of all those involved in the nursing profession from 1999 to 2001.

Mr. Hermanson: — All right, I will take the Premier at his word that he will provide those numbers for us. Back to the Fyke report. I now have a copy of the report and on page 7, Mr. Fyke, Mr. Fyke reports, and I quote:

I do not believe the system is in crisis for reasons usually cited. Yet there is a crisis. It lies in our failure to identify the real problems and to act on their root causes. The usual response to problems . . .

And this is exactly the response I got from the Premier.

The usual response to problems is to add money to the system — enormous amounts in the past four years. Dissatisfaction remains high and the headlines are the same year after year, proving yet again that adding money without changing the culture of the system provides only temporary relief.

Can the Premier tell us whether he agrees or disagrees with Mr. Fyke's analysis of health care in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well I agree, Mr. Chair, with what Mr. Fyke says in his report on the very same page which the Leader of the Opposition wasn't too anxious to quote. And he says right here, Mr. Speaker: "The word "crisis" fuels political rhetoric and is (too) prominent." And . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, he does. He says: "I do not believe the system is in crisis for the reasons usually cited." Fair enough. But day after day the Leader of the Opposition and the Health critic will get up and talk about the system being in crisis.

Now I do share the view, I do share the view and apparently it's the view of the Leader of the Opposition, apparently it's the view of Mr. Fyke that we're not going to judge . . . we're not going to solve all of the problems in health care with money. That's for sure. Let us recognize that it is going to take substantial dollars to provide health care. We're not going to do it on the kind of plan that they advance. That's for sure.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have to go further. We have to look at the provision of home care services, the provision of preventative medicine, the provision of how we integrate services — acute to long-term.

We have to look at the kind of addictions treatments that are necessary and particularly in some areas of our province, some neighbourhoods of our communities. There is a whole broad range of issues and hence the broad scope of the Fyke Commission; hence his description of needing a quality council; hence his description of trying to re-establish the importance of the regional hospitals — on and on it goes; that's the work we're doing — the broad stuff.

But in the meantime, Mr. Chair, we believe that public resources need to be provided for the provision of health care and on this we will disagree with the Leader of the Opposition and some of his caucus who believe that there should . . . ought to be a prominent role for privatized services in this system. On

this we will not agree.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, I have not heard anything from the Saskatchewan Party on implementing private health care in Saskatchewan, but I have heard the former premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Romanow, indicate that he is considering private care . . . health care. He is reviewing the Swedish model which has extensively . . . (inaudible) . . . added the private health care component to what was entirely a public system in the past.

So the Premier better be pretty careful as to who he attributes which statements. It's actually more that that idea comes more from his own side or at least a former member of a former colleague of the Premier's than from the Saskatchewan Party.

I would also like the Premier to be sure to confirm that in fact I had quoted Mr. Fyke correctly when he indicated yet there is a crisis in health care in Saskatchewan. It's very important that the Premier maintain his credibility and certainly if that wasn't in the report I would have been prepared to withdraw it.

But I was correct and Mr. Fyke did recognize that there was a crisis. It is related to the fundamental delivery of health care in Saskatchewan. And I would challenge the Premier to retract the statement that it is not the responsibility of the opposition in a political forum to raise these issues. Certainly the Premier has not changed his mind from the days when he was in opposition and raised the issue.

(15:30)

And rightfully so. If an opposition cannot raise health care issues and point out to the government the failure and the needs in the health care system, something that affects the very life in many cases of Saskatchewan people and the well-being of families, then the Premier certainly has a different view of accountability and the role of members of the Legislative Assembly than the public has and certainly that the official opposition has.

We still haven't had an answer from the Premier as to what role this parallel committee or parallel process plays. Would the Premier indicate to the people of Saskatchewan who is involved in this parallel process, what weight he ascribes to this, and at what juncture they will report publicly to the people of Saskatchewan their recommendations for health care?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition was anxious to learn what some of his MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) are saying about health care and the potential privatization. Well we heard this earlier today in the House. This is a direct quote from his MLA from Weyburn, Weyburn-Big Muddy MLA, a quote:

One option Bakken put forward during the course of her campaign was the privatization of health services.

Quote. Quote. It's a quote from the member from Weyburn, and the member from Estevan ought to listen. It says here:

I think (she says, the member from Weyburn) I think it should be an option. Why should we continue down the

path we are when people are being driven out of the province to look for health care? Why are we not looking at having privatized care in Saskatchewan?

That's what she said. Now fair enough if the Leader of the Opposition doesn't know that his member from Weyburn is out there promoting privatized health care.

I have here a quote from the Saskatchewan Party MLA from Wood River. What does the Saskatchewan Party MLA from Wood River say:

The whole health care system needs a review. I'm in favour of private clinics.

Private clinics.

Here's a quote from the member from Kindersley, the member from Kindersley who said, on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) television:

If people want to and are prepared to pay for the services, why won't you allow it?

Now that, Mr. Chair, speaks of privatized health care. I mean I could go on and on, Mr. Chair.

I have a very recent example of participating in the by-election in the constituency of Saskatoon Riversdale . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. The general background noise seems to have risen above an acceptable level. I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker, the member speaking, the Premier. So if there's some private conversations that need to take place, please take them behind the bar.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, as I was saying, I have a very recent experience of participating in the by-election of the constituency of Saskatoon Riversdale. Where my very, very worthy opponent representing the Saskatchewan Party, during that by-election, in my presence, talked about the need for private MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) in the province.

That, Mr. Chair, is a clear indication to me — and fair enough, it's a debate — that the Saskatchewan Party, and their representatives, and their MLAs share a view for privatized health care in the province.

Now we'll have the debate. We've had the debate before. They've often stood on the side of privatized health care. There's no doubt about that. We'll have the debate again. We welcome the debate. But they should not ought to pretend that they're not on that side of the issue.

Now the Leader of the Opposition talks about the parallel process. Well, Mr. Chair, that sounds ominous when it's described as some kind of a parallel process. In fact, in my view, the Department of Health is doing just exactly what the Department of Health should be doing. We have the recommendations of the Fyke commission. We have the public process going on. But to ensure that we will build a plan for implementation, we need those folks who are qualified in health care, both in the department and outside of the department, to

be considering options and to looking at plans.

And so here exactly is what's happening. As part of the planning, Saskatchewan Health is reviewing the Fyke commission with the assistance of approximately 30 external representatives from the health sector. And so the department has established a series of working groups with a focus on the following areas: primary and subacute care, specialized care, district governance, human resources, health system quality, sustainability, and the funding methodology. Many of the issues that Mr. Fyke talks about in his report.

And in addition then to just those significant folks at the Department of Health with their expertise, they're reaching into the community to approximately 30 other representatives from the health care sector to work on this important, important planning as we move forward.

Mr. Hermanson: — Can the — and thank you, Mr. Chair — and can the Premier tell us when this report will be made public?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, this is not a process of a group of people writing a report. This is a group of professionals — professionals in the Department of Health and professionals from the health care community — who are looking at options and plans and strategies. Because as we move forward, it's not simply enough that a minister of Health or a Premier or a Leader of the Opposition says well we should just ought to do this and it gets done.

You need to have the professionals who have done a lot of the groundwork and a lot of the thinking to provide the kinds of options that we know we're going to want to look at. So Mr. Fyke talks about district governments. He talks about primary care. He talks about regional hospitals. These all need the kind of background work that health professionals can do and will give us as we make decisions as legislators.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is the Premier then telling the House that the process undertaken by Sask Health with these external experts will not be put into a report and will not be made public? Is that what the Premier is saying?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, we will . . . This government, through its ministry of Health, through this caucus and through this cabinet and through this government, we will present to the people of Saskatchewan a plan for the delivery of health care services to take us into the 21st century — a plan I note that will be publicly funded; publicly administered health care; pioneered in this province — but a plan that will reshape and reform and retool a process that will take health care well into the 21st century. We will deliver that plan.

As part of delivering that plan we're engaging our Department of Health in preparing options and planning expertise. They're reaching out to the community as we converse with the community through the legislative committee, and when this work is complete we will prepare a plan.

They're not in the business of writing a report. We haven't asked them to do yet another Fyke. We've asked Ken Fyke to do this for us. We're considering the Fyke. And the fact of the

matter is, when this work is appropriately done, we will announce to the people of Saskatchewan the plan that we set out. And members of the opposition will be available at that time I'm sure to applaud the plan.

Mr. Hermanson: — What is the target date for the release of this plan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well we haven't set a target date, Mr. Chair. We haven't set a target date because we've committed to listen to the people of Saskatchewan through the legislative process. And the fact of the matter is we're going to do that thoroughly. We are going to build a plan and it will be released and provided to the people of Saskatchewan working with health care providers.

Now I'd like to know when the Leader of the Opposition is going to announce his plan for the privatization of services?

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. The Premier knows that the standing committee has to table their report by the end of August. And Mr. Fyke had a concluding date that he had to hit for. You know, the people of Saskatchewan, in light of Mr. Fyke's analysis that health care is in crisis in Saskatchewan and the fundamentals needs to be reviewed, needs some indication from the Premier and his government as to when he's going to release a plan.

The crisis cannot be allowed to continue any longer.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I understand how the Leader of the Opposition is very anxious to see what will be a very, very progressive plan for health care in Saskatchewan, and it will be delivered by this government through its ministry of Health, when it is ready and appropriate delivered.

Now that, Mr. Chair, speaks to a long-term plan for the delivery of health care services in the province. And I remind the Leader of the Opposition that on a daily basis we are working with the health care system to provide the best quality care that we can provide.

I would remind him again, as I have earlier this week, that in fact when we . . . when Canadian communities are scanned by independent source and test is done of health care services across Canada, I ask the Leader of the Opposition, I ask the members present, which community in Canada with a medical school as part of its area . . . which community in Canada ranks number two in the entire nation for health care services? The community of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Now the fact of the matter is we are working on a daily basis to provide quality health care in Saskatchewan. The fact of the matter is I think over 30,000 people a day . . . over 30,000 people a day are served by our health care system.

The fact of the matter is when Saskatchewan people have asked to judge the quality of health care of the services they've received in this province, as reported in January of this year, users are happy . . . happy with the care received.

The fact of the matter is when people are asked how would you rate the quality of care that was received through

Saskatchewan's health care system . . . this in January of this year, fully 86 per cent of those who were asked rated the system excellent or good . . . excellent or good.

Now if you were to listen to the members of the opposition, you would believe that this is a system that is . . . as the Leader of the Opposition is quick to say . . . a system in deep crisis.

The fact of the matter is we have a good quality system in this province that's providing services to over 30,000 people a day. Are there reasons for us to be concerned about certain portions of the system? The answer is yes. Are we concerned about the waiting list circumstance? The answer is yes. Are we working with communities, with health care providers to deal with these problems? The answer is yes.

What we hear from the opposition, particularly from their benches as they sit on their chairs, is a whole lot of protest, but very, very few, Mr. Chair, very, very few positive suggestions about how we might improve health care in this province.

They're very, very quick, very, very quick to describe a system in crisis but very, very slow to describe some positive solutions, except some of those we've heard earlier today talking about private MRI clinics, talking about privatized services, talking about if you got the money and you want to pay, you should be able to pay.

Now I want to repeat, as we provide the long-term planning, as we work with communities and the people of Saskatchewan to build a long-term sustainable plan, we are working on a daily basis, through the ministry of Health, through the health care providers of our province, through the unionized providers of health care in our province, to provide good quality service for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Premier mentioned that Saskatoon has a high standard of health care because they have the College of Medicine in Saskatoon. We recognize that after you get past the 15,000-person waiting list and actually deal with the professional health care providers that are there, that we do get service.

And that's a credit, not to this government — not for one second to this government — that's a credit to the health care providers who, in spite of the difficulties and barriers put before them by this government, are providing and delivering health care professionally to the people of Saskatchewan.

But this very group of astute health care providers tell us that the College of Medicine — the issue which the Premier raised — is at risk. Would the Premier today commit to maintaining the College of Medicine even if it means building a new health sciences centre on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well there's no doubt in my mind, Mr. Chair, of the longevity of the College of Medicine as a part of the University of Saskatchewan, as part of health care delivery in this province.

And we are — the Minister of Health and the district health board — they are working very, very closely with that College

of Medicine. To be sure, there's been some recent announcement from that college of expansion of enrolments. We're working with that college; we're talking to the university; we're working with the district about the concept of a health sciences centre. We understand the important, the important role that the College of Medicine plays.

And again I ask then the Leader of the Opposition, if he wants to preserve an adequate College of Medicine, a growing College of Medicine, an important component of health care in the province, how in the world, how in the world would he propose to do that if he'd have been government from 1999, having frozen the health care funding, how would he propose to freeze health care funding and yet do all of this that he says should ought to be done?

It is hard for the public to understand this, because on the other side he's saying every day, cut taxes, cut taxes, cut taxes. Freeze health care, but expand the College of Medicine, expand the number of health care providers, expand services. I don't know, Mr. Chair, maybe the Leader of the Opposition could explain that to the people of the province.

(15:45)

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Premier is making the people of Saskatchewan very aware of his lack of understanding of economic principles, that a strong economy is created by a competitive tax structure, and a strong economy is the basis on which we can provide better health care and stronger social services for our families here in Saskatchewan . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker and unusually it's from that member's side. So I would ask that all members come to order and listen to the person asking the questions and also the person answering the questions.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. The Premier has talked, and my questions have been focused to him, on the bigger picture issues with health care. We've talked about the Fyke report. And he has made some commitments to health care publicly.

But if he's to be believed, he must have kept the promises he's made thus far. If you can't keep the commitments you've made up to this point, how can you be trusted on the commitments you make into the future?

So I would ask the Premier, given the fact that his government promised that all patients arriving in emergency rooms would get a preliminary evaluation by a health provider within 15 minutes of arrival, given the failure to keep that commitment, that promise, and not even by a little bit — the fact that many times there's a multiple of 15 minutes; in one case recently a 4-hour wait for an evaluation — why should we believe anything he says?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition apparently has questions on what is transpiring in the emergency wards of the province. Now the fact of the matter is, our emergency wards, I am told by this information, use the

Canadian emergency department triage and acuity scale. So that everyone who comes through the door, everyone who comes through the door, receives this process immediately, which is to review the patient prior to registration.

The information I have is that, a patient comes through the door of the emergency, the triage process happens immediately. This includes I understand both ambulatory patients and those transported by emergency vehicles. And I'm sure this could be provided to the Leader of the Opposition, if he wants to see it. This is in fact the process that is being used in our emergency wards across the province.

Now there will be circumstances when treatment is required that cannot be provided on an immediate basis — on an immediate basis. I mean, this I'm very aware of from my own family circumstance several months ago. There are occasions with a broken limb or other circumstances where treatment cannot be immediately provided and there may be a certain wait. But that wait will be judged by the health care professionals who are present knowing other demands that are coming through those emergency room doors.

And I don't think the Leader of the Opposition wants a situation where he or I, as political figures in this province, are deciding who gets treated first or second or third in that emergency ward.

The information that I have is that when someone passes through the doors in the emergency ward, there is an immediate assessment, the triage is done, and then the decisions — the medical decisions, professional decisions — are made about treatment.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I want to make it very clear to the Premier that I'm talking about the initial evaluation by a health care provider. In other words, the promise, the commitment that his government made, his NDP government made, that within 15 minutes of arrival there would be an evaluation by a health care provider.

Now his paper may say that that is happening. But in fact it is not happening and there is many instances when it hasn't happened. It's because of a shortage of health care workers.

Now he talks about the fact that he thinks that the number of health care providers in Saskatchewan are meeting the needs. The fact, that's not true for two reasons. First of all, because the waiting lists are getting longer; and secondly, because 15 minutes after they arrive they are not always dealt with by a health care provider. There is no immediate evaluation within that 15-minute period. That's not happening.

I don't care what his paper says. It's not happening. And if he stands up in the House and tells the people of Saskatchewan that it is, he's not giving them accurate information.

Why should we believe anything that the Premier says if he doesn't even know he's not keeping this commitment?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition stands up and says that people are walking in, being brought in or by ambulance or entering the emergency wards of Saskatchewan, and not being seen by a health care provider.

That's what he is saying. Now would he please then document for me these circumstances where this is happening?

My understanding is that when an individual in this province enters an emergency ward, a nurse, most likely, performs that triage that occurs immediately, makes then the decisions about referring to the emergency physician or to other health care professionals. Now if in fact there are circumstances where individuals are coming into our emergency wards — whether it be in our base hospitals, our regional hospitals, or our community hospitals — where there is no health professional present to meet them and to do that immediate assessment, then he should ought to document that, both to the Department of Health, to myself, and to the districts involved.

Because I am sure, I am sure that if the districts involved were made aware of circumstances where people are coming into emergency wards and not being seen at all — now fair enough there may be a wait for treatment, fair enough, there may be a wait for treatment and we might all desire that sometimes that wait could be shortened — but if the Leader of the Opposition, and he says it's happened on many, many, many occasions, he said that in the House this afternoon, that I would want him to provide to myself, to the ministry of Health, and to the districts involved just where it is that these citizens are not being seen for long periods of time by any health care professional after entering the emergency ward.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. The answer to the Premier is it happened in Regina at Regina General Hospital. We've raised it in the legislature, in this session of the legislature so it's on the . . . it's on the official record. It was confirmed to the official opposition by nurses in Regina General emergency that there was not an initial evaluation. I'm not talking about treatment. There was not even an initial evaluation in some instances for up to four hours for several people. And in fact that was confirmed by the Regina Health District in the media the following day.

Those are the facts. How does the Premier respond?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And I think in that circumstance the Regina District Board expressed its deep concern over that circumstance and its willingness to take the appropriate action. Now I expect when a system deals with 30,000-plus individuals, clients a day, that there will be on occasion circumstance when you can't be sure that every, every, every person is served immediately.

But the Leader of the Opposition was standing here moments ago saying this is happening all over the province many, many, many times. Now he's cited one example. My recollection of the Regina District response to that was to take it very seriously and ensure that that kind of thing, to the best of their ability, wouldn't happen again. But if he's got these many, many examples, I invite him to please share them with the House.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank the Premier for acknowledging that I was right and he was wrong. I appreciate that fact.

The fact then is that his promise to the people of Saskatchewan is that not most patients, not when the going is good will this

happen, but the promise is that all patients — I think all is everyone — all patients arriving in emergency rooms would get a preliminary evaluation by a health care provider within 15 minutes of arrival.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's only . . . Mr. Chair, that's only one failed commitment. There was another commitment from the NDP in the last election campaign and that was to introduce a single . . . they're not very happy when they're exposed for not keeping their promises, Mr. Chair. I think we're hitting a few nerves on the other side. They don't like being shown for their incompetence, and their failure to speak truthfully to the people of Saskatchewan.

The NDP promised to introduce a single, reasonable fee for ambulance services, and to reduce ambulance charges throughout the province starting, Mr. Chair, by eliminating all fees for transfers between health institutions. To the best of my knowledge, none of this has happened. How can the Premier countenance not keeping this promise?

The Speaker: — Order. Why is the member on her feet?

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — With leave to introduce a guest, Mr. Chair.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I thank the Leader of the Opposition, and our Premier, for the opportunity to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, a very young, energetic, hardworking summer student who's come to give our office some reprieve during the summer months.

I would introduce to you, in the Speaker's gallery, Rumali Werapitiya. And Rumali, besides being hardworking and keeping our office smiling and a cheerful receptionist, is also a renowned basketball player in her school life and is working very hard on her studies.

I would ask all members to join in welcoming Rumali to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Executive Council Vote 10

Subvote (EX01)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Leader of the Opposition in his last series of questions was talking about commitments made in our election document in 1999 and specific commitments around the provision of ambulance services throughout the province.

We're not there yet. We're not there yet, Mr. Chair, but I intend

that this government is going to enjoy a four-year mandate. And I intend that as that mandate unfolds, we will make continued and furthered progress to that goal.

Now what has happened since that time? We undertook a significant study of emergency services across this province, a study that has now become part of the broad discussion around Fyke.

Now I note that on a daily basis these members across the way get up in the House and protest about the EMS study, and read petitions protesting the EMS study. Fair enough. But we are working towards the goals that we set out in that campaign because I say . . . or on this issue on the question of, of regularizing the charges for ambulance services, whether we be rural or urban Saskatchewan, it is the right thing to do. And we are moving towards that goal. And I am confident that as we approach the end of a four-year mandate we will see much, much, much of that work finished and in place.

I would ask therefore that as we want to talk about campaign commitments, has the Leader of the Opposition now changed his position, or do they still share the view that funding to health care should be frozen at the rate of inflation? Now is that still the view? Fair enough, I'll answer to the campaign commitments made by this political movement and this party and this government — I'll answer to those.

Will the Leader of the Opposition stand up today in the House so the people of Saskatchewan are very clear. Is it his commitment today that health care funding should be frozen at one point 9 per cent? Is he going to uphold that campaign promise if ever elected?

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The commitment the Saskatchewan Party made was better than the results of this government who, if you take away the federal dollars, have not kept up with inflation funding. Our commitment was to, as far as provincial responsibility is concerned, keep up with inflation. And all federal dollars earmarked for health care . . .

The Chair: — Order, order, order. Order, order. I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker and the person asking the question, and the person asking the question is having difficulty hearing the Chair. So would the committee please come to order so we can hear the questions as well as hear the answers.

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Chair, thank you. In all fairness the Premier should acknowledge that the Saskatchewan Party plan for funding health care is far more stable and generous than that of his government.

Mr. Chair, I would also tell the Premier that I've been informed by my colleague, the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy, that after we raised the issue in the legislature of an evaluation not occurring within 15 minutes on a particular day at the Regina General Hospital, and after emergency health care providers in Regina General heard the response of the government, they contacted us again and assured us that we were correct, and that in fact it's a regular occurrence at Regina General Hospital not to do that initial evaluation within 15 minutes. That's a blatant failure by this government to keep its promise.

Mr. Chair, I think the most serious failure of this government to keep a commitment, to keep a promise made in its election platform was the one to cut waiting time for key surgical procedures by at least 30 per cent over the next four years.

(16:00)

As we have heard in Saskatoon, the waiting list has increased by 50 per cent; here in Regina by 300 per cent. You've lost a lot of ground. I don't know how you can possibly hope within the two remaining years to not only reverse the losses but to reduce the waiting lists by 30 per cent.

Was this just a foolish promise made to get elected or did the Premier think that he would actually be able to reduce waiting lists without any concrete changes and improvements to the health care system?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, there is no one in this House that doesn't share some concern about the increasing numbers that are on waiting lists in the province of Saskatchewan. But again I think it's very, very important to recognize that the waiting list circumstance is often focused on very specific surgeries. And I'm told that many on the Saskatoon waiting list — if not, approximately two-thirds — are waiting for day surgeries in the city of Saskatoon.

I think we're all aware that the waiting lists tend to focus around cataract surgeries and orthopedics — knees and hips. I think we're very aware . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well you see, Mr. Chair, the member from Rosthern chirps from his chair continually but he won't stand up and ask a question. The member from Wood River chirps from his chair, won't get up and answer a question. Any time they want to they're free to stand up and ask some questions in this House.

Now the fact of the matter is this. What the Saskatchewan Party of course would never recognize, would never want to recognize, that in 1999-2000, most recent year, the preliminary data indicates that 93,000 surgeries were performed in Saskatchewan — 93,000. That's about 9 per cent of the population, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member from Rosthern wants me to say it lower. It's 93,000 surgeries performed in this province.

Now I ask, Mr. Chair, for members to compare that with the number of surgeries that were provided just 10 years ago — just 10 years ago. What was the number 10 years ago — 80,000. Today we are providing 13,000 more surgeries on an annual basis than we were 10 years ago.

Now the Sask Party will never tell you about that. They'll never tell you about the growth in services that are being provided to Saskatchewan people. Neither will they tell you how we compare with other jurisdictions in the surgical procedures that we are providing to Saskatchewan people.

And as I said, some of the difficulty in the waiting list is in orthopedics; it's hips and knees and so on.

It says, Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian Institute of Health Information, health care in Canada, our rate of hip replacement in the province of Saskatchewan, hip replacement

surgery, was 70.9 per 100,000 population — 70.9.

An Hon. Member: — So?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well the member from Wood River says so. Well so the average national provision is 58.8 per 100,000. We are 15 per cent, 15 higher, than the national average.

Now the fact of the matter is we're doing more, Mr. Chair. Have we got a problem? The answer is yes. Are we working at the problem? The answer is emphatically yes — working to recruit health care providers, working with districts, working with the College of Medicine. We're working to provide solutions to these problems.

The fact of the matter is these folks, do they have a solution? No, not one. I have not heard one solution from members of that opposition to solve or even begin to challenge the waiting list problems, not one solution — except, Mr. Chair, that we should bring in an auditor to do an audit of the system, that's what they said, and then freeze funding.

Well please would the member from Wood River explain how an auditor and 1 per cent funding will help the waiting list problem?

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the Premier is completely unfounded in his statements. The facts are — and this is important — the facts are that the Premier and his government have broken their promise on waiting lists; they're getting longer rather than shorter. And it's unfortunate that he would give such a flippant answer when those 15,400 people in Saskatoon and 11,000 people in Regina, plus others in other parts of Saskatchewan, represent people that are hurting — people that are in pain, people that are discouraged, despondent, parents that are very concerned about their grandparents and their children, working people who are concerned about getting back on the job.

And the Premier apparently seems to think he's providing enough effort, his government is addressing the problem when yet the lines are getting longer and longer, the problem is getting worse and worse. And I'm very disappointed with the Premier's answer in that regard.

The Premier also indicated he has no idea when they're going to bring forward a response to the Fyke report and the Standing Committee on Health's study of health care as well as the parallel committee sponsored by his department.

The government has failed in regard to promises for access to health care. They have failed miserably in regard to the 15-minute wait for evaluation. They have failed to deliver on their promises for ambulance services. So all through the entire Health department where we spend the most money — 40 per cent of every tax dollar spent on health care — this government has been an adamant failure. And the Premier doesn't even recognize it, and that certainly is a concern to the people of Saskatchewan.

I just want to ask one question on agriculture. Since becoming Premier, and I believe it was late January of this year, or at least Premier-elect — I'm not sure when the actual transfer, but

whenever the transfer was made from Mr. Romanow to the Premier — can he tell the House and the people of Saskatchewan how many times he has talked either in person or over the telephone about agriculture with the Prime Minister of Canada?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition starts this new line of questioning with some comment further to health care.

He talks about those in emergency wards who are not being seen by health care professionals. What has he been able to provide for evidence? One incident. One . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh now he says from his seat, many. But he won't say that from his feet. He won't provide the information about the many he says that occur in the province.

He provided the one, and the district involved took immediate . . . Mr. Chair, they obviously do not like to hear the truth of the matter. They do not like facts over there. For as soon as they're challenged with a bit of fact, what do they do? They all start shouting.

Now, Mr. Chair, to go back on the emergency question. I repeat, if the Leader of the Opposition knows of circumstances where he says that there are many, many people who are entering emergency departments in this province and not being seen, I challenge him today to put that information on the floor of this Assembly. Let us know where they are. Let us acquaint the ministry of Health. And let us acquaint the districts involved.

Now we have . . . Where's that guy from? The member from Sask Rivers. Now he enjoins the debate. The member from Sask Rivers enjoins the debate. He too seems to have information to offer. I invite him to stand up, ask some questions. Offer the information that the member from Sask Rivers has. Please, please enter, sir. Enter the debate. Save it from your seat. Enter the debate.

Now the Leader of the Opposition talks about rural emergency transportation. Again we have established the EMS report. We've laid that in the hands of the Fyke discussion. There will be, Mr. Chair, progress on provision of emergency services in Saskatchewan. There will be progress and commitments will be honoured, Mr. Chair.

Now the fact of the matter is again, I repeat, we've got challenges in our system, as does every Canadian jurisdiction. But when compared to all Canadian jurisdictions, which community — which community, Mr. Chair — rates number two in Canada? Number two? Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Number two in all of Canada.

Mr. Chair, who is it in the decade of the '90s pioneered the home care model for Canada? The province of Saskatchewan. Who is it, Mr. Chair, who pioneered in this decade the involvement of district, the involvement of communities in the development of health care? Who is it in this nation that has pioneered the integration of services so that people have come from across the world to look at what's happening in Saskatchewan? And who is it, Mr. Chair, who has decentralized services, brought services like dialysis, kidney dialysis, close to

communities; chemotherapy close to communities; mental health services close to communities; services like addiction services close to communities?

Which administration, which political party, which government has pioneered in Canada, in the west, primary care teams in rural Saskatchewan? And the Leader of the Opposition should know about primary care teams. Which, Mr. Chair, just by the way — just by the way — which political movement in this province gave birth to the concept of publicly funded health care and which political movement and philosophy fights it on every occasion? This group. I've given evidence today they haven't changed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the leopard has not changed its spots. Put them in charge of health care, they'll privatize everything in sight. That's their answer.

No, no you see this is . . . And I'll explain it, Mr. Chair. Sure they'll freeze funding to health care. What's the result? What's the result? They'll freeze the funding to health care while health care will carry on right out of the wallets of the citizens private. And so those who have the dollars will get the health care, will get the quality health care, and those who don't won't.

Because we know that's the system they believe in. We see it in practice just south of us. We know that's what they believe in. We know that's what they'll do. And if they want to come clean and make that statement we'll have that debate.

Now I want also, Mr. Chair, to talk about again their commitment to health care. What was their commitment, '99 election, a year and a half ago? They said to the people of Saskatchewan, put us in charge, and you know what we're going to do, we're going to provide health care at the rate of inflation, the funding at the rate of inflation. That's what we're going to add to the health care budget.

Now the Leader of the Opposition says well you've got federal money. Well he ought to check the books — he ought to check his facts. The fact of the matter is there's a whole lot more provincial money going into health care than there is federal money. It used to be a 50/50 split; we're down to about 50 on the dollar now.

Now the fact of the matter is that . . .

An Hon. Member: — What about agriculture?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'll get to agriculture, just you wait. We're going to talk a little bit more on health care.

The member from Estevan, she doesn't want me to talk about health care now because her friend from Weyburn's all in favour of the privatization.

An Hon. Member: — Am I on a waiting list too?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well she . . . yes, we'll put her on my waiting list for agriculture, all right.

Now let us, Mr. Chair, take a serious look at their commitment in the 1999 election to freeze increases to the Department of Health at the rate of inflation, which this year would have represented 1.9 per cent as opposed, Mr. Chair, to the 11.9 per cent dedicated to that budget from this government.

Now let's just see, let's just see, let's just see what would be the result of the member from Wood River — I'll have to send this down to some of his friends because they'll be interested to know what the member from Wood River supports — well he would support, he would support a budget that would remove \$292 million from the . . .

An Hon. Member: — I didn't say that.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Oh yes you did. He says he didn't say it; well he said it right in his election material. I saw it in his election material — health care funding frozen at the point of inflation. All right, \$292 million, \$292 million out of health care. Now you see our totals . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. I'm having a bit of difficulty hearing the person answering the questions. And so if there's a lot of background noise, if there's private conversations that need to take place, please move them behind the bar.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try not so much to agitate the members opposite. But here are the facts of the matter.

If we were following their financing policy for the ministry of Health in this province, it would have meant a 1.9 per cent increase to health care spending this year. That's what it would have meant. Now I just want you to know that would mean a reduction in the budget that now exists at 2.2 billion — it would mean a reduction of 292 million.

Now our total spending on acute and rehabilitation services in this budget is \$784 million. So if we took the 282 million they want to take out, if we took it out of acute and rehabilitation, that would be a 37 per cent decrease in spending. Now that would help the waiting list situation wouldn't it?

Now our long-term care spending 327 million — 327 million on long-term care. That provides 9,000 beds to Saskatchewan residents. So if you took out the 292 from long-term care spending, well I'll tell you what that would mean. That would be a 90 per cent reduction in long-term care spending if we followed their budget for prognosis.

(16:15)

In home care we suspend . . . we spend \$86 million. We spend \$115 million for . . . we spend a total of \$201 million on home care and the drug plan.

Well if you took out the 292 million that they were proposed to take out, well, Mr. Speaker, you know what, we wouldn't have a home care plan at all, we wouldn't have a drug plan at all, and we'd still have to cut something else to meet . . . My point is, Mr. Chair, the Saskatchewan Party made a very clear commitment for the funding of health — and we are, by the

way, debating the budget — they made a very clear commitment on how they would fund health. They said we're going to freeze it at the rate of inflation.

In this budget year that would mean \$292 million less for the provision of health care services. Now, maybe they've changed their position. Maybe they now take a different view of that. It would be appropriate in my view if the Leader of the Opposition would stand up and say that.

Let me conclude this by saying, Mr. Chair, we are engaged in a dialogue with Saskatchewan people through the all-party legislative committee on the Fyke Commission. We will, in conjunction with health care providers, with the communities of Saskatchewan, with the people of Saskatchewan, we will build and we will deliver, and we will develop and plan and announce a model for 21st century health care delivery in this province.

In the meantime, Mr. Chair, we're going to work on a daily basis . . . on a daily basis with our providers, with our health care districts, to provide the best possible health care that can be provided to the people of Saskatchewan.

Now the Leader of the Opposition inquires of conversations that I may have had with the Prime Minister. I am not in this estimate, or in any circumstance, going to document for the Leader of the Opposition conversations that I have with either the Prime Minister or other premiers, or other political leaders in this province. I am not going to do that, ever.

I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that in a variety of ways, through personal contact, through written communication, through exercise that we have conducted in this House, we have acquainted through, particularly through the work of the Minister of Agriculture, we have acquainted the federal government with the circumstances facing the farm families in this province and the circumstances about the drought that we're suffering in some quarters of our province this year. If his concern is that communication is being held with the federal government on this, he need not be concerned. Those concerns are being addressed to the federal government.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course the question was not to document the conversations but just to inform the people of Saskatchewan how many times he had communicated with the Prime Minister, and again the Premier failed. He went on a long rant — very little fact in the rant on health care — and sidestepped the issue. And that's very disappointing that our Premier would be so disrespectful of the concerns of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, in regard to the 15-minute wait, because the Premier specifically asked the question, I will respond because I want to assure the Premier that we do not come on a purely academic or basis of lack of knowledge, but we come with the facts. And Regina Health District has backed us up on these facts.

On a Monday, and I believe it was May, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon there were 52 patients in emergency, between the waiting room and patients already in rooms. The wait was three to four hours, plus another hour once in the room, and assessed by a nurse to see a doctor. At the same time we were on bypass to ambulance traffic for one hour and 45 minutes, so they

weren't even getting . . . many weren't even getting to emergency in a timely fashion.

On Tuesday morning there were 19 admissions in emergency waiting for beds. At 4 o'clock that day there were 22 patients in emergency waiting for beds. And then nurses informed us that the situation did not improve the next day. So this is a common occurrence. We have been informed by health care providers that this happens on a regular basis.

I'm disappointed that the Premier is not aware of this and hopefully he will be in consultation with his Health minister to rectify the problem, because it was a commitment and a very important commitment made by his government that is not being fulfilled.

Mr. Chair, there are several areas that I want to cover and I would just encourage the Premier to . . . I will try to stick to one item at a time and if he would stick to one item at a time in his answer, the process will not be as long for him.

I want to talk just briefly about post-secondary education. The fact is that his government in the last election promised free tuition. As we know the opposite has occurred; tuitions have increased dramatically. Particularly the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) has seen a huge increase in tuition. It's got to be quite a shock to students who were promised a first year of free tuition to suddenly find a huge increase in tuition. Not only that, but there's a very modest tax credit offered by the province for students . . . graduates, but in fact the changes to the student loan program taking away the interest-free component more than offsets any tax credit component to their post-secondary policy.

So in other words the prospects, the prospects for students, post-secondary students in Saskatchewan has deteriorated substantially and again flies right in the face of promises and commitments made by this Premier and his government to the very future of our province. How can he countenance such a failure to keep a promise?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, yes in fact in the last election campaign we spoke to the people of Saskatchewan about the possibility, the potential, the promise, that we would work to eliminate tuition on the first year. Well you know what the people told us? They told us they didn't like the idea one bit. They told us straight up they didn't like the idea one bit.

Now some of us choose to listen on occasion, Mr. Chair; and when we're told, well some of us don't choose to listen. I refer to members across. When we're told by a broad base in the general public, this is not a good idea, it seems to us then it's not wise to proceed.

What did we do? We had our Minister of Education and our Minister of Post-Secondary Education criss-cross the province meeting people in community halls all over the province, meeting students, meeting their parents, meeting educators. And the fact of the matter is they dialogued with people, and the people of Saskatchewan said there are several things you need to do instead of providing first-year tuition without cost to students.

One of them was create a tax mechanism by which, upon graduation, you can earn some benefit through the tax system. What have we done? Put it in place.

They said, they said, help our students, help our students earn their first-year tuition. Help our students do that. So what have we done, Mr. Chair? Well we have put in place the Centennial Summer Student Program. What have we done in this budget, the budget under debate, the budget these people will vote against? This budget provides a tripling, a tripling of the number of opportunities, Mr. Chair, for students to access summer employment in this province.

Now this program, this program is not just a simple . . . not just a matter of providing summer jobs, but these are meaningful jobs that are giving our young people an opportunity to experience summer employment that will be part of their long-term training and benefit, Mr. Chair. We're working with students to assist them to earn that first year tuition.

This program, over the next five years, will employ 10,000 of our young people — 10,000. And they are working in communities small and large, rural and urban. They are working in our regional parks. They're working across the province, some of them. Some of them here working with us in the legislature, Mr. Speaker. Some of them working in the Wascana Park just outside of this legislature. A great program.

Now the member from Wood River again, I think it is the member chirping, ask somebody in small business. Well you see they would have us put this program in place in duplication of other programs that already exist, I guess.

The fact of the matter is there is federal programs that assist students, federal programs which assist students to find employment in the private sector. Good programs they are. We're not debating that. Good programs they are. But as we build programs, we want programs that are complementary and not duplicating that which already exists.

So, Mr. Speaker, we listen to the people of Saskatchewan. We listen to them. They did not think the first year of tuition was a good idea. We've taken steps to provide other mechanisms by which to support students.

Now I just want to review also the significant growth in post-secondary funding. We've increased our third party grants by 3.5 per cent — 3.5 per cent to our institutions, 3.5. The university funding mechanism gets an extra \$3 million — an extra \$3 million. We are supporting the virtual campus — the virtual campus, campus of Saskatchewan through the technology of the Internet with \$2.5 million. We're expanding computer science expansion at \$1.5 million. More than that, the minister tells me.

We're supporting Aboriginal apprenticeship with another \$400,000. We've enhanced student loan interest relief in this budget and debt reduction with another \$600,000. We've expanded and made the announcement — and I'm very proud of this announcement — the expansion of the nursing program in the northern health access program, particularly suited and directed to students in northern Saskatchewan, \$1.4 million.

Mr. Chair, we are investing significantly — significantly — in the education of our young people.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, if there's one element of our society that has got to be disappointed with the NDP government, it's our young people.

The government made a commitment to help post-secondary students and they fail to keep that commitment. Not only did they fail — and yes, their proposal in the election campaign was wrong — but then they never corrected the problem. They've made it worse.

Tuitions have gone up. Student loans have become more expensive.

Mr. Speaker, he talks about student employment. Can you imagine the audacity of a government . . . the audacity of a government to put forward a student employment program that cuts out the private sector, doesn't include small business? Everyone knows that small business is a generator of jobs.

If you want to prepare a workforce to be productive, if you want to encourage young people to enter the Saskatchewan workforce, surely a government with any sense whatsoever, any common sense, any decency in fact . . . any decency, would include small business in its student summer employment program.

Mr. Speaker, what are students doing? Students are going to Alberta to get their jobs because they see a government here that thinks that the only real job . . . the only real job in our province is a job provided by the government, by a local municipality, by a park. Mr. Speaker, if it's a small business, they don't count. That's the message that the Premier has sent to young people in Saskatchewan.

Not only that, the Premier has told the people of Saskatchewan . . . and his Minister of Education, that there are going to be 30,000 fewer young people enrolled in elementary and secondary education in this province.

The Premier has given up on young people. The Premier has given up on them at the job level, at the post-secondary level, at the secondary, and the elementary level. The Premier is waving a white flag and saying he doesn't see a future for young people in Saskatchewan.

And that, Mr. Chairman, is disgusting, it's disappointing, it's disheartening. It hurts families, it hurts parents, it hurts grandparents because they recognize that families are going to be divided and the long-distance bills are going to go up because the young people of Saskatchewan are going to leave.

Mr. Chairman, we've questioned the Premier for a long time and we started out on accountability, and the Premier refused to be accountable in this legislature. He refused to tell the people of Saskatchewan where he measured accountability, what measure of ministerial accountability he demanded. He would not tell the people of Saskatchewan.

He's failed on his commitment to be more open and more accountable to the people of Saskatchewan. I have indicated

several areas where the Premier has failed in health care. He has blatantly broken promises to Saskatchewan people, and with no heart, with no compassion. He's not apologized to the people of Saskatchewan. He's droned on about numbers that are meaningless when waiting lists have got longer, when you can't go to an emergency room and get an evaluation within a reasonable amount of time.

Mr. Speaker, it is wrong for the Premier to paint a picture of Saskatchewan that is not accurate, that is not true. The colours are wrong, Mr. Chairman. The colours are wrong and the people of Saskatchewan know that the colours are wrong.

Mr. Chair, we want to talk a little bit about municipal affairs, municipal affairs. Taxes are going up. Taxes are skyrocketing at the municipal level because the Premier and his minister does not recognize the role of municipalities. They have been squeezing property taxpayers, and you know why they've been squeezing property taxpayers? Because the tax base is shrinking in Saskatchewan. There are fewer and fewer taxpayers but that property is still there.

(16:30)

And so the Premier, to duck the consequences of an economy that's shrinking, that's not growing the way it should and a tax base that's getting smaller because people are picking up and leaving this province, including young people, because of that fact, the Premier is putting the onus on property taxpayers because he thinks people are not going to move their land and their buildings and their property out of Saskatchewan. You've at least got them around the ankles on this one. We're going to trip up the people of Saskatchewan on this one.

Well the result is, the result is he's having more and more trouble funding education, providing quality education and an optimistic future for education in Saskatchewan. He's got more and more problems delivering health care.

And quite frankly, Mr. Chair, he has not given us any indication that he has the foggiest notion about what any constructive change to the health care system would be — not one shred of hope for the people of Saskatchewan, not one shred.

How can the Premier sit in his chair and shrug things off saying, oh well, you know, something about inflation and, you know, well if you guys were doing this . . . (inaudible) . . . That is disgusting, Mr. Chair. That is irresponsible, Mr. Chair. That is shirking responsibility, Mr. Chair.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — That is unacceptable for a Premier of a government that's been in power in Saskatchewan for 10 years. Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that the Premier would have recognized from the results of the 1999 election that that kind of message doesn't wash with the people in this province.

But the Premier is playing a fool's game, Mr. Chairman. The Premier is not levelling with the people of Saskatchewan. The Premier is not calling a spade a spade. And as a result, Mr. Chairman, the people of Saskatchewan are disillusioned, they're disappointed. Many are leaving. They see no hope. Hope has

been deferred, Mr. Chair. And the results are this government is losing the confidence of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, I expect to resume this questioning later on, but I do want to ask another question of the Premier before I turn over the questioning to my colleague, the member from Canora-Pelly, and that is on the whole principle of freedom of speech and democracy in the workplace. Now you would think that the Premier, the leader of a New Democratic Party, a New Democratic Party that proposes to support labour and want to create jobs in Saskatchewan, would support democratic principles in the workplace.

Mr. Chair, my question to the Premier is threefold, and I hope the Premier is listening — I hope the Premier is listening. The first concern, why would the Premier allow his government to force senior public servants to have to join a union against their will? Why would he do that?

Secondly, why would the Premier allow his government to deny the proper democratic process of a secret ballot with a 50 per cent plus one vote in favour of certification? Why would the Premier disallow that democratic process to take place?

And thirdly, Mr. Chairman, why would the Premier of Saskatchewan deny the employers the right to freedom of speech during a certification process? You would think that a premier of honour, committed to the democratic process and freedom of speech, would recognize the importance of allowing both employers and union organizers the same rights — freedom of speech. Would the Premier be accountable?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, it's a challenge to address the issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition when he started, I think somewhere way back in that tirade, talking about employment opportunities and educational opportunities for youth in the province of Saskatchewan. So we'll go back there, we'll go back there.

And I might just want to point out to the Leader of the Opposition this article which appeared in *The Leader-Post* April 11 in this year, 2001, with the headline which reads: "Sask. youths' job prospects improve." Improve. Just note these words, Mr. Chair.

Saskatchewan is one of the best places in the country for youths to find a job . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: —

In the 2000 (study) Provincial Employment Conditions and Ranking for Youth 15-24, Saskatchewan ranked third in the country — a jump from its fourth-place standing in 1999.

Saskatchewan is one of the best places in the country for young people to find a job.

Now they'd never learn that from the Leader of the Opposition. They'd never know that from members of the Saskatchewan Party who go around suggesting that this is about the worst place in the country in which to live, to be educated, and to

work, and to raise a family. If you listen to those folks, you would think this was one of the worst places in the country in which to live. Well, Mr. Chair, it is not. It is not.

And when it comes to opportunities for youth it is documented that the prospects for youth to find work in this province have in fact improved.

Now in addition, the young people in this province are being served through post-secondary education — through a deep commitment to post-secondary education. The young people in this province are being served through a deep commitment to education — K to 12 — in this province. The young people of this province are being served by a commitment of this government to pre-kindergarten, to community-based schools.

Just note. Just note, Mr. Chair, what has happened as a result of this budget. This budget brings through the ministry of Education 9.1 per cent increase to expenditures in K to 12 education in this province — 9.1 per cent.

Now again I ask, I ask the Leader of the Opposition, would he please to stand in this House and explain . . . I'm confident that he'll stand in this House as soon as I sit down. As soon as I sit down I'm sure the Leader of the Opposition will stand in this House and explain his commitment again to freeze the funding to education at the rate of inflation. Same commitment; same party; same election; 1999: a commitment to freeze education at the rate of inflation; 1.9 per cent would be the increase to K to 12 education in this province on that campaign promise. This budget — 9 per cent increase. What does that enable . . . why does that happen?

And he started out talking about municipal government. Well the fact of the matter is, our municipal leaders came to government earlier this year and said if you have resources that are extra put them into education. Put them into education. Exactly what we've done; 9.1 per cent into education, which it has in fact in some circumstances allowed the RMs (rural municipality) and the urban municipalities to in fact lower the mill rate. That's in fact the case.

Now the situation is that this 9.1 doesn't just provide for new resources to the existing system. It provides the resources that we can double in this province the number of community schools. Double the community schools. Essentially double — not quite — 80 per cent increase in the number of pre-kindergartens because, Mr. Chair, it is my view that monies that we can provide to the early education of children in this province are the wisest monies that we will spend in the long-term health of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And here we have in this budget a commitment to an 80 per cent increase in pre-kindergartens, a doubling of community schools which are working with many of our families and children most at risk, Mr. Chair.

Now, Mr. Chair, they want to criticize the Education budget, they want to criticize the Education budget. Well that's interesting because the Education budget, from those most closely involved in Education — the trustees — the trustees say

... Well I'll just quote again from the Prince Albert school officials. This was after the budget. The Prince Albert school officials gave the Saskatchewan government good grades on its provincial budget, quote, "Overall it's probably the best budget we've seen in 15 years."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — So that's, that's the view, that's the view not of a negative opposition who seems to thrive on negativity; that's the view of someone who's actually on the ground working to deliver education to our children in our families in our communities. That's the view of the people of Saskatchewan as opposed to the negative views that we hear on a daily basis from over there.

The last issue that the Leader of the Opposition raised, and I know he'll want to stand and pursue it further, is the question of a ruling of the Labour Relations Board, a ruling — note, Mr. Chair — of the Labour Relations Board in reference to the classification of people employed in the public sector; a ruling which indicated that those several hundreds of individuals should be part of the public sector union in the SGEU (Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union). A ruling I note, Mr. Chair, of the Labour Relation Board.

Now the Leader of the Opposition would want the public to believe that somehow we just made that decision in the benches of government. The fact of the matter is that decision's made with the Labour Relations Board.

Now I am not sure, and I'd ask the Leader of the Opposition to clarify this: is he suggesting that government of the day, that government of the day should intervene or interfere directly with decisions made by the Labour Relations Board? Is that the view of the Leader of the Opposition? Because if he wants us to do that the fact is we're not going to do it — the answer's going to be no. We are not going to intervene in rulings of the Labour Board, no matter what the Labour critic says, no matter what the Leader of the Opposition says.

So I ask the Leader of the Opposition to stand now in the House, stand now in the House and make it very clear to the people of Saskatchewan — working people, business people — is his view the government of the day should interfere, intervene in decisions made by the Labour Relations Board in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, before I ask a number of questions regarding one of the Acts that you're responsible for, The Constituency Boundaries Act, I do want to clarify a few numbers, Mr. Premier — numbers that were raised by the opposition, numbers that you've indicated. Because there are times when people read *Hansard* and they are a bit confused about the numbers that people talk about — 11 per cent increases, 12 per cent increases, 2 per cent increases.

Mr. Premier, I want you to clarify, in the Minister of Finance's mid-year financial report, —and we're talking about estimates for this year and estimates for last year, Mr. Premier — in that

mid-year release back in November of 2000, the Finance minister indicated that the Health budget, the Health expenditure was going to be 1,987,397,000. In addition to that there was going to be an expenditure of 150 million for the Transition Fund and there was going to be an additional expenditure of \$33.3 million, which was federal money that came in for the Medical Equipment Fund as it was called.

Those numbers, Mr. Premier, total \$2,170,697,000. Those are the Minister of Finance's numbers and those are what are on the record.

Mr. Premier, in your budget of this year, you indicate that the expenditure for Health is 2,207,228,000. Mr. Premier, that's a difference of \$36.5 million, approximately. But you know, Mr. Premier, the other thing that is noticeable, in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Mr. Premier, is that you are taking an additional \$20.7 million from the federal CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer) supplement that was entirely taken last year, the full 80-some million dollars, and you've set that side in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to access \$20 million each and every year — this year, next year, and the year after.

So, Mr. Premier, if I take the \$20 million out of the Fiscal Stabilization, which is federal money that you are now accessing, and I subtract it from the 36.5 million difference between this year's budget and the Minister of Finance's mid-year projections, you know, Mr. Premier, that's \$16 million. That's less than 1 per cent increase on what you said you were going to spend last year and what you are actually estimating to spend this year.

You know, Mr. Premier, that's way below the cost of living. I ask for your response.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:45)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, as you well know, this government has established the tradition of providing a mid-year financial report. At budget time we will indicate the estimated budget numbers and the final numbers will occur through the process of the Public Accounts.

Now the more accurate numbers, of course, will be those at budget time when we've been through the year of expenditures and the year of operations, when you know much more precisely than you did at the mid-year. Mid-year will be a — and the critic knows this — the mid-year is the projection at mid-year. Fair enough? Fair enough.

So when we get to budget time ... so the budget figures that we have today will be more accurate in their estimations than those figures that are available at mid-year. We get the final to-the-penny count with the Public Accounts.

So here's the actual facts of the matter. In Health, in the year 2001, the estimated expenditures — and these will be more accurate even than the mid-year report, and they're still estimated until we get the Public Accounts — but the more accurate, estimated figure according to our budget documentation here is \$1.977697 billion —one billion, nine

hundred and seventy-seven thousand dollars.

The budgeted estimate for this coming year, the budget estimated coming this year is \$2.2 billion — \$2.2 billion. And therefore, Mr. Chair, there's no mistaking the fact that new and extra resources are being added to the health care budget. There can be no mistaking the fact.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Well we'll ask people of the province to ask for a copy of the mid-year financial report, ask for a copy of your budget, and I'm sure that the people will be able to see the numbers that I've now indicated are on the record and I'm sure that they'll see that those numbers are correct, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier, 2001 is a census year in Canada, and The Constituency Boundaries Act makes specific references to the census taken in Canada and then how it must be dealt with. Mr. Premier, could you tell us when your government expects to receive the report, the census report, from the national census just done?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm not sure I can entirely, with confidence, accurately answer the question.

I think the tradition is that it comes in the April of the year following the census. If that follows, then we could expect it April of 2002.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. If indeed that's correct, and I understand it will always occur in the year following and whether it be March or April.

Mr. Premier, the constitution boundaries Act clearly lays out a process for the government to follow in terms of looking at the revisions or possible changes. Does the Premier follow the . . . will the Premier plan to follow the existing provisions laid out in The Constituency Boundaries Act, or do you propose any changes to this Act before dealing with that topic?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, at this time, at this time, government has no proposal before the legislature or before itself to change the Act.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. The Act clearly indicates a process to be followed whereby after the Clerk of the Executive Council receives that census report, which you are indicating is probably April of 2002, that there is a period of 30 days for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to establish a commission.

Mr. Premier, do you plan to follow that clause and establish that commission under that directive?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the law . . . this is the law of Saskatchewan and unless this legislature at some time debates and changes that, we will adhere to the law established in the legislation.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much. Excellent, Mr. Premier. We expected that that would be your answer, and I ask you to look at section 5 of the Act — and I don't know whether you have a copy of the Act — but if I might, Mr. Premier, that

section says that the Premier must consult with the Leader of the Opposition on the appointment of this committee.

How will this consultation take place, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I observe, Mr. Chair, that the Leader of the Opposition, or if in the case of some circumstance we end up with leaders of the opposition, that the two of us or the three of us would meet, discuss this matter, and come to a mutual understanding. It is a provision of the Act that I would follow.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Premier, what I would like you to clarify is whether or not the actual appointment of those people to the commission will . . . in using the word, consultation, in the Act, consultation has had different meanings for different people. I'm wondering if there is to be approval by the Leader of the Opposition for the people that . . . for the names that are put forward for the commission. Is that what you're meaning by consultation and establishment of that commission?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — No, Mr. Chair, to be fair, and I'm confident that the member opposite and all members opposite want to adhere to the Act and the intention of the Act and the law as prescribed in the Act, that intention and prescription is that there should ought to be consultation, that consultation will occur. This Act does not imply or state that there must be agreement or approval from leaders of the opposition. It indicates clearly there must be consultation, and there will be consultation.

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Premier, if I understood your comment, you are stating then that there will be no need for the Leader of the Opposition to approve the names that will eventually make up the commission?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, yes. The fact of the matter is the legislation doesn't prescribe to the Leader of the Opposition or leaders of the opposition a veto. But let's, to be fair and let's understand, we all have a desire and a reason to ensure that any constituency boundary commission is going to be fair, that it's going to be seen to be fair, that it will do good work because it will affect members on all sides of the House. It will affect constituencies across the province.

I'll want to consult with the Leader of the Opposition and I'm relatively confident that when we reach this point in time that we will find a mutual agreement.

But the Act does not provide veto to a leader or leaders of the opposition. That's very clear.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much for that answer, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, one of the other conditions in the Act is that the commission must consult with the public on new boundaries.

How do you see that process unfolding since it might be April that that release is, or maybe March, and we may not be back in session by then. How do you see that process occurring for consultation with the public by the commission members?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'd want first of all to ensure that as we put the commission together that we're putting

people in place that will have the expertise and the experience and knowledge and I would want to trust their judgment on appropriate public consultation.

We have had in recent years an experience, and there were opportunities for public input and a further follow-up after the initial report, where individuals could appear or groups could appear before the commission to make either protest or recommended change.

The Act as I see it here talks about the potential of the commission to have hearings at times and places that it considers appropriate. It allows the commission to use paid advertisement. It sets out some prescription for people who want to present to the commission. It is required to provide an interim report, then to have hearings around the interim report, to make copies of the report available to the public.

And then finally, after that kind of dialogue and consultation, they provide the final and official report here to the legislature. And at the end of the day, we would have to approve it.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, one of the other clauses in this Act states that the constituency populations quotient is derived by using various populations. That is population of the total amount of the province and the north and then dividing that number by 56 after eliminating the northern population.

Mr. Premier, we don't know what the census report is going to indicate in terms of where people are located. We know that the population of the province of Saskatchewan has dropped a fair amount in the last little while. And I note, Mr. Premier, that in the Speaker's report, he indicated that the voters list from 1995 to the voters lists of 1999 that the numbers changed by about 12,760 voters in the province. So indeed we have dropped that many voters from '95 to '99.

You created a Rural Revitalization department to look at rural development and rural revitalization and encouragement of growth in that sector. And I'm wondering, Mr. Premier, in light of the emphasis that you've put on rural Saskatchewan, in light of the concern that is expressed in rural Saskatchewan, if the census report is indicating that there is a significant shift from rural to urban, is it your plan to proceed with adjustments even if they may be within the guidelines that are there or will you be requiring a specific change in the census report to initiate the boundary commission and its workings?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I'm not sure, Mr. Chair, I completely understand the member's question.

The census which is happening or has just happened will, by this legislation, trigger the boundaries commission next year. Within the body of this piece of legislation is the population requirement of constituencies south of the dividing line of a 5 per cent variance.

Now I think the member is asking is there a plan today to make amendment or change to that, and the answer today is no. As I indicated in my very first answer, we have not considered — I have not considered — we as government have not considered, this legislature certainly has not considered any change to this

Constituency Boundaries Act. And therefore, therefore the Act, unless changed, will demand that our constituencies, to maintain the concept or the principle of the one person, one vote, will retain the 5 per cent variance figures.

And I can again say, Mr. Chair, that I have had no discussion with the legislative drafters or others to plan any change to The Constituency Boundaries Act. Now maybe in a following session of this legislature we may want to. But as I speak today, there's been no consideration of that. So the way it's written is we have a 5 per cent variance.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, Acts are there for interpretation and lawyers will give different interpretations. I thank you for your response to the suggestion that you are not proposing any changes to The Constituency Boundaries Act.

But the question that I'm asking is, is there a certain number of constituencies that you will look at when we talk about the 5 per cent variance, and when we receive the census report, it will enable the report to be then divided up in such a fashion that it will place or allocate population per constituency?

Are you looking for half of the constituencies now to be out of whack on the 5 per cent, to then proceed with redrawing? Or if there's only one, will you then look at redrawing those?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — We will have to wait, I think, for any reasonable discussion about this matter to see the results of the census.

Now my sense is that the member is asking . . . work that will be done by the commission. Again I'm not entirely clear, I think, on the member's question. My understanding is that this legislation requires that the boundaries commission be established and function as a result of the census. That's not a matter of debate at this point.

I have indicated that we do not have any plans at this time to open the Act or change the Act. Again, we'll have to look carefully at the census numbers and make any decisions that may accrue from that. But until such time as we have those numbers, it can only be speculation.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, in the past . . . I want to talk to you just a little bit about gaming in this province. And in the past you've been quoted as saying that the funding of vital public services like health care and education is too important to fund on the whims of the gambling public.

Yet here we are a decade later and your government is dependent on hundreds of millions of dollars in gambling revenue.

Mr. Premier, if essential services like health care and education are already funded, how should gambling revenues be spent?

(17:00)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the gaming revenues of this and I think every government in Canada, the gaming revenues do flow to the General Revenue Fund. Some of those revenues

will find their way into the fundings of the various activities of government from health to education to highways to so on.

I am convinced that some of those funds appropriately must find their way into programs that will provide for the prevention and for the treatment of the tragic game addictions that do unfortunately occur.

But the simple answer to the question is those revenues flow into the General Revenue Fund. We have to make the priority decisions on how . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. I'm having difficulty hearing the answer. There's some sidebar conversations going on and I would ask they move that conversation to behind the bar so that we can hear the questions and the answers.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, have you ever considered giving some meaningful tax relief to hard-pressed Saskatchewan people? I mean lately with the higher property taxes, higher energy rates, it seems like although your government claims to have given tax cuts, it seems like you're perhaps giving with one hand and taking with the other hand.

And I was just wondering if you have considered giving some meaningful tax relief to these people?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I would debate with the member to say that I believe that meaningful, meaningful tax relief is being provided to the people of Saskatchewan from their provincial government.

A year ago, as the member will know, the Minister of Finance unveiled a three-year program of significant, significant personal tax relief. We have succeeded already in eliminating the flat tax — the former flat tax — the high-income surtax, and the debt reduction surtax. They are now gone.

We've introduced a very progressive three-rate tax on taxable income. We've provided the 8,000 basic and spousal tax credits. We've added the \$1,500 provincial child tax credit, the 500 provincial senior supplement.

In this budget, the income tax reductions continue which will save Saskatchewan families significant amounts of tax dollars. I'm pleased to say in this budget we're providing new tax relief to our small-business community by reducing the small-business tax rate by a full 2 per cent — from 8 to 6 — as well as raising the ceiling for the definition of a small business.

So my view would be, Mr. Chair, that there in fact is some very significant tax relief provisions coming to the people of Saskatchewan through this budget, through last year's budget, and through a plan that will carry us into next year.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. In your comments though, you did neglect the fact that you have also raised property taxes, you've extended or expanded the sales tax, and we also have higher education tax. You neglected to mention that.

Mr. Premier, 1977, a six-month review by your government on

gambling showed two disturbing trends. The first one being that you wouldn't release the results of that review to the public — something we have come to expect from your government — and the second one was that this internal review showed an increase in addictions.

The minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming at that time said the government should and would do a wide-ranging review of the social and economic impact of gaming. You yourself have said all aspects of gambling should be studied before large-scale operations were allowed.

Yet here we are a decade later, Mr. Premier, with a multi-million dollar casino sitting in the heart of Regina, with expansions on the way, and another casino proposed to be built right in your own hometown of Moose Jaw. And eight years after you introduced the VLTs (video lottery terminal) into the province, you have yet to show us any figures indicating some of the problems inherent in gambling.

Why didn't your government do a comprehensive survey on gambling, one that would look at all aspects?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is — and I do have a little history on this file — the fact of the matter is we did carefully study and put in place at the time of the introduction of the VLTs into the province, we put in place what at that time was the most comprehensive program of public education, prevention, and treatment opportunities that existed anywhere in Canada, and I would venture to say almost in North America, not in North America.

Now over those intervening years there has been growth in gaming, no doubt about that. We have now engaged in the base-line prevalence study which I'm told by officials will be completed and the results will be available this fall. In each of the agreements that we have signed around gaming, there has been provision of funding and programs to meet the needs of those who find themselves addicted and who can find some very serious, very serious consequence of abuse of gaming. So the work is being done. The work that you speak of, that you ask of, is being done. The prevalent study is underway, and I'm assured that we will have those results this fall.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. But there was one study or a review done in 1997 that your government would not release to the public. And I would like to know your reasoning for not releasing it.

And I'd also like to know, Mr. Premier, what the current rate of problem gamblers is in the province, and what does that percentage translate into with regards to the total number of people in this province?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I apologize to the member, I didn't catch the question. The total number that she asked for was of which?

Ms. Eagles: — I'm sorry, Mr. Premier. What is the current rate of problem gamblers in this province, and what does that percentage translate into with regards to the total number of people in the province, like what percentage of people?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, this, this . . . to achieve the answer to the member's question is very much a part of the prevalent study which is now underway. It is the goal of the prevalent study to exactly determine the number of peoples who may in fact be very negatively impacted by gaming.

We know, Mr. Chair, that there are many, many, many citizens of our province and visitors to our province who game without . . . who participate in gambling opportunities without finding themselves in an addictive circumstance or having serious financial consequence. We also know there are those who are. And the prevalent study is to determine just that kind of information to give us an understanding of the numbers, to give us an understanding of the causes, to give us an understanding — a better understanding — of how we may meet their needs and prevent the addiction in the first place.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, you did still neglect to answer why the 1997 survey was not released to the public. So I'll let you answer that one before I ask the next one.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I thank the member for her patience on this subject. Now as I've consulted with officials here and others, we are not aware of a 1997 study. And if the member could give us a little more description of the study I might be better equipped to answer.

Ms. Eagles: — Yes, Mr. Premier, it was a six-month review is what it actually was, being done in 1997 on . . .

So the next question, Mr. Premier, is how many calls were made to the gambling hotline in the past fiscal year and how does that number compare to three years ago, five years ago, eight years ago?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, the information that I have begins in a tally that starts in 1995-96 when I . . . I guess it was a little before that the gambling hotline was put into place, but that would be early in its history up until 1999-2000. So that doesn't include the current year.

In 1995-96 the total number of calls were 2,035. That grew in '96-97 to 3,100 . . . I'll round them a bit. That grew in '97-98 to 3,600; '98-99 to 3,700; and happily in 1999-2000 fell to 2,900. So we're averaging I would say around 3,000 calls a year.

Some . . . and I just want to caveat this too by the indication from this material that the 2,800 number for the '99-2000 has an asterisk beside which says it's preliminary data, but I assume it's fairly close.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, how many counsellors do you have in the province to assist people with gambling addictions?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, we don't . . . because the health districts are involved in the provision of addiction services in problem gaming, I'm not sure we have the accurate number here, and I'll ask the Department of Health to be sure to get us the exact number. I'm told it's approximately 40. Approximately 40.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, we've heard . . . and you have mentioned about the gambling prevalence survey that is taking place — this \$145,000 problem gambling survey that was recently undertaken — and it will not go far enough to address the issue of problem gamblers. This is what we've heard.

And that the best time to do this is the moment gamblers seek help. The waiting time between making the call and actually getting in to see someone is at least three weeks. Mr. Premier, many serious things can happen in that time, if someone believes him or herself to be in a desperate situation.

In fact many people are suspicious of a government-sponsored survey of gambling. It's kind of like a bad employee being put in charge of his own performance review. How effective will this survey be, especially when some of the questions will obviously be extremely narrow in focus?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, for the information of the member, the prevalent study is being conducted by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, a very reputable organization in the field. It is not a study being conducted by government. We're providing, of course, the funding. But it's a very, very reputable group and I would hope that the member would not cast aspersion on the study, because it's a very, very credible group.

They, I understand, will be using an instrument that is called the Canadian Problem Gambling Index which has been under development since 1997. And the validation of the instrument was tested on a sample population of 3,000 adults. And the reliability of this instrument, this testing is considered to be a very significant improvement over other previous methods.

We were part of a national task force that worked towards the — when I say we, I mean the province of Saskatchewan — were part of a national task force that developed the new instrument. And given the credibility of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, I have a great deal of confidence that the prevalent study being undertaken will be a very valuable, valuable read of what's happening in our province.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, what kind of initiatives are in place to address the waiting times for those seeking help with their gambling problems?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I can share with the member the broad package of activities that are happening in the field, both in treatment and prevention. The largest budgetary contribution is for the provision of treatment.

For the most part, if not exclusively, the treatments are being provided through the health care districts and through their mechanisms.

(17:15)

Now I think it is fair to say that we are meeting an increased demand for these services. The information I have says that over the last four years the client level has grown from 521 to 815 clients. Now in terms of the numbers here, each one is tragic. Each one is tragic, and one hates to see the growth.

The only . . . the silver lining here is that perhaps some of the outreach, some of the positive prevention and encouragement for people to seek treatment is having an effect and people are seeking the treatment that's there.

Where there will be delays in accessing treatment, I think I share the member's view that we need to be working as diligently as we can to find mechanisms by which people can access early treatment.

We've committed a fair significant financial dollar to it. This information also indicates that there are about 40 people doing the work. I think following the prevalent study we're going to have to have a hard, hard look at the whole range of services to as best we can treat, and even perhaps more importantly, prevent.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. When you gave me the figures before about how many people had called the gambling addiction hotline, you stated what the figures were in '95-96. And then in '98-99 it was up to 3,700, and then in '99 and 2000 it went back down to 2,829 people. And now you've just stated that the figures were 521 — the problem gamblers — and they had risen to 815 in treatment, I believe you said.

And I was just wondering if those dates corresponded. Because, you know, we've seen a decline in the number that have phoned the centre, and yet at the same time the number for receiving treatment have went from 521 to 815. So I was just wondering if the dates on those correspond or if you could explain that to me.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — You see, I think there's quite a difference in the numbers of calls to the gambling help line — remember that's calls to the line. The other numbers are people who are actually in treatment — actually in treatment. These are not inquiries; these are people who are actually in treatment.

Some of those who will call the help line will be referred to treatment and they may be reflected in these numbers. Others may be referred to other programs, not the one-on-one kind of intensive treatment but other educational programs, and won't be reflected here.

In some ways both sets of numbers — a decline in the number of calls and an increase in those receiving treatment, while it's tragic in every case, may in fact be good signs that people are accessing the help. They are accessing information. Fewer perhaps are feeling the need, but we're getting help to more people. And that I think is good news.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier, for clarifying that for me.

Mr. Premier, four years ago a Canada West Foundation report indicated that Saskatchewan adults spend more than \$400 per capita on gambling. That's the highest number in Canada, Mr. Premier. And no doubt that number has risen in the past four years.

We also know that the Health department — a department in which you were once the associate minister of — spends at least one and a half million dollars a year on programs for gambling

addicts.

What programs and services are encompassed in this \$1.5 million? And why are gambling addicts still having problems receiving or getting access to these programs and services?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Provided from the 1.5 million budgeted in the Department of Health for prevention and treatment services — and it's both prevention and treatment — as I said, the largest chunk of the budget is for the treatment program; that's \$630,000. To maintain and staff the problem gambling help line is \$195,000. We do professional training, and budget for that \$30,000. And a wide variety of prevention initiatives, spending \$70,000 on these.

We also partner, as you know, with the Canadian Mental Health Association who provide community programming through their associations. And so to CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) we provide \$250,000.

We're also working of course with First Nations in the programming that they're doing. Not funding that comes directly from the Department of Health budget, but through the other agreements.

So that will describe, I think, the \$1.5 million that's been expended.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, six years ago an internal NDP caucus memo strongly urged the government to get out of the casino business. The memo went on to say that the increasingly politically volatile nature of the gaming issue was an excellent opportunity for the government to extricate itself from any further involvement in the expansion of casinos in Saskatchewan. In short, the government should cut its political losses.

One of the signatures on that memo, Mr. Premier, belongs to the person who is now the minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming. And, Mr. Premier, now as you are and as we are all aware, the minister has been in the media spotlight this past year as there have been many question surrounding alleged activities within the province's liquor and gaming industry.

And the opposition has repeatedly said that it's obvious the minister currently responsible for Liquor and Gaming does not have a clear idea of what is going on within her own department and that she should resign.

Would you give the . . . or will you give the people of Saskatchewan a commitment today that you will ask the minister responsible for Liquor and Gaming to step down, and that you will conduct a full internal audit of the standards and practices of the Liquor and Gaming department?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I will not today or tomorrow or the day after be asking the minister, current minister of Liquor and Gaming to resign from cabinet because in my view, Mr. Chair, this minister has done exemplary work, Mr. Chair, in a very, very difficult circumstance — exemplary work.

Now do we need to have a careful look at the structures of Liquor and Gaming? I think that's fair to say yes, we do. I don't

think I would use the same kind of language that the member from Estevan has been using, but I think we do need to continually be reviewing our structures, our processes, whether it's in Liquor and Gaming, in all aspects of government. And yes, I think we will be taking a look at Liquor and Gaming as well as other aspects of government.

But on the first point, will I be asking the minister to resign? The answer is absolutely not.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. But, Mr. Premier, you must also remember that a lot of the problems within the Liquor and Gaming ministry could have been prevented if the minister would have acted upon the recommendations set out by the Provincial Auditor.

We all know your opposition to gambling, Mr. Premier. In fact, you've gone so far as to call gambling a desperate money grab by any government that brings it in and that will be only seen as a quick fix to solve financial problems.

Hasn't gambling solved a lot of your financial problems, Mr. Premier? In fact, hasn't your government's extensive, extensive involvement in gambling proven to be an unprecedented windfall of revenue over the years?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, on the subject of gaming, on an individual, personal basis, I am not one who supports gambling. Am I therefore to oblige my personal views, or how those views are based, on the general public? The answer is no, the answer is no.

From my point of view, a responsible government dealing with gaming must ensure several things. It must ensure that the regulatory regime is secure and strong. It must ensure that benefits, financial benefits from gaming flow to the public good, flow to community good. It is my conviction that some of those financial gains should be provided to the prevention and treatment of those who find themselves in difficulty with gaming.

On each of these, Mr. Chair, this province has shown leadership. On each of these we've shown leadership. And when challenges have arisen, as they have — and there is no doubt about that — this province has responded.

This government has worked with communities, this government has worked with First Nations peoples, this government has worked with the city of Regina, this government has worked with other communities in the province, is working with the city of Moose Jaw to ensure that gaming in this province is well regulated, well controlled, that the benefits flow to the community, to the public, the public good.

And as I've indicated earlier, we are serious in our commitment of undertaking prevalent studies, serious in our commitment to provide prevention and treatment where that's required.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. I believe that your government is the true addict. It is addicted to gambling and it is addicted to the revenues derived from it.

Mr. Premier, you've also been quoted as saying that liberal gambling laws will mean more prostitution, drug trafficking, and other crimes common to cities with wholly relaxed . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Would the committee please come to order? I'm having difficulty hearing the question put forward by the member for Estevan. Thank you. I would like to hear what the member for Estevan has to say but I'm having difficulty hearing it. So the committee please come to order.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, I'll repeat the preamble to my question.

You've also been quoted as saying that liberal gambling laws will mean more prostitution, drug trafficking, and other crimes common to cities with wholly relaxed regulations.

The sad fact of the matter is, Mr. Premier, that we do have increased prostitution. And drug trafficking is certainly a problem. And we all know about the high crime rates in Saskatoon and Regina.

Mr. Premier, do you attribute those statistics to your government's gambling policies, or do you attribute our province's social ills to other things, for example, the decrease in the number of police officers on our city streets and in our towns and the lack of employment opportunities for our young people?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, when we look at issues like drug and alcohol abuse in our communities, when we look at crime, the causes are many and varied and I think the member will know that. There will be many roots of those causes in family breakdown; we'll find roots, causes of these issues in poverty, in lack of education, in a wide variety of causes. Each of which, Mr. Chair, if I may say, this government has been tackling.

We've been showing to the nation for instance, the only province in Canada to show consistently now a reduction in the number of families and children living in poverty. That kind of a result will show, I believe, significant change in some of the other issues that the member talks about.

I repeat again, it is my view that in a community and a society that there will be gaming opportunities, and it is the role of government to ensure that those gaming opportunities are regulated, well regulated, well policed. It is the responsibility of a community through its government to ensure that benefits accrue back to the community, accrue back to people —not to private interest.

And it is my view that government must be responsible in providing the kind of programming that will reach out to prevent and reach out to treat those who find themselves in difficulty.

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Premier, I quoted what, you know, you have been . . . you have thought of the gambling laws, and how they'll mean more prostitution and crime. But we must remember that this gambling, as it is today in Saskatchewan, is a creation of the NDP government and therefore your

government must take responsibility for it.

Mr. Premier, some people believe that a lot of the penalties regarding gambling associated crimes are too lenient and that it doesn't address the more serious issue of fraud or theft. These people firmly believe that more needs to be done in this area.

Mr. Premier, has your government considered imposing stiffer sentences for those caught in gambling-related offences?

(17:30)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I think it needs to be clearly stated that when the member from Estevan was in the employment of the former premier, there was growth in gambling in this province, a significant growth in that time, in the bingos. We saw growth in horse racing industry at that time.

There has been in the last decade in Saskatchewan, in Canada, across North America, Mr. Chair, a growth in gaming opportunities. There's no denying that. We've seen casinos opened in Winnipeg, we've seen casinos opened in the United States of America, we have seen a casino open in Regina. We through partnership with First Nations have seen Indian owned and operated casinos in our own province. There has been an expansion of gaming. I'm not denying that.

But for the member to suggest, the member for Estevan to suggest, that when she was working for the former government and its leader that there wasn't gambling going on in the province of Saskatchewan is really to stretch the truth.

Now, Mr. Chair, she asked a question about the penalty. As she knows, the courts will award penalty for a guilty verdict as they see fit. We have not introduced in this session, as she knows, nor do I contemplate in the near future introduction of legislation that would change the penalties for fraud or for theft. These are matters that will fall under the purview of the federal government in any event.

But I think now it is fair to say, the member from Estevan should maybe now, maybe this is the appropriate time, for the member from Estevan to stand in her place and acquaint this legislature with the position and the policy of the Saskatchewan Party on gaming. Is she saying through this line of questioning that the casinos of this province should be closed? Is she saying that?

Is she saying that the VLTs in the hotels across Saskatchewan should be removed? Is she saying that the charitable bingos that are happening in this province should not be happening? Is she saying — and let's be clear; we'd like her to please be clear about this so she can speak on behalf of her party — is she taking the view that there should not be funds accruing to the treasury from gambling in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Premier, if you want us to answer the questions, call an election. We'll gladly replace you on that side and we'll answer them all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — It was your government that brought in casinos. You blame the former administrations constantly. You had the option regarding what discussions were held before the 1991 election.

We had GRIP. What happened? Your government tore it up. You could have done the same thing with this. So that just doesn't wash any more. There you go, Bill.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair, now here is an interesting theory, here is an interesting theory. Here is an opposition party who doesn't want to disclose its policies until they're in government. That's what the member just pointed out. You just let us get in. Well we had an election; we had an election.

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. I would really like to hear the question, which we were able to do, and I would really like to hear the answer. So would the committee please keep the sound level below so that I can actually hear the questions and hear the answers.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Somehow or other I've agitated them. Now they're busy demanding an election call. That's what they're doing now — they're busy demanding a call of an election. So I call an election — I guess then they'll tell us what they think about issues. Well isn't that an interesting position for an opposition party to take.

They don't have a position. They want to keep this all under wraps until an election call.

The Chair: — Order. Order. Would the committee please come to order. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now, Mr. Chair, I'll see if I . . . I'll just . . . Well, the member from Rosthern, see he doesn't stand and ask questions. He just asks or hollers from the benches. Now again, Mr. Chair, I think we've had an interesting experience here where the opposition refuses to enunciate a policy outside of an election call. That's what they're saying to us here this afternoon. Let me ask again. Just let us ask again. I'll ask the member from Estevan again.

Okay. Please, would you enunciate today for the House, for the people of Saskatchewan, the policy of the Saskatchewan Party opposition regarding the future of gaming in the province.

Is it your policy that VLTs should, ought to be removed from the hoteliers of Saskatchewan? Is it your policy that the casinos which are established in partnership with the First Nations here in Regina should be shut down? Is it your policy that we should eliminate the charitable bingos? Is it your policy that revenues should not flow to the public purse from gaming?

Now, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Chair, I'll give the member from Estevan another opportunity to answer that question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier. I find it very interesting that the Premier's interested in the policies of the opposition. This is a government obviously that's been in

government for some 10 years now and their response to everything, every question, every kind of . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Would the committee please come to order. I'm very interested in hearing what the member for Kindersley has to say and the question that he has to ask.

Mr. Boyd: — The Premier likes to chastise from that side of the House members when they raise their voice on this side of the House. But every single one of them opposite there was . . . or was beaking off from their seats a few moments ago and simply not allowing the opportunity for questions. I want to talk to the Premier for a moment.

The Premier likes to and the NDP have always liked to in this legislature absolve themselves of any kind of responsibility whatsoever for anything that takes place in this province in any way, shape, or form, and their entire attitude and their entire attack has always been, tell us what you would do.

Well we will be happy to tell you what to do when we choose to tell you what we will do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — We will enunciate the policies, we will enunciate the policies of this opposition when we choose to, just as he did in the 1999 election campaign. We were out front in the 1999 election campaign a full year and a half with our platform. Our platform was there a full year and a half.

Where was your platform at that time? Didn't announce it until election day and throughout that.

And incidentally if we choose to do it that way we will do it that way, Mr. Premier. We will, we will allow the people of Saskatchewan the opportunity, the opportunity here in Saskatchewan to hear the policies of the official opposition on our timetable, and it won't be generated or it won't be generated by you folks in terms of what that timetable should be, Mr. Premier.

And if you think that your rising in the House and somehow or another wanting to chastise members on this side of the House, and elicit some sort of off-the-cuff remark from them, it won't work. We will do it when we choose to do it, Mr. House Leader, and it won't take any kind of promise from you or any kind of prompting from you in any respect.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Premier, one of the areas of responsibility that you have to the administration and to the province of Saskatchewan is the whole area of agriculture. And I would choose to say that as the official opposition critic, and as a farmer, I believe it is one of the most — if not the most — I believe it is the most important area of our economy in Saskatchewan.

And there are always . . . and we know that there will always be ups and downs within that agriculture economy, and we are certainly witnessing some of them right now.

Mr. Premier, any kind of agriculture policy that we've ever had in this nation has always been a large part formulated by the

governments of Saskatchewan — the administration of the NDP over the years, the administration of other governments over the years. And we have set benchmarks all along in terms of policy discussions, and how the policy framework in terms of agriculture policy should be set forward. All of the years of the past, Saskatchewan has been a leader in putting forward ideas and plans with regard to that.

Yes, they certainly have, and we can clap for that; absolutely we can clap for that. Up until about 10 years ago. We can support that view.

That has changed . . . that has changed. There's always been three pillars to any kind of farm policy in Canada over the last number of years. Those three policies . . . those three pillars have always been crop insurance, NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account), and a third line of defence, as we've always had that and has always been expected of governments. And your government has promised that time and time again that those three pillars would always be in place.

You ran through the 1991 election campaign saying that you would commit to that, and you would always agree to keeping in place those three pillars of it. And for better or for worse, you made policy decisions around that timeframe. 1992-93, you were opposed to the farm safety net program, the gross revenue insurance program, and you decided that you were going to abandon that program. You made that policy decision. It's perfectly within your right to do so at that time.

And every single occasion after that, the Minister of Agriculture, and ones previous to him, have stood in this Assembly or through the Throne Speech or through the budget and have said that you would put in place . . . at the removal of the GRIP program, you would put in place a long-term safety net program to address that kind of shortfall in terms of ag policy. We've waited since 1992, through to 3, 1994, and subsequent all the way to today for those discussions to conclude.

We see the minister has put in place the ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) committee. He's put in place farm support review committees. He's put in place all kinds of opportunities for the NDP to finally come forward with a plan to deliver to the farm people of this province.

And most recently there's been two occasions when we thought, in official opposition — and I suspect the farm people of Saskatchewan would agree with me that they thought — that the Minister of Agriculture would be finally laying out a plan for that long-term safety net.

The most recent one was obviously at Whitehorse recently when the ag ministers got together. And I think the farm people of this province were prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt, if you indeed put forward a concrete plan, and then it could be discussed and looked at at that time. We didn't see one.

The opportunity previous to that was in Ottawa when you stood before the . . . when your Minister of Agriculture stood before the agriculture committee, the Standing Committee on Agriculture, and put forward a plan. We expected — and I

believe the farm people of Saskatchewan would support me in this view — we fully expected that would be a great opportunity for the Minister of Agriculture to lay out a plan.

What did we see? There was none. He gave a pretty good speech in terms of the problem addressing that. Yes, gave a pretty good presentation in terms of addressing the problem. We expected we would see something.

What did we see from other provinces? The province of Alberta, Mr. Premier, went there with three specific proposals to address what they felt were some of the things that we could do to help the farm sector right now in Saskatchewan. They said we could do something with the federal fuel taxes that would help. And obviously that's true. If we can reduce input costs on the fuel side, that indeed would help our producers in Western Canada and certainly here in Saskatchewan.

If, they said — the Alberta Minister of Agriculture — if we did something in terms of transportation, implementing the Kroeger/Estey reports, that may help in terms of our transportation concerns.

And while we don't agree that all of the Kroeger/Estey reports are completely what we believe in, at least they said this would be a step in the right direction. And they had a plan.

In addition to that they said that they believe that the Canadian Wheat Board should be opened up. Now the Minister of Agriculture, in response to that — and I recall very clearly, and I'm sure he does as well — said those are three, I think, good proposals. Those are three things that we could look at here in Saskatchewan. Those are three things that make some sense in terms of opening up opportunity for our farm families here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, I want you to be on the record for the farm families of Saskatchewan to say clearly, on behalf of your government, do you agree with those three proposals that were laid on the table before the Standing Committee on Agriculture, that were presented by the province of Alberta and steps in the right direction in terms of agriculture policy here in this province?

(17:45)

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, some weeks ago, I joined with Western premiers and territorial leaders and made a unanimous call — led from Saskatchewan and Manitoba — to reduce the federal fuel tax on fuel used in agriculture production. It is appropriate that we note in this House that this government took that step. We took that step on behalf of farm families.

And I share the view of the member from Kindersley, that has been voiced by the Minister of Agriculture from Saskatchewan, that that would be an immediate and appropriate response from the federal government to lower input cost to our farm families. Just take the tax off farm fuel like we've done, like we've done. So we share that view.

In terms of marketing, we believe that there ought to be concern . . . we ought to review all marketing options.

And in dealing with transportation, this is key to the future of this province, key to the future of farm families in this province — the whole issue of transportation.

We are an exporting province, Mr. Chair, particularly in the agricultural sector. We want to further diversify value add in the province. But even if it's raw commodity or if it's value-added production, transportation is absolutely key to the future of this province — to the future of Canada for that matter.

And so, on this point as well, we share a common front in this legislature for the need to be building and reviewing and looking at all forms of transportation in the West, and particularly in Saskatchewan. On this front, we are agreed.

Now the fact of the matter is and I want to just put this on the record — the member wants me to put some stuff on the record; well I want to put this on the record and I want him to acknowledge it — that in the provinces of Canada, in the provincial budgets of Canada, if you compare those budgets, you will find that this province, by a margin of 2:1 on a per capita basis, invests more in our farm family than any other province in Canada.

So that Saskatchewan today invests from this provincial budget \$436 per capita into farm programming. That compares with Alberta, which is next at 206; Manitoba, which is next at 194; Prince Edward Island, which is next at 162.

Mr. Chair, this government, through the reality of the budget — not through rhetoric, but through the reality of the budget — stands behind Saskatchewan farm families. Not through, not through speeches, not through rhetoric, but through real tangible programs, real tangible dollars, we're standing behind our farm families.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, then would you support Alberta's call that they made at the Standing Committee on Agriculture to implement a pilot project for the removal of the monopoly on the . . . from the Canadian Wheat Board in Alberta?

They offered up their province as a pilot project. Would you support that call?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — The answer is . . . On that very specific question about the Alberta proposal to open the Canadian Wheat Board, the answer is no.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So while the Premier stands in his place and says we accept and we are certainly supportive of any kind of call to allow farmers marketing options and marketing choices and to help them in terms of marketing, the very first and only opportunity that this government will have in terms of supporting a pilot project — not in this province; it's not going to affect the farmers of this province, but in Alberta where they clearly want it and their government is in agreement for it — this Premier stands in his place and says no, not only are we not going to allow marketing options here, we aren't even going to allow them in another jurisdiction.

Well the fact of the matter is, is Alberta is prepared to take that

on. They want to have marketing choices in that province. And they have a duly elected government that wants that as well.

And in Saskatchewan, in Saskatchewan, rather than listening to any of the rhetoric from the Premier about wanting marketing choices, when it comes right down to the question of do you support it or don't you support it, the answer is always clear from this government in terms of agriculture policy. And the farmers of this province know it very well; they can always expect a resounding no from this NDP administration. Just as they can expect from this NDP administration and this Minister of Agriculture — as they've gotten used to over 10 years — nothing, not a thing.

A long-term safety net program that's been promised for eight years now, nine years, and nothing from your administration.

Any kind of a program, any kind of a detail about what you would like to see in a program in terms of whether you'd like to see a revenue insurance program, whether you want to see enhancements to crop insurance, whether you want to see top-ups to NISA or anything like that, nothing from this Minister of Agriculture time and time again.

And on top of that, whenever we are discussing agriculture policy in this country, the fact of the matter is when the AIDA program was put in place, the minister of Agriculture, Upshall, of the day, sat in Mexico rather than taking the time to be . . . rather than taking the opportunity to stand before the agriculture people in Ottawa and debate them and put a plan on the table on behalf of the province of Saskatchewan. They did nothing.

When CFIP was on the table, where was the minister? Not even close, once again, to putting any kind of a plan forward.

The NDP's proposal, the NDP's plan in terms of agriculture policy has always been and always will be — and that's why the farmers in this province don't support you now and never will in the future — the program has always been, from your administration, blame Ottawa, and there's considerable blame for them, no question about it. Ask them to put a plan on the table, ask the rest of the provinces to put a plan on the table, as Alberta did, and then sit back as you always do and the Minister of Agriculture always does and complain and complain and complain and say: we don't like the design of it, we don't want to take part in it, we don't want anything to do with it.

But where is the Minister of Agriculture when it comes time to putting the plan on the table? The farmers of this province know it very, very well. It isn't there. Never has been there and never will be from an NDP administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Chair, I'm not sure I heard a question there, but here's exactly what we're about as a Government of Saskatchewan, sometimes enjoying the support of the opposition and sometimes finding them offering no support at all — in fact, creating difficulties.

But here he wants to talk about long-term plans, long-term plans. This government working with our provincial counterparts, working with a national plan, we're talking about

developing the issues around food safety. It's going to be crucial, crucial to the future of agriculture. The member knows that.

We're talking about environmental issues that are going to face agriculture over the future.

We are talking about the safety nets, whether it be NISA, whether it be CFIP, CSAP, crop insurance. We are talking about the safety nets. We are talking about the kind of improvements that are necessary. But while we're talking, Mr. Chair, we are putting our financial resources into these programs.

Now we were brought into the AIDA program. You remember, Mr. Chair, how they railed on us, pushed us into the AIDA program. Well you know how that worked for Saskatchewan producers. You know how that worked. We all remember, Mr. Chair, we all remember how they were front and centre, front and centre, especially their leader and the member from Kindersley in support of getting out of the Crow rate.

Well that little plan, that little promotion of theirs to get us out of the Crow rate cost Saskatchewan farm families \$300 million — about \$300 million — which is about the difference, Mr. Chair, which is about the shortfall many times on our family farms. I talk to young farmers in my own family who say to me if they had that Crow benefit it's the difference between making it and breaking it on the farm. They supported the end to the Crow Benefit — \$300 million out of Saskatchewan farm families.

Mr. Chair, in this budget year, I repeat, we are dedicating significant budget resources from the provincial treasuries to our farm families. Why? Because we believe in the strength of the farm family, we believe in the role of agriculture as an ongoing and growing role in the future of our economy in our province, Mr. Chair.

I want to again repeat, this budget, this budget shows a 35 per cent increase, a 35 per cent increase in funding for agricultural programs in this province. I believe that that's a significant percentage increase. But it is equally a commitment, a commitment to the future of agriculture in this province, a commitment to support those who occupy and who farm and who work that one-quarter of all the arable land in Canada located in Saskatchewan. That's our treasure and we're going to work with our farm families to ensure that future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 17:59.