

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the exorbitant increases in long-term care fees. Their prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

This petition is signed by the citizens of Saskatoon and Regina.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand today to present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are very concerned about the increase in long-term care fees. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately implement . . .

Oops, I've got the wrong petition today too. This is on the child sex trade:

. . . implement all 49 recommendations of the final report as submitted by the Special Committee to Prevent the Abuse and Exploitation of Children Through the Sex Trade.

And the signators on this petition are from the city of Humboldt.

I so present.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by citizens of the province of Saskatchewan, and it is in regard to Saskatchewan residents who are in long-term care homes and have seen their fees scheduled for increase. The prayer reads, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Rosetown, Eston, and Biggar.

And I'm pleased to present these petitions to the House.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today on behalf of people from my constituency who are very concerned about the increase for long-term care rates:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to bring to light the concerns that people have about long-term care fee increases. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

Signatures on this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Melfort and Star City.

I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to present to do with the new rates for long-term care. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the city of Yorkton and the village of Rokeby.

I so present.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by residents of the community of Eastend concerning the long-term care home fee issue. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of this province that are very concerned about the huge increases in long-term care fees. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for

long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And this is signed primarily by people from my constituency of Estevan but also from Regina.

I so present. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the increase in long-term care fees. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increase for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Ogema, Coronach, Gladmar, Weyburn, Pangman, and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens concerned about long-term care fee increases in the provincial government's budget. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are all from the city of Swift Current.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens concerned about crop insurance premium hikes.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens of Findlater, Bethune, and Holdfast.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this afternoon by Saskatchewan residents who are very concerned by the outrageous increases proposed by the government in regards to long-term care homes. And the petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people from Canora, Wadena, Elfros, and Wishart.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to present a petition from citizens concerned about increased long-term care home fees. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

Signed by the good citizens of North Battleford and Biggar.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with citizens concerned about the changes to the crop insurance program. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

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

The petitioners, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Allan, Colonsay, and Blucher.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents who are concerned about the changes to the crop insurance program.

The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plans to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the

communities of Dysart and Cupar.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too also rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding long-term care fees.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, on this petition are from Dysart and Cupar.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise on behalf of citizens in my constituency who are outraged at the long-term care fees. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the exorbitant fee increases for long-term care services in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks of Limerick, Lafleche, Woodrow, Mankota, and Killdeer.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 7, 18, 23, and 31.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Wednesday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2002 (Votes of Confidence).

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on day no. 36 I shall ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: in the year 2001 how many contracts for the grain option coverage were taken out with Saskatchewan crop insurance? Secondly, how . . . what was the total liability to crop insurance for the contracts for the grain option coverage?

And, Mr. Speaker, I also have another question that . . . similar question that deals with 2002.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Before proceeding to introduction of guests by other members, with leave of the Assembly the Chair would like to introduce to you several people who are in the Speaker's gallery today.

First of all it's my pleasure to introduce Walter Ostanek, Canada's polka king, who has received 14 GRAMMY nominations and who has won three GRAMMYS in recent years. He is also a Member of the Order of Canada and several polka halls of fame worldwide, and has a star on Toronto's Walk of Fame.

With Mr. Ostanek are banjo virtuoso Ron Sluga — a.k.a. (also known as) Ron Banjovi — formerly a member of Frankie Yankovic's band, and Norm Kobal, king of the tenor saxophone, both from Cleveland, Ohio, and Jay Michaels of Saskatchewan's own Western Senators.

Mr. Ostanek and the Western Senators have just completed shooting of PolkaRama, a 13-week television series, right here in Regina.

Welcome to them. I would ask them to stand.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Now behind them, seated also in the Speaker's gallery, is a large delegation who . . . these are social science teachers and officials from the Department of Learning, who are here on the fourth annual Social Sciences Teachers' Institute on Parliamentary Democracy. I'd like to introduce them one by one and ask them to rise as I introduce them.

They are: Alan Colpitts from Abbey High School; Eldon Danielson from Birch Hills High School; Lauren Dzaman from Herbert School; Joan Falk, South Corman Park School; Delise Fathers, Central Collegiate in Moose Jaw; Pat Fergusson, Estevan Comprehensive; Kelly Glaspey, Weyburn Composite; Faye Harrison, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), Woodland Campus in Prince Albert; Carri Lelliott, Oxbow Prairie Heights School; Dennis Moffat of Nutana in Saskatoon; Marea Olafson of Eston Composite High School; Robert Pantel from Gronlid School; Wayne Parohl, Elizabeth School in Kindersley; Tami Reynolds, Consul School; Jodie Ross from Preeceville School; David Rogers from Melfort Comprehensive High School; Dana Skoropad of Riverview Collegiate in Moose Jaw; Valerie Triggs, Southwest Shared Services.

And I want to make special mention of our steering community composed of four teachers and five officials from the Department of Learning. They are: Trudy Betthel from Oxbow School, and Fred Caswell from Robert Usher Collegiate in Regina, and Kim Engel from Grey School, and Chris Siemens from Hazlet School. And from the Department of Learning: Armand Martin, Gail Saunders, Ray Robertson, Anna Schmidt, and Brent Toles.

And I would also like to introduce a special guest, the program coordinator from the Ottawa Teachers' Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, and that's Ted Buglas.

Welcome all.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House, a distinguished group of visitors who literally come to us from around the globe. This is a group of students who are enrolled at the University of Regina, English as a second language program. They are seated in your gallery. I look forward to meeting with them after the question period.

And I would ask at this time to ask all the members to bid these people welcome to Saskatchewan and to this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(13:45)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with the member from Regina Victoria in welcoming our group of visitors here this afternoon from the University of Regina. I certainly hope that they have an interesting and rewarding visit with us here this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Exemplary Corrections Service Awards

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning, the Lieutenant Governor, Dr. Lynda Haverstock, and the Minister of Corrections and Public Safety recognized 33 individuals who have provided exemplary service with the provincial and federal correctional systems.

Corrections Exemplary Service Awards recognize the special obligations and hazardous conditions peace officers in our correctional system work within. The medal recognizes individuals with at least 20 years of full-time exemplary service. Ten of those years must be as a peace officer in an institution or with a parole or probation office.

Today 14 members from the Correctional Service of Canada and 19 members from Saskatchewan Corrections and Public Safety were honoured. As a former colleague myself, I'd like to offer congratulations to each of the 33 recipients. Their contributions to keeping our community safe, and to the rehabilitation of individuals in conflict with the law, is commendable and admirable in our environment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to the Tisdale Trojans

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, a week or so ago, I asked that everyone join in congratulating the Tisdale Trojans and the best of luck in competing on the Air Canada Cup.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the best wishes from this Assembly obviously worked because fans across Saskatchewan are joining the town of Tisdale in celebrating with the Tisdale Trojans, the new AAA midgets national champions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, although our wishes may have encouraged the Trojans, the team, their organization, and community truly deserves the credit for this incredible achievement.

Mr. Speaker, the players congratulated each other and they credited everyone who worked so hard in making this a success as being an example of how Saskatchewan sticks together and works hard together and overcomes incredible odds to win.

The team members certainly deserve to be proud of their performance, and I'm sure that this was an experience that each of them will never forget.

Please join me in congratulating everyone involved with the Trojan team as they enjoy this very hard-earned victory.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Children's Choir "Sing for Peace"

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, what's that line from the Bible, "And a little child shall lead them." On Saturday night, I and a large, appreciative crowd were given a dramatic and very musical illustration. I attended the annual concert of the three parts of the Saskatoon Children's Choir, and it was a remarkable concert indeed by a group of very talented singers, ably directed by Phoebe Voigts and accompanied by Bonnie Nicholson — and helped by a host of those volunteers we all praised last week.

But this is a concert and a choir with a significant and laudable difference, Mr. Speaker. This is the fourth concert given in the support of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the campaign begun by 1997 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Jody Williams — a campaign, I suggest, that we all should support. The fact that it is children most likely to be harmed by land mines makes the choir's involvement all the more poignant.

At Saturday night's concert, Jody Williams was the special guest speaking to the audience. Her message of hope and peace was augmented by the theme of the choir's musical selections, which was entitled, We Rise Again: A Choral Concert for Peace.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this July the senior choir will be taking its music, and its message, on a tour of France and Spain. As well, on the way they'll be singing at the Peace Gardens in North Dakota.

Our province and our nation could have no better ambassadors, and I know all the members in our House will wish them well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Construction on Avonlea Crop Processing Plant Begins

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Construction of a \$5 million specialty crop processing plant in Avonlea has begun, building on the natural advantages of the area. When chickpea acreage in Saskatchewan grew by 30 per cent in the year 2000, acreage of that crop around Avonlea grew by 300 per cent.

The plant will convert a vacant Sask Pool elevator and add processing facilities around it. Scheduled for a late September opening, the plant can process 3 million bushels annually.

This plant will be one of the most advanced in Western Canada with two simultaneous lines handling flat or round seed pulse crops. The lentil line will process 800 bushels an hour and the pea line will handle 3,000 bushels an hour. A sorting device in the pea line allows sorting chickpeas by size at a rate of 1,000 bushels per hour.

The construction by Blue Hills Processors, aside from saving the Southern Rails Co-Op short-line railway, will create between 10 and 12 permanent jobs. More jobs will be created during peak times.

Congratulations, Blue Hills Processors.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mary MacIsaac Celebrates 108th Birthday

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to have as a constituent a woman described by her friends as a shining example of the levels of involvement that women can attain when given strength, courage, and an independent spirit.

I'm proud to say that I am one of her friends, as are you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm pleased to announce to the Assembly that four months and two days ago, Mary MacIsaac celebrated her 108th birthday.

She is a member of the Three-Century Club, which is exceptional in and of itself, but hers is also a life marked by achievements far beyond longevity.

Mary MacIsaac was born in New Brunswick and came to Saskatchewan in our provincial infancy to teach in some of our pioneer towns before settling in Prince Albert, where she and her husband Jack lived until his death in 1981. She has lived in Saskatoon since 1984.

Her resumé is impressive enough to satisfy a crowd of overachievers. She's been a teacher, a president of the Catholic Women's League, a member of the Provincial Cancer Commission, and a member and developer of regional libraries. She was active in the establishment of hospitalization in 1947 and medicare in 1962, and was a charter member of the Canadian Federation of University Women. She has an honorary Ph.D. from her alma mater in New Brunswick, and is a strong supporter of both the co-operative movement and Heritage Saskatchewan.

Mary MacIsaac is a mother of five, an accomplished pianist, an

avid canoeist, a sharp reader, and an embarrassment to all of us who can't keep up to her.

By the way, Mary celebrated her 106th birthday by going cross-country skiing, proof positive of the special strength and spirit of Mary MacIsaac — a wonderful woman and a great role model. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Skills Canada Competition

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-one L.P. Miller High School students from Nipawin took Saskatoon by storm recently, at the fifth annual Skills Canada competition.

The competition is like a trade and technology Olympic playoff where students from around the province compete in up to 30 trade areas. The Skills Canada competition was established five years ago to promote youth employment within our province.

The 21 students entered 14 events and took home 15 medals. These medals included four gold, seven silver, and four bronze.

I would like to mention the names of the gold medal winners, as they will be going on to compete at the national event in Vancouver, May 30 to June 2: Keely Relland, software applications, advanced category; Andrew Hildebrandt, electronics; Carl Dahl, small engine repair; and Leanne Ens, forestry.

This will also be an international qualifying event. The gold medal winners from Vancouver will be invited to an international competition in the year 2003.

I would ask all members to join me in congratulating the instructors and the students from L.P. Miller High School on their recent success at the 2002 Skills Canada Competition. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kerrobert Credit Union

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, more good news for rural Saskatchewan. I rise today to bring more happy heralds of another credit union. The Kerrobert Credit Union made payments to members and was able to increase retained earnings with net income of close to \$200,000 last year.

Members learned of this windfall at the general meeting recently held in the Prairieland Community Centre. General Manager Gerry Brown said the profit enables the credit union to return about \$63,000 in patronage dividends to members. The Kerrobert Credit Union has more than \$17.3 million in deposits, and the institution has close to \$12.4 million out in loans, along with \$6 million in other investments.

The strength of Saskatchewan's credit unions demonstrate that rural Saskatchewan is still a dynamic and vibrant centre for commerce despite the opinions of the members opposite and national bank executives.

The success of these community-owned institutions, Mr. Speaker, illustrates clearly that rural residents are not willing to succumb to the negative attitudes. To quote the CEO (chief executive officer), Sid Bildfell, quote:

... in good times, everyone wants to be here, while in challenging times, the competition leaves. It is in these periods — when others withdraw from our market — that we stand to gain the most. We are here. We remain. And as the demand for our services intensifies, we are presented with new opportunities to serve and build our communities.

I am sure all members will want to join with me to congratulate Kerrobert Credit Union for another successful year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Increase in Long-Term Care Fees

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The Premier has had another weekend to think about these long-term care fee hike increases that he is putting on Saskatchewan seniors. Now our MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) have been hearing about this issue everywhere we've gone over the weekend. People of all ages are saying to us: you've got to stop this; you have to make the NDP (New Democratic Party) back down.

My question to the Premier is: is the NDP listening? Mr. Speaker, has the Premier listened to the people of Saskatchewan? Will he stand up today and cancel the NDP's attack on Saskatchewan seniors?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, over the course of the past week I have visited the communities of Muenster and Humboldt, Bruno, Peterson, Indian Head. I spent Friday and the weekend in my own constituency and city of Saskatoon. I have been speaking to seniors. I've been speaking to their families. I've been speaking to business people and educators and working people who may not have direct connection to long-term care.

And, Mr. Speaker, I've been reading the letters, many of the letters that have come to the Minister of Health, letters that have come to myself. I've been listening to the petitions. And it is clear to me, Mr. Speaker, there is a high level of public concern and public uncertainty among and around the proposed changes to long-term care.

And therefore, Mr. Speaker, today, as of now, I am placing this policy on hold and under review.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Future Casino Expansion in Saskatoon

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of Gaming.

Last week the NDP announced they have signed a new 25-year gaming agreement with the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations). Part of the deal gives SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) exclusive rights to any new casino development in the city of Saskatoon for the next three years.

Presently the Prairieland Exhibition operates the only casino in the city. It was thought the new agreement would have to include some revenue-sharing arrangement with the exhibition to compensate for the loss of their casino. But in the new agreement this issue is not addressed.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain why the NDP signed a new gaming agreement before addressing the concerns of the Prairieland Exhibition?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The agreement that was signed with our friends and partners, the First Nations people, had nothing to do with any type of casino expansions in Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker.

It was a 25-year agreement of mutual trust between two parties. And, Mr. Speaker, it's curious to me that the members opposite raise their concerns about a 25-year agreement with First Nations but never have yet asked one question about the 25-year agreement this province has with Weyerhaeuser.

Is there some sort of questionable reason for why they're concerned about our 25-year agreement with First Nations and not a multinational like Weyerhaeuser? Something curious here, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, this side of the House is concerned with any 25-year agreement that the government might sign with anyone in the province.

Mr. Speaker, the money generated from the operation of the Emerald Casino is extremely important for the continuation of community events and programming offered by the Prairieland Exhibition. The casino's existence is now in question because of this new deal.

(14:00)

The exhibition board members were expecting the provincial government to address their concerns and for the provincial government to include compensation for the Emerald Casino as part of a new agreement. In fact, Don Featherstone states, and I quote:

We need them (the government) to more or less guarantee our money. I don't think our board would ever ratify a deal with SIGA alone.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will the minister commit to addressing the concerns of Prairieland Exhibition and to being a partner in any new agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When that situation arises, there will be discussions and negotiations. I mean, that's the normal process.

But I do want to go back again and wonder; I'm very curious. We have 99-year leases with cabin owners. We've got other types of long-term leases with farmers on farmland. Mr. Speaker, why is it that opposition continues to have a serious concern about a 25-year agreement this province, this government, this coalition government has with our First Nations friends and partners?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, this is a business proposal, not a lease on cabins. It is a totally different issue.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will the minister commit to addressing the concerns of the Prairieland Exhibition and will the government be a partner in any new agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member from Canora-Pelly asked me if I can handle it. I think I can. It's too bad, too bad that they can't handle their research a little bit better, Mr. Speaker.

They've simply forgotten the fact that when the time comes to discuss those types of business arrangements, it will happen. It will come to pass. Be patient. Have you forgotten that there is an agreement between Casino Regina and the casino that was here where they paid \$2.6 million a year? When there's time to make a good business deal and arrangement, it will happen, members opposite, and Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the Prairieland Exhibition Association and the people of the city of Saskatoon are very concerned about any new deal that might come forward. Mr. Speaker, the government's own press release states:

The NDP is committed to a process that would give the FSIN full jurisdiction to all forms of gaming on First Nations land.

And Perry Bellegarde refers to this jurisdiction for gaming as the jewel in our crown.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain this process to the people of Saskatchewan, and what the NDP are considering?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Once again, there's an application process to enter into any kind of a casino agreement whereby the local municipality will, in fact, have a say as to whether or not it goes ahead or not.

But you know — and, Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the members opposite and this House — that I failed to mention that the agreement reached between Regina casino and the

former casino here was a 30-year agreement. I didn't hear any questions about that.

And I think it's appropriate, Mr. Speaker, given the kind of questions that are being asked, the Leader of the Opposition in his speech on February 28, saying that:

Gaming will certainly play an important role in successful future First Nations economic development.

Have they changed their mind, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the province was to agree to give full jurisdiction to First Nations for all forms of gaming on First Nations land, that could mean the establishments of casinos on reserves located in urban areas of the province and the province would no longer be controlling the expansion of gaming.

It may also mean that casinos could be built on urban reserve land without the approval of the city and its residents.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain whether this will ultimately mean that SIGA could build a new casino on urban reserve in the city of Saskatoon without the approval of the people of Saskatoon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, once again, there is a process that's in place when a casino . . . when there's a licence requested for a new casino and it involves the community at large, Mr. Speaker. It's based on certain criteria that are required for the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority to look at before any such process is approved, Mr. Speaker. This has been around for a long time.

I'm sure the members opposite would be well aware of our agreement, our partnership with First Nations. A partnership that we are pleased to have entered into given the accolades that they received, particularly the new chief executive officer of SIGA, Mr. Speaker.

So our First Nations partners, we have confidence in them. We will follow the processes for community development of additional gaming.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatoon will be very alarmed to hear that there was not a yes or no answer given to that question. I would like to ask the question one more time, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister explain whether this will mean that SIGA could build a new casino on an urban reserve in the city of Saskatoon without the approval of the people of Saskatoon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much more plainly I could say it, that nothing happens until the

community supports any kind of proposals that are put forward. There is a process in place and a community will have a say as to whether or not there is an approval to be considered for any expansion of gaming in that city.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Action Committee on the Rural Economy

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Speaker, this morning the Action Committee on the Rural Economy made public their extensive final report. And this report makes some very important recommendations on how to revitalize rural Saskatchewan. The report will officially be presented to the legislature this evening.

Mr. Speaker, the government has spent over \$600,000 for this committee's work. And this investment would be returned to the province many, many times over if the recommendations are implemented.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister stand in this House and commit to implementing the priority recommendations put forward by the ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) Committee.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite the same comments that I made this morning to the media, and that is that the ACRE committee's been in place now for 18 months. They tabled for us in the year of 2001 seven recommendations that they wanted the government to act on. And I can report today, Mr. Speaker, that those seven interim recommendations that the committee recommended to us, we've acted upon every one of them.

I say to the member opposite there are now 40 recommendations that are new priority recommendations that are before us, and 100 other recommendations that the subcommittees and the committee will review over the next period of time.

And we make the undertaking, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to act on those recommendations over the course of the next while that we're in government — over the next four or five or three or two years, or from two years to ten years. Over the next two to ten years, Mr. Speaker, we'll make sure that all those recommendations will be implemented, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may have heard the minister wrong. But I believe him . . . that I heard him say that he acted on every recommendation in the interim report.

But it contains several recommendations that they felt, the ACRE committee felt, needed to be acted on immediately. And they recommended that we ensure the consistency of taxation of all rural municipalities, taking steps to alleviate the current education tax burden on farmland and reducing the reliance of education funding on the property tax base.

Instead the NDP cut the farm land property tax rebate program and the RMs (rural municipality) across this province are now in the process of raising their mill rates due to a reduced foundation operating grants and revenue sharing.

Mr. Speaker, why do the NDP ignore the recommendations from the ACRE committee? Why is the minister saying that they followed up on every one of the recommendations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have the report in front of me and the member had an opportunity to review the report as well. And in the first part of the document, they talk about the interim recommendations, beginning on page 14. And on page 14 there are seven recommendations, Mr. Speaker, of which the education property tax does not appear on any of those interim recommendations, Mr. Speaker.

And what I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member opposite, that you stop misleading the people . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I would ask the member to make all his remarks directly to the Chair and the Chair only.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, and to the opposition opposite, when you have the document in front of you, you've had an opportunity to examine it, why would you tell Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, that the education property tax portion is in the interim report? Because, Mr. Speaker, it appears nowhere in the interim recommendations. And we've acted on every one of those, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the members opposite that you should get the . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. Once again I ask the minister to speak directly to the Speaker and refer to the opposition in the second . . . the third person.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The opposition should in fact take another look at the report, Mr. Speaker. The member should take a look at the report and quit leading the people . . . misleading the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, with the facts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister should read the entire report that was given to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the ACRE committee involved a consultant to do an independent economic analysis of the rural economy and to help them develop a strategy that would increase output and employment in rural Saskatchewan. They determined that the population of rural Saskatchewan will need to grow by 225,000 people over the next 20 years to provide an adequate labour force in the province.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree that it is absolutely essential that we grow Saskatchewan? Does the minister agree with the finding by the ACRE committee?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, clearly this government and this ministry agrees with the recommendations that have been put forward by the ACRE committee. We've been working closely with 43 men and women from across Saskatchewan over the past eighteen and a half months, and what we've been working on, Mr. Speaker, is making a difference in rural Saskatchewan.

So it's about partnerships. It's about working with communities. It's about working with farm organizations and groups. It's about working with individuals in the transportation area. It's about building our infrastructure. It's about finding new ways of getting capital to grow the rural economy, Mr. Speaker. All of those things is what we agree in and are going to work with the ACRE committee to enhance.

And, Mr. Speaker, we made a conscious decision in the development of the ACRE committee not to put any of the Saskatchewan Party members on it, Mr. Speaker. Because when you put Saskatchewan Party members on this kind of a committee you have wedge issues and polarization, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the member opposite . . . to the members opposite, don't get in the way of good public policy and good work in rural Saskatchewan today because every time you get involved . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, up until now I didn't believe my questions were all that political . . .

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

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Up until now I don't believe that questions were particularly all that political, we just wanted to hear some direction from the government. And we didn't need Saskatchewan Party members on the ACRE committee; the people of Saskatchewan were saying the same thing that the Saskatchewan Party's been saying on their Grow Saskatchewan meetings.

Mr. Speaker, the ACRE report also states, and I quote:

The role of government is not to pick winners but to set the proper economic and business climate and (to) remove roadblocks so that Saskatchewan entrepreneurs and communities can take advantage of the opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, that is again exactly what the Saskatchewan Party has been telling the NDP over and over. Whether it be with the invasive activities of the Crown corporations competing with private businesses or by direct government investment in some businesses while others are left out on their own, the NDP need to create a climate that encourages economic growth and development and then get out of the way and let business do business.

Mr. Speaker, now that the ACRE committee has put it in print, will the NDP listen and will they quit competing with private

businesses in this province?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I said earlier in my comments that on this side of the House this ministry and this government are going to work at implementing the recommendations that are in the ACRE committee over a period of time.

But what I say, Mr. Speaker, that we're not going to do, what we're not going to do is this, Mr. Speaker. Last year in this Assembly we had the member from Kindersley stand up — Mr. Boyd — and he made a speech about rural Saskatchewan and what a joke the Internet was. And he laughed about the need for Internet and he said cell phones. And I have a copy, Mr. Speaker, of that.

And all the members on that side of the House said, well this is a great big joke; these guys are spending all their time on the Internet. Well, Mr. Speaker, what is the very . . . what are one of the . . .

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

(14:15)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — And the member from Kindersley stood up, Mr. Boyd, and he made a mockery of the work that the ACRE committee was doing in developing infrastructure for communities.

And every one of those members on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, laughed with joy and couldn't hold their sides, Mr. Speaker, from the . . . And I say, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be building rural Saskatchewan, we're going to be investing in rural Saskatchewan, and we're going to be working collectively with communities and municipalities; and say to them, you should stay out of the way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while I was reading the ACRE report, throughout the ACRE report you get a sense of urgency. There is a definite urgency to change things in Saskatchewan and make it better.

A number of times you see the message, it's time for action, and there is also printed a number of times in the ACRE committee report that the status quo is simply not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister stand today and say if his party is going to be willing, or if the government's going to be willing, to introduce any piece of legislature this session that would follow-up on a recommendation on the ACRE committee or are we going to study the study for another year until next year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, earlier I said that the member from Kindersley said this, and I want to go back to this, Mr. Speaker, because this is what the member last year said. And I quote what Mr. Boyd said:

. . . it is almost laughable (that) some . . . things, (Mr.) . . .

Minister, and, Mr. Speaker, that they have put forward (the) . . . terms of (these) . . . thing(s). They are saying that one of the problems to rural Saskatchewan is the fact that (they need) . . . high-speed Internet, (Mr. Speaker).

And then they laughed all about it.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to do a number of things. Mr. Speaker, we're going to invest in rural Saskatchewan a variety of different ways. We're going to make sure that there are capital funds, Mr. Speaker, through the investment funds, to make sure that rural Saskatchewan people can invest in opportunities. We're going to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that we invest in infrastructure, in roads, in Internet, in cell phones, in power and gas and energy, to make sure that those communities have a vibrant opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

And we're going to invest in people who can work in those communities along the way, Mr. Speaker, for people who are living in those communities and across the piece. We're about building . . .

Minimum Wage Board

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the Minister of Agriculture must be living in fantasyland because all of his answers are fantasy.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. Recently CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio reported on the expenses racked up by the Minimum Wage review board over the last year. It was revealed that the board spent \$800 for research and consultation services, that this was the only original research the board undertook.

We sincerely hope that the board requested, received, and considered other research material on which they based their conclusion that the minimum wage in Saskatchewan should be increased.

However, on February 25, all the board sent to the Minister of Labour was one piece of paper with one sparse recommendation that the minimum wage be increased. There was no background information, no explanation, or documentation supporting the decision the board made.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell this House whether she received supplementary information or a report from the board explaining their recommendations; and if she did, will she table that documentation today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, during estimates when my department was up, I answered this question a number of times for the member of the opposition.

And, Mr. Speaker, I clarified that a number of times in the media, on the radio, that when the recommendation was put forward to me, it was attached to a report that had an economic analysis, an analysis on the province, research put into it from various presentations that had been made on behalf of businesses and interest groups to the minimum wage board.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I'd like to clarify what the minister said. She did not answer the question in estimates and the government shut down the House early that day.

Mr. Speaker, the Minimum Wage Board spent \$800 on a . . .

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

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, the Minimum Wage Board spent \$800 on a report of independent research and QED Information Services.

Will the minister explain what research the firm did for the board and what their research findings were and how that research factored into the board's decision to increase the minimum wage?

And, Mr. Speaker, will the minister table that research report in the House today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the research was done, the effort . . . the time, effort, and information was gathered by the Minimum Wage Board. And, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the members opposite, what is their view on this?

When you look at . . . the member from Indian-Head . . . Mr. Speaker, the member from Indian-Head, and I quote in *Hansard* June 12, 2000:

. . . I really think that a fair labour policy (in wage) is letting the market take care of itself . . .

Now, Mr. Speaker, then we've had other members . . . we have had other members that have commented that they know of workers that would be willing to fix roads for less than minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes in fair wages and adequate compensation for workers in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order, please. I would ask the member for Saskatoon Nutana and the member for Rosthern to desist. Order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 35 — The Fiscal Stabilization Fund Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 35, The Fiscal Stabilization Fund Amendment Act, 2002 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

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

**Bill No. 36 — The Corporation Capital Tax
Amendment Act, 2002**

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 36, The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 2002 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 37 — The Medical Profession
Amendment Act, 2002**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 37, The Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2002 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By leave I stand to table responses to written questions 139 through 142 inclusive.

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 139, 140, 141, 142 have been submitted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 17

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 17 — The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a . . . this Bill No. 17, the public employees pension Act, seems to be fairly short. The amendments that are put forward are fairly direct and to the point, and I think they have just reason.

When I read through the amendments, or the proposed amendments, there was a couple of things that came to mind, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to maybe just comment on those if I could before we move this along into committee.

The first thing that comes to mind when I was reviewing this, and it pertains to a changing way of life that we're seeing here and changing norms and customs in our society.

The Bill refers in this case, under the Public Employees Pension Plan, to spouses of members and this pertains to a marriage breakup. So that when a spouse, as a result of this marriage

breakup, achieves the age of 50 instead of 55, that member or the spouse of that member can therefore move ahead and try to have a retirement fund set up from that pension plan. And I think that's quite a desirable outcome and really what this amendments were made for.

Unfortunately, that amendment wasn't put in in the year 2000, when the other amendment was put in. So now we're catching up and I think that that's fine.

I guess in the changing norm or the changing society, we see a lot of families, marriages that are certainly in trouble, not necessarily leading to a divorce but to a separation. And when . . . I don't see anything in here or in the explanations that would allow that same kind of division of an asset under a separation or a legal separation. It would appear to me that this is a . . . may become a serious problem if in fact the asset that needs to be divided up under the separation has to be withdrawn entirely or cashed out. Then the interest would be . . . it would be taxable and the benefit would result in almost . . . in fact, no benefit for the member in this case. So that's something that we want to talk about when we get . . . bring this Bill to committee.

In another circumstance, Mr. Speaker, a family today often don't go into a formal marriage arrangement and are in fact living long and very fruitful lives in a common-law situation. I don't see in these amendments how this will apply to those situations when that kind of a marriage relation breaks up, not a formal marriage relation but one that is very common nowadays. And I think when we get to committee we should be looking at those consequences of this particular action.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that when we're talking about pension plans, and in the other Bills that are coming up talking about pension plans, we have to understand that the numbers of people that are going to be coming into that pension plan in fact are going to be increasing in proportion to the total numbers. So we have to make sure that the pension plans are correct and have the right interpretations placed on the amendments.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we can ask some of these questions in committee and I'm prepared to allow this Act to go forward to committee.

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

Bill No. 18

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 18 — The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another Bill pertaining to pensions, The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Act.

I think when the pension plan Act was first implemented, there was certainly a need in this province for an Act or a plan such

as this. It applies to self-employed people; it applies to farmers; it applies to those people that don't qualify for pensions any other way. And I think it has, it has in fact filled a pretty valuable role in our society.

One of the advantages of this Saskatchewan Pension Plan is that it is a tax-deferred plan and that will allow some planning once the . . . once we get to the age of 69 and the assets of this asset can start to be returned back to the people that were contributing to it all along.

There's some housekeeping amendments to the Act that I think are quite important. But I noticed in reading through this Act, Mr. Speaker, that there is a . . . an item or two in here that gives me some concern. And it also is a concern with some of the other Acts that we have seen — or amendments to Acts that we have seen coming before the legislature.

The concern that we have here is that some of the details of how this is going to be administered have been taken out of the legislation and put, in fact, into the regulation of the Act. And I think once you put those details into regulation, it takes it out of the purview of the legislature.

And I really believe that that trend is not the right direction. It's quite disturbing to us because the purpose of the legislation . . . legislators is to be able to see what's in the amendment, how they're going to be affected, and we can contribute significantly. But if they're in regulation, that's strictly an order in council change. And that is quite disturbing.

Also, some of the things that I mentioned earlier, in an earlier debate on Bill 17 regarding the numbers of senior people, proportionately, we'll be experiencing in this province . . . the concern that I have also is that when people finally reach the pensionable age, there's a tendency for those people to be leaving the province, taking their pension with them, and their asset base.

I know from lots of situations on the farmers that have decided to leave the province for whatever reason, usually for education reasons for their children, for tax reasons, they finally, when they sell an asset, it too — the asset — is liquidated and that liquidation is transferred with them to out of the province.

So not only do we have to make the pension plans relevant and pertinent, and we have to make it so that they will apply to everyone equally, we also have to put other conditions in place to make sure that once we get to that age that there is the necessary attraction for people to stay here in this province.

Again when I look through this Act, there is some clarification that will likely be needed when we get into committee. But at this time I think the clarification would be better presented there and I will move that this go forward to committee.

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

Bill No. 19

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 19 — The**

Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2002 be now read a second time.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again with this particular Act, The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, this is the Act that applies to a rather specific number of people in this province.

In this particular Act, it applies to those people up to the point of 1977, I believe it is. And so there is going to be a time when this particular Act will no longer be in place and all the people that have contributed or a pension plan has been built on their behalf will in fact be pensioners.

The concern in this Act — and it's being addressed in these amendments as far as I can see — really apply to making those conditions so that they're the same as the federal Income Tax Act. Without those conditions, I think the pensioners in this province would be at a disadvantage. And so moving this one forward to committee will allow us to ask some more specific questions. So at this time, Mr. Speaker, I'll move this Act move forward to committee.

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

Bill No. 13

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 13 — The Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists Amendment Act, 2002** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the Bill that's before the House, The Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that the government has been working with the association over the last year to . . . and they've recommended a number of changes. And I'm sure that every one of them is something that the people that are involved in the association feel is important.

We have to take some time to acknowledge the vital role that these people play in our lives. Unless we were involved with someone that has a hearing or a speech problem, many of us just take their work for granted.

But their work is seen not just in the health care industry but also in the education system. I find a number of the school boards that I work with across the province are always interested in finding people that have the experience and the professionalism to work in this field. And I know that the numbers are something that we would like to see an increase in. They're needed in many parts of this province.

Mr. Speaker, they're professional people and we know that their work is valued by the health care system and the education system as well.

The Act that's before us right now is basically a routine Bill. The people that we have spoken to are very much in favour of

the amendments that have been brought forward. Actually, we are proposing . . . the Bill proposes to increase the number of public representatives on the association from one to three and I guess this is something that they consider very vital and it will be helpful in doing their work. It also allows for one public representative to sit on the council's Complaint and Investigation Committee.

The amendment also extends a representative's term from two years to three years. I'm sure that this is going to enrich and enhance the speech pathologist and audiologist's work and give them an opportunity to make better use of their own time.

Mr. Speaker, the other amendments that are being looked at in this Bill are really administration and it's something that we have a number of questions on, but I'm sure they can be handled in Committee of the Whole. So at this time, I move that this Bill be sent to Committee of the Whole.

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

Bill No. 24

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 24 — The Powers of Attorney Act, 2002/Loi de 2002 sur les procurations** be now read a second time.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I consider it a privilege to be able to get up and speak on this particular one because it has some very interesting components to it. I think the philosophy behind it is admirable. I think there's some details in there that we need to discuss and we need to look at in detail.

We know how this government works, Mr. Speaker.

For example, remember on Friday, I believe it was, we had the member from Qu'Appelle talking about he knew what the right thing to do was, and today he was abandoned by all the members on his side and he's the only one left hanging there, wanting to continue where the government doesn't want to go.

So we need to look at this Bill carefully because the way they've been wishy-washing and flopping back and forth on their measures they are taking, they may do the same on this one. And we find out that this government is full of a lot of ill-thought ideas and plans.

So it becomes imperative, Mr. Speaker, that we look at these closely and make sure that what the Bills that are passed by this particular House are Bills that are actually for the benefit of this province, not just for some of their political gain over there.

The embarrassment that they've suffered over there is no problem. On this side of the House we rather enjoy watching it.

However, back to Bill No. 24, The Powers of Attorney Act. The powers of attorney basically are those situations where individuals have signed away, for various reasons, the running of their financial affairs to someone else. And there are those situations where that's necessary. All members, we are all

familiar with individual cases involving vulnerable adults who've signed away their economic affairs through a power of attorney.

And then the question comes up: how well and how carefully will these financial affairs be carried out by the person that is now responsible for those financial affairs? And in some of the cases that I think we're all aware of, Mr. Speaker, we found that some of these situations have gone to court, and that's as usual, Mr. Speaker, tied up the courts for many, many years — also at substantial cost to the individuals and their families, and the taxpayers of the province. And when finally a judgment is made it's very seldom a win-win situation. There's usually just a whole lot of losers.

It makes sense, Mr. Speaker, to allow provisions restricting someone who's been convicted of a criminal offence related to violence, fraud, or breach of trust in the last 10 years, that they cannot have power of attorney. And I think that's good because the concern that is out there, Mr. Speaker, is that someone with some sort of a devious background, finding people who are vulnerable, talking them into giving them the power of attorney, and thereby basically turning over all their financial affairs to this individual.

(14:45)

And so to the extent that this particular Bill says that if you've been involved in some of these criminal activities in the last 10 years, you cannot act as power of attorney unless there are some very unique circumstances that exist, that aspect, Mr. Speaker, I think takes care of one of the key concerns that everyone's had across this province with power of attorney.

The previous Powers of Attorney Act, as you're well aware, Mr. Speaker, I believe is only one page of material. And it's pretty hard to understand how in a complex financial situation all the concerns could be covered in a one-page document. So things have to be tightened up and have to be expanded.

One of the problems that has been brought to us as members of the opposition is that there is an issue of a non-mandatory form. So there's a form that's not mandatory — rather interesting.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, if someone is granting a power of attorney to another individual, the question is, has that person been assessed as to his or her mental capacity? So the need to know that if someone is signing away a power of attorney, what is their level of capability at the time that that occurs?

Another concern that's out there, Mr. Speaker, is the concept of power of attorney. It's a very legal document and yet a lot of people who haven't been involved in a lot of legalities and manage to keep, you know, their lives out of court throughout their whole lives, may not really understand what is meant by power of attorney, how big it actually is and how binding it is.

And so those are some of the concerns that are out there that people may not be fully aware of what they're actually doing when they sign off on a power of attorney statement.

There are also provisions, Mr. Speaker, that allow an individual the ability to name an alternate power of attorney. This wasn't

in the old Bill. I mentioned that the old Bill was only one page long. This wasn't in that old Bill.

Previously this was not allowed, and yet the legal community has argued that if one could do this under a will, why not under a power of attorney? And so that's why this is brought into that. And we're quite delighted, Mr. Speaker, that the government in this case has been listening.

And we know that when they form their Bills, they don't always listen. I think today in the House, Mr. Speaker, we saw a prime example of that, where the beginning of last week we asked the Minister of Health questions about long-term health care and he was very firm in where he was going, Mr. Speaker. Then they had the Premier up, and the Premier underlined that and said, yes, we're going and we know we're going; we'll continue there.

Today, Mr. Speaker, they backed away on that, which is good — which is good. But it makes us understand that this government isn't very sure where they're going, so we need to look at all aspects.

The accountability requirements, Mr. Speaker, on Bill No. 24 will also be well received by all individuals, families, and the community in general. This will allow an individual or someone's family to track the money as it is used or the assets are called in or sold.

Now I think that's very critical, because the accountability is there. I think we're all familiar with estates that seem to have just disappeared in the hands of a few unscrupulous people that had powers of attorney. There now needs to be accountability on that, and I think that will clarify many of those concerns that are out there.

There are still, as I said, Mr. Speaker, a number of other concerns that we have. Those things that we've . . . that I've mentioned this afternoon that we're supportive of, we will remain supportive. We need to do a bit more research on some of those other items.

And so we are encouraged by this Bill's overall intent. It was needed. It needed to enlarge the concept that was out there, but we want a bit more time and consideration to do a bit more research on it, and do some more checking to see that there aren't some more flaws in this one so that we don't let the government make some more errors that they've been making quite often in the past — in the last week or two.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would now like to move that we adjourn debate at this time.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

The Chair: — I would invite the minister to introduce her officials and, if she wishes, make a few brief opening remarks.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you very much. I would like to indeed introduce my officials and I would also, with your indulgence, like to make a few introductory comments.

Immediately to my north is deputy minister . . . I'm not going to do right and left here, okay? I understand from *The Globe and Mail* that right and left are . . . is a concept that's poorly understood by at least Canadians outside of Saskatchewan.

So to my north is my deputy minister, Terry Scott. Even more northerly to Mr. Scott is Mr. Dave Phillips, assistant deputy minister of operations. On the south wing we have Mr. Bob Ruggles, assistant deputy minister of programs. To the east we have Donna Johnson, acting executive director of corporate services. And to the southeast, to the southeast, Mr. Rick Bates, director of communications services. And to the west we have the opposition.

Now I would like to say that Saskatchewan Environment has a new name, a new deputy, a new minister. So I think it's important that I take just a couple of minutes to give an overview of the department.

I have other officials . . . Did you want me to introduce all the officials who are present here prepared to give us advice if needs be are: Larry Leckner, director of environmental assessment; Don MacAulay, director of parks and special places; Doug Mazur, director of sustainable land management; Joe Muldoon, director of environment protection; Dennis Sherratt, director of fish and wildlife; and Tim Kealey, fire management and forest protection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan Environment protects the water, air, and land, the plants, the animals, and special places that are the foundation of a clean and healthy environment and a prosperous society.

The quality of the environment, the strength of the economy, and the health of Saskatchewan people are linked and interdependent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of Environment's goals is a clean and healthy environment and that includes clean water. So you will know that this government has recently completed a comprehensive review of its drinking water management activities. Short-term priorities were addressed and Saskatchewan's long-term, safe drinking water strategic plan calls for expanded drinking water safety regulations and increased plant inspections.

Over the last two budget years new funding for drinking water regulation totals 33 new positions and \$3.8 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, other jurisdictions envy Saskatchewan's air quality and our clean air strategy helps to ensure that it stays that way.

As well, centenary funds are being used to clean up contaminated sites. More than \$2.7 million will have been spent between the years 2000 and 2003 to assist municipalities in the

remediation of orphan fuel storage facilities. More than \$2 million will be used to help communities establish regional landfills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan enjoys a well-deserved reputation for our effective fire suppression program. Focusing on early detection and initial attack capacity has proven to be very effective at preventing costly escaped fires.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to mention just a few other highlights if I may. Thirty-five species are being added to the list of species at risk due to habitat fragmentation, invasion by exotic species, or changing land uses that cannot easily be constrained.

Just under 1 million hectares were designated as part of Saskatchewan's representative areas network in 2001-02. This brings the network to 5.4 million hectares, containing representative areas from all of Saskatchewan's 11 eco-regions. In co-operation with Ducks Unlimited and Sask Water, Saskatchewan Environment is implementing a pilot program where farmers are paid to retain wetlands.

Saskatchewan Environment is now responsible for the urban parks program as well as Saskatchewan's provincial parks.

Some of the upgraded facilities that park visitors will enjoy this year include Moose Mountain's renovated park chalet, Battlefords' new park administration building, and new interpretative program centres at Saskatchewan Landing and Duck Mountain provincial parks.

It is important to note that Saskatchewan ensures environmentally sustainable forestry developments by applying the best available management science, and thorough consultation with all stakeholders.

As well, Saskatchewan Environment works diligently to build co-operative and productive relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Some recent accomplishments include the development of a First Nations conservation officer program, and fish and wildlife management projects that reflect Aboriginal rights.

Saskatchewan Environment's work to protect and manage our province's natural environment contributes to Saskatchewan residents' health through clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, and clean, healthy land to support us.

We will continue to meet our objectives in a manner that supports the economic and social and recreational aspirations of all Saskatchewan people. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, and to your officials, welcome this afternoon.

There's a large number of issues that your department deals with, and my colleagues are going to be ones to question you about various areas, but I'd like to start this afternoon by talking to you about the park programs.

A few years ago — I think when I was first elected, and I'm sure the minister was there at that time — there was a

considerable amount of money that was allocated for regional parks. And in the last number of years it's down to two-digit figures. And I'm wondering if you can give me an idea of how that money is spent on regional parks today.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I'd like to thank the member for that question. With respect to the regional parks, there are two parts to the funding, Madam Member. First of all through the centenary program we provide \$500,000. That is used for various programs within the regional parks. The Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association has a process internally to decide how those funds will be allocated. As well, we provide a \$75,000 grant directly to the Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, thank you. Could you clarify what kind of programs you were talking about? You have \$500,000; it comes to the regional parks through the Centenary Fund. What type of programs or facilities are actually paid for with this money?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to advise the House that I actually forgot to mention one particular aspect of the funding that goes to SRPA (Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association) in my first answer and that is with respect to the centenary student funding that they do receive for employing summer students. But you were asking specifically about the 500,000 capital.

What that goes to is to maintain support of existing infrastructure in the regional parks. That would go for things like upgrades to water and electricity connections that are existing already in the parks, building maintenance and building improvements such as painting the buildings, and a big part of what it would be spent on would be roofing for the existing buildings in the regional parks.

It's important also to emphasize that this money is allocated by a peer review system of a committee set up by the Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association. They review the proposals by the different local park boards.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, can you tell our viewing audience how many regional parks there are in this province?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — There are as many regional parks in this province as there are spots on a Dalmatian. There are 101 regional parks in the province.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, can a park apply for maintenance or upgrading of equipment every year or is there . . . and can they have a project that's continued over for a number of years?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Madam Member, every spring the Regional Parks Association has a call for submissions for the programs to spend the capital money, and certainly the parks could apply year after year. It will of course be subject to the peer review that I talked about earlier.

As long as we have the centenary funding for capital, there is the money available. We've made a commitment right now through to the year 2005 for the capital money through the

centenary program.

Ms. Draude: — I didn't hear your answer, Madam Minister, whether a park could apply for money for a project that could be carried out over two or three years, if they have something that can't be done in one year?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Madam Member, the projects that are funded through this are relatively small projects, they're not large projects, so at most they might be carried over for one or two years. But because they are essentially small capital projects, like re-roofing a building or doing some upgrades to water connections and so forth, generally the expectation is that they will be completed in each year.

I should also point out that the Government of Saskatchewan provides the \$500,000 that is used to basically assist in a lot more. Last year there was about \$1 million worth of projects that were carried out in the regional parks. So we are essentially providing seed money, and then the local communities and their volunteer labour and so forth assists in leveraging that up so that more work can be carried out to do the very wonderful stuff that's carried on in the regional parks.

And I should say at this point that one of the very first pleasurable duties that I had when I first was appointed to this ministry was to attend the annual general meeting or conference of the Saskatchewan Regional Parks Association. And I was extremely impressed with the dedication and diligence of all the people who were represented there.

I think that we have wonderful treasures in the form of our regional parks in this province and I would like to very publicly on record commend the Regional Parks Association and all people who are volunteers with the various regional parks for the excellent work that they are doing in maintaining those parks. They are truly Saskatchewan's treasures.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, I can't agree with you more. They are a treasure out in rural Saskatchewan and they do . . . one way that we can attract urban people out to the rural areas. And it was a great concern a number of years ago when the money for regional parks was cut back so drastically. We have about the same amount of funding spent on our provincial parks now.

And I'm wondering if you can tell me, first of all, the number of people that are attending the regional parks as compared to the provincial parks? I believe that the numbers have gone up in provincial parks since funding was cut to regional parks.

And also just to clarify your last answer, are you saying that . . . this money that comes from the Centenary Fund is seed money? Does that mean you have to have a matching amount of money before you get any money from the Centenary Fund?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Just very quickly, Madam Member, no, it doesn't mean it's seed money or that you have to have matching money. The point I was trying to make was that the local communities do assist and certainly do a lot of volunteer labour and help to maximize the admittedly limited amount of capital funding that we are able to provide through the overall provincial budget for regional parks. So that they, by adding

volunteer labour and so forth and local fundraisers, they're able to make the projects bigger than you would think on the basis of the \$500,000 for capital . . . Centenary Capital funding for 101 regional parks.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, I shouldn't ask two questions when I stand up because the other question was the number of people that are attending, or are going into our regional parks and the number that are going into our provincial parks?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I wasn't ignoring your question. I did want to answer the second part first, because I thought I knew the answer without having to ask my officials. On the first part of the question, I'm advised that between 2.25 and two and a half million people annually attend provincial parks.

We do not have an estimate or a guesstimate for the number of people attending regional parks. So if you want, I can take notice of that and get you an answer. I will tell you that I am one of those people who goes to the regional parks. I probably shouldn't — since there are 101 of them — I probably shouldn't single any of them out and give a commercial for those . . . for any particular park.

But I think that probably just about every citizen in this province at one point or another goes for a moment of peace and tranquillity or some good fun and recreation to the regional parks.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, has the parks tracked the number of tourists that are outside of Canada in the last number of years or is it just noted as a park entry? I'm just . . . The reason I'm asking is I'm wondering if tourism to our provincial parks is increasing from our American neighbours with the difference in the dollar.

(15:15)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I would like to advise you that, as you know — and I think we both have the same goals — we would like to see more tourists from outside Saskatchewan coming to our provincial and our regional parks. We don't have numbers with us today to give you the number of American visitors, for instance, but I would like to just give you a few stats, a few figures. And then if you want further information I can certainly provide it to you.

We do know that the visitation to the provincial parks has increased over the last five years. We also do know that there was a slight dip in 1999 in terms of the number of visitors. But that's back up again now — or at least we're hoping, if ever spring should actually formally and officially arrive in this province not just by date, but also by the climate indicating that spring is here.

Visitation to the parks is up for the provincial parks. We understand that it is also up for the regional parks and we do know that visitation to the urban parks — which are a new part of Saskatchewan Environment — that visitation to the urban parks and special places is also up.

I would like to inform you that 35 per cent of the visitation of the west side parks — of Cypress Hills and Saskatchewan

Landing, for instance — are people who are from Alberta. And in Meadow Lake, over 50 per cent of the visitors who go to the Meadow Lake Provincial Park are Albertans.

So we are clearly getting our share of people coming, at least from Alberta eastward. And we do have as well a very aggressive and extensive billboard campaign underway in Alberta to attract people to come to Saskatchewan to visit our parks.

And we also have a very active and very successful working relationship with Tourism Saskatchewan, so that we are doing a lot of things to attract more out-of-province and out-of-country visitors to our Saskatchewan parks, whether they are provincial, regional, or urban.

Ms. Draude: — Madam Minister, just one final question: can you give me an idea of what it costs for your billboard campaign in Alberta and outside of this province?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Madam Member, you were asking . . . you wanted the cost of the billboard campaign in Alberta to the penny.

Well we have an . . . we've expanded the billboard program this year and that is thanks to the co-operative arrangement that I referred to earlier with Tourism Saskatchewan and the Canadian Tourism Commission.

So to the penny, Madam Member, Tourism Saskatchewan is contributing \$10,000 to the billboard campaign in Alberta, the Canadian Tourism Commission contributes \$8,000, and Saskatchewan Parks under Saskatchewan Environment contributes \$10,000. So it's a total program of \$28,000 to convince Albertans that our parks are prettier than theirs and they should come here.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good afternoon, Madam Minister, and welcome to your officials.

Madam Minister, if I could I'd like to spend just a few minutes on portions of the budget dealing with forest fire operations. Perhaps you could confirm for me that last year the Forest Fire Contingency Fund was set at \$40 million, I believe. And could you also provide the current balance of the Forest Fire Contingency Fund.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — As I believe the member from Carrot River is aware, the Forest Fire Contingency Fund is alive and well, and we're hoping that we don't have to spend it at all. We are hoping and I'm sure that all people in Saskatchewan are not only hoping but praying daily for great amounts of precipitation, particularly now as we're waiting for the forest floor to green up. It's particularly important that we pray for rain.

The Forest Fire Contingency Fund, when it was originally established, was established with a total of \$40 million in it. Last year we spent six . . . we drew down \$6 million from that contingency fund to fight escaped fires.

Now maybe I shouldn't have said to fight escaped fires, because probably there was a little bit that was used for regular

operation as well to prevent some fires as well. But we drew down the funds last year by \$6 million from the original fund of \$40 million.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, did you indicate that you drew it down by 6 million or 4 million — 6 million. And what amount was it drawn down by the year prior?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — We just established it last year. We established it at \$40 million and drew it down by \$6 million last year.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Madam Minister, you've actually just identified one of the areas of concern that I had in that in fact two years ago the Forest Fire Contingency Fund was identified in the budget at \$50 million. And then there were in fact charges against it. You're quite correct in suggesting that the legislation, however, was only passed last year.

So if you could please once again give me an indication as to what the total amount spent from the Forest Fire Contingency Fund has been since it was originally established and the \$50 million was identified as being set aside two years ago?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I would like to advise the member for Carrot River that two years ago there was not a special fund, the Forest Fire Contingency Fund. So there was \$50 million in that, but that was an appropriated amount — it was not a special fund — and so the unexpended money that had been appropriated for forest fires was returned to the General Revenue Fund at the end of the year.

We don't have the exact numbers here with us today, but we believe that we spent around 3 to \$4 million out of that \$50 million in 2000 to 2001. But last year was the first time that we had the special fund actually set up as a special fund and it was set up with an amount of \$40 million. And last year out of that \$40 million we spent \$6 million on forest fires.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Minister. So then if I understand this correctly, last year you drew down the Forest Fire Contingency Fund by approximately \$6 million. Then under other forest fire operations, there were expenditures of approximately \$35 million. So total forest fire-related kind of expenditures would be in the area of \$41 million. Am I correct, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Well you're sort of correct. You're lowballing on the numbers actually. The note I have is rather than \$35 million, it's \$36.6 million in the base fire budget for 2002-03. And there will be, when you add up the money that is in the Forest Fire Contingency Fund, in excess of \$60 million available to fight fires.

Again, I want to make the point that it is imperative that we hope and pray for good precipitation all across this province because this is the time when the forest is particularly at risk. And so we have people on a daily basis watching to see if there are any fires that are out of control.

We expect though that if the precipitation that we received very

briefly this morning in the form of snow here in Regina is matched by a healthier dose of snow up in northern Saskatchewan that hopefully we can keep on top of the fire situation and we won't have any out-of-control fires.

But, again, that's . . . that perhaps may be a bit of a vain hope. Every year there are fires that do get away on us, but in forest fires, just like in other things, you have to hope and pray a lot.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I guess what I'm trying to understand here is that we've got an expenditure of approximately 36 million last year under the forest fire operation side. You've indicated we've drawn down the Forest Fire Contingency Fund by approximately \$6 million. And I guess the question is, is that the total of monies expended on firefighting last year?

(15:30)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I hope I'm going to be giving you the numbers that you're looking for. Our fixed budget last year for forest firefighting was \$26.861 million. And our expenses for fire management and forest protection was \$26.861 million. So that comes in right exactly on budget.

Last year we budgeted for small fires — those are fires under 100 hectare — we budgeted \$8 million. In point of fact though, we expended \$15.594 million, so there was an overexpenditure of \$7.594 million. It's important to keep that number in mind as you try to track and figure out where I'm going to land with the \$6 million drawdown from the Forest Fire Contingency Fund at the end of it.

The large fires, we had a contingency of the 40 million, the Forest Fire Contingency Fund; what we spent was \$6 million. And we had recoverable costs, though, of \$1 million from the forest fires. So the direct costs for Saskatchewan for fighting the fires last year was \$48.5 million.

And I hope that's clear, but I'll answer any more questions if it's not.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well I think we're getting there, Madam Minister.

The question that I have then, given the numbers that you've just provided, what is the additional \$7.2 million being requested for in supplementary estimates? And why would that not simply have been charged against the Forest Fire Contingency Fund?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I would like to advise the member that all fires, like all people, are not created equal. And we budget it and account for it in different ways.

It's important to note that last year we had, in total, 857 fire starts in the province of Saskatchewan. I find that quite an amazing figure.

But the \$7.2 million that you're referring to is money that is used to fight small fires. And then there is also \$8 million that we budgeted for the small fires. So in total, as I had said, the expenses to fight small fires last year came to \$15.594 million.

So that left us with an over-expenditure of \$7.594 million.

The Forest Fire Contingency Fund is used to fight large fires. So the \$6 million expenditure from last year was to fight some of those larger fires that got away on us. We had last year between 400 and 450 small fires.

And you know so much of fighting fires depends on where they strike, how many strike in a day, how quickly we can get to them. That's why we have a basic fixed budget in forest firefighting of \$26.86 million. That's to do the fire preparedness — to get the staff ready and hired and trained properly, to set up all the equipment and things that they might need to be able to be nimble and flexible to get out there and fight those fires while they're still small so that they don't get away on us and we end up with a major loss of a very valuable natural resource.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Madam Minister. Perhaps for those folks watching out there who may have some difficulty getting their head around why you would be paying for a large fire versus a small fire differently and out of different funds, perhaps you could explain how it is that it was determined that the Forest Fire Contingency Fund would only pay for large or escaped fires.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Basically what we do is we budget a base of fixed costs that we know on a year-to-year basis we're going to have. We know unfortunately that there are going to be some forest fires.

Actually I probably shouldn't say unfortunately because we also know that a certain amount of fire in a forest is healthy and helps to maintain a good, healthy ecosystem, helps to crack open the pine seeds and so forth.

We wouldn't want to get in the situation where they were in, in the northern United States a couple of years ago, where they had a lot of fires raging out of control because Smokey the Bear had done such an excellent job of suppressing all those fires that the, basically, the forest floor wasn't cleaned off and then you ended up with an old forest that just got out of control.

So basically we know we're going to have a certain amount of fires each and every year. So therefore we budget a fixed base of cost and as I said that's the \$26.86 million that we budget.

We know that it's very difficult to predict what the costs will be of those large, escaped fires and that's why last year we moved to set up this contingency fund that would be there to fight the fires if, heaven forbid, we would have major fire incidents that had gotten away on us.

Our basic emphasis though, always, is on fire prevention and suppression on a timely basis.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just on a follow-up to this, Madam Minister. I understand that in your forest fire planning that sometimes, you know, you reach a point where the season comes . . . kind of comes to an end, so to speak, in the forest fire season.

I'm wondering how many fires were left throughout the winter to be taken up . . . to be put out, so to speak, after the season . . .

after the new budget came in effective April 1?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I would wish that the fires quit at a certain point, but actually they don't, and that's one of the unique challenges that we have with forest fire suppression.

Come the wintertime you think, well, here comes a lot of snow and everything and it gets really cold and the fires are doused by the snow. In point of fact, what happens sometimes — and depending on where the fire is — the fire can basically go underground into the peat and then it would flare up in the spring.

And I'm told that we, right now, are managing about 12 of those kinds of fires right today; that there's about a dozen fires that were smouldering throughout the winter and have now flared up and we're working on them.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Madam. Mr. Chair, to the minister: then if your department knows that these fires are in existence and they're in a state of significant control because of, because of the climate, does not your department see then a sense of prudence to be able to attack these fires in the early winter — late fall or early winter — when it would be much easier to douse them?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I'm laughing a little because it is so obvious what the answer is. But I guess not having had the opportunity yet to go up to a fire line and see how they're managing this, it didn't immediately occur to me.

But as you know, to put out a fire it requires water. Water does a curious thing in the winter in Saskatchewan — water freezes. So what happens is basically the fires get started and then they get underground into the peat. Last year we had a very long fire season. We had active fire starts right up until the end of October.

The fire will then get underground and it will burn up to a certain point and then it'll flare up when it comes to a dead tree trunk or whatever. The only way to stop this is to flood the area. But it's very difficult to flood an area with water in November, December, January, when, if you got that water in the plane and you're busy flying around, you've likely got a great big ice cube there.

So that's why we have to be very vigilant in the early spring and watch as we see the ground melting as the snow goes away. Then we try to get out there and get on top of these fires that were not completely suppressed from the last fall.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — . . . if you will, and then that is used to in fact fund a lot of . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Could the member start again because I believe *Hansard* wasn't picking up the question. So if you could start at the beginning.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, with respect to the reforestation portion of the budget, Madam Minister, could you explain exactly how the funding for reforestation works in the province. I understand that the forestry companies are in fact charged a levy, a surcharge and

then that is used for a lot of the reforestation activities.

But is that the entire budget? And does that money just simply flow through the department or does the department fund a portion of the reforestation activities directly?

(15:45)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I'm sorry I've taken so long to be able to answer your question, but I hope that in my answer I've got at what the question is behind the question. And so if you will bear with me I want to give you the whole load in terms of reforestation.

Now industry, as you know, pays reforestation fees. And that money goes into trust funds. When they do the reforestation, they take the money out of the trust fund and they plant the trees. Now quite often the companies incur . . . the costs that the companies incur to reforest land is more than is available in the trust funds, but the companies of course have a legal obligation to replant and they do do that. So that's one answer.

But we do know that there was a time — in the hopefully very, very distant past and never to be repeated again in this province — there was a time when the trees were not . . . when the forest was not adequately restocked, when adequate reforestation didn't occur.

So we have money in our budget to replant where the land wasn't sufficiently restocked. And the most obvious example of that is actually, I believe, probably either within your own riding or close to it. And that's of course the Pasquia/Porcupine forest on the east side. We have an obligation to Weyerhaeuser under the forestry management agreement to do the planting there and the department budgets for it and does do that planting.

Now if I'm following what I think you're asking, on page 43 under vote 26, the subprogram of reforestation, I note — as indeed you have noted — that on the line on reforestation for 2001-02, the money budgeted was \$5.342 million. And for this year, estimated for the year 2002-03, we have estimated that we will spend on reforestation \$3.842 million. That looks like there's going to be a shortfall of \$2 million, and that there will be significantly less trees being planted. We are not though compromising the principle of the protection of the forests long-term health. That's a fundamental and ongoing principle that we hold very dearly in Saskatchewan Environment.

That \$2 million is a contract portion between Saskatchewan Environment and SaskPower and it's for tree planting in the northern forest in exchange for carbon credits. So by agreement with SaskPower — indeed I believe they probably asked for it — we're spreading the expenditure out for the reforestation, that \$2 million, over four years rather than doing it all at once in this particular year.

The work will still be done. The reforestation will go ahead but it will be spread out over four years rather than happening all this year.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was wondering perhaps, Madam Minister, if you could be a little more specific

in terms of the areas where that money is being spent and you indicated the northern forest fringe I believe. But would that be more in the Pasquia/Porcupine FMA (forest management agreement), the Prince Albert FMA, like where . . . in what areas are you spending the bulk of that money?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — The bulk of the money will be spent in the Pasquia/Porcupine area.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Madam Minister. You referenced the trust funds that the monies are deposited into when they are collected from the forestry companies for the reforestation fees.

Do, first of all, all of the forestry companies including some of the smaller contractors, smaller sawmill operators, and through to the larger companies, do they all pay the same reforestation fee, the same amount? And who manages the trust funds once the monies are deposited into those trust funds?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — What I would like to say to you in response to your question, to the member from Carrot River, no one will be excluded from the reforestation effort that is going on in the province.

We have trust funds set up for all the large companies already and we are in the process right now of setting up trust funds for the smaller operators. What we're anticipating is that the Saskatchewan Forest Centre will likely be managing those trust funds on behalf of all the smaller operators.

But basically, the reforestation fee is volume related. And it is important to note that no one is excluded and no one is exempt from this reforestation fee.

It is important that we manage our forests as a renewable resource. That means that when people chop down the trees, we have to be able to plant anew so that we can have new trees growing. So we have this reforestation fee.

We will set up probably an umbrella trust account for the smaller operators and we anticipate that it will likely be managed through the Saskatchewan Forest Centre in Prince Albert.

But no one is exempt. If you chop down a tree, the expectation in Saskatchewan is that there will be a tree planted that will grow to replace that tree. This is a valuable renewable resource that we have in Saskatchewan. We intend to manage it properly.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, does that mean then that a company like Carrier Lumber, for example, that only has access to private wood, that they will be paying that fee as well?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Well I apologize if I've misled you in my answer, because we really have no authority on private land. I assumed when you were asking the question about reforestation that you were talking about public lands.

I mean, we have I think it's 93 million hectare . . . or 93 million acres that . . . of Crown land in northern Saskatchewan that we're managing, so there is very little private land ownership in

northern Saskatchewan.

So I apologize if I gave you the impression that we would have a reforestation fee for Carrier Lumber. They get their lumber off private land, so we have no authority there.

But we certainly wouldn't mind using some moral suasion, because of course it really is important. If you chop down a tree, you should be looking to replace that tree. Trees are a very valuable resource in Saskatchewan, and as we consider the implications and ramifications of Kyoto, and the possibility of carbon sinks, these trees are even more important than they were before when we just looked at them as a means of providing two-by-fours so that we could build houses. They are also very valuable in maintaining the planet's ecosystem.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, one of the issues that I followed up with your predecessor on a somewhat regular basis was the issue of wood waste within both of the FMAs, and as you will probably recall . . . wood waste.

As you will probably recall, a couple of years ago there was a very serious issue when a permit was given by your department to the forestry companies, and they were allowed to leave the 4-inch tops in the bush as opposed to the 3, and huge volumes of waste accumulated very quickly.

I understand that there have been some measures put in place to try and eliminate that problem, but as you well know, in any forestry operation there is always going to be a certain degree of waste of some kind. And I know in the community of Hudson Bay, it's an issue that a lot of people are very, very concerned about.

And I guess the question that I've asked of me most often is, okay, if this wood is simply going to be left in the bush to rot, for all intents and purposes, why can't someone locally go in and gather it for firewood, use it for making post rails, doing something with it? A lot of people are very concerned about the amount of waste that there is, and I think it bothers them to a great degree that this resource just simply ends up, ends up rotting away.

And I have a letter here that I'll actually forward to you, Madam Minister, but it's from a couple who expressed this particular concern. And they, in fact, have been going out into a lot of this areas where there is waste and getting . . . collecting firewood and . . . But it seems that at every point, there's an attempt to thwart their activities to salvage this waste. And I know that a lot of this has to do with the various arrangements in terms of the companies, and the land that they work on and that they have available, and their right to that particular area.

But I guess the . . . As well as forwarding this particular letter on to you, Madam Minister, the question I would have is, would it not be in everyone's best interest perhaps to sit down with the Weyerhaeusers, the other companies operating within the province, and suggest that at some point after they have been through an area and all that remains is the waste, that it might be in the best interests of everyone to have . . . to give the communities the ability to be able to go into these areas and salvage this — be it for firewood, fence post rails, any number

of purposes?

And I give the government some credit for having made an effort — and the previous minister — for having made an effort in terms of reducing the volume of waste that there was being left in the bush. Because at one point, it was, it was, it was horrendous, the amount of waste that was being left.

But I think we could probably look after a lot of what there is still even just as a result of regular logging operations or regular operations in the bush. We could do a lot to clean even that up. And I was just wondering, Madam Minister, what are your thoughts on that?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I would like to thank the member from Carrot River for providing me the letter from his constituents and I would like to assure you that we will follow this up, the specifics of the letter, very actively and we will respond to these people from Hudson Bay.

But I think just now, since you've raised it, that I should give a general response because obviously we want to have — and I want to emphasize this — we need orderly management of the forest. It is a very valuable renewable natural resource that we have.

As you were talking about salvage operations and so forth, I was reminded of the four R's of conservation. And you're going to do exactly the same thing that I did. Everybody always can get the first three and then we go like, duh, what is the fourth one? But there is reduction and then recycling, reuse, and recover, I believe, is the fourth one. But it's important that we keep pushing on all four of those R's for proper conservation.

We are continuing to tighten up the requirements, the cutting requirements within the FMAs, so that the larger companies are taking smaller wood and leaving less waste. So we continue our efforts in terms of the reduction aspect there. It is important to note that FMA holders have the legal right to the wood that is in their FMA. We respect their right; we feel that we have a mutual legal obligation with them.

So we work with the FMA holders to encourage them to work with local communities, with local small-business people in the area to harvest some salvage that is left over, but we want first of all to reduce any waste. But we do encourage the larger companies to — where there is salvage that could be used for firewood, could be used for fence posts, or even some limited furniture making — that we want to see the wood properly used. We don't want it to rot on the forest floor.

I would point out that your question is a very timely one. It was only last Friday at 4 o'clock in the afternoon — no, 3 o'clock in the afternoon — that I sat down with Steve Smith of Weyerhaeuser to discuss this very issue.

So Weyerhaeuser, like the province of Saskatchewan, is concerned about reducing wood waste. And where there is waste due to the large lumbering operations, we then encourage those companies to work with the local communities to ensure that the wood doesn't rot and that it can be used appropriately — but bearing in mind that the FMA holder is the one that has the legal right to the wood.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Minister. You're quite correct about the legal right to the wood. But at the end of the day, Madam Minister, it's your department that does issue the permits, the licences, and signs the agreements, and I think that ultimately that's where the responsibility lies. And I think certainly that would, if nothing else, it would give you some negotiating leverage in terms of being able to approach these companies and perhaps suggest alternatives

And it's interesting that the people that get the most upset about this waste are the people who actually earn a living from the industry themselves in that they know and understand — and I always refer to as a case of point to Hudson Bay — they know and understand that if they don't look after the resource and they don't respect it, they aren't going to be able to continue to earn a living.

So it really bothers these people in the local communities that this wood is being wasted to this degree. And it, as I say, at one point it was in absolutely massive amounts. I certainly appreciate your recognition that it's an issue and that it does need to be addressed. And if that can be by the community in any form, then I think that's what should be done.

But one of the things that we're still dealing with, particularly in my area, is the piles of wood waste from a couple of years ago when it accumulated so rapidly. And something that's become quite controversial is the burning of this waste.

Could you tell me what the department's position is on the burning of some of the large piles of this waste in the bush.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Well the member brings up a very interesting point and an interesting conundrum. Because there is no doubt that as time has gone by, we have, all of us, this whole society — the companies, the government, the local communities — have become much more sophisticated in terms of how we approach the forest and the management of it.

And as I said earlier in my response, it is important that we reduce as much as possible the wood waste. And so we work with the companies to have them change their timber practices so that there is less wood waste. But unfortunately it used to be, in days gone by, that there was a fair amount of wood waste that was accumulated.

So that wood, of course, has been . . . Those trees have been chopped down; they're there. It is waste. They have no commercial value. We, like you, are heartsick about that but we have to deal with the issue. We would not allow burning until and unless conditions allowed for it because we wouldn't want to burn a pile of wasted wood and then have it get off and become an escaped fire.

Basically right now we do have the ability with Weyerhaeuser at the P.A. (Prince Albert) mill to use accumulated wood waste for cogeneration. And so we're taking care of that particular problem at that site. That doesn't answer the question though, that you would have for Hudson Bay.

I should also point out, though, that we are very mindful of air quality in this province and are doing some fairly important studies to look at air quality, particulates, dust in the air, and so

forth. Because one of the strengths and beauties of Saskatchewan is that we do have an abundance of clean air. We don't have a lot of smog and we certainly wouldn't want to be creating the smog from wood waste either.

But you've put your finger on a very important issue that we are looking at and trying to find some solution to. Again I want to emphasize that we do feel it's important to work with local communities as much as possible and to respect and to listen to and hear the wisdom of local people who, as you very correctly point out, live with this situation on a daily basis. And it is in their own best interests that the forests are properly managed.

(16:15)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Minister. If I could just switch topics completely here for a second.

I received an e-mail a while ago from a gentleman who is suggesting that there is going to be a pilot project established by the department at Buffalo Pound, and that this pilot project is going to involve establishing a lakeshore use fee, and that that will be used to finance cleanup and address other environmental issues.

Now is there in fact a pilot project, Madam Minister, at Buffalo Pound that involves the collection or the establishment of a new fee with respect to these kinds of issues? And if so, is there any intent to . . . what is the purpose of that fee and what is the future intent with respect to that fee?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — With respect to your question about Buffalo Pound, it's important to note there is a resort village there and they would be ultimately the people who would be making the decision if there were to be any kind of fee like you're talking about. It is being examined and there have been no final conclusions reached as of yet.

There's a land use plan that's being discussed for Buffalo Pound, and it would not be Saskatchewan Environment that would be implementing this shore cleanup fee if it were put in place. That would be a question that would be . . . something that would be being levied by the resort village at Buffalo Pound.

If you would like further information, though, I can certainly undertake to get an additional answer to you. Or if you would like to table the e-mail that you've received, I would have my department officials communicate directly with the person who has sent the e-mail and we will get a very specific response detailing authority and responsibility.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you for that response, Madam Minister. I think that the understanding of the individual was that this was perhaps going to be a fee levied by your department but I think your answer explains that. And if this is something that's going to be levelled at the municipal level, then obviously a person has a concern with that, that's where they'll have to direct their concerns.

But with respect to fees in general, when we asked the written question no. 38 — a while ago, you'll recall — with respect to fees and fee increases, you did indicate that there would be no

change in revenue taken in. And you did in fact provide a fairly detailed schedule of revenues from all of the different fees charged by your department.

However, those were all global numbers and you did not in fact indicate whether there would be fee increases or decreases inside of those total revenue numbers.

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Okay, I'm not going to give you a one word response on this one because I don't want to get in trouble. But it's a little complicated. Some of the fees go up on adjustments of . . . as volumes increase and so forth. So there's built into some of the fees is a natural growth that's formulaic-based. But overall, one could say generally that there are no fee increases but you will notice that the . . . there's no change in the revenue that comes to Saskatchewan Environment.

What we have determined, though, is that there are certain fees for which GST (goods and services tax) is payable. And so we will be levying GST and remitting that appropriately.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Madam Minister. So, Madam Minister, then you can assure us that there are going to be no increases in hunting licenses, fishing licenses — those kinds of things this year — over the course of the, over the course of the year in any of those? Or park fees or any, any of those direct fees?

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — I would like to advise the member opposite that the situation with respect to hunting license fees and fishing fees and so forth is so stable that we've actually sent out the hunting and angling guides with the picture of the former minister on them. So it's a very pretty picture of the member from Athabasca, but we thought that since he was so adamant that we not increase the fees that we would keep his photo in the hunters' and anglers' guides this year.

Actually what we were doing was making sure that . . . anyway.

But there were no rate or service fee increases for this fiscal year. I did mention the GST issue and also talked . . . I tried to indicate that there are some volume-based increases. But those are, those are, those are based on a formula. But just overall generally, what you paid for your fishing licence last year is what you're going to pay for it this year.

And I hope you don't do as I did. I bought my fishing licence last year, used it once, and then went home and laundered it. And so it came out just in little bits of paper and I didn't feel that I could go back and fish any more even though I had paid for a full season's worth of fishing because it was just a bunch of little scraps of paper that came out of the washing machine.

Now, now we get into fishing tales. Have to tell you, I was very pleased last summer to go up north and go fishing. And I am the world's lousiest fisher. I caught an awful lot of stuff. What I caught was a lot of weeds.

And I actually did hook one fish — little, itty-bitty guy — and as I was trying to decide if I would reel it in or not, my good friend from Athabasca said, oh I'll take it off the hook for you. And he reached over and . . . this guy knows catch-and-release

really well because before I was able to decide if I wanted to have that fish to take it home to fry for dinner, the fish had got away from the member from Athabasca and it was back in the water where it belonged.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, well as we are all aware, the revenue from some of those fees we've just been discussing — particularly the hunting and fishing licences — a percentage of those revenues are ultimately supposed to end up in the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund.

And I guess, Madam Minister, we've certainly had a wide-ranging discussion on the use of the surplus by your government this year and the way that you are now funding certain other entities that were formerly funded directly by the department, and the fact that revenue from those fees going to the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund will now actually be funding 18 civil service positions as well that were formerly funded directly by the department.

Now, Madam Minister, the Provincial Auditor has suggested that he will be taking a look at the use of those funds and the surplus from that fund in order to determine the . . . in order to determine if the law, the criteria for the fund is being followed.

Madam Minister, do you support the Provincial Auditor examining the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund?

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

Mr. Gantfoer: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Chairman.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Gantfoer: — Members, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to the Assembly this afternoon a couple of individuals from my constituency. First of all, I'd like to introduce Justice Halderman who has come to Melfort, I believe, a couple years ago and is a Provincial Court judge I believe. And the reason that I'm not real sure about this is I can quite happily report that we haven't had the opportunity to have any kind of professional relationship over these two years.

But Justice Halderman is here today with his daughter Amy watching the proceedings of the House and I'd ask all members to welcome them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund

Environment

Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you. I would like to also welcome Justice Halderman and Amy here. And I hope that we are

providing sufficient answers and entertainment for you to keep you glued to your seat here.

Now I said jokingly, finally you were asking me a question about the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund. I enjoyed answering the questions during question period and I enjoyed answering the questions that the members of the steering committee put to me when I met with them a couple of weeks ago to discuss the specifics of how we are funding — for this year only — the 17.8 staff positions and what they will be doing.

And you ask me whether or not I support the auditor in his examination of our use of the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund. Not only do I support the auditor in that endeavour, I would expect that the auditor would be looking at how we are accounting for these funds. This is a normal procedure and normal practice for auditors. This is what we expect them to do, so . . . And I am sure that when the auditor reports you will find that, yes, indeed, we are properly using these funds.

I would like to refer the member opposite to The Natural Resources Act, a consolidation from 1993. And if you could turn to section 20 of The Natural Resources Act, that section is subtitled the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund and is the legal authority under which the fund was created. If you then turn to subsection 26 . . . 20(6), you will find detailed there, from points (a) through to (i), what the minister may use the assets of the fund for. If you would like, I could certainly read into the record what they can and cannot be used for. Okay?

If you would . . . I'll give you the whole load then. Here comes section 20 of The Natural Resources Act, and I think, if you follow it through, you will see that we are properly accounting for and expending money in the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund.

Certainly when I met with the members of the steering committee, they . . . their concerns and fears were allayed when we sat down and took them through the very detailed specifics of what is happening in the fund.

Before I read it, I do want to emphasize that this use of the accumulated surplus in the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund is for this year and this year only. Next year, it will revert to normal practices. But section 20(6) reads:

The minister may use the assets of the fund for:

(a) the acquisition, by purchase, lease or otherwise, of any area of land or any rights with respect to land that the minister considers to be suitable for fish or wildlife related purposes;

That would be, for instance, purchase of land, conservation, easements and so forth.

Section (b) reads:

The minister may use the assets of the fund for:

the acquisition, by purchase, lease or otherwise, of any equipment or materials or the retention of any services (I

underline that: the retention of any services) that the minister considers necessary to restore degraded fish populations or fish habitat, to create new fishing opportunities or to manage fish habitat or wildlife habitat;

(16:30)

I've already mentioned in response to questions from the side opposite in the House, during question period, that there are fish hatcheries for instance that are funded through the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund.

Clause (c) reads that the assets of the fund may be used for:

the development and management for fish or wildlife related purposes of any land mentioned in clause (a), or any other land controlled by the Crown in the right of Saskatchewan, in any manner that the minister considers advisable;

And of course, what the minister considers advisable is activities that help to enhance the very valuable natural resources that we have in terms of our fish and wildlife.

Section (d) reads that the assets of the funds may be used for:

the design, development and operation of facilities to enhance fish habitat and fishing opportunities;

There you get the activities that are used: the fish hatchery; the hydro-acoustics stuff — that's a fancy name for the fish-finders, the sonic thingamajiggies that tell you where the fish are swimming around, that give poor fisher . . . fishers like me a better than even chance against those poor little fish. But it still doesn't work.

Section (e):

the acquisition of fish for fish stocking projects;

We've obviously got to buy some fish to be able to stock.

Section (f) reads that the assets of the funds may be used for:

the provision of assistance, on any terms and conditions that the minister considers advisable, to conservation groups for the development, operation or maintenance of locally sponsored fish enhancement or wildlife enhancement projects;

That would include protection enhancement activities; the RANs (representative area network); the conservation agreements with Ducks Unlimited, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

So we work very closely with those four groups to be able to lever funds so that we can get as many acres of land as possible that will be used for conservation purposes.

Section (g) relates to using the funds for:

the provision of information, by way of promotional,

educational or other activities, related to stimulating and encouraging public knowledge and awareness of fish and wildlife and of projects financed by the fund related to fish and wildlife;

This one is key, I would say to the member from Carrot River, because we do hunter education activities through there, ensuring that people are going to be using their firearms in a responsible manner and ensuring that the woods are safe when the hunters are out there.

Section (h) reads that the funds may be used for:

the assessment or evaluation of any waters in Saskatchewan for their fish or fish habitat potential or any land for its wildlife or wildlife habitat potential.

So the member for Moosomin was asking earlier, before we started these formal proceedings, about antelope. This is where we would for instance find the money to do aerial surveys to determine how many antelope there were, or to be looking in different areas to see how many deer there are, to be having our regional ecologists do the good and fine work that they do.

Finally, the final subsection in section 20 relating to the use of the funds reads that the assets of the funds may be used for:

(i) the payment to a rural municipality of a sum of money in lieu of taxes respecting provincial lands within the municipality that were acquired through the fund.

And that, I would say, is where the Municipal Habitat Conservation Fund comes in, so that we are paying a grant in lieu to the municipalities so that when land is set aside through working with Ducks Unlimited or the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, when land is set aside, the municipalities don't see this as a loss because we are . . . we've set aside a fixed amount to pay a grant in lieu of taxes each and every year.

And that fund, the Municipal Habitat Conservation Fund currently holds \$2 million and that use is restricted by minister's order. So the money is there to pay the taxes.

I hope that I haven't bored you with my extremely long answer. But in point of fact we welcome and we expect the auditor's scrutiny of the use of the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund.

And we firmly believe that everything we are doing is in accordance with the provisions of the Act and we look forward to this House receiving a report from the auditor on this topic next year.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you. Thank you, Madam Minister, and thank your officials. And I look forward to further discussion in the days and weeks ahead.

Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move considerable progress on the Department of Environment estimates, and if we could move to the Public Service.

**Public Service Commission
Vote 33**

Subvote (PS01)

The Chair: — I would recognize the minister responsible to introduce her officials; and if she wishes, make a brief statement.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. With me today is Wynne Young to my left, the Chair of the Public Service Commission; and to her left, Lorraine Von Hagen, manager of corporate services; directly behind me, Clare Isman, executive director, human resource development; and beside Clare, Rick McKillop, executive director of employee relations.

And we're pleased to be before the legislature today in estimates to answer the questions of the opposition.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I also wanted to welcome the officials here today. And the first question is that, your government has been talking about reducing staff and making for a smaller, smarter government, and I see in this particular department you've decreased the staffing from 133.7 to 117.9. What particular area within the department was affected by this downsizing of staff?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, thank you for the question. I can be very specific on that. In the administration area there was a reduction of 8; in human resource, information services 1.5; employee relations, 3.5; human resource development, 4; and there was one increase in the Aboriginal internship and management development program, an increase of 1.2.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Ms. Minister. Can you tell us or give us the details here today of how these reductions manifested itself within the other government departments?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Again, without getting into specifics right away, I can say that certainly the direction that all departments were given was to not affect front-line service delivery and to draw the reductions from administrative, HR (human resources), and other areas like that. And certainly to have the priority of keeping front-line public service delivery intact.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I haven't to date received the global numbers from your department. Would those be made available fairly shortly?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We believe that the numbers will all be available May 17.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Taking into account the existing vacancies, how much was saved by the government during the time frame in which there was a freeze on hiring?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — This is a difficult question to answer, mostly from the . . . It's not impossible to answer but difficult to answer from the point of view that some positions . . . some departments have vacancies that were just in the process of being filled. So they were delayed in filling . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. Order. Sorry. I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker so if we could just please to come to order and have some decorum.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, we'd have to be very specific what question we're answering because some vacancies would have been vacant just in the normal course of things and weren't necessarily directed by the direction to freeze. The vacancies that weren't filled because of the freeze direction, only the individual department managers would actually know which ones were vacant anyway and which ones were particularly held vacant because of a freeze that they would have normally staffed because there's always a bit of a vacancy level running in government.

Now I guess the important thing to know there is that departments spent in the previous budget year based on their budget for that year. Now they have new budget figures and now they will have to live within the new budget figures. So the degree to which they've reduced from the spending last year to the spending that they've got this year would be the saving, if you want to put it that way.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I realize that it would be very difficult for you to have those numbers with you right here today, but can you provide us fairly shortly with a list in each department as to how many positions were reduced, how many of these positions were vacant at the time, and how long that they were vacant? And I will look forward to that list, perhaps within a week or so?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — If the member would accept that staff would contact her in order to be very clear what the question is before we send people off to gather information because there's a lot of wrinkles around vacancy, part time, short term. There's a whole range so we want to be real clear what the question is before we send people off to get the answer.

Ms. Harpauer: — That would be satisfactory, Madam Minister.

(16:45)

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, and to your officials, welcome. Madam Minister, during the time that there was the freeze on hiring and filling vacancies, I know that there were a number of different departments had different itinerary bookings, conventions outside of Saskatchewan, and travel outside of the province, and actually had fares booked and places booked that they were supposed to attend. And I understand that there was a lot of cancellation had to take place.

Is your department aware of these cancellations and the costs that would be involved in this?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — That would be Finance that would have those kind of details. We're strictly the human resource part of it, not the other expenditures.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since the hiring freeze has been lifted, how many employees have been hired, either to fill vacancies or new positions?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Since April, 57 positions have been advertised and not yet filled. And the kind of positions, there would be things like social worker, aircraft maintenance engineer, laboratory technologist, equipment operator, lab technician, parental care attendant, just to give you some examples.

But the advertising resumed and 57 have been advertised since April.

Ms. Harpauer: — Fifty-seven advertised positions, but how many of those have been filled?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Forty-seven of those have been filled.

Ms. Harpauer: — Do you foresee a need to advertise or to hire any more in the next near future?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The departments, once their budgets are set, and as they have been set at the lower level with the reductions that were announced by the Premier, then that is their budget to work with. So that's their budget for the whole year. We don't analyze positions on a day-by-day basis. Once you've got your budget, then you're expected to work within that.

Now if we were to find part way through the year that we had to make further adjustments, then we would make that decision then. But at the moment the budgets that we're here discussing today are the budgets that have been approved for them for the coming year.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. With the recent government reorganization, how many positions disappeared in terms of deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers, and upper management?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — We were just clearing up whether we actually had that information. And because the deputy to the Premier is responsible for the upper level of deputies and management, we could sort of count in our heads and say, well, this department is changed and whatnot. But it would be more appropriate to ask those questions of that very high upper management level in the Executive Council estimates.

Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. Last year we saw a major increase in the public service positions. How many of these new people hired last year lost their jobs as a result of the overall reduction and government reorganization?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — 15.3 of the increase last year was for the Aboriginal internship program and all of those are still in place.

Ms. Harpauer: — Okay. When you had mentioned that you weren't responsible for knowing the numbers of the assistant deputy ministers and deputy ministers and so on, what level is your department responsible for? Where is the cut off of where they are not responsible to know the staffing?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The difference is between whether positions are order in council or within the classified service of the public service. So we're responsible for the large body of

hiring in the public service, but orders in council are done by the deputy to the Premier, which is Executive Council.

Now we could obtain the numbers for you, but we don't actually have them right now today.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and we would very much appreciate those numbers in the future.

How many students this year will be hired under the summer student program and how does that compare with the numbers that were hired last year?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The reason I was taking a minute there was there's two separate programs. Well there's actually three areas because there's a centennial, there's the hiring the Crowns do, and then there's the regular summer government hiring. So there's actually three separate categories of student hiring.

The centennial jobs are the ones targeted particularly at career development. The other jobs would be more your . . . your more typical summer job. And then the ones with the Crowns we don't directly get involved with.

But from the centennial, last year the centennial was 1,516 and government, other government jobs for students were 531 for a total of 2,047. And for the centennial summer student program this year there's . . . for the total program it's 1,350, and for government generally, six hundred and . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, that's minus the 240 . . . It's 400, just a little over 400.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you tell us how these students are paid? Where does the money come from that makes the payroll for the students? Does it come from out of your department or from other departments, or where does the money come from?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, there's two ways they're paid. For a regular government department it comes completely out of their budget, and then for a department that's hiring under the centennial program there's the 40 per cent matching and they find the rest within their own budget.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The reduction in the number of students hired, was that by design because you have chosen to cut back on that program? Or are there other reasons of why there's less students hired this year than last year?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — It's strictly a budgetary measure. The fact of the matter is is that lots more people would like to hire lots more students if there was lots more support. But this is what we feel we could afford this year.

And certainly it's a flexible program and everybody anticipates a pickup in economies right across Canada and we should be able to expand that again as things improve.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I know that I'm hearing it in my office and I'm wondering if your office also got phone calls with people, in particular businesses, complaining that the restriction on the summer job program was

only for government and government related departments and that there wasn't a student program available for the business owners.

Have you been hearing that and have you taken it into consideration to broaden that program to include businesses?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — There's really two issues there. One of them that ... is that government in Saskatchewan, NGOs (non-governmental organization), parks, etc., are all large public service organizations that are all in the process of having a lot of their older staff retire. So one of the purposes of this program is succession planning where you're preparing a new group of people to take over the leadership roles in all these various public sector organizations.

The other part of it is that the federal government already provides a fairly substantial private sector program. So our goal was not to duplicate what the federal government was doing but instead to fill a need in the private sector for career related jobs related to what the students are studying at university.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. That's all the questions that I'll have for today.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:59.