

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Deputy Clerk: — I wish to advise the Assembly that Mr. Speaker will not be present today to open this day's sitting.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens of northeast Saskatchewan concerned with the condition of Highway No. 23, west from Junction 9 to the town of Weekes. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 23 in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by citizens of Weekes, Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a petition today signed by a number of citizens from my constituency who are concerned about retaining their community-based ambulance services. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

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

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are from the community of Cudworth.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring a petition for some people who are concerned about the cost of prescription drugs:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reinstate a reasonable annual deductible amount for prescription drugs in Saskatchewan.

Everyone that has signed this petition is from Shell Lake, Saskatchewan.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise this morning on behalf of citizens concerned about 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 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.

Signatures on this petition this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are from the communities of Bjorkdale, Mistatim, Archerwill, Tisdale, and Zenon Park.

I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also have a petition today to do with overfishing at Lake of the Prairies. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with the federal government, First Nations representatives, and with other provincial governments to bring about a resolution in the Lake of the Prairies situation and to ensure that our natural resources as a whole are used in a responsible manner by all people in the future.

The signatures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are from Yorkton, Regina, Bredenbury, Yarbo, and Calgary.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with this government's tobacco legislation. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the community of Moose Jaw.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a petition here to improve Highway 42:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary repairs to Highway 42 in the Arm River constituency in order to prevent injury or loss of life and to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Elbow, Marquis, Riverhurst.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also have a petition from citizens who want adequate, reasonably priced

telephone service in the Emerald Lake area. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to modify the exorbitant rates of telephone hookup to these cabins, and provide regular cellular telephone coverage.

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

Signed by the citizens of Emerald Lake and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I would like to present a petition today with citizens concerned about Highway No. 15. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to use a portion of its highway budget to address the concerns of the serious conditions of Highway 15 for the Saskatchewan residents.

And the signatures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are from Davidson, Imperial, Watrous, Simpson, and Semans.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are concerned with the overfishing in Besnard Lake. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to work with the federal government, First Nations representatives to bring about a resolution in the Besnard Lake situation and to ensure that our natural resources as a whole are used in a responsible manner by all people in the future.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are all from the city of Prince Albert.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received.

A petition concerning the enactment of a law that would enforce all bicycle riders, in-line skaters, and skateboarders to wear approved safety helmets; and

Addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper no. 7, 11, 17, 23, 24, 134, and no. 147.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to draw your attention and that of the members to two international visitors who are seated in your gallery.

Now one of our . . . just by way of preface, Mr. Speaker, I might say that St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral in Regina has a partnership link with Lichfield Cathedral in England.

And one of our visitors is to be the principal speaker at the annual clergy conference of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle and to develop the cathedral-to-cathedral link. He is the Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral with special responsibilities for the cathedral libraries, education, and outreach and it is his first visit and that of his spouse to Canada and Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members Canon Tony Barnard, Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral and Mrs. Anne Barnard from Lichfield, Staffordshire, United Kingdom. They are accompanied by our Legislative Librarian, Marian Powell.

I would ask them to stand so that they can be recognized and I would ask the members to extend them a warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the other members of this House a number of students from Osler School — 34 students, grade 8 and 9 — in the east gallery. It's a good, vibrant community. It's growing quickly and so is the school. It's usually bursting at the seams.

They are accompanied today by their teachers, Glen Osmond and Grant Elke, as well as chaperones Maryann Wiebe and Joanne Friesen. They've just arrived in the building and they're going to be doing a tour of the building a little later on. I'll be meeting with them and I hope they get enough of an exposure to question period so they have some good questions about the activities here as well.

Would you join me in welcoming the students from Osler.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I have several introductions to make this morning.

First, to introduce — although this individual certainly needs no introduction in this House — an individual who served this legislature, served the people of Saskatchewan for many, many years in a variety of benches in this House — in a time in opposition, for many years in government, in a variety of governments, in many portfolios. I want to welcome, seated behind the bar today, our very good friend and former colleague, Mr. Ned Shillington.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to have the House also acknowledge and welcome Sonia Shillington who is seated in your gallery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's been my privilege therefore to introduce and welcome an individual who served this House as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for many years with great distinction.

It's now my privilege to introduce to this House two individuals who will serve this House with great distinction as MLAs. That would be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the two individuals seated in your gallery, both of whom who have received from their respective constituency organizations the nomination for the New Democratic Party in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, and in the constituency of Saltcoats.

First in the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy, a woman deeply involved in her community, a lifetime of activity in agriculture and education — Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members to welcome the next MLA for Weyburn-Big Muddy, Sherry Leach.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, seated beside Sherry, accompanied by her daughter, Justine, the next MLA, a woman again who is deeply, deeply involved in her community, currently serves as mayor of the community of Kamsack, the New Democratic Party nominated candidate last night for the constituency of Saltcoats, Pamela Nykolaishen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, to have in the House today my son James who is sitting in the Speaker's gallery. James lives in Calgary, and he's home this weekend to golf in a charity golf tournament in Weyburn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that most young people who have left Saskatchewan would like a reason to come back to Saskatchewan because they left their heart here. And my son, and many others like him, are looking for that reason. And my goal, and the goal of the Saskatchewan Party, is to make that possible.

So I'd like all members of the legislature to help me welcome James today to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to join with the Premier this morning through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in welcoming the mayor of Kamsack. I hope she enjoys her one day in the legislature.

I should add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is the first time I've been this shaky and this nervous in this House since I was elected in '95, but I think I'll pass quickly on that.

So I welcome the mayor of Kamsack here today, and I hope she enjoys herself.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Universities Hold Convocation Ceremonies

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in congratulating the 2002 graduating classes from the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan.

Spring convocations for both universities have taken place over the last three days with the University of Saskatchewan's occurring Wednesday and Thursday while the University of Regina started Wednesday and Thursday and finishes up today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the University of Saskatchewan conferred nearly 3,000 degrees, diplomas, and certificates on its graduates in the two-day period. Convocation addresses were given by honorary degree recipients Alan Cairns, Peggy McKercher, and Diane Jones Konihowski.

By the time the University of Regina ceremonies are finished, more than 1,500 graduates will have received their degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all members of the House recognize the hard work and dedication that these graduates have given in their chosen field of study. It is these leaders of tomorrow that we will be turning to for their insight and knowledge, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had the privilege of attending the convocation ceremonies in both Saskatoon and Regina and the calibre of the 2002 classes is certainly impressive. It is their knowledge and expertise that we will be turning to to grow Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Democratic Party Nomination for Saltcoats Constituency

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, well, well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan, this time for the citizens of the Saltcoats constituency. Last night at the Ukrainian Catholic Hall in Kamsack, the New Democratic Party nominated its second candidate for the election which the ever-vigilant members of the press tell us is on the near horizon.

The Premier, myself, and the members from Elphinstone, Yorkton, and Regina Qu'Appelle along with the 150 enthusiastic supporters welcomed Pamela Nykolaishen to our team.

And once again, Mr. Speaker, just as in Weyburn-Big Muddy, we're stacking the deck by selecting a very qualified candidate. How qualified, Mr. Speaker? Well for openers she's the current mayor of Kamsack and the financial secretary for the Kamsack School Division.

She understands the concerns of municipalities and the aspirations of our educational system, Mr. Speaker, and will be a strong voice for both in our caucus.

Want further evidence, Mr. Speaker? Pamela Nykolaishen believes in getting involved in her community just as Sherry Leach is involved and lives in hers, Mr. Speaker. How involved? Well rather than read the whole list, let me just say that her record of her involvement covers more than 20 single-spaced lines on her resumé — from church to Scouts, to figure skating, and many more, Mr. Speaker. And those are just for openers, Mr. Speaker. Two nominations, two very exceptional candidates . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — The member's time has expired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Canada Environment Week

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, next week, June 2 to June 8, is Canada Environment Week. Canadian Environment Week is held the first week of June each year and brings to attention the many aspects of the environment and the benefits of environmental protection. This coincides with World Environment Day, which was proclaimed in 1972 and is celebrated each year on June 5.

People throughout Saskatchewan will be participating in events to celebrate Canadian Environment Week. Individuals, community groups, schools, and workplace organizations are joining together to do their part for the environment. These include such events as planting trees, organizing recycling programs, or making resolutions which benefit the environment, such as walking to work.

In addition to these many events, the Saskatchewan Association for Resource Recovery Corporation is planning an eco-day event June 8 to raise awareness about its used oils recycling program. June 5 is also Clean Air Day Canada. The day was proclaimed to create an increased public awareness of two environmental priorities — clean air and climate change.

Clean Air Day involves community activities that target environment, health, and transportation issues, the idea being that if we take action now and continue this over the long term, a difference can be made. We consider air pollution our biggest environmental health issue and therefore there is a great deal of enthusiasm in celebrating this particular day.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join with Saskatchewan residents and offer their support in celebration of Canadian Environment Week as well as World Environment Day. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to Graduates

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in our legislature this morning to pay tribute to all those who graduated at this week's convocation ceremonies at our province's two universities.

To receive a university degree is an exceptional accomplishment and represents a pinnacle of achievement for each recipient, and a time of great pride for every graduate's

family.

Mr. Speaker, at this week's spring convocation at the University of Saskatchewan, 2,955 graduates received degrees and diplomas, while at the University of Regina 1,546 graduates were recognized.

I know all members of the Assembly will want to join with me in expressing our special congratulations and best wishes to each of these graduates.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize the achievements of those who received special honours at the University of Saskatchewan. Former U of S (University of Saskatchewan) Chancellor, Peggy McKercher; Olympian athlete Diane Jones Konihowski; and constitutional expert Alan Cairns each received honorary degrees.

Donna Greschner received the prestigious Master Teacher Award; Ali Rajput received the Distinguished Researcher Award; and Heather Kuttai received the President's Service Award.

To each of these very worthy recipients, we all, I'm sure, want to express our sincere congratulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

World No Tobacco Day

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the World Health Organization has declared today World No Tobacco Day. The World Health Organization calls for smoke-free areas for sports and recreation, as well as heightened awareness of tobacco advertising.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the use of tobacco products causes health problems, and it is particularly disturbing when young people get addicted to tobacco. However, the legislation that this government has passed to deter young people from smoking does little to achieve this end. This legislation penalizes the wrong people — the shopkeepers and store owners — while the youth trying to purchase tobacco products through deceitful means get off scot free.

Without any mechanism in place to fine underage youth for possession of tobacco products, they will continue to smoke and they will continue to purchase cigarettes through deceitful means. It is very disturbing to know that this government feels that fining the shop owner — the person who has been duped — is more important than fining the person committing a fraudulent act by presenting false identification.

You know that they are doing that when they present false ID (identification) to purchase cigarettes. I ask that this government reconsider The Tobacco Control Act to include fining underage youth for possession of tobacco products.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Former Saskatchewan Educator Honoured

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When I was minister of St. Andrews United Church in Indian Head, I came to know and appreciate not only the community of Indian Head, but Qu'Appelle, Sintaluta, Wolseley, and Grenfell.

They always particularly impressed me in the way these communities encouraged and promoted culture and education for all their citizens to keep their minds active and their communities and their spirits alive. They still do this today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Because I have many pleasant memories of that time, I am happy to announce to the Assembly that this afternoon in the town of Wolseley, one of Saskatchewan's most beautiful towns, a special ceremony is taking place in the library which is emblematic of the community spirit I mentioned.

The ceremony will honour Mr. Harold Whyte, a distinguished Saskatchewan educator in several communities for more than 30 years, who retired to Wolseley and who, when he died in 1996, left a substantial sum to the local library.

To honour his commitment to education, to literacy, and to the pleasures of reading, the library is dedicating the Harold Whyte Book Nook, a special reading room in the library for children. The mayor, the reeve, several students, and Mr. Whyte's close friend, Bill Dowhaniuk — known to many of us — will all take part in this dedication.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have today mentioned university convocations. Harold Whyte graduated from the University of Saskatchewan in 1927 and spent his life preparing Saskatchewan students for their futures.

I am very pleased that this true pioneer from the previous century is being honoured today and that his dedication will enable the pathfinders of this new millennium.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rocanville School Gets Awards

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, recently four young scientists from Rocanville School came back with a few awards and a lot of great memories from the National Science Fair in Saskatoon, May 11 through the 19.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Cody Wilson and Wade Affleck won a silver medal, \$300 prize money, and \$1,000 scholarship to the University of Western Ontario in the junior life sciences category for their project on correcting colour blindness.

As well, Dustin Affleck and Dion Campbell received an honourable mention and the Peer Choice Award in the intermediate engineering category with their project on an auto theft prevention device. The Peer Award is a special award voted on by the other groups in the region who choose the best project. Along with the award, the pair received \$750.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Rocanville science teacher, Dennis Thiessen, says I can show them how a thing works in a textbook, but to actually get them to do a project themselves is a great way for them to learn.

Mr. Speaker, over the past number of years, the Rocanville School has entered the science fair projects back since 1988 and, in that time period, 13 projects from Rocanville School have gone on to the National Fair.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations to Rocanville, the teachers, and the students for their ongoing efforts and further achievements at the National Science Fair.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskTel Competing in the Marketplace

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Yesterday we raised concerns on behalf of Brad Brickner, owner of VS Response Systems. Mr. Brickner has learned that he is now going to be competing against his own tax dollars as SaskTel SecurTek is getting into the personal medical alarm business.

Mr. Speaker, we've raised these concerns and those of many private Saskatchewan business people before. Small-business owners who have found themselves in competition with taxpayer-funded SaskTel or the SaskEnergy Network are examples.

Today for the first time we have heard what the government really thinks of these private business people. In response to Mr. Brickner's concern, Don Ching, president and CEO (chief executive officer) of SaskTel called him and other small-business owners, whiners.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier agree with Don Ching that expressing your business concerns to the government is whining?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well let me first of all clarify one thing. When the member from Rosetown, Mr. Speaker, says that we use taxpayers' dollars for these sorts of things, it's absolutely incorrect, Mr. Speaker.

The last time, Mr. Speaker, that SaskTel ever had any taxpayers' dollars involved in their corporation was back in the . . . before the Second World War in fact, Mr. Speaker — before the Second World War. And in fact the last time there was taxpayers' dollars transferred over to CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) was in early 1990 . . . in the early 1990s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we had to pay for the huge debt that that party, Mr. Speaker, racked up in the Crowns, Mr. Speaker.

Let me be perfectly clear though, first of all. A bit of a history lesson, Mr. Speaker. When the federal government through

CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) deregulated the telephone environment, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel had a choice. Either it could get into competition or it could go out of business, Mr. Speaker. I think they have one agenda — out of business for SaskTel. That's what they want, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to call the minister the artful Dodger but there wasn't much grace in that answer.

Mr. Speaker, Don Ching told the *Leader-Post* that he didn't care about Mr. Brickner's concerns. He went on to say and I quote:

“Private businesses that are raising issues of this nature in my mind are whining about something that has no real legitimacy to it . . . and they should get over that.”

Mr. Speaker, the arrogance of this statement is unbelievable and unacceptable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, Don Ching is appointed as president of SaskTel by who? This government. His salary is paid by the very taxpayers of this province that he is calling whiners. It's one thing for the NDP (New Democratic Party) to chase private sector business people out of this province. It's another thing to call them names on the way out.

Mr. Speaker, how do statements like Don Ching's make private business feel valued in this province, and how does it encourage private sector businesses to look into investing here?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well again, Mr. Speaker, when the federal government, through CRTC, deregulated, SaskTel had a choice — they either get out of business or they compete, Mr. Speaker.

Now that they're in competition, Mr. Speaker, I look, and I referred to this yesterday, through my own Access cable bill, I see, through Rogers AT&T, they are in the cellphone business, Mr. Speaker. High-speed Internet is delivered by competition.

I listened to the member from Redberry Lake stand up here in this House today petitioning us to deliver cell service out in rural Saskatchewan. How are we supposed to deliver that, Mr. Speaker? How are we supposed to deliver that unless we earn revenues from other places, Mr. Speaker?

Now if that member, if the member from Rosetown is suggesting that this company should not partner with SaskTel, that makes no sense to me at all. SaskTel partners with many businesses, Mr. Speaker — some 170 businesses across the province.

I note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that SecurTek, just as an example, SecurTek partners with City Lock and Security out of

Lloydminster, Melhoff Electric out of Swift Current, and many others across the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the Crown corporations are steamrolling over private sector business, and the news gets worse. Don Ching goes on to say that if Mr. Brickner was so concerned about SaskTel's involvement in the industry, his company should have come to SaskTel and worked out a deal.

So that's the only answer to business in this province. If you think the government's going to get involved in your sector, come to the government and work out a deal. Let them buy you out. It's a big-government attitude — either you're in or out. Either you're with the government or you're on your own.

Mr. Speaker, Don Ching's statements are appalling and they are arrogant. They reflect terribly on the Government of Saskatchewan and on SaskTel.

Will the Premier immediately fire the president and CEO of SaskTel, Don Ching?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not clear to me what this member is arguing. Is this member arguing that there should not be competition? Is that what he's saying — there should not be competition?

I think he's arguing for this business — a legitimate business, Mr. Speaker; they're a legitimate business here in Regina and I wish them well, Mr. Speaker — I think he's arguing though that they should hold a monopoly.

It just can't be. We are in a deregulated environment. We're in an environment of competition, Mr. Speaker.

(10:30)

He's arguing, I think, when you look and I listen, and I list . . . I listed some of the companies. You've got City Lock and Security out of Lloydminster as part of SecurTek. They've partnered with SecurTek. You've got Melhoff Electric out of Swift Current, Mr. Speaker. You've got Phoenix Security Sales out of North Battleford. You've got Scott's Electric out of Weyburn, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

They will all be sharing in distributing this service, Mr. Speaker, through SecurTek, for the seniors in our province who want some sense of security around their health. Is he saying that they should not share in some of those revenues? The private sector should not share in some of those revenues? I disagree with him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ministerial Business Trip

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. By the answer it's quite clear that this government just does not believe that business can work unless the government is involved in it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation. It was reported on CBC this morning that the minister and a staff member travelled to California last summer to attend a workshop about the Internet. The three-day trip cost taxpayers \$6,000. Unfortunately the minister declined a request for an interview with the reporter to discuss the reasons for the trip.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it brings to mind the song about, do you know the way to San Jose. Mr. Deputy Speaker, will the minister explain to this House . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I'm having very much difficulty hearing the question. So would hon. members please come to order so the Chair can hear the question.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, will the minister explain to this House exactly what workshop she attended, what she and her staff member learned there, and why she refused to answer questions about the trip yesterday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to be able to answer this directly rather than have my responses filtered. And I might say that we did provide a very complete answer. That someone chose not to use it is not my lack of having provided the information.

And I'm going to say further to the member that I do know the way to San Jose and I think it would be very important for him to understand that in the dramatic changes taking place in Web-based operation of companies today worldwide, that Cisco is a world leader. San Jose is the home of their international management training centre where they bring in the top expertise from around the world to assist people who are transforming their systems to increase productivity, increase savings, and improve customer service. And the day and a half spent there was very instrumental in guiding our thinking on investments which will be in the hundreds of millions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) had some very simple questions to ask the minister about the trip. When she refused the interview request, a staff member suggested they apply through the access to information.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my question is very simple. To the minister: why did she refuse to answer the questions with the media yesterday?

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, I will emphasize again that we provided all of the information and details on this trip.

And I will just say that we have here a company, Cisco, that is one of the partners — I notice here they are one of the sponsors of AMTEC, the Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada. Now Cisco is a very strong partner in helping grow the Saskatchewan economy and helping make sure that we're choosing leading edge solutions.

And if a company that is international is prepared to make this commitment, why won't the members opposite?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ethanol Industry

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question is for the Minister Responsible for Government Relations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just two days ago, the Government Relations minister told the Melville *Advance* about the development of the ethanol industry. And I quote:

The government does not want to be seen owning ethanol plants.

Close that particular quote. But he went on to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

The preference would be (the preference would be) to allow private sector industry in communities to run with this ball.

Mr. Speaker, we couldn't agree more. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister Responsible for Government Relations tell his NDP colleagues about his views on ethanol? Will he tell the NDP to step aside and allow the private sector to work with communities here in Saskatchewan to develop the ethanol industry for Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say on behalf of the government, all members of the government, who are well aware of the initiatives as it relates to developing the ethanol industry, that certainly we want to see a private sector driven ethanol industry.

And I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we will. We will see a private sector driven ethanol industry in this province in spite of members opposite, Mr. Speaker, who are not helping in terms of attracting that private sector investment by the daily barrage and dragging private sector individuals through this legislative Chamber, people who just want to invest and who want to make profits. Mr. Speaker, I want to say as well, if attracting that investment requires private sector development, every member on this side of the House will be here to support public sector investment as it's required.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, every one of those members has a responsibility to stand in their place and tell us if they absolutely refuse to see public sector investment in their communities, they should stand up and say it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, will the Industry minister stand up today and clearly state that neither CIC nor the NDP government has yet made a binding commitment with Broe industries of Denver, Colorado to invest directly in the ownership of ethanol plants in the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — You know, Mr. Speaker, I think it's about time I made one thing clear. From government's perspective and the interaction that we've had from every potential investor — every one — there isn't one operation that hasn't either asked for a loan guarantee or an investment commitment.

And I say to that member, if you have got a private sector investor that's coming to the plate with 100 per cent private sector investment, you bring those folks . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Order. I would remind hon. members to put all of their comments to the Chair and through the Chair. The minister has 15 seconds.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — You know, Mr. Speaker, they can't seem to comprehend this. You know, the member from Shaunavon and the group that have been doing that work down there have been working to attract private sector investment. And do you want to know, Mr. Speaker, when they first met with me they never asked for private sector or public sector investment, they asked for a public sector loan guarantee.

Now I want to know if those members . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. The member's time is expired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've heard this minister several times stand up and indicate to the Assembly and to the people of the province that there is no deal as of yet with Broe industries and the Government of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you go to monster.ca, the largest Internet-based job search company in the world, you'll find two job postings from Broe industries with regard to ethanol development. The first job posting is for an ethanol project manager to, quote, "lead the design and construction of a world-class ethanol plant in Saskatchewan."

Broe's job posting goes on to say:

Our expectation is construct the first plant near Regina, followed by up to five additional plants.

In the second job posting, Broe industry is asking for an ethanol plant manager to, quote:

Run an 80 million litre per year ethanol plant in Belle Plaine, Saskatchewan. Construction is expected to be complete by the third quarter of 2003.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the NDP hasn't made a firm commitment to Broe industries on behalf of the taxpayers to build a plant at Belle Plaine or anywhere else, why is Broe industries already hiring people for these projects?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what I want to say? I say that is absolutely wonderful news. It's encouraging and we, on this side of the House, are supporting it

because you know what it says?

It says, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the nonsense from members on the side of the House, these people see an economic development opportunity partnering with businesses and with local people here in Saskatchewan, in Shaunavon and in Melville and in Tisdale. And they see an opportunity to create wealth and to create jobs in this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, the fact that they are willing to post job opportunities is very encouraging to me, because you know what it says? It says that in spite of the belling and yelling from that side of the House as it relates to trying to destroy this industry, they're still committed to coming here and working with us to build and grow a strong ethanol industry in Saskatchewan.

And that's good news.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Support for Agriculture

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan farm families in our province are extremely upset and they have every reason to be. This NDP government has cancelled the spot loss hail insurance. They have increased the crop insurance premiums. And they've cancelled the education property tax rebate.

Our office has received over 1,200 postcards from farm families in our province with concerns about these issues. And I know that the Premier is receiving these same postcards.

So, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of farm families are telling the Premier to stop his attack on Saskatchewan farm families. What does the Premier have to say in response to these hundreds of farm families?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I would just remind all hon. members that the use of props and exhibits in the House is not permitted.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, I spent yesterday in the communities of Birch Hills, Archerwill, and Kamsack. I spoke to many people involved in farming, and people in those communities.

I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are appreciative of the leadership being shown by this government in defence of farm families across Saskatchewan. They are appreciative of the leadership.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — They are not appreciative of the doom and gloom that is delivered. If there's not enough trouble facing the farm families in Saskatchewan — with drought, with dust clouds, with farm Bills in Washington threatening to destroy their livelihoods — they are not assisted by the doom and gloom that comes out of that party opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'd love to say that all 1,200 postcards were postcards of appreciation. Unfortunately, that's not the case. There are postcards of farmer families that are concerned and they're facing the worst drought in decades, and they're facing the US (United States) farm Bill and the impact that that will have on them.

And what has the provincial government done? Well it's cut the crop insurance coverage, it's increased the premiums, and it's cancelled the property tax rebate.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of farm families are telling the Premier that these actions are wrong. They are sending the message loud and clear, through hundreds and hundreds of postcards — over 1,200 cards that our party's received to date. They have radio ads urging people to call the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier even listening to this? Why did this government pick this year to attack the farm families in our province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, when the national government of Canada cut back their support for crop insurance in this most difficult budget year, what did this government do? Added 14 million new dollars — 14 million new dollars to the crop insurance program. We have more producers enrolled in crop insurance this year than last year — more producers, Mr. Speaker.

We've added a new drought program which they oppose — which they opposed. And now they stand in the House trying to prevent the development of an ethanol industry in this province, which will support diversification for our farm families.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a time, this is not a time when we should stand apart. This is a time we should stand together as legislatures . . . as legislators on behalf of the farming families of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — The biggest disaster for farm families in this province is that government who has absolutely no plan on what to do to deal with any of the problems.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Last week the Saskatchewan Party came up with a plan to at least deal with the water shortage for livestock producers, and the Minister of Agriculture called it a dumb idea. That is what he said, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP are telling farmers that it's a dumb idea . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I'm having difficulty hearing what the member is saying and I would ask all hon. members to come to order. Would the member . . . Order.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister of Agriculture said that helping farmers is a dumb idea. And he says that helping ranchers is a dumb idea. And I find that unbelievable and unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP knew that this drought was coming and they knew that farmers were facing low commodity prices and they picked this year to jack up the property taxes, the crop insurance premiums, and the crop . . . and hack crop insurance coverage.

What are they thinking, Mr. Speaker? Why did the NDP pick this year of all years to launch the attack on Saskatchewan farm families?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will recall a year ago how this government worked with the national government to put a program in place to meet the drought needs of last year. You remember how that happened? Well we're working again. We're working again with our federal counterparts to talk about a program around the drought issues, the cattle issues that are facing people today.

Now I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it wasn't the Minister of Agriculture who talked about their ideas being dumb. It was one of the journalists right up in the gallery — I heard her myself, I heard her myself. That's the assessment outside of this House, that's the assessment outside of this House.

And will the members opposite join with us, join with us in approaching the national government to get some assistance on the drought file and we'll be there, we'll participate for our producers.

I talked to producers yesterday who are having to sell off their cattle herds. This is not a time for finger pointing. It's time for us to get together, approach Ottawa, let's put together a program.

She says we don't have a plan. That's the critic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who stood right out here in the corridor, right out here in the corridor and said to the people of Saskatchewan, we don't have a plan for agriculture; we wouldn't know what to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ethanol Industry

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the first business of Broe Companies is operating nursing homes in Colorado. This is interesting — this is according to their Web site — this is interesting in view of raising our ceiling here in Saskatchewan on the number of beds in private nursing homes. Its second business is, of course, running short-line railways in the US corn belt.

As we know, it has never produced a litre of ethanol. Obviously, the Government of Saskatchewan and Broe Companies will have to partner with someone who has some expertise in the construction and operation of ethanol plants. Well, Mr. Speaker, the entire resources of the Liberal research team have failed to find any company with ethanol expertise

involved with Broe. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Will the member go directly to his question, please.

Mr. Hillson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I get up and try and ask a serious question and they . . . they start making wisecracks about the NDP winning in North Battleford, as if that's going to happen before Allan Rock . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Will the member directly go to his question.

Mr. Hillson: — My question for the minister is, who are we going to be partnering with? Who is Broe and the Government of Saskatchewan going to partnering with who . . . with a past ethanol expertise? There has to be someone we're partnering with. Who is it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I am assuming that the Liberal member . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. We've almost made it through question period. I would ask all hon. members to please stay in order. I recognize the Minister of Industry . . . I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I . . . (inaudible interjections) . . . I am pleased, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the warm response I'm getting from the opposition today. May I . . . May I say . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think . . . first of all, I want, all I want to advise the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Will the member for Rosthern please come to order. I recognize . . . I recognize the Premier. Forty seconds.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — I should have known it, Mr. Speaker; his students have left and the minister of Rosthern or the member from Rosthern . . . By the way, I . . . by the way, Mr. Speaker, I look . . . I'll look forward to visiting the member from Rosthern's hometown this coming weekend, by the way and I'm sure he's going to give me a nice little greeting when I get there.

I want to say to the member from North Battleford, he talks about his caucus research operation. They need to do a little better on the joke material that he's bringing into the question period.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak here on behalf of government and I'm going to say this very clearly. I'm going to speak to this very clearly.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to develop an ethanol industry in this

province. We have laid out the framework of the most progressive ethanol industry in North America. We've laid it out. The legislation is before this House. We are talking to communities; we are talking to partners — Canadian and across this continent — because, Mr. Speaker, this province is going to lead North America in ethanol production.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 63 — The Members' Conflict of Interest Amendment Act, 2002 (No. 2)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move that Bill No. 63, The Members' Conflict of Interest Amendment Act, 2002 (No. 2) 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.

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member for Saskatoon Idylwyld on his feet?

Mr. Forbes: — Leave to introduce guests, sir.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you, 25 young adults from E.D. Feehan High School in Saskatoon to our House today. They are students of English as a Second Language and I think they're probably finding the proceedings very interesting.

So I ask all members to welcome them to our House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Hon. members, the Chair also has some guests that he would like to introduce and requests leave. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you very much, hon. members. In the west gallery as well are 19 English as a Second Language students from ages 16 to 25. And they're students that attend St. Joseph School — in the west gallery. And they're accompanied by teachers Lorraine Ratzlaff and Erin Hilbig. And I would ask all hon. members to give them a warm welcome as well. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before orders of the day I request leave to move a motion to withdraw The Architects Amendment Act, 2002.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Bill Withdrawn

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the Government House Leader, the member for Prince Albert Northcote:

That the order for second reading of Bill No. 29, The Architects Amendment Act, 2002, be discharged and the said Bill withdrawn.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table responses to written questions no. 243 through 253 inclusive.

The Deputy Speaker: — The questions listed have been answered.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 52 — The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to move second reading of Bill No. 52, The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 2002.

As many members will know, The Municipal Revenue Sharing Act establishes the level of provincial assistance to be allocated to both urban and rural municipalities. Accordingly, these amendments give legal effect to decisions announced in the 2002-2003 budget.

The Bill provides for the amounts of funds available this year to both the urban revenue-sharing pool and the rural revenue-sharing pool.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to announce that the Bill provides for an increase this year to the total amount available for the urban revenue-sharing pool of \$4.9 million, and an increase for rural revenue sharing of \$4.3 million. This represents an increase globally to urban and rural municipalities of 18 per cent over last year's amount.

Total unconditional funding available for cities is \$20.85 million; for towns, villages, and resort villages is 10.97 million; and for rural municipalities is \$28 million. Together, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this amounts to an overall total of \$59.8 million.

My officials have consulted with the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, the cities, and the Saskatchewan

Association of Rural Municipalities on how to distribute these funds this year. Their views have been incorporated into this legislation.

With respect to the unconditional revenue-sharing grants for cities and other urban municipalities, each city and urban municipality will receive the same unconditional revenue-sharing grants as last year, plus an increase of \$6.08 per capita that represents each municipality's share of the new funding.

SUMA and the cities support this. For rural municipalities the new funding has been allocated by increasing the road preservation and construction component of the unconditional revenue-sharing grant for rural municipalities. An additional \$200,000 also has been allocated to conditional bridge grants.

Each rural municipality will receive an increase in funding this year. This distribution strategy, once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is supported by the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. Amendments related to some housekeeping measures make up the remainder of this Bill.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the total revenue-sharing funding of nearly \$60 million represents a significant level of financial support to Saskatchewan municipalities. I urge all members to support this Bill.

Accordingly, I move second reading of Bill No. 52, The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 2002.

(11:00)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Speaker, it's . . . this piece of legislation and the increases to municipal government are certainly welcome. And we won't . . . we certainly aren't going to condemn the government for increasing funding to local governments — our local municipal governments, urban and rural — because of the fact that over the past number of years, this government has actually removed funding.

It's cut grants. It's cut municipal sharing which has put local governments at a great . . . in an area of great difficulty as they endeavour to continue to meet the ongoing needs and costs of running their administrations, of providing the services to their residents and to their taxpayers.

And over the past number of years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what many local governments have found is they've actually had to put on hold project developments, or they've had to cut back in some of their expenditures because they found it very difficult, as the government kept reducing the revenue-sharing pool over the past number of years, to continue to go to their local tax base to ask for the increases necessary just to maintain the ongoing services that they had.

And so this piece of legislation and the increases that were announced this year in the budget of some, I believe, almost \$10 million, while they fall short are certainly — as we have heard the president of SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), Mr. Hardy, indicate — certainly are welcome and will be accepted gratefully. But they look forward

to the day when this government will indeed meet its ongoing commitments to live up to its long-time commitments of the equal sharing in regarding to the revenue-sharing amendments . . . or revenue-sharing pool.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government is crying . . . or members opposite were saying, wow, when the minister talked about the 18 per cent increase. And while the 18 per cent increase is welcome, it falls far short of the burden that this government has put on local governments over the past almost 10 years while they've been in office.

And as I indicated earlier, while it's welcome and while it's good news, unfortunately, many governments, even with the increases that were announced this year, are facing situations where they're increasing the tax rate on their taxpayers because of the fact that in the rural communities we see the government remove the educational tax component. And their argument is we've increased the funding, therefore there shouldn't be increases at the local level in regards to the educational tax.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we're finding out is many local governments, while they've been holding the line and even with the minimal increase they are expecting as a result of this piece of legislation, as a result of the budget document that was released by the government, are still in many cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, finding that when the local tax board comes to them, there's an increase on the map because the increases of the revenue-sharing pool, the increases in education, have not kept up with the demands and the costs of providing the services to educate our young people right across this province — be it urban or rural, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly we can . . . we will commend the government for beginning the process if you will — and we trust it's a beginning — of actually bringing back a fair display and equalization of revenue-sharing funds so that local governments can indeed meet the demands that are placed on them on an ongoing basis as they endeavour to meet the ongoing costs and the increases that they are faced with on an annual basis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's certainly imperative that we recognize the need for increases and that we recognize that local governments are at a point in their administrations where they don't have a lot of resources left to draw on and where they have to rely on the provincial government — much as this provincial government has to rely on the federal government — when it comes to revenue sharing and sharing grants in regards to education and health and what have you, that the responsibility of the federal government has over . . . through the years off-loaded onto provincial governments where they have then turned around and off-loaded onto local governments.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we compliment the government for beginning to realize that the burden that they have placed on the local taxpayer by their local governments is inappropriate and they're beginning to address that additional burden by placing more money in the hands of local governments to address their needs, we still believe, and that as SARM and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) has indicated, that while this falls short, they will accept it and they will continue to lobby for that increase that indeed brings the

proportion of sharing and of funding from the provincial government back to where it was a number of years ago.

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is certainly appropriate. The increases are appropriate. And we will continue to encourage the government to move forward in addressing the shortfalls that they have off-loaded onto local governments over the past number of years.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe it would be appropriate for us as well to take some time to indeed review all the implications of this piece of legislation, The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 2002, and therefore I move at this time to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 45 — The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to move the second reading of The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2002.

The Local Government Election Act exists, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to set out the rules, processes, and procedures for conducting of elections at the local level. That is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the election of members of urban municipal councils and school boards.

Over the past few years, the government has been making a concerted effort to increase municipal autonomy and authority unless overriding provincial interests exist. It is in this spirit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the government proposes the Bill we have for consideration today. We feel very strongly that it is important that the legislative amendments make the Act less prescriptive and more flexible for the municipalities and school boards that use it while, at the same time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ensuring that the democratic process is not jeopardized.

The proposed amendments will offer greater autonomy to local authorities in their own election procedures and will authorize municipal councils or school boards to establish disclosure requirements respecting campaign contributions, expenditures, and to establish campaign spending limits at their discretion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are hopeful that the changes proposed today will help to maximize the participation of electors while at the same time protect the local democratic process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the proposed amendments will first authorize the use of mail-in ballots for residents of special care facilities, extend mobile poll privileges to caregivers of incapacitated voters, clarify the returning . . . the role, pardon me, of the returning officer in the candidate nomination process. Next, allow election officials in the cities greater flexibility during the second nomination process, allow local officials flexibility in extending voting hours on election day beyond the minimum requirements, and authorize a municipal council or school board to establish disclosure requirements respecting campaign contributions and expenditures, and establish election campaign spending limits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these amendments were developed in

co-operation with stakeholder representatives from both inside and outside government. I want to thank these people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for their assistance and advice in making sure these proposed amendments are both appropriate and effective.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, passing these legislative amendments will make the Act less prescriptive and more flexible, while at the same time providing options for municipalities to increase elector participation and ensure that the democratic process is not jeopardized. I believe these amendments are in the best interest of local governments as well as the people of Saskatchewan and are worthy of support by all members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill No. 45, The Local Government Election Amendment Act, 2002.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to speak on the Act to amend The Local Government Election Act. I believe I have to agree with the minister that it's very fundamental to our democratic society and our structures that we make every possible attempt to allow as many of our citizens to vote in all levels of the government, for elections in all levels of government.

And as we know from statistics, the number of people voting in federal elections, provincial elections, and municipal elections have fallen dramatically. And actually at the municipal level, it's quite, quite alarming how few people do come out to vote. And it's very important that we enable citizens to . . . enable and encourage the citizens to come out to vote at all elections at all levels of government, but particularly the municipal level where the numbers of citizens voting has decreased dramatically.

And I think it's very important that we take special care to encourage people that are in special care facilities to allow them and give them the opportunity to vote and set in some clearly defined rules about the procedure around that whole area.

We must balance the rights and the needs of people in special care circumstances or people . . . elderly or disabled people at home, to give them the opportunity to vote in elections.

But that balance of allowing more accessibility to people to vote to . . . also must be balanced with the rights of people to have a secret ballot to vote for the person that they would like to represent them in a way that looks after their rights as far as a secret ballot is concerned.

As I mentioned before, the number of people voting in all sorts of elections in this country has dropped dramatically and we must continue to make our rules and conditions flexible to look after that concern, Mr. Speaker.

And as the minister was outlining a number of areas where they're opening up the provisions for . . . or defining the provisions for persons nominated. And the flexibility to encourage greater voter participation is a very important part of this Act — also to undertake a mail-in ballot — but the point of

it is to give the local officials the right to and the flexibility to make some changes in these areas to allow voters to participate in greater numbers.

But I'd just like to temper again the notion that we cannot . . . we must respect the voters' rights in elections and we must keep in mind that important concept of our democratic structures in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we will take a look at this Bill in greater detail to make sure that there are no problems in it. We will speak to our colleagues and friends in local governments and municipalities and the leaders in the municipal governments to see if they have any concerns about this; if there should be any changes concerning this Act.

And so at this time, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

(11:15)

Bill No. 53 — The Department of Economic Development Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thanks very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm pleased today as Minister Responsible for Information Technology to move second reading of Bill 53, An Act to Amend the Department of Economic Development Act, 1993.

The amendments today are designed to facilitate the continued work of the information technology office in the implementation of information technology and information management initiatives. The changes will also reflect recent changes in the structure of the Saskatchewan government.

The main beneficiary of these changes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are the people of Saskatchewan who will continue to have access to on-line services, and that these . . . this access will be faster thanks to a more efficient process that we are putting in place today.

I think we all agree that information technology presents a great many opportunities to the people of Saskatchewan. These amendments will legislate processes that will enable us to continue to take advantage of those opportunities — opportunities like electronic commerce technologies that make it easier for citizens to do everything from purchase licences to other services on-line. As well, improved efficiency will mean that those tax dollars that are contributed to these services are better spent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the information age means that our government is more accessible to citizens regardless of their area of residence.

The amendments I am presenting here today will enable the information technology office to continue the important work that it does, and to take on new information technology information management activities.

Certainly we all know the Government of Saskatchewan recently went through a reorganization process. This process was designed to create a more streamlined, focused public service that would be better able to serve the people of Saskatchewan.

As part of that reorganization, the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development and the Department of Energy and Mines were merged to create the new Department of Industry and Resources. It was necessary therefore to rename the legislation that is currently before us and remove all references to the former Department of Economic Development. Other minor amendments are of a housekeeping nature, and they are also included in the Act at this time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the first policy change that we are dealing with here is inclusion of a new clause to allow the ITO, the information technology office, to create a government-wide strategic approach to information technology usage and information management. This is part of our commitment to encouraging all parts of government to work together to implement the most efficient, effective approach to information technology that's possible.

The second policy amendment in this legislation will allow the information technology office to better administer the province's information technology and government on-line initiatives.

The government on-line initiatives are designed to manage overall government funding for electronic service delivery projects, and the change in this Act will allow the information technology office to fulfill its mandate in that area.

Specifically the new clause provides the ITO the authority to purchase goods for other government departments, and enter into agreements with third parties in order to acquire services for other government departments and agencies.

These changes will allow departments to work with the ITO to enhance government service delivery for the people of Saskatchewan. It allows for co-operation and efficiency which are two important priorities of this government, and certainly were key to this government's reorganization initiative announced this spring.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will also allow us to move forward in implementing a comprehensive government-wide, e-government strategy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would move at this point second reading of the economic development amendment Act, 2002.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bill No. 53, an Act to Amend the Department of Economic Development Act, 1993 is a very interesting piece of legislation. And interesting in the fact that it talks about information technology. It talks about the ITO, the Information Technology Office and how that all works and opportunities to do more of our business online through information technology, whether it's licensing and those sort of issues.

But it also raises some real red flags in the fact that over the last

couple weeks when we've heard of some of the misuses of the information that is online that is available to specific agencies. And right now, I mean, that's what's going on with the government as we speak, there are a number of employees off work as some of their practices are being investigated. They are off work with pay, but some of the uses of the information that is available to government workers and how that is used is being investigated.

Now this talks about information technology and I know it doesn't go . . . doesn't outline all the guidelines and regulations, but any time we start talking about information technology, we've certainly been sensitised because of the real disaster that has happened. And I mean who is available, who has the availability to this information? And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we certainly have to look at that quite a bit further.

He talked about the government reorganization and reorganizing the Energy and Mines and Economic Development into one department. And so it's a matter of then changing the Act to fit that.

But any time again, as I said, you start to talk about economic development, I was really just almost astonished today when we were talking about economic development in during question period and some of the people . . . some of the questions were regarding private business and dealing with economic development. And it's more or less the attitude that if you want to do business in our province, if you want to be a private business owner in our province in certain sectors, come and talk to us, the government, first and we'll see whether you can operate in partnership or not.

And it just, it was really astonishing. So often, so often we talk about the attitude in our province and how it may be a negative attitude. What promotes negative attitudes in our province is when business people have to go and negotiate with the provincial government so that they can do business unrestricted, in a non-competitive fashion with our provincial government. I mean that deals with an attitude that really, really is a negative for business development, for growth in our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill — although it deals with information technology and the changes and reorganization in departments — we feel it needs to be looked at quite a bit further. Because as I said, any time you start dealing with information technology, red flags pop up on this side.

Because we had . . . it's interesting how many phone calls we've had over the last two weeks, people saying, well you know, I was dealing with a department and they knew this, this, this, and this about me; they knew all my information. And they were saying, how could that department — whether it was SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) or Social Services or whoever — how did they get all that information on me? How did they know what I had done four years ago, five years ago, eight years ago?

And it raises some pretty interesting questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Who has information on myself or any other member? The member from Swift Current, I imagine there's a lot of information on him, and now you wouldn't want some of that to

get out. But it's just the whole principle, it's a whole principle of information being stored on computers that you think is safe and secretive, but people have access to that.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's an issue that we need to raise with a number of interested parties before we could let this Bill move on. So at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 53.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 6 — The Horned Cattle Purchases Amendment Act, 2002

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the minister and ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have with me today the assistant deputy minister, Mr. Hal Cushon; and seated behind him is Mary Jane Laville, who is the manager of the livestock inspections branch.

Clause 1

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, first and foremost, I would like to clarify a few things with the minister. I have a copy of a letter that the minister sent to the Stock Growers Association that basically accuses the Saskatchewan Party of stonewalling the Bill.

And just to refresh the minister's memory, I'd like to read from that letter if I may. And it says:

Bill No. 6 — The Horned Cattle Purchases Amendment Act has passed second reading and has been referred to Committee of the Whole where it will be examined on a clause-by-clause basis prior to the third reading.

(And) As you are aware, the Government introduced the bill on the advice of the Committee in an effort to further encourage cattle producers to dehorn their cattle prior to leaving the farm for market and to update the membership of the Committee to reflect changes in the province's cattle organizations. Assurance has been given that all cattle organizations supported the changes and that the Official Opposition had been briefed on the importance of approving the legislation. It obviously came as a surprise that the Opposition has continually called for a reduction in the amount of the increase in the fee to be assessed on horned cattle.

And the minister went on to say that:

At this point I have no interest in moving forward with this Bill until I receive assurance from the producer associations and the Opposition to support your recommendation. Without those assurances I will not be taking . . . further action to implement Bill No. 6 — *The Horned Cattle Purchases Amendment Act*.

And although there's Bills in the past that we would have loved

to have seen that our influence was so strong that us voicing a few concerns with a Bill would indeed mean that the minister would not move the Bill forward, it hasn't been the regular practice in the House in the past.

So I would like if the minister could tell the Saskatchewan Party what they have done out of the ordinary with this Bill to slow down the progress of the Bill.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, I want to say to the member opposite, I don't think anywhere in my comments I've suggested that the members opposite have slowed down the progress of the Bill. What I have said in my letter to the Stock Growers Association, and into my conversations with members from the Stock Growers Association, is that we were advised that in the process of developing the content of the Bill, that they had provided and done due diligence on all fronts.

Because as I've said privately to the member opposite — and to the member from Maple Creek who I expect will be asking some questions as well — is that we had initially intended to bring the changes to this piece of legislation in regulation. But the industry had said to us that they wished that this . . . they would come to the legislature and we would make the legislative changes particularly in the area which they felt needed . . . most affected. And that was the change in the level of charge of the fee which would then go . . . which is currently at \$2, which they suggested should go to \$10.

Now what was most disturbing about the . . . particularly now that you've raised this issue with me and want to debate it in that perspective, what was most discouraging and which tempered my concerns about moving ahead with this piece of legislation was the comments that were made by the member from Maple Creek.

And I have the *Hansard* in front of me, which you've asked me to refer to, in where the Stock Growers Association and the board said to us very specifically that they wanted the legislation to include a change from \$2 to \$10. And we said that we would be happy to do that.

Now the member from Maple Creek suggests that it should not be \$10 in his *Hansard* report which is on May 9 of 2002 which I quote from, in which he said:

. . . (maybe) we (can possibly) move . . . (this) from \$2 to \$5 . . . (and not \$10) . . .

And so I say to you, Madam Member, and through the Chair, that the reason that we moved this piece of legislation the way in which we did is because it had full endorsement from the industry we were told, which we were also told that it had full consultation with all of the stakeholders in the province, including you.

(11:30)

But most disturbing in this piece, Madam Member, and in the *Hansard* from which I read, was the implication that was made by the member from Maple Creek that somehow the funding from this fund was being used to fund other parts and levels of government operation. And I quote what he says here:

But the other possibility that has occurred to me, Mr. Speaker, is that maybe the government ran so short of funds in their budget this year that they borrowed (the) money back from the Horned Cattle Fund to underwrite some . . . (of their endeavours). And now they have . . . (relinquished) this particular fund . . . (which) this (is) highly . . .

And then it goes blank after that.

And I say to the member opposite, there is absolutely no rationale or need for us to be discussing that issue in my view. And so when, in fact, we read this kind of information which is provided in this Legislative Assembly, challenging this piece of legislation, which has absolutely little to do with why, in fact, we were changing it on behalf of the industry, that's why this Bill hasn't proceeded as quickly as it has and the letter has gone out that . . . why this letter has gone out to the industry to advise them that there are huge numbers of concerns about how they, in fact, are managing the industry on behalf of producers in Saskatchewan of which we assumed, and were told, that they had had that debate and discussion with members opposite on your side of the House.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Through you to the minister. Mr. Minister, if you had read the entire transcript of *Hansard*, I think you would have found that our concern was that the fee jumped from \$2 to \$10 in one motion.

We suggested maybe moving from 2 to \$5 incrementally and then to \$10. We never suggested that it shouldn't go eventually to \$10. And I think also that the suggestion that we somehow didn't approve of the figure ultimately is incorrect. If you read the entire record of *Hansard*, you will see that we suggested moving to \$5 as a stop-gap measure and after a year or two at that level it could ultimately go to \$10.

So it isn't a matter of not agreeing with the ultimate amount or the suggested amount by the associations and the industry generally, it's a matter of timing. And I think that in the interests of fairness and accuracy, you should have made that point clear in your answer to my colleague a minute ago.

I think also that we need to . . . we need to have a very clear understanding of what this process is all about and how we arrived at this point.

Now I don't know what sources you have within the industry that told you that this issue had been discussed with the official opposition. But to my knowledge, nobody on this side of the House was aware of this Bill until the day it landed on our desks here. We had no knowledge of the contents of the Bill — let alone that it was going to arrive.

And I think that the other issue that we need to clarify here today is the subject of the Bill. If this Bill was just about changing the fee for horned cattle from \$2 to \$10, we wouldn't be at this point in the discussion.

But there is more in this Bill, issues that I have raised with you personally and in a letter. There's more in this Bill that if we're going to open the Bill up, why don't we make the changes that could be done to clean the language up in this Bill and not just

rush it through on the basis of well, that's what the language said originally, we'll just continue doing it. Because there are some clear areas of confusion in this Bill that I think need to be addressed today.

Having made those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to go to the issue of section 3, if I may. And the question I asked had to do with what the Act says about the value of horned cattle and dehorned cattle.

In my letter to the minister, I indicated that this piece of the legislation says that:

Every dealer who purchases horned cattle . . .

And I'm going to leave some of the other language out of here that refers to the purebred cattle. That:

Every dealer who purchases horned cattle . . . shall:

(a) purchase the cattle at the current market price for cattle which are polled or have been dehorned, and pay that price to the vendor less the deductible amount for each head of horned cattle being purchased . . .

Now, Mr. Minister, when I raised the concerns of that particular language with you in the letter just of a few days ago, your response says that:

There are no changes necessary in that particular wording because that is what has existed in the Act previously.

And I don't dispute that, but what I'm trying to make clear, Mr. Minister, is that when the Act is opened to make the changes that the industry seemed to want, why don't we take advantage of the opportunity to clear up the language that might be confusing.

Your response to me says that:

Section 3(a) as written uses the same language as in the existing Act, therefore cattle markets will continue to operate the same before and after the proposed amendments are made.

Mr. Minister, I can lay out a situation, a hypothetical situation for you this morning that is going to make this wording of this Act potentially pretty difficult for some people. And I know it might be a hypothetical situation, but since the horned cattle Act has generated a substantial amount of interest, let me just give you the hypothetical situation.

Let's say we have an individual who brings 20 head of cattle to an auction market that have horns. Those cattle go through the auction ring, the individual that presented those cattle to the auction market has been penalized \$10 a head for those horned cattle. And when they come through the ring, the buyers there notice that these horned cattle are good quality cattle, but they've got horns and they're worried about the impact those horns might have on other cattle they are going to buy or truck that day, or other cattle in their feedlot operation.

So the buyer takes advantage of that situation and decides to bid

and ends up purchasing those cattle at anywhere from 5 to 10 cents a pound less than the market price that day for dehorned cattle.

Now if you've got 20 head going through and, let's say, they are 1,300 pound cows, and you lose 10 cents a pound on each of those cows, the \$10 a head penalty is going to be a \$200 cost to the producer. But the 10 cent a pound penalty is going to be a substantially higher figure. Now in this day and age, nobody can afford to take those kind of penalties.

But having gone home and looked at his cheque and seeing what it cost him and being aware that the horned cattle Act has become an issue of some discussion in this legislature and throughout the industry, he might just decide to check the Act and see what the Act says.

And he reads in section 3 the wording that exists and the wording that you indicated makes no problem for any producer because it was there previously and you're just using it again, but he reads the wording here and it says that the purchaser of horned cattle shall:

(a) purchase the cattle at the current market price for cattle which are polled or which have been dehorned . . .

He takes this to his lawyer and he says, you know what? The Act says I should have been paid exactly the same amount of money as the guys who are selling polled cattle. That's what the Act says. But the buyer bought those cattle from me at 10 cents a pound less. I don't think that's fair. I don't think that's right. I'm going to sue the auction ring and the buyer.

Your Act and the language in it allow for that kind of legal action. And that's why I think if we've opened up the Act to change the dollar figure of the penalty amount, why wouldn't we take the opportunity to make changes in the wording of the Act that would clear up any of those potential problem areas? It's not a big deal, and I suggested a possible wording change that would take this kind of complication out of the Act and address the very basic needs that the government feels they have to address in this particular piece of legislation.

So, Mr. Minister, there are some problematic areas with this Bill. And I think we should take advantage of opportunities, like opening this particular piece of legislation represented, to address those complicating areas.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I say to the member opposite that I don't have a great deal of issue with the position that the member takes, as it relates to how in fact you enforce the particular piece of legislation that's currently there, that's been rewritten again in the current legislation that we're proposing on behalf of the . . . a number of farm organizations, livestock producers.

And we can't for a minute assume that the buyer who's in the auction marts is going to assume that because the \$10 fee as it's recommended here — the \$2 fee has already been taken off — that for some reason or another, they're not going to pay the same level of price that you might for an animal that in fact does have horns which is polled. And so there is no method today for, as you point out rightfully, of enforcing that.

Now what we . . . And I expect what the livestock associations here would have anticipated when they were reviewing this piece of legislation, is that by having it included here, that at least there may be some pressure on the buyers in the markets to not discriminate against the individuals who in fact have already paid the fee for their horned cattle. And by increasing the level of the fee on the horned cow or on the horned animal, that in fact they wouldn't discriminate when the animal gets into the market ring, which is why I'm thinking and understanding that they are increasing or calling for . . . one of the reasons why they're calling for the increase in the level of the fee.

And you're absolutely right that there will be no way of knowing, if you have an animal that enters the ring in an auction mart along an animal that is polled and the horned animal gets a lesser cost . . . or gets a lesser price, what the rationale for that is because they would already know that there's been a deduction that's been made for the horn. And we have no way of course of calling the buyer on that, the way in which the legislation reads today.

But you should know that when we went — and I expect do know — that when we went to deal with this piece of legislation, we had long conversations and detailed conversations with a number of people. And this is who they are: the Farm Animal Council . . . And this first round of presentation and discussion began in January 25 of 2001. And the people who were involved in that conversation were the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Livestock Markets and Order Buyers Association, the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, the Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association, plus large cattle finishing lots in Saskatchewan presented by the Royal View Cattle 84 Ltd. Also involved in that discussion was the Saskatchewan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association.

And then again, after the current recommendations were put forward by them, the committee then directed a further analysis at the request . . . and that went then in February . . . or in June of . . . or June 20 of 2001 to a meeting where the committee recommended increasing the deductions only. And also there, also talked about changing the representation on the committee. Those were the only two recommendations that came forward.

And then on November 1 of 2001, representatives of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food received consensus on the recommendations of this piece of legislation that are before us today, which were the two.

And those recommendations were approved from a consultation meeting that included the Saskatchewan Cattle Breeders Association, the Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association, the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the National Farmers Union, and representatives of the dairy industry in Saskatchewan.

So those are the folks who at the end of the day said that, now that this legislation is ready for drafting and crafting and for the floor of the legislature, those are the only changes which we wish the legislation be enacted today.

And so if the member is suggesting here that there has not been due diligence done on this legislation to the degree it should have been, that there should be further amendments that should be made to this piece of legislation in order to achieve the kinds of language that you're suggesting we should be trying to achieve, we could take the Bill back, and take the Bill back and bring it forward at another time. And take it back to the associations, to the producers groups and say to them, we're not satisfied here that the language of the legislation is appropriately crafted.

And we've had this private conversation with them since you and I have spoken, and that's not the message they're giving me. They're giving me the message that we should be moving ahead with what has been presented here, which they've reviewed, which they've endorsed, and I'd be happy to do that.

But if there's some sense here that there's discomfort here in the level in which this legislation still today appears before us, I would be happy to take it and take it back and stand it for another period of time, which I expect will be the next session of the legislature, and deal with it at that particular time.

(11:45)

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Chairman, through you to the minister. Mr. Minister, you've cited the extensive list of farm-related organizations that had input into this particular piece of legislation. And you've assured us that they were all in agreement of the impact of the legislation.

I guess, you know, I don't have that same assurance. That same group of producer groups have not come to me personally or, as far as I know, to our Ag critic, my colleague, the member from Watrous. We have not been approached on this issue.

And I'm also a little troubled by the preponderance of assurance that you're saying you have because when I have talked to individual members of some of those organizations, as far as they knew, the only thing that this particular Act addressed was the change in the fee amount — the deductible. They didn't know, when I initially talked to them, that there were any other pieces in this particular piece of legislation, any other sections that were troublesome or where wording was changed or any alterations had been made. They weren't aware of that.

And you know, I found that quite troublesome, that some of the people who seemed to be the most assertive on this particular issue weren't even aware that there was anything more to it than the actual dollar amount changes.

So you may feel confident you have their support; I'm not so sure that they know all of the ramifications of the changes here or the wording that has been left intact or altered slightly in other areas.

So, Mr. Minister, I'm not asking you to pull this Bill. I'm just asking you to take complete responsibility for it and that our concerns have gone on record today as having been raised. I'm trying, frankly, to wash my hands of the problems that I think this Bill might raise if the language remains intact.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, the

members. I'm comfortable with the way in which the Bill reads today because I'm comfortable with the dialogue of which my department has had with the various groups and organizations from which I've listed that we've had conversations with.

I'm also comfortable with the fact that this Bill didn't just arrive today for us. The consultation on this piece of legislation really began on January 25 of 2001. I can't . . . And then again made its way in a very detailed fashion on November 1 of 2001 before it arrived here this spring.

Now I can't answer for you why it is that you haven't heard from the livestock associations. I'm not . . . I can't answer that question.

I believe that the first reading on this piece of legislation was about a month or a month and a . . . a month or six weeks ago or five weeks ago. And if to date you have had not had an opportunity to speak with those livestock organizations in the province of whom I've listed, I can't answer that either — why you've not had an opportunity to do that in any kind of detail.

But I'm assured today from the members that are here representing the department and from the . . . from the department who's been working on this piece of legislation that the changes that we have in front of us today are ones that they would be most pleased for us to move ahead with.

And I just want to reiterate one more time that if in fact there is a sense here that you want to have greater consultation with your livestock . . . with the livestock industry, of which we believe we have, and that you have some sense here that the people who are listed here do not represent the livestock industry in Saskatchewan appropriately and you think that there's another set of organizations or individuals who represent this issue more appropriately, we'd be happy to hear who they are and delay the moving ahead with this piece of legislation to another time.

But as far as we're concerned, and I'm concerned, on this side of . . . as the minister responsible for this piece of legislation, we've provided the due diligence that we thought that was necessary in changing this piece of legislation to the likes of those people who raise livestock in the province.

So if the message here is clearly . . . is clear that you want us to hold this, remove it, place it to another agenda on another schedule on another day, I would be happy to entertain that motion on your behalf.

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

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — To ask for leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to point out that we have a visitor from the other side of the province. I'm talking lengthwise, Mr. Speaker, not width.

Modeste Bigeye is in your gallery. He's from Black Lake, and

he's currently in the city. He's attending the convocation of Mary Jane Sayazie. Mary Jane is receiving a Bachelor of Education, and she is a member of the Black Lake Dene Band. Mr. Bigeye is the Chair of the Black Lake Education Committee, and I would ask all members of the Assembly to welcome a well-travelled guest from all the way.

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

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 6 — The Horned Cattle Purchases Amendment Act, 2002 (continued)

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Mr. Minister, I want to move on to section 5 and ask a few questions for clarification as well here.

In section 5 it starts out by saying:

In this section, 'approved auction market' means . . .

And it gives a definition.

If you move to section (2), it talks about:

. . . no person shall deliver horned cattle to any point outside Saskatchewan unless . . .

And in subsection (a) of that particular article, it goes into wording such as:

prior to transporting the horned cattle outside Saskatchewan, the owner of the cattle and the owner's agent . . .

And so on.

What I need to know, Mr. Minister, is: is there an automatic assumption that cattle are going to the auction market because of the use of the term auction market, the definition of the auction market in the earlier part of section 5?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — It's my understanding here that it would be up to the producer to determine whether the livestock are going to an auction mart or to another . . . to a feedlot in — if you're referring to another province — in another province. That's what our assumption would be here. It would be the producer who would have the understanding of what's happening with the livestock.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, through you to the minister, well if there is some option available to the owner of that group of livestock, that herd that he's transporting out, then the objection I raised in my letter to you becomes even more significant, I think. Because this says:

prior to transporting the horned cattle outside

Saskatchewan, the owner of the cattle or the owner's agent pays to the minister, or an inspector on behalf of the minister, the deductible amount for each head of horned cattle to be delivered outside Saskatchewan.

It sounds to me like this is fairly wide open. It doesn't say transported to an auction market or transported for sale; it just says "prior to transporting" out of the province. And there's a number of reasons, as you've indicated, that somebody might want to transport their cattle out of the province without actually going to an auction ring.

So the question I asked was, can we assume that people must pay that fee before they transport out cattle from the province, and by transporting in your explanatory notes said both trucking and on foot? So must the fee be paid to the ministry before animals are transported out for reasons other than going to an auction market?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. When you are transporting or moving livestock — as you'll know having done it, I know on your own as you've mentioned — you would require a manifest. And of course on the manifest you would state where the livestock are going to. So when the truck arrives or whether you're moving them on foot, of course you would then advise the inspector about where it is that the livestock are going.

In the case of a truck moving the livestock from your farm somewhere else, the manifest would read . . . if it's my livestock, that my livestock are going to an auction mart or my livestock are going to, let's say, a feedlot somewhere else. If they're going to a feedlot then there would be an inspection there that would be done. The producer would then pay the fee to the inspector and then the fees would make their way into the fund.

In the case if the livestock in the manifest . . . if the manifest reads that the livestock are going to an action mart in another province, into Alberta I mean, what would happen here is that when the livestock arrives then in the action mart in Alberta, they would do the deduction in the same way that we do in Saskatchewan.

And this legislation tries to make that process seamless. So there are in fact, to your question, two processes that are engaged at the same time, led off the information that's on the manifest provided by the producer.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, to you through the Chair. What about the situation where an individual is transporting his cattle or her cattle to Alberta but not for sale purposes? This particular piece of legislation as it's worded does not make any provisions for those situations?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. If the livestock are not for sale then there is . . . these fees do not apply. Either the brand fee doesn't apply nor does the horned cattle . . . the horn fee apply.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Minister, since we opened up the Act, would it not be a suitable suggestion to have said that just what you've indicated? That cattle going out of the province but not

for sale, fees need not be collected or applied; because you know if I read this particular piece of legislation, it suggests to me that just being transported out of the province, the fees have to be paid no matter what the destination is.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well the . . . I'm told, Mr. Chair, to the member, that in fact these kinds of issues were raised in the conversations that were had over the discussion around the Bill.

However, the changes haven't been made here because they have not been recommended to us by the industry. Had the industry made those kinds of recommendations to it in the way in which I answered the earlier question, we would have made those amendments. Now we did not get that from the industry.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to make note that this is one of the first Bills that came before the Assembly this session and, in fact, it is also one of the first Bills to come to Committee of the Whole. So I wanted to point out that I don't feel that this side of the House has unduly held up this Bill even though we've had concerns about it and raised those and basically asked for some answers to questions.

And I notice that this Bill comes into force with proclamation, and a lot of people in Saskatchewan probably don't realize that this Assembly passing a Bill does not mean necessarily that it comes in effect right away. And in this case, the changes that we will see go ahead, when cabinet basically is good and ready for it to go into effect — and it could be next week, it could be next year, it could be never.

And I just want the minister to clarify if that is, indeed, the case and tell me if he has let the organizations and associations that's interested in the Bill know that, from today forward, it is a cabinet decision and totally in their hands?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I should . . . I just want to say to the member opposite I have not at all indicated personally or in any other correspondence that I have submitted or will in the future say that this piece of legislation has been held up by anyone other than the fact that we have not resolved, within this legislature, what the language of the Bill might be.

And so, you should rest assured that I will be advising the industry upon the completion of moving . . . upon completion of the moving of this piece of legislation forward, if that's our interest, that we'll need a date for proclamation and that the importance of the date of proclamation, of course, is when you start to collect the fees.

(12:00)

And I expect that there'll be — not expect — there will need to be some notice provided to the industry so that they can prepare themselves and the people who will collect the fees on our behalf, that there's going to be a change to the level of fees that are going to be collected. So the member can rest assured that we'll provide that information in the way in which I've suggested.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a couple of questions on this Bill here.

It's kind of appropriate it came at this time. On the weekend there, I was talking to quite a few cattle producers and they are all getting ready to move the cattle to community pastures. Some of them were opening them up on Thursday and Friday, I think, Saturday. Some of them were taking at reduced rates and that. So there was quite a bit of discussion, you know, about that.

And then I asked him about this \$10 fee and most of producers didn't know about it. They agreed that \$2 was low. A \$500 . . . or a 500 per cent increase in one year, they kind of — you know what cowboys are like — they kind of shook their head a bit but they can live with it. They just hope that there isn't going to be increases in the further years which they stated to me. They feel \$10 is the max that they can bear right now. So I hope that you're not looking at raising it in the next few years.

But they asked me a few questions that basically I couldn't answer, so I said I would ask under Committee of the Whole when this Bill come up, because I knew it was coming up this week.

So one of the questions they asked on the \$2 fee, how much was collected last year and how much was collected 10 years before that on the \$2 fee? Has there been much of a change? Has there been a decrease through the market of horned cattle coming in?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. I just want to say that the number that I have here from last year, March of 2001, they collected 139,000 and . . . \$139,000. We expect that this year that amount would be about the same.

What I don't know is the question that you ask as to 10 years ago. We can try and find that number for you and then make it available for you and as quickly as we can so that you can get back to the people that you need to.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The reason I'm asking is I . . . like I had mentioned in my speech that I've always believed . . . I've always watched the market, and going over a number of years, you've always seen less and less every year of horned cattle, so . . . And that's a way of determining if it was always less was to check the fee check off in the last 10 years. So I would . . . just curious for that piece of information.

Now with a \$10 fee, do you expect to collect basically five times as much money, which should be well over the half a million dollar mark, for the year 2003?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think, Mr. Chair, to the member, that the anticipation here is what will happen is that because you've raised the fee to a level that will be a disincentive, that you'll see the number from \$139,000 reducing itself. I mean, that's the intent here.

Now whether or not that will be the case, I don't know. We'll pay attention; this will be a good question, I expect, for us to sort of manage and monitor next year to see whether or not we have actually seen any influence by making this kind of change to the fee.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you. Yes, that would be and I'll be kind

of monitoring myself.

Following up on that, will you be sending out some information, doing a little bit of ads, letting know producers that there is a \$10 fee? Because like I say, the ones I talked to on the weekend, I think out of 10 guys I talked to, only one actually knew there was going to be a \$10 fee being brought in.

So is there going to be just . . . either through the rural service centre or some of the magazines that you do send out to producers, you will be mentioning that the fee will be going up to \$10 so they will know, and have a chance to maybe do some more dehorning this spring, is when most guys are doing it.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — This is a very important point that you make, that we be sure that when this legislation makes its way forward and the proclamation occurs, that we advise all the livestock inspectors, that we make sure that the livestock associations across the province are aware of the fee increases, and that livestock producers are aware of what the fee increases are.

And the communications piece is going to be critical here because this hasn't been asked for, as you can appreciate, by the government. This increase has been requested by the industry. And that's why this communications piece is even more important than one might appreciate. Because what . . . the last thing we want is to hear from producers in Saskatchewan that these increases have been somehow been driven by the need of the . . . needs of the provincial government.

So you can rest assured that we'll be making this information available to livestock producers and associations and our livestock inspectors across the province.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And that's . . . I can imagine you very, very well will be doing that.

Another thing: on the fee being collected, now that you brought that up, one of the questions asked me, what . . . where did the money go last year — that exact \$139,000, a breakdown of that? And where does this \$10 fee go? Which departments does it go; which research does it go; who handles it? — basically the accounting of it.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member: my officials provide me with where some of the expenditures are made from the fund: \$36,000 went — I expect this is last year — to the Veterinary College; \$35,000 went to VIDO (veterinary infectious disease organization); \$7.5 thousand went to the Foundation of Animal Care; and 15,000 went to the Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders.

And then on an annual basis about 161,000 goes to the Western Beef Development Centre, to the research and development centre. And then an additional \$15,000 is provided on an annual basis to the Saskatchewan . . . to the Department of Agriculture and Food to look after the administration of this entire fund.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And with the extra . . . And there probably will be more money coming in the first year too, because it will take a year or two for people to start doing more dehorning at home.

I noticed in the Act there, there was a Cattle Purchase Advisory Committee. Does that determine how the money's going to be split up for the upcoming years? Basically at the beginning of every year, how do you decide who gets the money? Or is there a formula or is there just kind of a percentage formula to each group?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. The member's right, absolutely right. The committee determines where the money goes and I expect that, particularly where the largest chunk is, on the research and development, it would be targeted to those areas where they are expecting that they will be able to have the largest influence in terms of research and development work.

So it is the committee that makes the decisions about the allocation of the funds.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. There'll be no further questions.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 8 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 6 — The Horned Cattle Purchases Amendment Act, 2002

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

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

The Deputy Chair: — I recognize the minister and ask the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just before I do that, I'd like to very briefly explain to our guests from Black Lake as to the process involved here.

As I explained to them earlier, Mr. Chairman, is that estimates is where the opposition has the opportunity to ask the Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) any questions about the budgets, you know, kind of related to SERM. And that's what this whole exercise is about. And often we'll come back four or five times during a session to have a number of questions asked of opposition.

And I'd also point out, Mr. Speaker, even though the questions are many, I've often told Mr. Bigeye the quality sometimes is

not there but the quantity certainly is.

And I'd also point out that Mr. Bigeye travelled 16 hours to get here. And it's an extremely tough trip and I would certainly again welcome him here to the Assembly.

I would point out the officials we have today. To my immediate left we have Terry Scott, and Terry Scott is the deputy minister; and next to Terry Scott, we have Bob Ruggles, and Bob Ruggles is assistant deputy minister for programs; and directly behind me we have Donna Johnson, and Donna is the acting executive director for corporate services; and next to Donna we have Rick Bates, and Rick is the director of communication services; and to my right we have Dave Phillips, the assistant deputy minister for operations.

And other environment officials, Mr. Chairman. In the back we have Ron Zukowsky — Ron is the executive director of policy and assessment; we have Ken Lozinsky who's with parks and special places; Doug Mazur, director of sustainable land management branch; Sam Ferris, environmental protection. We have Kevin Calleele, the director . . . acting in the capacity of Dennis Sherratt, he's also with fish and wildlife. And finally we have Dave Tulloch, the fire and management enforcement protection personnel. Thank you.

(12:15)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good afternoon to the minister and welcome to his officials.

Mr. Minister, I think given the situation that the province has been facing this spring with respect to the number of fires that there have been — and we've certainly had some fires that have caused a tremendous amount of damage — I think perhaps everyone would appreciate a bit of an update from you, sir, in terms of how many fires are there out there now; what is the status of the various fires.

And then I think as well, yesterday there was an appropriation passed for one-twelfth and part of that two-twelfths . . . are those appropriations going to meet the needs in terms of the expenses incurred in the firefighting? Or are we going to be . . . or have they exceeded . . . has the cost exceeded the appropriation to date?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for your very important question. I don't disagree that it has been a very challenging time for the province. And as of 10 a.m. this morning we've had 35 forest fires burning in the province. The total number of fires to date this year is 328 fires and that's 17 per cent above last year's total and roughly 56 per cent above the five-year average. So there's no question that the amount of fires out there is tremendous.

We have had not-yet-under-control fires, the ones that we're primarily concerned about certainly, that are creating a significant challenge for us all. There's about seven that are out of control. There's been some good progress made on other fires, but clearly these fires are fairly big fires and we're doing what we can to try and address this challenge and move forward.

Right now we have 712 firefighters working and patrolling these fires. We also have a number of actions or standby for fire suppression activities. There's 42 helicopters that are engaged, 19 tanker aircraft, 47 bulldozers, and 9 swamp tractors. And there's no question that we've had a great amount of work, just a tremendous amount of effort by a great number of people that are involved and the personnel that are involved.

So clearly it is a very tough start to a fire season. And I can tell you that a lot of the SERM staff right from our deputy minister's level right down to the firefighter and commissary folks out there, and the tanker crews and the fire bosses, they're all working very hard, long hours and they can certainly appreciate that they have to do this because the impact on our forest and property and certainly the communities as a result of these fires is just tremendously negative to all the people involved. And we can appreciate that.

So there is some very good and hard work being done. But nonetheless, it is a tremendous challenge.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And, Mr. Minister, I would like to join with you in congratulating all of the firefighters out there right now and congratulating everyone involved in the firefighting efforts.

I think, when you look at the firefighting capabilities in this province, you do realize that a large amount of that is dependent on volunteer firefighters. And those are people who, in situations such as this, don't get paid and have to take time away from seeding. And in the case of a couple of fires that occurred in our area and throughout the province, you certainly have individuals who weren't able to get out and seed. They were busy fighting fires.

But that's just an example of a community pulling together and doing everything that it needs to do. And one example of that, Mr. Minister, that I saw was Nipawin where absolutely everyone came together and I was in awe of the ability of the community and the individuals involved there to be able to come together and work towards the best interests of their community.

But the second part to my question, Mr. Minister, was: what has the cost been to date and will there be enough funding for the firefighting expense with the appropriations that have been made to date?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for the question. What I would point out is that it's very difficult to give an exact figure because, as you know, these fires are ongoing and we certainly have invoices and the bills coming on a regular basis. And it's difficult for us to assess what the total cost we've spent to date.

But what I can tell you is that based on the fact that we have approximately \$70 million in terms of the budgets needed to fight fires this year, the breakdown would be certainly the Fire Contingency Fund; that of course is a backup fund that we would use if we didn't extend our \$36 million base fund to make sure that we have enough money to fight fires.

What I will point out is that it is never an exact science about trying predict costs because we don't know how long the fires

will go on for. We're not sure how much extra costs that will be incurred. But what we do is that we certainly action fires. We are going to protect Saskatchewan's interests. We will continue fighting these fires, and we will work very close with Finance to make sure that we have the means, you know, to do exactly that.

What I will say is that we've had a rough start — there's no question about that. But in this business, as you know, simple things like more moisture, less wind, certainly all these contributing factors will determine how tough a year we're going to have or how good a year.

I would also point out that the directive we've had from Finance is to continue watching the bottom line.

And the fire suppression activities undertaken by SERM clearly show that as a result of our proactivity — I'm talking about preparedness and monitoring and reacting as quickly as we can — that this whole preparedness model that we've been undertaking is certainly a model that many other jurisdictions are facing . . . or looking at and hoping to implement.

So we are doing as best we can and we're certainly leading the nation, in my opinion, in making sure that we're prepared to respond to these fire as quick as we can and to try to keep those costs down as much as we can. And that of course takes a dedicated crew, which we certainly have. And that of course takes some systems that we certainly have. And that of course as well takes some diligence in making sure that we train folks and we hire as many people as we can to make sure that they are able to fight these fires.

So I can tell you — I can't give you an exact figure — but I can tell you that we are certainly experiencing a jump in starts. We're hoping that we have more rain, as everybody else is hoping for rain.

But what we do know is that we're prepared to continue fighting fires, that we're prepared to respond to the fire situation, and we'll continue improving the system and watching the bottom line to make sure that we protect Saskatchewan taxpayers' interests as well.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, if it became obvious in the near future that the cost of fighting the fires was going to exceed the three-twelfths appropriated to date, what is the mechanism whereby your department could access the required funding?

Now I know that you and I both hope that that certainly is not the case. But should it in fact be the case, how would you go about accessing the necessary funding? And I guess accessing it in a timely way because certainly this isn't something where one would want to allow any kind of tie-ups in terms of the amount of time needed in terms of accessing the funding.

So if you could just indicate as to how we would access funds if they exceeded the three-twelfths.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for that question. What I would point out is that we do have a budget that we follow. And if the fire season is such that we need more money

as we go down this June and July time frame, we would approach Finance, and I would ask the member to directly ask the Minister of Finance the process that he would undertake.

But clearly I think, from our perspective as we mentioned before, we have a budget in place. We're going to use the budget to protect Saskatchewan's forests and property and people and communities. And the budget's there and the money's there, and we're certainly going to do our very best to utilize it as effectively as we can and certainly watching the bottom line. But any question that you have about Finance, I would ask that member to contact the Minister of Finance and he would fill you in with the financial details. Thank you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, could you provide us with some details on the situation in Archerwill. What is the status of that fire currently? Is it under control? What kind of progress is being made and how many people do we have actively engaged in the firefighting in the Archerwill area? How many SERM personnel do we have out there and what role is the department currently playing in the Archerwill area?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question. And I would point out that one of the things I think is very important is that we constantly update folks on what's happening with the Archerwill fire and other fires as well. And I hope the member will bear with me when I basically explain what some of the other troubled areas are as well just so that we are able to get a clear picture to folks out there that may be listening as to what is happening with our fire situation.

I can report that Archerwill right now, that suppression efforts are initially . . . were initially taken by the local fire folks and certainly SERM was involved as well. We have a type 1 team dispatched to the fire on May 28 with resources buildup certainly continuing. And I can report that today it is being held, as of today. And of course this is 10 a.m. today so that is also always good news.

But what's the challenge in Archerwill is that we do have strong winds. And that's what's happening all throughout the province is these strong, gusting winds and the dry temperature is really putting the resource team that we have in place and all the resources we have in place at maximum capacity. There's a lot of people doing a lot of work and there's a lot of folks of course being affected. And we want to look at and recognize both those challenges.

(12:30)

And a good example of that, just for the member's information, is that yesterday was a really bad day. It was a really tough day for all the folks involved.

As you know, Archerwill and Montreal Lake and now we hear this morning that Turtle Lake also . . . the Turtle Lake area suffered some significant losses, property losses. While the forest itself wasn't . . . it wasn't as great as one would think, there was significant property loss, and I believe the total amount of cabins there may have numbered 50 plus. So there was again some very, very tough losses for a lot of people out there.

And certainly on behalf of all the crews of SERM that are out there firefighting and all the local firefighters and the RM (rural municipality) folks that are out there helping out, that is there on behalf of the government and the Premier, that we want to express our profound sadness. And we can only try to understand the immense sense of loss that people in the Turtle Lake area and throughout Saskatchewan that may be . . . that are going through . . . the feeling that they're going through now.

And I would point out to them that it is the highest priority for us of trying to make sure that properties and peoples' lives are protected, as well as the forest industry. And so these are some of the things that we're working towards.

So if it's Archerwill, if it's Turtle Lake, you know, we certainly are aware of some of the challenges. And as I mentioned, we're quite frankly at the wall in terms of all the resources that we have. We've got some very good help, as you know. We've had this agreement with other provinces that we would help each other out in the event that this happened.

Manitoba's having some challenges; Alberta's having some challenges — as Saskatchewan is having challenges. But today I can tell you that we're having some good support and collaboration by way of some aircraft and other support mechanisms from BC (British Columbia), from the Yukon, from Ontario. I understand that Quebec is also coming out to help out.

So it really, it really points out that we have a good system of co-operation amongst all the provinces. And we recognize that we're all in this boat together, so we help each other and we certainly share all the resources. And there's agreements to that effect.

So when we talk about Saskatchewan leading the nation, certainly trying to provide some best practices and some good ideas in helping deal with the Archerwills and certainly the Turtle Lake and the Montreal Lakes of this world, there's been some . . . a lot of good work being done.

We are all of course praying for rain, but we're thankful for the efforts of many of the firefighters that are out there and the team that's out there. And as well we've also instituted a fire ban, a province-wide fire ban to make sure that we don't add to the problem. And there's no question one of the things that we are asking folks out there to be very careful.

As you know, there's . . . northern forests right now are also at risk, as well as the southern farm lands in some of the communities. So our resources, as we speak, are just severely stretched. And we are just going to have to buckle down hard and work alongside of the RMs and continue working diligently with the many players out there and partners out there because no question about it, Archerwill, Montreal Lake, Turtle Lake, the northern area, there are fires out there, and we're doing our very best to respond to them given the resources that we have. And it is going to be a tough job this summer.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, could you provide the same kind of update on the fires at Tobin Lake and Makwa Lake as well, please?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the questions. I would point out there is — as you mentioned — there is quite a bit of fires that are out there, and we're trying to stay on top, as fresh information as possible. And again, this is from 10 a.m. this morning and things of course, as you can appreciate, change by the hour.

One of the things that we were quite pleased with in terms of the amount of attention this is getting, is that I was very happy as a minister to see the Premier take an interest in visiting a number of the areas.

I know he went to Nipawin. I know that he's went to Archerwill. So having the Premier tour some of these areas, and you can appreciate certainly some of the challenge that people that lost certain properties have gone through. And he's out there and a lot of SERM folks out there appreciate that, a lot of people of Saskatchewan appreciate that. So, certainly want to commend the Premier for making the effort of being out there. It's always nice to be able to have some kind of a spiritual and, certainly, financial help at this time. And certainly that leadership was there.

I would point out on the Tobin fire, it started off five miles northwest of Tobin Lake. The winds have shifted to the southeast of the lake. And I can tell you that so far we believe that there is two cabins that may have been burnt; one was a trapper's cabin, another may have been a hunting cabin. There's also a outfitting operation, I think, that has been saved in that area.

And so it is estimated that about roughly 1,200 hectares, I believe . . . Sorry, I may have the wrong number here but I'll get the right, correct number. But the Tobin Lake fire is a big fire. It's moving along quite quickly. The winds are gusting things up, so there has been property loss. There has been certainly other losses as well. We're . . . again, it's roughly plus 1,500 hectares. It's growing. And we've certainly got as many people on it as we can.

Now in reference to the Pine Cove or the timber fire — the second question that you had — you know, we had Cat lines working there until 1 a.m. in the morning. We are . . . as I mentioned, it's close to the lake. There was a small resort area called Pine Cove that was being challenged, but they had these sprinkler kits and they had Cats working. So we think that there's been some success on that front to stop much more property from being burnt.

So it is roughly, right now, it's crossed Highway 126 and there is a number of other places that are . . . of course, it's moving along quite well so we're trying to stay on top of these things as we're going.

So both the Tobin Lake and the timber fire, as you mentioned, there's been a lot of action undertaken. And as I pointed out earlier, you know, the resources are to the wall here — you've got people working many hours and we have to be very careful that we don't burn out our firefighters or put them at undue risk. So that balancing act also has to occur. And so we've got tanks, equipment in terms of the air tanker service, and Cats and men and personnel from all over working on this particular challenge.

So there has been progress but clearly it is a tough battle to win. But we are going to put our hearts and our minds into it to make sure we do our best to protect Saskatchewan people properly — forest and communities as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, it was, in fact, a pleasure to have the Premier accompany me to Nipawin in order to view the fire and the damage that was caused as a result of it.

And given that you mentioned the visit of the Premier to Nipawin, Mr. Minister, at a meeting with the mayor and council of Nipawin after the tour, the Premier made a pretty firm commitment to the community that he would cost share the firefighting costs that were incurred by the community as a result of the utilization of water bombers and various other department equipment.

The Premier also indicated to the community that as quickly as he returned to Regina he would be instructing officials to determine what those costs were and to begin negotiating with the communities . . . community of Nipawin on an appropriate cost share.

Mr. Minister, has the department now determined what the cost was to the town of Nipawin for the use of the SERM firefighting equipment? And have the negotiations begun with respect to the cost share on the cost of that equipment?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Well what I would . . . What I would point out, when you accompanied the Premier to Nipawin, he certainly wanted to see the site and to make sure that the people out there seen that the Premier was quite concerned of all of Saskatchewan. And the response that I made is, good for the Premier, good for the people of Saskatchewan and certainly good for the morale of all the people that are fighting fires. So again, we thank you for accompanying the Premier to Nipawin.

And I would point out that the Premier basically has indicated that he was going to support the communities and was going to continue working with them.

And I can tell you right now I don't have any of those costs that you're speaking about. Negotiations certainly are underway. And as I mention right now, there's a lot of resources that are being expended right now and we don't have all the detailed cost analysis in place yet in terms of what the Nipawin fire may cost.

But I'll point out, just for clarification, certainly local firefighting is a local responsibility. SERM's current practice is to provide support to local firefighting services on a cost recovery basis. But given the exceptional fire season, it is appropriate to review the situation and government is currently reviewing SARM's request for assistance. It is expected that options will be developed for cabinet's consideration that addresses both the current year's issues and the long-term. In the meantime, Saskatchewan Environment will continue to focus on its core programming and will provide assistance to municipalities as needed and as requested.

So I was very pleased, as I mentioned before, the Premier to tour some of these areas. He's made commitments. We're working very closely with the town to make sure that those commitments are being followed.

The cost analysis, as you can appreciate, is going to take us some time to figure out. But clearly, we are going to be responding. We're going to put together a team to talk about some of these issues; we're working with SARM.

So clearly the Premier's commitment was bang on and we're going to follow through with it and we're going to work with all the parties . . . or the departments involved and the parties involved to come up with a good, long-term solution.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, so are you indicating then that there is at this point no real criteria in place for cost sharing the cost of firefighting and that you are going to be addressing all of these situations on an ad hoc basis?

If there is any type of criteria that currently exists, could you make the Assembly aware of it? And if not, what kinds of suggestions are you making in terms of developing criteria around cost sharing?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for that question. What I want to point out is one of the things that you should know is that assistance . . . people asking for our help, all those requests are still coming in. The bills are still coming in. And certainly there's a lot of people out there that are asking for a lot of help from SERM.

And that's one the reasons why I want to stand up today and say we're going to plan this thing out to avoid the ad hoc approach that you say is in place.

So we are clearly not going down here to try and figure out a process that we're going to put in place with SARM to look at these events. And it's through good planning, good co-operation, clearly understanding the roles and responsibilities of all the players involved, that's also very key. And we go through this process and we'll come up with a good system to avoid the ad hoc scenario that you are certainly suggesting.

So I would point out that, no, we're not going to take any ad hoc approaches. We're going to work very clearly and very carefully and very quickly through this process to make sure that we, alongside of SARM, figure out some good solutions.

And as I mention, as we speak, a lot of the RMs are asking for help today. There's bills coming in and all these processes are moving along quite quickly. And we're trying to make sure that we put a good plan in place to make sure that we're able to respond very quickly to some of these challenges together with the RMs.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, does the declaration of a state of emergency at this point have any bearing whatsoever on a community's eligibility for assistance? And what are the plans for the future? Will that be a component or a consideration when you do in fact put together

the criteria for cost sharing?

(12:45)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question again. I would point out that our role and our job here clearly is to fight fires. And that is what SERM does. And certainly as I mentioned before, while we have some very tough challenges with the warm weather and no moistures and the wind, that it is a very tough job to do at this time.

But clearly our role here is to fight fires. And I would ask that member, and I would defer the question about disaster or declaration of the disaster. That'll be handled under the Corrections and Public Safety minister, and Minister Thomson would be the appropriate person to handle that particular question. Thank you.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Chair, to the minister. I just would like to give the minister an update. Perdue continues to have water concerns and just recently the town authorities gave a restricted water usage notice out to the households in Perdue. They are not allowed to use any water from midnight to 6 a.m. And there's a number of concerns.

First, I would like to know if the minister is aware of the situation in Perdue. And what is the minister and the department doing to help alleviate Perdue's water problem?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question on Perdue. What I would point out is that in terms of the actual history of what our involvement with Perdue is, I would ask that we defer to the Sask Water estimates so we'll get a full detail as to what is happening, you know, to date. I don't have that file and information in front of me.

But from SERM's perspective, what we're going to do, as that member can appreciate, is we have rules and regulations that are going to be put in place. We're going to have rules, we're going to sit down and explain to the mayors, to the councillors what these rules are. We're going to have some monitoring, and there's going to be transparency and making sure that some of these communities that may be under a boil-water advisory, that they have . . . paramount to them is public safety. So as long as there's challenges with any community's water system, we're going to issue a boil-water advisory or a boil-water order.

Now after that order or advisory has been initiated, we will sit down and if they decide to work with Sask Water or decide to go with the private sector, well that's certainly the village's options.

And from SERM's perspective we are there to regulate, we are there to help them monitor, and we're there to explain the rules and regulations. So I would point out we are not going to take any chances with any communities from SERM's perspective.

We are going to make sure that if there's a challenge, if there's any hint of any problems, then we immediately issue a boil-water order or a boil-water advisory making sure that the residents of Perdue or any community in the province are aware that there's some challenges. And as long as those challenges remain, and the questions remain, the boil-water order will

certainly stay in place or the boil-water advisory.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, are you aware of any regulations that require communities to maintain a certain amount of water in reserve — and I'm speaking primarily urban communities here — where they're required to keep a certain amount of water in reserve for firefighting purposes?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much for the question again. I'll point out that there is no regulations per se to have a certain amount in a capacity for firefighters. But there are guidelines that SERM and Sask Water will certainly work with the communities to make them aware of those guidelines. And there is much work to be done there again as I mentioned.

But clearly there is no rule or regulation. There are guidelines in which you talk about having the fire department having these . . . this ability to store water.

The committee reported progress.

The Deputy Speaker: — This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday. And have a pleasant weekend.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:56.