

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand once again today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of the good city of Humboldt who are concerned that the government may close down the Humboldt territory operations office of Sask Housing and they're praying that the government do not do that. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the proposed closure of the Humboldt territory operations office for Saskatchewan Housing Authority, and to renew their commitment to rural Saskatchewan and maintain a full, functioning territory operations office in Humboldt.

And the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are all from the city of Humboldt.

I so present.

**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise again today to talk about the closure of the Humboldt territory office for the Housing Authority:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reconsider the proposed closure of the Humboldt territory operations office for the Saskatchewan Housing Authority, and to renew their commitment to rural Saskatchewan to maintain a full, functioning territory operations office in Humboldt.

The people that have signed this petition are from Humboldt and St. Gregor.

**Mr. Gantfoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon, I have a petition about . . . from people 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 afternoon, Mr. Speaker, are from Tisdale and Archerwill.

I so present.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present. 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. Speaker, are from the communities of Langenburg, Spy Hill, and Inglis, Manitoba.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens who are concerned about the crop insurance program and the prayer reads:

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

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

And the petition is signed by residents of Ogema, Bengough, Weyburn, and Parry.

I so present.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition dealing with crop insurance, signed by the good citizens from Marquis:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition from workers concerned about having permanent injuries and not being covered by workers' compensation. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to acknowledge the concerns of the taxpaying citizens by causing the Government of Saskatchewan to ensure that absolute fairness and equitable treatment be given to those injured and disabled people and their families and be diligent in this most urgent matter.

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

Signed by the good citizens of Waldeck, Blumenhof, Neville, Cadillac, and Swift Current.

I so present.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise

in the Assembly again today and bring forth a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan that are concerned about the tobacco legislation. And the prayer reads as follows:

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 as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

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

I so present.

### READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

**Deputy Clerk:** — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional paper nos. 11, 18, 24, 59, 132, and 157.

### NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 64 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: (1) how many legally registered drivers reside in Saskatchewan; (2) how many of these drivers have vehicles registered in their names; (3) in reference to SGI's safe driver rewards program, how many people will receive a discount under this program and what is the number of people at each rebate level; (4) what will the dollar value be of these reductions; (5) how many registered drivers in Saskatchewan will not qualify for any reduction under the program because of their past driving record; (6) are company vehicles eligible for this program; and (7) how much is budgeted for the promotion of this program and what is the detailed breakdown of these promotional costs?

Thank you.

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 64 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: in the year 2002, how many productions by Minds Eye productions already have or will take place in Saskatchewan, and how many have or will take place outside of Saskatchewan, and where were these productions made?

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I have another question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 64 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: after CIC took an equity position in

Minds Eye productions, how many productions by the company took place in Saskatchewan in 2001, and how many took place outside of Saskatchewan, and where were these productions made?

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 64 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Industry and Resources: what was the total compensation paid by Crown Capital Partners to Gary Benson in the year 2001?

**Mr. Brkich:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 64 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Sask Water: will the conservation development authority be moved to the Environment portfolio from Sask Water?

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is a delegation from Namibia's Office of the Prime Minister. This distinguished group of people is here working with Saskatchewan officials for a couple of weeks.

To you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the rest of the Assembly and to the people of Saskatchewan, I would like to introduce them to you and I would ask them to stand as I introduce them.

First, Mr. Gerson Tjihenuna. He was the Undersecretary of the Cabinet Secretariat and Policy Analysis Department. Mr. Steven Isaack, Director of Management Services Directorate. Mr. Dicks Kandando, Director of Policy Analysis Directorate. Mr. Mathew Kaholongo, Chief Policy Analyst of the Cabinet Secretariat Directorate. And Mr. David Tiboth, Efficiency Analyst with the Management Services Directorate.

Saskatchewan is collaborating with Namibia under a twinning arrangement, Mr. Speaker, that flows from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada's partnership for public sector capacity building for governance and social development, which is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

Under this project, Saskatchewan and Namibia will collaborate on seven projects and they are: the policy analysis and foundation, job classification plan development, gender-sensitive school curriculum, HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome) curriculum, distance education, land valuation processes and tools, gender based policy analysis.

I want to welcome each and every one of you to this great province of ours and hope that your time spent here is enjoyable and productive. And I would ask all members to help me in welcoming these distinguished people to our Assembly and to Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, I would like to join the member from Melville in welcoming our guests from Namibia. We hope you enjoy your stay in Saskatchewan. We hope that you enjoy the proceedings this afternoon. And we hope your travels throughout our province will be safe. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, 50 students and teachers and sponsors who are in the west gallery. There are 28 grade 8 students and 22 grade 7 students from Argyle School, just a number of blocks west of the legislature. And they're accompanied by teachers, Mrs. Lori Godwin and Mr. Dave Boan, as well as chaperone, Mrs. Barb Burwell.

I'd ask all members to welcome them to the legislature.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege this afternoon to introduce to you and to all members of the House, a group of 28 grade 7 students seated in the east gallery, Mr. Speaker.

These grade 7 students have come from the community of Preeceville, specifically Preeceville School, to be present early this morning and this afternoon here in the Legislative Assembly and continue on this afternoon with tours throughout Regina.

I want to thank teacher Jodie Ross for organizing and bringing these students to Regina, and also some chaperones. And of course the bus driver, Mr. Jerry Lisitza, and Carrie Konkel for taking the time to bring 28 students to Regina.

I hope you've enjoyed the morning and I look forward to . . . I'm sure you'll look forward to the question period as you and I have discussed earlier on today.

I'd ask all members to welcome the group from Preeceville.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kasperski:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the legislature, 29 grade 4 students from St. Josephat School. They are seated in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker. And these students are here for a visit with their teacher, Mrs. Pack, and parent chaperone, Mrs. George. And I'm looking forward to meeting with them after question period for a photo and some soft drinks.

And, Mr. Speaker, I recognize some of the children. St. Josephat School is right next to the . . . very close to the mall where my constituency office is. And although I don't see too many on these days, I certainly see some them in the fall as they come around and hang around at my place once in a while.

But anyway, I'd like to welcome all these grade 4 students from

St. Josephat School.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Members of the Assembly, it's my pleasure to introduce to you my very much younger sister, Audrey Langhorst, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. And she's here today with her husband, Bruce Langhorst. Audrey is in the process of retiring from SaskPower and Bruce is in the process of trying to retire from farming.

And I ask all to welcome them to the legislature.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hillson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also join with you in welcoming Audrey and Bruce Langhorst from the Battlefords to our Assembly this afternoon.

But I do want to introduce to you seated in your gallery, Darcy Vany of Regina. Darcy graduated this spring from the University of Regina and received her Bachelor of Administration. I'd ask her to please stand.

She wants to remain in Saskatchewan and is now marketing assistant with *tappedinto.com*. Her parents farm north of North Battleford and have not been receiving the rain which most of our province has been blessed with the past week.

So I'd ask all members of the legislature to join me in welcoming Darcy this afternoon and wishing her well in her career in Saskatchewan. And also wishing her parents well as well.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(13:45)

**Mr. Hillson:** — And, Mr. Speaker, if I may also ask your indulgence, I would ask that the members for Nutana and Meewasin kindly take very good care of their seats because there are two gentlemen in the east gallery who will soon be occupying them. Thank you.

**Ms. Atkinson:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to join my colleague from the Battlefords in welcoming the person that he didn't introduce, Grant Karwacki, to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon.

As all members will know, Mr. Karwacki was nominated in the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana to represent the Liberal Party in the next general election and he received that nomination last Thursday evening at the Albert Community Centre, and I understand that the crowd could have been a little larger.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, those people who are involved in politics in our constituency, particularly those people from the NDP (New Democratic Party), are looking forward to the rumble in the jungle of Nutana in the next provincial election. And I want to assure Mr. Karwacki that the candidate is going to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee in the next general election.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce my daughter Alison, who is seated in your gallery up here. Alison, I'd like you to stand up. She wasn't here on day one of this session when I gave my maiden speech. She actually was in Ontario, western . . . She studies at the University of Western Ontario. She had a national scholarship. But she hopes to come back home and pursue a law degree in environmental sciences here.

So to all of you, I'd like to introduce Alison.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

#### Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company Production

**Mr. Forbes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was the opening in Regina of the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company's new production entitled *The Alley*. This company is based in my constituency of Saskatoon Idylwyld, and I'm happy and pleased that audiences across the province — and indeed across the country — will be able to see this production.

Maria Campbell, a well-known First Nations writer is the author and creator of this fresh and challenging piece. In collaboration with the 2002 Circle of Voices participants, Ms. Campbell has created a play that allows its audience a glimpse into the lives of two ancient characters of Cree mythology: Weesakeechak and First Grandmother.

However, one should not expect to witness these two characters as they would normally appear in folklore and legend. As a skateboarder and a retired downtown lady, representations of Weesakeechak and First Grandmother interact with the homeless youth of a prairie city. The story takes a hard look at the challenges faced by young people caught in an urban landscape, carrying the intergenerational burden of colonialism. The story also looks at the key to liberation as being held in the teachings of our past.

Maria Campbell uses a combination of story, song, and dance, and Indian humour to entertain, educate, and empower.

The last showing of this wonderful play is tonight at 8 p.m. at St. Andrew's church hall and I would encourage all members to take in this delightful yet profound drama. Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Squadron 888 Air Cadets

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, June 5, I had the honour of attending the annual ceremonial review of Squadron 888 Air Cadets at the Wakaw Recreational Centre. Mr. Speaker, Korean War veteran Mr. Wilfred Paintednose conducted the review from the One Arrow Reserve. And after that many awards were presented to individual cadets.

Mr. Speaker, Squadron 888 Air Cadets consist of both male and female Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. The cadet squadrons throughout Saskatchewan provide a great opportunity for youth between the age of 12 and 18 to participate in character enhancing activities through group and individual projects. The focus is on learning personal responsibility, self-discipline, respect, courtesy, building friendships, and experiencing the joy of achievement and the pride of success.

Mr. Speaker, two cadets earned their pilot licence at this year's ceremony and it was a very exciting and rewarding moment for them. Mr. Speaker, the cadets are a valuable organization in assisting in the development of personal character and the contributions that they make to the betterment of our society. And I salute them as well as their many instructors, commanding officers, and mentors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Improvements to Saskatchewan Highways

**Mr. McCall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year the government has committed almost \$300 million to improving Saskatchewan highways and I am pleased to report to the House today on some of the projects that have either been completed or are currently underway.

At the end of May a 12-kilometre resurfacing project was completed along a section of Highway 7 near Tessier and Zealandia.

There are also three projects of note, Mr. Speaker, that began in the last couple of weeks. A surfacing project has begun on the outskirts of Arcola on Highway 13 and will cover 11.6 kilometres west to Kisbey. An increase in truck traffic on this highway has led to a great deal of rutting and rough sections, and the surfacing project will upgrade this section of highway to a standard that can better handle the heavy traffic.

Another resurfacing project currently underway is a 17-kilometre section of Highway 16 east of Paynton.

The last project of note, Mr. Speaker, is the construction of the Kincorth bridge. Work is now under way to construct a concrete overpass on Highway No. 1 West over the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) tracks near Kincorth, approximately 16 kilometres west of the junction with Highway 21.

Mr. Speaker, these are just three examples of the more than 700 kilometres of highways that the province will be reconstructing and paving this year. And apparently the opposition can't stand it, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McCall:** — The government of Saskatchewan is fully aware that highways are lifelines that connect people of this province to one another and lifelines that will also drive economic development. That is why this government is fixing the roads, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Leask Couple Receive National Farming Award

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. John Cote and Barb Stefanyshyn-Cote of Leask were chosen as Canada's outstanding young farmers in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec.

The young couple were recipients of Saskatchewan's Outstanding Young Farmers Award and advanced to represent Saskatchewan for Canada's outstanding young farmers program.

Seven couples representing the seven regions in Canada were judged on their farming operations, community involvement, dedication to the industry, and environmental considerations. Every year two couples are chosen to share the honour. The Cotes share the designation with a Quebec couple, Gilbert Beaulieu and Johanne Dube.

The judging process involved interviews, an application form, and a presentation of their respective operations. The candidates' operations included specialty crops, hogs, dairy, poultry, fruit, and greenhouse production.

John and Barb operate Lumec Farms Ltd. northwest of Leask. Their successful management has enabled them to increase operations to 3,300 acres. The Cotes have used their education and resources to improve farming techniques while preventing soil erosion.

Seven hundred and fifty individuals attended the evening gala to witness the recipients receive a silver belt buckle and lapel pin. The two winning couples also receive an expense paid trip to Toronto for the 2002 Canada's young farmers banquet and presentation.

The OYF (outstanding young farmers) program brings together positive people in our industry from coast to coast, Barb explained. She invites anyone interested in the program to contact them.

Congratulations John and Barb for your outstanding dedication to the agriculture industry.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Maclean's 2002 University Rankings

**Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, the 2002 *Maclean's* guide to Canadian universities has just been released and Saskatchewan's two universities have done very well.

In the six years since the guide has been published, the University of Regina has risen from 11th to 7th in the overall ranking for comprehensive universities. The University of Saskatchewan has also followed this trend rising from 15th to 11th in the medical-doctoral category.

One of the reasons for the increase at these two facilities is the extensive recruitment effort by both campuses to find new professors and instructors.

Mr. Speaker, this improvement in our rankings in *Maclean's* suggests that our provincial investment in post-secondary

education is improving the quality of the university experience and is being recognized across the country.

Mr. Speaker, our universities and students are setting the groundwork for a great future. This government will continue to strive to meet the standards in excellence and ensure that a post-secondary education in Saskatchewan is not only attainable but extremely reputable.

I would ask all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating our universities for such an impressive showing.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Saskatchewan's First Woman Sheriff Retires After 25 Years

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize today Weyburn's sheriff, the province's first woman sheriff, who retired last week after 25 years of service. Wendy Dammann, who served for more than 25 years, has hung up her sheriff's hat for the last time.

Wendy grew up on a farm near Froude and in 1969, when she realized that there were sheriffs in Saskatchewan, she decided that's what she wanted for her career. And in 1977 she became the sheriff in Weyburn and held that position for some time.

She was only one of 13 sheriffs in Saskatchewan at that time, and today there are only eight sheriffs in the province.

In 1987 Weyburn and Estevan merged their regions, and Wendy became the sheriff to serve both of those regions.

Wendy had a few words to say last week upon her retirement, and I'd just like to quote them:

I did my job for 25 years without having to duck and no one blackened my eyes.

I tried to treat people the way I like to be treated and over the years I've developed a few friends along the way.

Wendy now plans to take some time for herself and to have some fun even though she says that she will certainly miss her job as sheriff. She plans to travel, play golf, fish, hunt, and camp.

And so on behalf of all residents of Weyburn and surrounding area, I'd like to thank Wendy for her commitment and service to her community and to thank Wendy for a job well done and wish her well in her retirement.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Western Development Museum Centennial Project

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's 100th birthday is in 2005, and the Western Development Museum is offering everyone in the province a unique opportunity to make a permanent contribution to the celebration by creating a major exhibit called 1905 to 2005, Winning the Prairie Gamble.

It is to be displayed in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, North Battleford, and Yorkton, and will give everyone the opportunity to record their personal stories, the stories of their families for survival and success, whether related to family, community, business, or social history.

Mr. Speaker, our individual stories collectively will make our provincial story. And what I like about this project, Mr. Speaker, is that this collection of historical stories from our pioneer years is going to be collected and stored on computer. And when you think about it, we began with the Red River cart and the sod hut and now we live in a wired, high-tech, largely urban world. We're going to preserve the history of one generation with the tools of the next generation, and I think that's very appropriate, Mr. Speaker.

It's a terrific way to honour our past as we look forward to a great future. And anyone interested, Mr. Speaker, can call 1-888-821-2005 and take part in this project. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Provincial Efforts to Secure Support for Agriculture

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day in the House NDP ministers either give the wrong answers or no answers at all. And now even the Premier has fallen into this habit.

Yesterday the Premier said he knew nothing at all about a federal ag package. He said, and I quote, I "am not privy to any details that the federal government may be planning to announce." Yet as it turns out, the NDP Agriculture minister has a lot of details and he gave them to the *Leader-Post* yesterday — in the afternoon, right after the Premier had said they had no knowledge of any package.

Mr. Speaker, why didn't the Premier give us a straight answer yesterday? Why is the Premier reluctant to give this House honest answers in the Assembly?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, let me remind the House and the Leader of the Opposition, if his memory is this short, that yesterday he asked me the following:

... has the Premier been informed by the federal government when the announcement of a new farm aid package is expected? And will it include any trade injury and drought relief as well as a new agricultural policy framework?

And my answer of course, Mr. Speaker, was that it is, no, I have not been informed by the federal government, by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, or the Minister of Trade, or anyone from the federal government about any detail or plans to announce the federal program.

But let me say this, Mr. Speaker. Today I pick up, today I pick

up a statement by the Broadcast News — the Broadcast News — and I read here that in a conference call from Rome, federal Minister Agriculture Lyle Vanclief confirmed a federal announcement is coming very soon. And get this, Mr. Speaker. He also confirmed any aid package will be cost shared with the province.

(14:00)

Mr. Speaker, this is a fine situation when the federal government of Canada chooses to inform the provinces of Canada of agricultural policy in a news conference in Rome through Broadcast News — I have to read the Broadcast News.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very peculiar way to run a country. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I have decided this morning, I am this afternoon leaving this province to attend to Ottawa to attend a meeting with the Prime Minister tomorrow.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, out on the farm the folks there will be saying the Premier has finally woken up after the horse is out of the barn. He's done it again.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier goes around blaming other people. Mr. Speaker, he blamed . . . he and his colleague blamed the Federation of Agriculture. Today he's mad at the federal Minister of Agriculture for making an announcement in Rome because this government has no contact, no input, no negotiations with the federal government. They sit back and wait for the federal government to make an announcement in the way that the federal government chooses to do so.

Mr. Speaker, where has our government been? Where has our Premier been? Mr. Speaker, where was the Minister of Agriculture, where was the Premier, while these decisions were being made?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, I have been in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I have been in Williston, North Dakota. I have been in Saskatoon. I have been in Dawson City. And tomorrow, I will be in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Agriculture has been across the country meeting with ministers of Agriculture, meeting with ministers of Agriculture and meeting with farm leaders across the country. Today, Mr. Speaker, it's time again for the Leader of the Opposition and, if I may say, the Leader of the Liberal Party in this province to stand and confirm their position in support of Canadian producers and Saskatchewan producers. It is time for them to stand up again and say they stand with Canadian . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. The floor goes to the Premier.

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, as I was saying, it is time for the Liberal leader and the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party again to join producers across Canada and

state their unequivocal support for a trade injury payment from the national government, 100 per cent funded by the national government.

And while we're on the question, Mr. Speaker, of agricultural policy, have we heard a word of policy? Have we heard a word of policy, except the agricultural critic of the opposition sitting in the corridor and saying to the people of Saskatchewan, we wouldn't know what to do. Mr. Speaker, it's time they came forward with some policy and it's time they stood with producers — stood, I hope, with the Liberal leader of Saskatchewan, stood with this government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Premier says he's been everywhere, but he's been everywhere except where it counts — speaking on behalf of the agriculture industries of Saskatchewan, speaking on behalf of the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier allowed his Agriculture minister yesterday to blame Bob Friesen and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture for the information he received. Well, Mr. Speaker, we understand that that isn't true either. Because Bob Friesen says that none of the farm groups discussed any of the numbers that the Minister of Agriculture was quoting yesterday. In fact, he said the only person that gave out any numbers was the Premier's Minister of Agriculture — that's what Bob Friesen said today.

Mr. Speaker, why is it that we can't get a straight answer from this government? Why is it this government knows . . . doesn't know what's going on? Mr. Speaker, when is the NDP going to stop blaming everybody but themselves for their own incompetence?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Less than a month ago, that member, the Leader of the Opposition, heard what the Canadian Federation of Agriculture had to say about support for farm families. He said, Mr. Speaker, and the member of the opposition heard him, he said the trade injury in Canada should be paid for by the national government.

And I can affirm today, Mr. Speaker, as I did to the media and to this House, we had a conversation on Friday with four provincial Ag ministers and the national farm organizations. And we put the hypothesis to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture that if in fact, Mr. Speaker, there's a cash payout of 7, 8, or \$900 million of which trade injury is involved, will the farm organizations say that they're going to buy in? And they said that they're prepared to take the package, is what they said, Mr. Speaker. That's what I said to the media; that's what I say to the opposition.

And I say to the member of the opposition, you need to stay . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order.

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, we have been talking for weeks — and in fact, it's now months — about the damage that

will be caused by the US (United States) farm Bill.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the story in today's paper, as inspired by our Minister of Agriculture, says that any package will address drought, it might address water projects, research and development, and provide new . . . money for the new agriculture policy framework.

But there is no mention of injury payments to address the US farm Bill. No mention of that whatsoever, Mr. Speaker. And that was the whole point of this exercise. That is why we stood with the NDP in meeting with the federal government to provide federal support for Canadian producers to compensate for injury caused by the US farm Bill.

Mr. Speaker, what happened to that idea? Why has that been lost? Why has this government not stuck to its guns and insisted that the federal government provide compensation for injury caused by unfair trade? Mr. Speaker, now how do they propose to fight the US farm Bill?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Speaker, in this side of the House, we have been very clear about the subsidy and the US farm injury to Canada for the better part of two years, Mr. Speaker, and it's been on our page. In fact, in September . . . or in February of this year, when we submitted our document to the national government, we had included in it, Mr. Speaker, the importance of having trade injury.

And the only people, Mr. Speaker, in this House who we've had to take kicking and screaming and dragging on the subsidy fees has been the member from Rosetown-Biggan. He's the guy who we . . .

And finally, Mr. Speaker, finally, Mr. Speaker, he's on board, he's on board now, did a 180 and we're glad to have him here.

But I hear him say today, Mr. Speaker, that gradually he's slipping and he's getting ready to leave which is not unusual, Mr. Speaker, for the Saskatchewan Party and the Leader of the Opposition.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, I would tell that NDP government we have not slipped one millimetre and we are far ahead of them on any agriculture issue.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, we have seen this movie before and, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't have a very happy ending. The NDP wasn't at the table when the feds came up with the AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program and, as a result, that program was a disaster for Saskatchewan farmers.

The NDP then wasn't at the table when they put the CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) program together, and again Saskatchewan producers got the shaft.

Now it appears that Ottawa is coming up with another program and again the NDP government was not at the table, and again we can expect it to be a disaster.

Mr. Speaker, this new program, according to the *Leader-Post*, does not address trade injury caused by the US farm Bill, and Saskatchewan taxpayers, according to the *Leader-Post* article, may be asked to pick up a portion of the bill. That's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. How did the NDP let that happen?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Speaker, not only has this government in Saskatchewan been at the table for the last year, Mr. Speaker, building a new agricultural policy framework and a brand new farm safety net in Saskatchewan; not only haven't we been at the table, Mr. Speaker, we've been leading the parade in terms of what should happen in Canada on agricultural policy.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — We've said, Mr. Speaker, we've said that we need a brand new safety net in Saskatchewan. Why? Because it doesn't work.

And the last time we had an agricultural debate on policy framework as it relates to safety nets, members from that side of the House were there and we weren't back in Saskatchewan for 10 minutes and they were gone, Mr. Speaker. And that's where they're aiming to do again.

There's only one group of men and women on this side of the . . . in Saskatchewan today who are pulling the train, Mr. Speaker, and the train on agriculture is well on its way. And the engineer, Mr. Speaker, of that train is right here. And the caboose, Mr. Speaker, the caboose of that train is right there — antiquated and out of date.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, they are so far ahead of the parade that they're the circus and they're the clowns, Mr. Speaker.

Saskatchewan people are ending up paying the price for NDP mismanagement and incompetence. We're getting a flawed farm program thanks to that NDP government.

Last month taxpayers have been forced to pay for three separate reviews under this NDP government. The NDP is reviewing the breakdown that led to the privacy scandal. The NDP was forced into reviewing the actions of a former minister, the Environment minister. And now the NDP is spending \$50,000 — taxpayers' dollars — to review why the SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) minister couldn't get his story straight.

Mr. Speaker, maybe we need just one big review. It's called an election. That will give Saskatchewan people a chance to pass judgment on our government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Mr. Speaker, how many more times are

Saskatchewan people going to have to put up with the NDP's mismanagement and incompetence?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, I was hopeful, I was hopeful as I left . . .

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, I was hopeful today that as I left the province to attend to Ottawa to meet with the Prime Minister, I might be able to go to Ottawa and say that I come with the unanimous support of the political parties of Saskatchewan, as I go today with the unanimous support of Western premiers and Territorial leaders. Given the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition today, I'm not at all sure I can go saying that there's unanimous support for the province of Saskatchewan and the producers of Saskatchewan.

Now you see, Mr. Speaker, each time that this group of men and women don't like an answer . . .

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

**Hon. Mr. Calvert:** — Mr. Speaker, today the Leader of the Opposition stands in this House and calls for an election. I hear a number of his members calling for an election.

Well here we go again, Mr. Speaker. They make a commitment to the people of Saskatchewan. He went to the people of Saskatchewan in the last election saying: I believe in fixed election dates. Fixed elections dates — that's what he said he believes in. Well now he doesn't believe in fixed election dates. Now he wants me to call one next week.

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you when I call an election in this province at the appropriate time, there's going to be lots more of New Democrat members on this side of the House and lots few Saskatchewan Party members on that side of the House.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Investigation of Claims by Government Agencies

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question again is for the minister responsible for SGI. Last Friday, Mr. Speaker, when the minister announced that he was asking SGI to conduct a review of their surveillance and investigation policies, he said he was also going to ask them to find out why he was given, quote, "incomplete information."

Mr. Speaker, very specifically to the minister: was the minister on June 6, or at any time prior to June 6, briefed by SGI officials with regard to the use of firms or individuals to conduct investigations on people with SGI insurance claims?

Mr. Speaker, that's June 6 or prior to June 6.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Mr. Speaker, I think I was fairly clear in my statement in the House the other day, that I listed off all of



the things that I would be asking for as the minister responsible for SGI, Mr. Speaker. And in the course of that review, that will be made public and available.

The only circumstances, Mr. Speaker, that may not be made public — and I've indicated this as well — is if there are specific cases that are dealt with. But the issue that the member raises will be dealt with in due course, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that of all the questions we've had so far, this minister still doesn't know what he was told on any particular day. No wonder in the House we go from day to day getting those ridiculous answers that we get from him.

Mr. Speaker, was the minister responsible for SGI briefed on SGI's special investigation unit and its activities, or the use of surveillance by SGI, in the investigation of insurance claims on or before June 6?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(14:15)

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Mr. Speaker, that member to suggest that we don't know what's going on from day to day, Mr. Speaker, lookit here. I'll let him calm down, I'll let him calm down, Mr. Speaker.

I look at the *Leader-Post* of June 11, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

In the midst of criticizing government's policies on investigations, Heppner (this is in the quote) was also forced to backtrack on some of his own prior statements.

In previous interviews Heppner had said that SGI shouldn't investigate people suspected of fraud without those people's permission.

Later he refused to state the Saskatchewan Party's position on fraud investigations. But (Mr. Speaker) by Monday, he said if the evidence warrants investigation, surveillance should be run (Mr. Speaker).

He seems to change his position, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well it's a sort of a backhanded compliment when the best answer that the . . .

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

**Mr. Heppner:** — . . . when the best answer the minister can have is to read out what the member of the opposition said. Surely he has some few ideas on his own. The Minister of Agriculture didn't today; the Premier didn't today. Let's try the minister for SGI again.

Was the minister responsible for SGI briefed on SGI's special investigation unit and its activities or the use of surveillance by

SGI in the investigation of insurance claims on or before June 6? Surely the minister knows what he was told on a particular day.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was absolutely clear in what I asked for in that review, Mr. Speaker. I said that when I stood in this House, Mr. Speaker, I was not provided with complete or accurate information, Mr. Speaker. And I apologize to this House, and I apologize again today if that's what the member wants, Mr. Speaker.

I've also asked for the review which will answer the very question that that member asked today, and I'm not going to interfere with that process right now. He will have his answers very quickly, Mr. Speaker, and most likely next week sometime.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — It's really amazing that the minister has to have someone else in charge to tell him what he's supposed to have known — what he's supposed to have known.

Mr. Speaker, again very specifically to the minister: did SGI officials or members of the minister's staff brief him at any time prior to or on June 6, on the number of insurance investigations conducted annually by SGI's special investigation unit?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I suggest that that member should have been briefed by some officials about whether or not people who commit fraud in this province, Mr. Speaker, should be investigated, Mr. Speaker. And thank goodness he's finally changed his position. And I assume that's the position of the party opposite now, Mr. Speaker, that they believe when people are suspected of fraud that they actually do get investigated, Mr. Speaker. Because clearly that's SGI's position.

Mr. Speaker, I've answered the question. I've been clear. The review will include and answer the very question that that member asks, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, it didn't cost the taxpayers \$50,000 for me to admit that I had to change my position.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — Now, Mr. Speaker, does the minister . . .

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

**Mr. Heppner:** — Does the minister actually need a \$50,000 review to have someone tell him what he knew?

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, if that member's stating now that because he changed his position we should stop

the review, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I wish he'd stand up and say that, Mr. Speaker.

The member surely knows that the review includes much more than that, Mr. Speaker. It includes a review of whether or not the surveillance and the in-depth investigation procedure that SGI follows is appropriate, Mr. Speaker.

And I believe that Price Waterhouse will provide that review to us next week sometime. It will be made public with the exception of . . . the exception of specific individual cases. The member just needs to wait till sometime next week, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a traditional question about how many angels can dance on a head of a pin. Now I guess we need to know how many bureaucrats does it take for that minister to hide behind.

Mr. Speaker, was the minister specifically told by the members of his staff, or SGI officials, that SGI only conducted between 8 and 10 investigations annually? Or did the minister make up that assumption?

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Well again, Mr. Speaker, I stood in the House and apologized because I didn't have complete information, Mr. Speaker. I didn't have complete information. And some of it was inaccurate, as I indicated, and I apologized for that. And that's why we've asked for the review — to ensure that . . . to ensure first of all that the procedures around surveillance and investigation, around cases that we believe may be fraudulent, Mr. Speaker, are dealt with appropriately. In addition to that, I've asked them to review — as a third point, Mr. Speaker — that they also provide for me information as to why I didn't have that complete information. And that member will have that information sometime next week.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — Isn't it amazing, Mr. Speaker, that the best this minister can do when he doesn't know something is to say his bureaucrats didn't give him all the information and they gave him wrong information. How weak can that minister be that he can't figure it out on his own that he doesn't have all the information? Surely he should be able to ask that from his bureaucrats.

Mr. Speaker, SGI has hired PricewaterhouseCoopers to find out why the minister was completely incompetent in answering any questions about SGI surveillance on insurance claimants. The SGI president says his two-week long review will cost Saskatchewan taxpayers \$50,000 to find out why the minister can't read his own briefing notes.

Mr. Speaker, \$50,000 for a report to explain an NDP minister's incompetence — incompetence, Mr. Speaker — is questionable when it is already quite evident to everyone else in this province, including the members of the civil servants, who the minister's blaming for this whole mess, that the minister is the one who can't run his department, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, why won't the minister just stop blaming the bureaucracy and admit he had it all wrong?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I want to be clear that I'm absolutely not blaming the bureaucracy, Mr. Speaker. I said, Mr. Speaker — I said, Mr. Speaker — that the information that was provided to me was incomplete, Mr. Speaker. Some of it was inaccurate, Mr. Speaker. I believe . . .

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

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — What I did say, Mr. Speaker, is the information I received was incomplete. Some of it was inaccurate, Mr. Speaker. And I said as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, that I would have a review conducted, Mr. Speaker — unlike those members, who would form some vigilante group and get rid of people willy-nilly, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, thank goodness, I want to say again to the people of Saskatchewan and reinforce their position and our position, Mr. Speaker, that we agree on this finally — that people who commit fraud, who ripped off the people of Saskatchewan, should be investigated, Mr. Speaker, and appropriate action should be taken, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 204 — The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2002 (Votes of Confidence)

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

**Mr. Hermanson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move first reading of Bill No. 204, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 2002 (Votes of Confidence).

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

## WRITTEN QUESTIONS

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order. Order.

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and provide responses to written questions 287 through 303. I'd just like to inform the Assembly that this far surpasses last year's total.

**The Speaker:** — Responses for questions no. 287 right through to 303 inclusive have been tabled.

## PRIVATE BILLS

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Bill No. 301 — The Conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2002**

**Mr. Peters:** — I move Bill 301, The Conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2002, be now read a third time and passed under its title.

**The Chair:** — I thank the member. Before we put that motion, we will go through it clause by clause.

Preamble agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 8 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

(14:30)

**Bill No. 302 — The Sunnyside Nursing Home Amendment Act, 2002**

Preamble agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

**Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Amendment Act, 2002**

Preamble agreed to.

Clauses 1 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

## THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 301 — The Conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2002**

**The Speaker:** — Would the member move that the Bill now be read a third time and passed under its title?

**Mr. Peters:** — I so move.

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

**Bill No. 302 — The Sunnyside Nursing Home Amendment Act, 2002**

**Ms. Jones:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 302, The Sunnyside Nursing Home Amendment Act, 2002 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.

**Bill No. 303 — The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Amendment Act, 2002**

**Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would report . . . I now move that the Bill No. 303, The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Amendment Act, 2002 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.

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Speaker, I ask leave of the House to move to government business.

Leave not granted.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

**Motion No. 13 — Forest Fire Suppression Program**

**Mr. Yates:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the conclusion of my remarks today I will be moving a motion seconded by the member for Regina Northeast:

That this Assembly praise the heroic efforts of our forest firefighters, and that it recognize the government's forest fire suppression program, developed over a number of years, a program whose efficiency is a model for the rest of the country.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Yates:** — Mr. Speaker, the members of the Assembly will know the important role that forestry plays in our provincial economy, and that the suppression of fires in our forest fire belt is key to having that forest economy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the things that most members may not understand is some aspects of the forest fire suppression program that we have in the province, which is a model throughout all of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very dedicated forest fire suppression crews and program made up of both members of the Department of Environment and Resource Management and First Nations people throughout our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We do an excellent job of fighting fires within our province.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know the challenges we face this year, and many recent years, with forest fires within our province. And the timely and very aggressive nature in which we tackle those programs and fires within our province, Mr. Speaker, make a significant difference to our communities, to our economy, and of course to the North in general, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk for a few minutes a little bit about the efforts put forward by both the government and the forest suppression crews in tackling the problems we have with forest fires across our province this year and in future and past years, Mr. Speaker. We have a budget totalling \$130.022 million in this province to put forward towards fire suppression, Mr. Speaker. That's a

very, very significant commitment by the people of this province to our forest fire suppression crews, our program, and in fact the forest industry in our province. That was an increase of \$9 million this year alone, Mr. Speaker.

As well, we have a program dealing with reforestation. That is very important that we, in the aftermath of both logging and the lumber industry, but as well in the fire industry . . . or in forest fires, Mr. Speaker, that we have a reforestation program.

Now I want to talk a little bit about the activities of our forest fire crews throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. On any given day, from about the first part of April all the way through to the end of September, Mr. Speaker, we have forest fire crews on various stages of alert in various parts of the province, based on a number of factors.

I want to talk a little bit about what those levels of alert are, so people understand the conditions under which these men and women have to be ready on a moment's notice to attack a new fire, or in fact, Mr. Speaker, may be called in in an already existing fire if it gets out of control — moving beyond the parameters and limits of those who are already involved in fighting that fire.

Mr. Speaker, a red alert is when a crew must be ready to depart from their predetermined staging point five minutes after receiving a call. So they must be ready to leave within five minutes after receiving a call. So those members must be packed, ready to go, and actually sitting, ready to move. And that includes both initial attack fire suppression teams, as well as aircraft that would be on red alert, ready to go on just a moment's notice.

A yellow alert has crews ready to depart from that predetermined point, Mr. Speaker — or in fact, aircraft — within 30 minutes. A blue alert means they must be ready to move and be on the go within 60 minutes. And a green alert is really when crews are on a stand down situation where the forest fire hazard is very, very low.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker — or Mr. Speaker, pardon me — that gives very little time for these crews to do much of anything but sit and wait for that deployment, Mr. Speaker. Fire crews are made up of personnel who are fully trained. They're experienced firefighters, in most cases, in this province. They're geared to fighting sustained fire actions, Mr. Speaker.

But we also have initial attack crews where their job is to go in and in the very early stages of a fire, maybe after a lightning strike, try to contain that fire or in fact put it out before it gets out of hand, Mr. Speaker.

Each crew will have seven firefighters as a minimum, Mr. Speaker, I'm told. And they will in fact be able to deploy on a moment's notice.

We have a number of different types of fire crews within the province, Mr. Speaker, and I think we should reflect a little bit on the entire structure of the fire crews in our province. We have what we call a crew fire, which there is usually one to ten firefighters involved with. We have a sector fire which will have anywhere from 11 to 50 firefighters involved, Mr.

Speaker.

And then we have a division fire which will have anywhere from 51 to 150 basic personnel involved. A campaign fire, Mr. Speaker, will have anywhere from 150 plus personnel involved and will have many, many support mechanisms attached to it because that would be a project fire which would take a sustained period of time to put out, Mr. Speaker.

We have within our province as well to assist the regular departmental firefighting crews, a number of northern First Nations firefighting crews, in fact 52 of those crews that are established contacts within communities in both northern and First Nations communities. And their jobs are no different than the firefighters employed by the Department of Environment and Resource Management on a regular basis, on a full-time basis. They work with those individuals putting out fires throughout the North.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very, very important to understand that we have a very active firefighting contingent within our province, and in fact have the ability to fight several forest fires simultaneously, which we are often called upon to do.

Mr. Speaker, the equipment that the department both has on hand or in fact leases or rents out to suppress fires in our province include both fixed-wing aircraft in three different types of aircraft, Mr. Speaker; what is known as trackers, which basically are an aircraft used to drop retardant on a fire to try to prevent it from spreading beyond the parameters it's within now.

(14:45)

Now we have what are known as CL215 water bombers, Mr. Speaker, which are designed aircraft to drop water on a fire. They, in fact, swoop down upon a lake and using the force of their engines, fill a compartment with water with a scoop coming down, Mr. Speaker, and go and drop that water on the fire and can return to the lake; and they do that for several hours consecutively in order to attempt to contain and put out a fire.

And last but not least for fixed-wing aircraft, we have what we call bird dog aircraft and these aircraft are small fixed-wing aircraft where there is both a pilot and what is called a bird dog officer in it. And that bird dog officer is responsible for being above the, in a plane, above the fire zone and directing the operations of the air attack vehicles — or aircraft, pardon me, Mr. Speaker — the CL215s and trackers, as well as directing, to some degree, the crews on the surface, Mr. Speaker, fighting the fire with more conventional means — shovels, backpacks, and . . . water backpacks and hose, axes, and other fire suppression hand equipment.

Mr. Speaker, they're trying to help those individuals maintain a barrier around the fire but also give them notice if the fire happens to be coming behind them or if high winds are moving flames in an area which would be very close to them, Mr. Speaker.

Now the firefighters in our province, on an annual basis, deal with many, many fires and . . . individuals who've had the

opportunity to use their skills both here and in other parts of the country.

I just want to talk about where we were in the province as of June 10. We had a total of 18 — or pardon me — 19 fires burning, Mr. Speaker, throughout the province. We have a year-to-date with . . . where fire hazards are high to extreme throughout most of the province. The rain in the recent days has done some good in the southern part of the province, in the Cypress Hills area. But throughout most of northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, fire is still a very, very serious issue.

In addition to our fixed-wing aircraft, SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) has at its disposal a number of helicopters, which both move personnel around in the fires and within the fire area, Mr. Speaker, but they also have the ability with buckets, as well, of scooping up water and dropping water on various fires. And they are used quite often in very tight areas around communities.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker — Mr. Speaker, pardon me — our firefighter crews have been doing an excellent job in containing some very, very difficult blazes this spring within the province of Saskatchewan. And they are doing that at a period of time when we have an unprecedented dry period in the province and our resources are stretched, quite frankly, to the max. And those individuals, working very long hours, very little rest, have been doing what they can to save portions of our northern forest as well as the communities in those areas, Mr. Speaker.

You don't have to look very far but to look at the situation that's been faced by some of our communities this year — Nipawin as an example. A fire, it starts in the community of Nipawin, spreads into the forest area adjacent to Nipawin and it had the potential to do a significant amount of damage to the community and the surrounding forest area.

Now the firefighters, both from the local firefighter crews in those communities — Nipawin and neighbouring communities — did a terrific job. But in doing . . . in fighting that fire, Mr. Speaker, they soon realized that without help from the outside that fire would spread beyond their ability to control it.

So they called upon the province for assistance. The province responded with both fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft to assist in putting the fire out, Mr. Speaker. And in fact were able, with the help of Saskatchewan Environment Resource Management and the air support group, to contain that fire from spreading to nearby homes, properties, and an old folks home or seniors home, Mr. Speaker.

So communities across Saskatchewan are both able and willing to use provincial resources as they're required to help support their community firefighting initiatives when it fact those fires get out of hand, Mr. Speaker. And that is a significant benefit to Saskatchewan communities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have many, many, many reasons why it is important to have a professional fire suppression program within the province of Saskatchewan. We have a very active forest industry and the loss of that forest industry would be devastating to the economy. We have many communities in the

forest fringe or within the forest of Saskatchewan and most of our northern communities are surrounded by heavily wooded forest area, Mr. Speaker.

And the suppression of fires that start in northern Saskatchewan or in the forest area and that . . . (inaudible) . . . suppression saves both property and lives, Mr. Speaker, not to mention the wildlife habitat and wildlife within those areas, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in northern Saskatchewan fire suppression provides not only jobs but it provides a safety element that many, many communities in Saskatchewan count on from their municipal governments. But of course no municipality in northern Saskatchewan would have the capacity to in fact tackle fires that would start within their municipality. So it's very, very important that the province have an active forest suppression program.

Mr. Speaker, today there will be more than 300 individuals involved in forest fire activities in our province that will be actively fighting fires today. Now on any given day, Mr. Speaker, we will have several hundred individuals waiting to attack fires that have acquired throughout northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, a year ago this government made a budgetary decision to increase the number of firefighters in the province by 88 new positions. This government understood the importance of firefighting in our province, understood the importance of fighting those fires, and understood that new resources were required.

When we brought forward a budget, Mr. Speaker, that added those 88 new firefighting positions to the province of Saskatchewan, what did the members opposite do, Mr. Speaker? They voted against it. They voted against 88 new forest fire positions, Mr. Speaker. They voted against protecting our forest industry by voting against them. They voted against the protection of northern communities when they voted against it, Mr. Speaker. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, they voted in favour of endangering communities in the North and endangering the forests of our northern province . . .

**An Hon. Member:** — It was a shameful moment.

**Mr. Yates:** — And it, as the member has mentioned, it was a very shameful moment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, those 88 positions were obviously needed this year. We're facing one of the most difficult forest fire seasons we've faced in many, many years.

But what do we hear from the members opposite day after day after day? Mr. Speaker, we hear from them, well where are we going to find the money to fight the fires? If we don't have enough money in the budget what are we going to do?

Well we heard the Minister of Finance say that the most important thing is fighting the fires, Mr. Speaker. And if we need to, we'll find the money, the Finance minister said. We have in past years, in difficult years, and we will this year. This is not about playing politics; it's about putting out fires.

And the Minister of Finance is absolutely right. It's not about playing politics; it's about putting out fires. And, Mr. Speaker, that's what we employ a very dedicated and very professional firefighting suppression crew and program for, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what do these members do? I think it's important to talk about what they do in periods where we may have what would be known as a green alert or a very low firefighting or fire start-up possibilities.

Well then these firefighters in provincial parks in the North provide maintenance work for park activities. They will haul garbage, fix picnic tables, clean up park areas, but they're still only minutes away from being able to respond to a fire in their area.

These workers will work in, as an example, Candle Lake Park, cleaning up the park, hauling wood, doing other work, grooming trails where people would walk normally. Doing other work that needs to be done. These are very valuable employees even in the times of year where we may not face a high fire hazard, Mr. Speaker.

And these employees are needed to be there during the time of the year when forest fires are most prominent, Mr. Speaker. They need to be on ready alert, they need to be available on very short notice.

So, Mr. Speaker, they don't sit there in times of low fire hazard. They do provide other work for the province, beautifying our parks, making them more enjoyable for our tourist environment, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, these members need to, or these employees need to be recognized for their dedication in particularly tough seasons and times, where they will work many times 16 to 20 hours a day without rest, with very little opportunity for comfort. They will be stuck in fire camps where there is very little other than bare necessities, and they will have to operate in that environment for sometimes many, many days. And, Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we recognize the efforts of these individuals.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to return again to the recognition a year ago that the Minister of Finance and the members of the cabinet came to when they realized we needed to add to our fire suppression crews. And we needed to add 88 new positions in order to adequately deal with what has become the average or the norm of requirement for our fire suppression.

And I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that they understood and knew when they made that decision that these people in low fire hazard years were utilized in fact to beautify our parks and to do other work that enhanced our tourist industry.

And in fact when we had difficult years like we are facing now, that their efforts were to ensure that we would have a future tourism industry in Saskatchewan by protecting our forests, protecting our northern communities, and protecting a way of life for many northern people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the cabinet was wise when they chose to add 88 new positions a year ago and I often have speculated as

to why the members opposite would want to put at risk the economic well-being of northern Saskatchewan, why they'd want to vote against protecting our tourism industry, they'd want to vote against protecting our forest industry, why they'd want to vote against protecting northern communities.

But I think, Mr. Speaker, it's very, very obvious. This opposition likes to vote against anything that's good for the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, they want bad news because bad news in fact gives them a political platform in which to stand and talk about how they would make everything better. They'd fix absolutely everything.

**An Hon. Member:** — So they say.

**Mr. Yates:** — So they say. They promise everybody everything. They don't say how they'll pay for it, Mr. Speaker. But when the government makes wise decisions in adding new firefighters to protect northern communities, the economy, and in fact the tourism industry, what do they have to say, Mr. Speaker? Well they vote no. They vote no.

So I don't know, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to understand where the opposition comes from when they make decisions that are totally inconsistent with what's good for the well-being of the people of Saskatchewan.

And then they pretend and make the . . . or take the position, Mr. Speaker, that in fact they're representing the people of Saskatchewan. Well, they vote against firefighters. We see them going sideways on an agricultural package of trade injury for the people of Saskatchewan today. We see them going soft on crime and saying people shouldn't be investigated for fraud, Mr. Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** — It's unbelievable.

**Mr. Yates:** — It's unbelievable. Any time you try to do anything on a positive note, Mr. Speaker, they simply go sideways on it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. The members opposite, they can talk about fire suppression and what they'd do. But I'd like to hear later on this morning what they're going to say about the firefighters in our province.

I'd like them to answer the question, Mr. Speaker, why they voted in favour of . . . against, pardon me — voted against — adding 88 new fire suppression jobs in the provincial fire suppression system, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, the members opposite . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I hear somebody over there yelling that if the fires hadn't got started, they wouldn't be needed. That's a foolish remark. Clever statement. Clever statement if I ever heard one. Clever statement.

So his solution is we shouldn't have fires. But, Mr. Speaker, when you live in fantasy island . . . or you live on fantasy island where there are no trees, then you don't have to worry about forest fires.

(15:00)

But when you live in the real world, well we have a good portion of our province that relies on the forest industry and the forest for its livelihood and life, Mr. Speaker, we have to deal with the reality of our problems. We can't live in fantasy island like the members opposite and promise everything and have to deliver nothing.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to talking about the efforts of our heroic firefighters in the province, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite clearly don't understand the issue. They're saying if you didn't have the forest fires, you wouldn't need the fire suppression crews.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that would probably be true if we lived in a country or in a province or for that matter we lived in the middle of the ocean and there were no trees, Mr. Speaker. But that member that's suggesting we don't need forest fires . . . suppression crews to deal with forest fires in a province that has forests through over half the province, Mr. Speaker, it's like telling the member opposite . . . me telling the member opposite that he should be able to go swim in the ocean amongst a bunch of sharks, Mr. Speaker, and offer himself up for bait — offer himself up for bait, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite might do that though because that would be logical to his statement about not needing forest fire crews if we didn't have them, you know. Well, Mr. Speaker, even . . . as the member over here has said, Mr. Speaker, even sharks have some discretion. They probably wouldn't eat him either.

Mr. Speaker, in northern Saskatchewan forestry plays a major role. So we do need forest fire suppression crews and we do need crews that are motivated to do their jobs and the crews we have in Saskatchewan are very motivated. They're very well trained and they believe in what they're doing, Mr. Speaker, and they work very, very hard at what they're doing.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that the members opposite should take more consideration for the needs of the province and less consideration on trying to make political heyday when they vote against motions that are brought forward or budgets that are brought forward that are helping build the Saskatchewan economy, protecting communities, and in fact protecting all of northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, for those reasons I am very, very proud today to stand and move, seconded by the member from Regina Northeast:

That this Assembly praise the heroic efforts of our forest firefighters and that it recognize the government's forest fire suppression program developed over a number of years, a program whose efficiency is a model for the rest of the country.

I so move.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today in the House and second the motion as presented by my esteemed colleague from Regina Dewdney.

Forests are a very important part of the Saskatchewan industry and the Saskatchewan economy, Mr. Speaker. And I think we . . . we're all aware of that, that the forest industry plays a very major role in Saskatchewan and has for a large number of years. And I suppose I could go back to the days when my grandfather spent some time in the forest . . . in the saw mills and the forest back in the '30s and '40s. But I think I'll save my colleagues that misery of bringing them up to date on some of my family history.

But Saskatchewan has approximately 35 million hectares of Saskatchewan . . . of forest that represents about 60 per cent of the Saskatchewan land mass.

So as you can tell, Mr. Speaker, from, just from those stats alone, that the forestry is a very important industry to Saskatchewan and to all of Saskatchewan, but of course it plays a major role in the North where it is a source of employment for a number of people.

And as we have experienced in this province over a number of . . . last number of years, a few number of years here now, we've experienced some dry conditions. Not the same can be said today for the southern part of Saskatchewan after having a wonderful, wonderful rainfall over the last few days, but the same is not true for the northern part of our province. Much of our, even our agricultural land in the northern half of the province is suffering from drouth. But of course the forest reserve is too.

And as a result of that, we've experienced a significant number of fires this summer, and this spring and this summer so far in the forest reserves. And I think it certainly indicates the need to have a crew, a system in place, a readiness, a preparedness to take on those forest fires when they do attack our forest reserves.

And the need to have that crew in place and have people in place and have a plan in place, a plan of attack in the event of forest fires, simply makes good sense as far as most people is concerned because it protects a very valuable resource. Thirty-five per cent of the forest supports forestry development that generates more than \$580 million into the provincial economy annually.

Forest management of the Crown lands in Saskatchewan is the responsibility of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. Saskatchewan Environment proves assets that other provinces and federal agencies and rural municipalities.

Fire management costs average 24 to \$28 million annually. And over the last 10 years, the average of 785 fires burnt more than 465,000 hectares annually. So it is a problem. And, Mr. Speaker, I suppose it's been enhanced in the last few years because of the dry conditions. So with that in mind, the provincial government in its wisdom — and I would say it was quite wise — went in the budget year of 2001-2002 had set aside an additional \$5 million in funding for forest fire suppression.

And we've seen that wisdom really come into play this spring with the dry conditions. We've seen the outbreak of a number of forest fires. And we've seen the equipment and the

manpower that was not only trained — adequately trained to meet the needs — but they were in place to meet the needs, and they did a wonderful job of attacking the fires.

Of course this . . . as dry conditions prevail, forest fires are something that man will have a very difficult time fighting. With all the latest technology and all the latest equipment, man can control it in some cases, and in some cases even put the smaller fires out. But once they get a hold, it's awfully hard to do much more than simply control them, and wait for mother nature to bring around the weather conditions that will bring rain and really put out those fires.

I've, on a personal level, back in 19 . . . probably I think it was 1985-86, lived in a northern agricultural area of the province and at that time, lived about 12, 15 miles from the Porcupine Forest Reserve where we were experiencing a spring very similar to this — a very dry spring. And a fire broke out just into the forest reserve, just north of where I lived. And in no time, because of the dry conditions and the dense undergrowth and the products that were there in the forest to fuel the fire, the fire was off and running in no time.

And I was really amazed at how quickly the department at that time was able to react to the fire. They in very short order had assessment of the fire. They were moving equipment in, they had manpower moved in within 24 hours. And they brought in heavy-duty equipment from miles away in very short order and went to work fighting the fire.

And I admired that they just didn't simply go into the bush and start fighting the fire helter-skelter. They had a plan. They put a plan into place and they moved according to that plan. And very effectively they were able to surround the fire and contain it. Was it put out immediately? No it was not put out immediately. It took time to finally get the last of the embers out, I guess you could say, but they moved very effectively on that and it was simply because they had a plan in place.

And I think that's what many members opposite missed, particularly last year, when they voted against the government's initiative to increase the funding for forest fire suppression by \$9 million, because they all stood up and voted against that.

But yet it seemed to me it was short-sightedness on their part because a forest fire can do a lot of damage, not only to the forest itself but indirectly and directly to the businesses involved in the commercial aspect of forestry, but also to personal property. For those who may have cabins, or may have resort areas in the forest reserve, the forest fire can do a lot of damage to that, which would of course lead to job losses.

And then once a fire has gone through there would be the need to replant and re-establish that forest which would, once again, increase the costs to our society and to our economy.

So I find it very short-sighted on their part that they were unable to support an initiative that would be in the best interests of Saskatchewan people, and the best interests of our economy, and in the best interests of our forest industry.

And I want to, once again, say how pleased I am that the government had the foresight to establish an . . . extra funds in

the forest fighting suppression budget and that these funds are put to very valuable use in maintaining, not only the equipment, not only maintaining the staff, but to continue to train new recruits and prepare them for the . . . prepare them with the ability to fight forest fires with the latest of technology and training and equipment. And many of the fires that have occurred utilized fully the trained and expertise that the firefighters provided from the 2001-2002 budget and other initiatives.

Firefighters, Mr. Speaker, are civil servants and they are devoted to keeping our province, our property, our families safe every summer. They do their job. They live and spend their money in our communities and have earned every ounce of respect from the people of Saskatchewan.

And it is not an easy job, Mr. Speaker, because it's not only a dangerous job because of the dangers of fighting a forest fire in the reserve but it's also a trying job because you're always on call waiting for the outbreak of a forest fire, and the crews have to be physically and mentally ready for that eventful happening.

It's interesting that when . . . there is a system in place to address forest fires as they break out, and the determination is made when a fire is spotted as to a few different things. First the size of the fire, the location of the fire. The location of the fire can then be transcribed to the . . . through the information outlet already available to the department to establish the types of fuel that is in that area that would cause the fire to perhaps take off real quickly, or perhaps the fuel isn't there to feed the fire in a robust way so that they have a little bit more time.

But because of the experience and the understanding of the forest itself by our department and their expertise, they're able to determine whether the fire is in a location where it's going to be very tough to get at, it's going to be very tough to fight, it's going to be fuelled with explosive fuels that will cause the fire to burn quite rapidly. Or they may be fortunate enough that the fire will be in a location where it doesn't have access to that type of fuel and therefore will take a little longer for it to really catch hold. And they know those things and they know how to address them.

And as a result of that, they have a fire line organization that is comprised basically in four categories, and that's the fire crew which consists of one to five firefighters. Then they have the sector fire which consists of 11 to 50 personnel basically, and then they have the divisional fire which will consist of 51 to 150 basic personnel. And then they have the campaign fire, and of course that would be the big one — it was consuming a lot of hectares — and that would consist of 151-plus firefighters. It will depend on the situation and what the requirements are.

So it's a bit of a plan that they have in place and then I think that we all benefit because there is a plan in place based on experience, based on the knowledge of the forest, and based on the ability of our firefighters to answer the call quite quickly.

And we are experiencing, as I said earlier, some dry conditions in Saskatchewan this summer so we have had a number of forest fires in our forest area. And as of Monday, June 10, there were 19 forest fires burning in the province. Seven fires had already been extinguished in the past 24 hours and two new



fires had erupted over that same time frame.

(15:15)

So you see, Mr. Speaker, it's sort of an ongoing battle with the . . . with mother nature and our forest firefighters, is that they gain on one hand but because of conditions, they have a new outbreak somewhere else. And I know many of the forest fires . . . fighters pray every day for rain, which of course would help the fire situation. But a lot of times with rain comes lightning and lightning strikes, and the emergence of a new fire.

So it's sort of a double-edged sword, but I'm sure that all the forest firefighters would take the chances with the lightning in return for the rain.

But the total number of fires to date this year in Saskatchewan has been 394. And this total is up from last year. Last year at this time it was 372, so you can see that there's an increase in the number of fires.

The five-year average for this date was 258. So you can see it's significantly up; not quite double but certainly long ways down the road to being double. And so there's certainly a demand put on our resources to fight those fires. And we're answering that demand fairly, fairly well.

There are 1,055 firefighters working and patrolling these fires. And that's a fair amount of people that are consumed just trying to protect our forest, and they do just a tremendous job of that. And it's not only do I believe that, but there's certainly been those who are involved in the forest industry and those who are involved in making their living in the forest that certainly appreciate the efforts put forward by the Saskatchewan firefighters.

And I have here a letter from Weyerhaeuser dated September 10, 2001. It's addressed to the minister, Buckley Belanger, which says:

. . . Mr. Belanger:

I have been reviewing the forest fire . . . (stats) for the 2001 season and (I) wish to offer my appreciation for the outstanding performance . . . (of) your department and, particularly, Murdoch Carriere's Forest Protection Branch.

As of this week, there have been more than 750 forest fires in the province, significantly more than either last year or the five-year average. Despite these numbers, Weyerhaeuser has experienced only two fires of any size: the Raven Fire on the Pasqua-Porcupine FMA and our Roderick Fire on the Prince Albert FMA. By our measure, neither of these is considered serious and salvage (has) is being planned, where timber quality is acceptable.

I want to take this opportunity to endorse the initial attack strategy adopted by the Branch and express my thanks to all of those firefighters, pilots, spotters, who have contributed to this season's success. By limiting the loss of commercial timber, as well as property lying within the forest, Saskatchewan's forest resources will continue to support jobs, local economies, and preserve recreational

opportunities for all.

Signed by Mr. Steven M. Smith, vice-president, Saskatchewan operation of Weyerhaeuser.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a glowing endorsement of the fine, fine job done by the firefighters in our province here where they're recognized by those people who are on the front lines and making their living in the forest industry, such as Weyerhaeuser.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude my remarks by saying what a pleasure it is for me to join with my colleague from Regina Dewdney in seconding this motion. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to rise this afternoon and talk about provincial firefighting, and certainly the forest firefighting that goes on in the province. And certainly on this side of the House we're very proud, Mr. Speaker, of the heroic efforts that we've seen many times this year, many times this year, Mr. Speaker, by provincial employees as they try to protect Saskatchewan's forests.

And we've heard on a daily basis, almost a daily basis, Mr. Speaker, sometimes in this House but often in the media, that forest fires have reached a significant higher level, become a significant problem this year, Mr. Speaker. We know that in the parkland area that the blessings that have been bestowed upon southern Saskatchewan, as we've noticed, Mr. Speaker, in the last few days, the rains that have blessed the southern part of the province have certainly not been quite as plentiful in the central part of the province and certainly not in the Far North.

And that's a problem, Mr. Speaker, that's a significant problem. Because what it does then, Mr. Speaker, is that it increases the challenge significantly for those men and women who, who have been charged with the responsibility of protecting our provincial forests.

As someone who lives in the central part of the province we've noticed — I've certainly noticed, Mr. Speaker, and some of the members on this side of the House who also live in the central part of the province, Mr. Speaker, as do a couple of members on the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker — have had the opportunity to notice that becoming a professional firefighter for the province of Saskatchewan requires a significant amount of training.

And those of us in the central part of the province, Mr. Speaker, get the opportunity to be able to witness that on a first-hand basis. Certainly we've noticed in the central part of the province, Mr. Speaker, that those men and women who pilot the water bombers, who pilot the chemical bombers, and who pilot the bird dogs, Mr. Speaker, have been active since early spring, since when there was still snow on the ground.

Before the firefighting season even started, Mr. Speaker, these men and women have been very aggressive and very progressive in updating their skills and getting their skill level to the point that should firefighting in this province reach a

significant level, that they will be prepared to be an active participant in the aggressive attacks that are needed to put out forest fires in this province.

We need to commend, Mr. Speaker, those men and women who have taken on this significantly risky type of profession. Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity many times to witness the bombers as they attack a fire. Usually they're brought in when a fire is in a significant state of advancement in a forest.

These fire bombers, they come in and they fly at low levels in air that is significantly turbulent, Mr. Speaker, because of the fire. The fire itself causes a lot of air disturbance, and they fly these planes into that, those situations, trying to attack a fire that is causing significant damage, significant damage, Mr. Speaker, to an extremely, extremely important resource in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now one of the unfortunate downsides, Mr. Speaker, is that these men and women are forced to work, when they're using the bombers, the water bombers, the chemical bombers, they're working with virtually some of the most antiquated equipment in the world, Mr. Speaker.

When I meet with these men and women and we talk about the risk that's involved in forest firefighting and the equipment that they're using, they've mentioned to me several times, Mr. Speaker, that some of the water bombers are reaching 30 years of age. That's a lot of hours that's on those planes, fighting fires. Planes like that are no longer in use. The mechanics are having a hard time finding parts for those planes any more and have actually become quite — and we should be very proud of this, Mr. Speaker — have actually become quite ingenuitive in being able to keep those planes aloft to protect our Saskatchewan forests.

As we all should know — and we should know this very well, Mr. Speaker — is that the large water bombers are using an engine that's of World War II vintage, World War II vintage, Mr. Speaker. And so we need to congratulate those people that are willing to take on this huge responsibility of working with equipment that's extremely old and is becoming extremely hard to even find parts for them.

But we're going to congratulate them because, rightly so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these people have taken on not only the responsibility of protecting Saskatchewan's forests in very dangerous situations, they're doing so with very old equipment. And so we want to congratulate those people for the effort that they make in protecting our forests and the lack of effort by this government in making sure that the people who fly this equipment have the newer and the more appropriate type of equipment to be able to fight forest fires in this province.

Because as we look back, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the tenure of this NDP government, we need to examine their priorities and what this NDP government felt was most important for them. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why this government, this NDP government, would choose the priorities that they did, and would actually think the antiquated equipment that they're providing for our forest firefighters and forest firefighting pilots, most specifically, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why they would choose to increase the risk of this very dangerous job by

choosing the priorities they have in the last decade or so.

Because, Mr. Speaker, it is firmly believed on this side of the House and we certainly know that it's a very popular position on this side of the House that within the province, this government has made some very, very questionable decisions in the past decade, and one of them was not to continue to upgrade the water bombers in this province.

You know, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this government were to put together a plan where they would have replaced, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of those plans every other year . . . All they had to do was every other year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, replace one of those large water bombers, some of the most antiquated equipment in the world, forcing — forcing — our civil servants to work with some of the worst equipment in the world. If they'd replace even one bomber every year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the past, more than a decade now — it's certainly been almost 12 years that this government has been in power — they could have replaced six of those planes, paid for each one over a two-year period. It would have certainly reduced the cost to the Department of Environment and Resource Management.

And that way we'd have been upgrading equipment on a regular basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So that what would happen is that our forest firefighting pilots, those pilots who put their — actually to a degree — put their lives on the line to protect our provincial forest would have the appropriate equipment to be able to do that first initial attack that is so crucial and not have to depend upon the ultimate skills of the aircraft mechanics, Mr. Speaker, every winter to try to hold this antiquated equipment together. And that's a sad state, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this government would put the lives of men and women at risk with equipment such as this.

They know very well that with a readjustment of their priorities over the past decade that we'd have more up-to-date equipment in this province. I'm not saying that they could have gotten . . . replaced them all.

Certainly, when the Saskatchewan Party becomes government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will be taking on that role to ensure that forest fires in the . . . forest firefighters have the appropriate and up-to-date equipment that is extremely crucial, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so then we need to, we need to remind ourselves that the firefighters out there are certainly, certainly looking forward to the day when the election is called because then they know the Saskatchewan Party is committed to protecting the lives of forest firefighters in this province. And certainly on this side of the House, we're looking forward to that as much as they are.

Now we know, too, that this motion speaks to the firefighters, those men and women who put on . . . also put on the ground, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And certainly, from my perspective, I can speak to this on a very personal level. Where I live, many young men and women are involved, work for Department of Environment and Resource Management as forest firefighters. These are young men and women who have taken on this role with a significant amount of enthusiasm. They're proud of the work they do — they're very proud of the work they do, Mr.

Deputy Speaker.

My friends and neighbours have children that work for Environment Resource Management fighting fires. They do an outstanding job and we're very, very proud of them.

(15:30)

But on top of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not only, it is not only employees in Environment Resource Management who fight forest fires. These are the people who fight forest fire in the provincial forest, we certainly understand that. But when the fire spreads outside, outside the provincial forest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, more than, more than the firefighters who are employed by Environment and Resource Management have become involved in the control and the erasing of fires.

And certainly we're well aware and we've certainly heard of the fire very close to the town of Archerwill, how the local volunteer fire department became involved in that and were involved to a very large degree and we need to applaud, we need to applaud them also, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Because it is men and women such as these who believe so firmly and are so proud of their community they simply abandon their regular careers and came out to protect their community and protect the resources in their community, hand in hand, hand in hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the professional firefighters that are employed by Environment and Resource Management.

Because I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that where I live, my home farm at Paddockwood, Saskatchewan, that my son is also a volunteer firefighter with the Lakeland and district fire co-op. And he often . . . he has often this spring, because of the extremely dry conditions in our area of the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker, up in the Lakeland area, along the parkland, the forest fringe, is that they've been called out to several fires this spring.

And they have worked in concert with the professional firefighters of the Environment and Resource Management. And because of that co-operation, because of that proud co-operation that all firefighters have, is that they have been able to do an outstanding job of controlling and bringing it to a rest many of the smaller fires that have gone on in the forest fringe area of the province.

And that not only happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Certainly I mentioned Archerwill and in the Lakeland part of the country, Emma Lake, Christopher Lake, and around Candle Lake — this happened there but we know this happens everywhere. This happens right across that forest fringe where the fires also involve private lands and that both sets of firefighters, whether they be private or public, are out there working in concert to bring under control these devastating fires.

And the fires, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year have been extraordinarily devastating. And we only need to follow the news media on a regular basis to know that this year has been one of the worst when it comes to forest fires and the extent that the forest fires have moved on to private lands.

And the damage, that cost, is going to be horrific financially.

Certainly insurance companies are going to have to really suck it up this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of the financial load that it's going to place upon them. But that's why we buy the insurance.

But unfortunately, unfortunately for the province though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that doesn't carry into the provincial forest and that resource is going to be lost forever. At one time back in the '80s we certainly had a salvage program that worked very well to be able to go into those forests that had been ravaged by fire and to just salvage the timber as best that could happen.

And of course we've seen in the late '90s now what has happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this NDP government has chosen that that is . . . not to do that any more. And that is a significant loss. That's a significant loss, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we know the results of the opportunities that could arise from salvage operations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are significant when we look at the overall fiscal picture, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We know that the costs of a fire are significant. Once you start putting water bombers in the air, once you start putting rotor-wing aircraft in the air, once you put the bird dogs in the air, Mr. Deputy Speaker, plus all the men and women who are on the ground, Mr. Deputy Speaker, mopping up behind to ensure that the fire doesn't get out of control again. There's a significant cost to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of this cost could be recouped. And this government has chosen not to take advantage of that, all the hard work that men and women in this province provide to save our forests so that we ensure that there's still going to be lots of green forest in this province. But there's still an opportunity for salvage operation.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as an aside to this, some entrepreneurs in the Prince Albert area wanted to get involved in a salvage operation in a provincial forest where a fire had gone through and they saw a significant opportunity there to salvage that timber that has now been lost.

In fact what they were able to discover — and of course entrepreneurs do this, is that that get out their pencil, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and work out the numbers — is that the PST (provincial sales tax), Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PST that would have been collected by this province on the extraction of salvaged timber after a forest fire had gone through, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would have paid for the fire, would have paid for the cost to this government for that fire.

So the government would have recouped the cost of that fire and jobs would have been created in this province. And certainly that's a significant loss. And so that's too bad that this government doesn't have the foresight that when tragedy strikes in a situation such as this, that we can't try to do the best we can with getting a little bit of good out of the evil that can take place in a situation such as this.

Now certainly, certainly we know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that fires are extremely expensive and that the people who are involved in firefighting in this province do their utmost to ensure that a fire is brought under control and extinguished as

quickly as possible. They know that putting . . . doing this will actually save the province money. And so we want to applaud those efforts.

But unfortunately, unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we're not finding that same level of enthusiasm from this NDP government. As we look back in this year's budget that was brought by the Minister of Finance in late, late March is that this government thought so little of forest fighting measures that need to take place in this province that there was a huge cut, huge cut, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this province.

And when the Minister of Finance was asked about it he said, well they were, you know, they were just kind of hoping that maybe there wouldn't be quite as many fires this year as last year. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all the Minister of Finance had to do was leave these hallowed halls of . . . in Regina here and go up to the provincial forests and he would have known that we needed, we needed, those finances to remain in the Department of Environment and Resource Management's budget in case there was a season such as this. Exactly as we pointed out in March.

We pointed this out in March, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that those resources were going to be desperately needed, the northern forest was very dry, that the parkland area was very dry. And lo and behold, the Saskatchewan Party was right again. And so then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it starts to beg the question as to who is best equipped to look after a budget in this province — whether it's the present Minister of Finance or whether it might be more appropriately the member from Canora-Pelly. He seems to have a much better grasp of the realities of what's needed in the budget.

And certainly we are, on this side of the House, we are looking forward to that day when we start looking after budgets in this province. Because there will be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there will be the appropriate amount of finances available for firefighters in this province to be able to aggressively attack fires. And they, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are also looking forward to that day.

As we look back at this province's budget and their attitude towards firefighting in the provincial forests, Mr. Speaker, last year in the previous budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was \$40 million — \$40 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker — set aside as a Forest Fire Contingency Fund, a Forest Fire Contingency Fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they only needed to use . . . this NDP government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, only needed to use about \$6 million of that. So it begs the question, what happened to the other \$34 million? Well as we went through the budget with a fine-tooth comb — lo and behold, there's significantly fewer dollars in the Department of Environment and Resource Management's budget.

So it begs to the question that the \$34 million must then be clawed back by the Department of Finance. And you kind of begin to wonder if they have to claw the \$34 million back from forest firefighting to balance their budget, the priorities of this government. It makes it awfully tough on forest firefighters in this province to be able to protect one of our greatest resources when this government continues to attack their budget.

And so then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to understand very clear and people of Saskatchewan need to understand very clearly, when it comes to protecting our environment, when it comes to protecting our natural resources, the NDP government will be second to everyone. They will be second to everyone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they have shown very clearly that their commitment to protecting our resources and making the best of our resources is not on their radar screen.

They seem to be more interested in being involved in the private business, challenging private business, competing with private business. Taking tax dollars from private business to compete against private business seems to be their number one priority. And in the meantime they're withdrawing funds from . . . funds such as the Forest Fire Contingency Fund that is so desperately needed to protect one of our largest and natural resources, one of our most beautiful resources, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so then it really begs the question that the priorities of this government sets when they establish their budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I start to wind down here in talking about this, we certainly need to look at the program that is in place. This province has been very clear and this NDP government has been very clear that we need to congratulate . . . they want to congratulate themselves for a program whose efficiency is a model for the rest of the country.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it begs the question then, if using 30-year-old water bombers is an efficiency model for the rest of the country, it must be a sad state of affairs for the rest of the country. But we know that not to be a fact. We know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that other provinces are significantly ahead of the province of Saskatchewan in upgrading their equipment. They have decided that they must be a lot more progressive in replacing their firefighting equipment in a progressive manner. And it has to be done on a yearly basis.

And this government has decided that what they're going to do is replace equipment on an ad hoc basis. And of course what we've seen is what's happened and, as I've mentioned earlier, is that we're now using water bombers that are almost 30 years old, some of the oldest equipment in the world.

And unfortunately because of this government's lack of commitment to forest firefighting this side of the House is not quite, not quite so enthusiastic to congratulate the government, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now certainly they talk about a program, which is basically ad hoc because it seems to change on a fire-to-fire basis. And they talk about a model which seems to be adapted on a year to year basis.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government, this NDP government, needs to understand is when you set a program in place, it needs to stand the test of time. It needs to stand the test of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not something that can be subject to the whims of a budget, to balancing the budget. And that's what's, that's what's happened this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the forest fire control program has been hit

hard, hit very hard by this NDP government in their efforts to have a so-called balanced budget.

Now this was just one area, of course, they tried to use to balance the budget. They came up with a fictitious bank account also to help balance the budget. And that certainly is not supported by anyone out there, including the Provincial Auditor, that this budget is balanced.

So if they needed to take this kind of monies out of firefighting to balance the budget it really begs the question as to priorities. And the priorities of our resources on this side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are very clear to everyone, very clear to everyone. It is the resources, it is the resources of this province that will provide the economic clout that this province needs to crawl out of the doldrums that have been created by almost 60 years of NDP involvement in Saskatchewan's economy.

And certainly we're looking forward to the day in the very near future . . . And, of course, we heard from the Premier today that on this side of the House we'd better be careful what we ask for. But we're going to continue to ask for an election on this side of the House because it is motions such as this where on one hand the government wants to congratulate forest firefighters, when you look at the rest of the motion, they want to take credit, they want to take credit for the efforts of the forest firefighters, and I think that's extremely inappropriate.

(15:45)

These men and women who risk life and limb to protect one of our most beautiful resources is suddenly having to compete with the government, compete with the Government of Saskatchewan, when it comes to accepting the roles that are played here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So then it begs the question then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the government more interested in patting themselves on the back? And I guess we saw that again today — patting themselves on the back — although sometimes we're a little concerned on this side of the House how the hand might get to the back or where that hand has been previously.

But certainly what we need is some forthrightness — some forthrightness and good government in this province. And after the next provincial election we're certainly going to have that opportunity and we're going to look forward to that. We're certainly looking forward to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this side of the House. I know that the members on the other side, they aren't quite as excited about the next provincial election as we are but certainly on this side of the House we are. The people of Saskatchewan are excited about it and I know that the forest firefighters are certainly excited about it and they're looking forward to the day when they're going to have a significant upgrade in equipment that is appropriate to protect the natural resource that we have in Saskatchewan.

But as we looked at this motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we did see a shortfall in it and that's unfortunate because as many of the motions that have come in the past — and this one moved by the member from Regina Dewdney, seconded from the member from Regina Northeast — is that they only seem to want to go so far. They're a little concerned of taking

responsibility for their actions, and certainly we've seen that many days in this House this year, last year, and the year before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this government, when something goes wrong they've always been able to find someone else to blame.

And certainly we're very concerned that even though this motion talks about praising heroic efforts, the significant heroic efforts of the firefighters in this province, is that they seem to want to stop short at doing just that. They want to add on to it that we need to congratulate the government that they want to take credit — the want to credit, or some of the credit, or a lot of the credit actually, Mr. Deputy Speaker — for the efforts of men and women who believe that Saskatchewan's forests are a significant and proud resource in this province. And maybe what, what this government needs to do is take some responsibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for their actions.

And so maybe as we work our way through this session — and certainly we're a long ways into this session now, Mr. Deputy Speaker; it's now day no. 59 and we're probably about halfway through the session — and maybe by the time we get to August this government will have a much better understanding of their responsibility for the decisions they make.

And certainly we haven't seen that, haven't seen that yet this year. We have ministers who — certainly the Minister of Environment and Resource Management . . . And I think it's important at this time to remind ourselves that officially, today, we're probably on our fourth — our fourth — minister for Environment and Resource Management in the year 2002 and it's only the middle of June, it's only the middle of June, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It makes you wonder as to what kind of continuity is going to be with this government. So can this government get their priorities straight? Can they take responsibility for their actions? Or are they simply going to continue to shuffle ministers around as soon as they get in a little bit of hot water, especially when it comes to issues such as this where they're actually taking money out of the Department of Environment and Resource Management to help the Finance minister cook his books, so to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And if that's what it's going to take is to attack the resources of our forest firefighters in this province, then on this side of the House we say shame — we say shame on you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because on this side of the House we recognize the weakness of this motion — it could have went a little farther — that I think it's important that we strengthen it. This motion needs to be strengthened. And we need to, we need to remind ourselves — and this motion has done that; certainly I have done that very clearly today, Mr. Deputy Speaker — that we need to praise the heroic efforts of our forest firefighters in this province.

And certainly I've also mentioned the volunteer firefighters in this province who have worked significantly with the provincial forest firefighters to protect our forests, and we need to congratulate them also. But I think it's important at this time that we strengthen this motion.

And so then I move, seconded by the member from Shellbrook-Spiritwood:

That the following words be added after “country”:

That this Assembly urges the provincial government be more forthright in accounting for the necessary cost of fighting forest fires in Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Once again, it’s a pleasure to stand in the House and speak to forestry issues as my critic area is forestry. And I want to take pride in being able to second the amendment that was put forth by the member from Saskatchewan Rivers and I believe that it was a very good amendment.

Mr. Speaker, when the . . . or Deputy Speaker, pardon me — when the member from Saskatchewan Rivers and I get a chance to speak, especially on forestry issues, we kind of speak from the heart for the simple reason that where we’re situated in the province of Saskatchewan, in what we call the central north, that’s basically where the agricultural portion of the province ends and the forestry part of the province starts.

Now I know for a fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the member from Saskatchewan Rivers and myself, for that matter of fact, have been in contact with forestry fighting and forestry fires of the nature that’s been going on in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to reiterate on that, around my hometown of Spiritwood there was a number of forest fires that took place in the past two or three months. And I know the forest firefighting unit from Spiritwood put in countless and endless hours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, fighting the forest fires that are in that area. There were days, Mr. Speaker, that when you walked up to them at a coffee shop and talked and their eyes were beet red for the simple reason they were out in the smoke for hours and hours and hours.

And one particular incident comes to mind which happened to be not that far from my family farm. And there was a fire that was started there. They don’t know how it was started, maybe a cigarette or whatever. But it started and it started burning toward a family farm. Now the farmer there decided to call some neighbours to help fight the fire. He phoned the fire department in Spiritwood and they came out to help him fight the fire. But with the winds that were about that day and the dry conditions that was experienced in that area, the fire started getting away.

And the call came out to my brother and my two sons that was . . . happened to be at the farm at the time to bring a tractor and a cultivator up there to help the fire brigade put out the fire. And they spent probably six or seven hours out there, Mr. Speaker, with machinery, with graders, with local Spiritwood firefighting units up there. And after six or seven hours of hard fighting, they finally got the fire under control.

It burnt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for some days after. All the hot spots were still burning so it was a constant effort by the local farmer to go out there every day with water and put out these fires.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite stand and say that we should congratulate the volunteer firefighters of this province, we on this side of the House and everybody in the province of Saskatchewan agree with them. You know, if it wasn’t for the local and the volunteer firefighters, a lot of these fires would get away and they’d never be able to put out.

But I also want to say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that both the members that spoke on this motion today from the city of Regina, I doubt very much if they’ve had any contact regarding forest fighting or been in a position where they’ve had to go out and fight fire from a local basis. But maybe they have.

But I know the members that are from this side of the House, a lot of them because they’re from rural Saskatchewan know what it’s like to fight forest fires and be involved in forest fighting. A lot of the volunteers that are situated and dealing with forest fires are also from the rural area, Mr. Speaker.

But with the amendment that my colleague from Saskatchewan Rivers put forth is exactly what he mentions, in the fact that the government didn’t go far enough.

And to reiterate on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember one of the comments that my colleague from Carrot River constituency asked the Finance minister in regards to forest fighting and how much up to date has it cost the taxpayers of the province in regard to forest fighting in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now I know, Mr. Speaker, we heard it on the radio about Alberta and how much on a daily basis they were spending on forest fighting. And I think the number from Alberta just on that one fire alone was probably in the neighbourhood of about \$1.2 million a day they were spending.

And I know myself and members from the North were constantly phoned regarding how much is it costing the taxpayers of the province. And I think that’s why the member from Carrot River constituency asked the question to the Finance minister, is how much is it going to cost? And I remember the Finance minister saying approximately — and I don’t know where he got this number from — but he said to date was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$17 million.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know from a report that was put in the *Leader-Post* that there was — I’m just going to read here how many fires there was in the province — 372 fires so far this year, Mr. Speaker. And at the same time last year there were just 294. So there’s a significant increase in the amount of fires this year to date as compared to last year.

Now when you look at how many fires that were in the province of Saskatchewan and you look at the cost that the Finance minister has given us as far as a dollar figure of 17 million, something doesn’t seem to add up.

One would almost think that it’s way more than 17 million. So I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just where our Finance minister came up with this figure of 17 million. Especially when you look at Alberta, when they’re spending 1.2 million a day on the forest fires in Alberta, and there wasn’t near the forest fires in Alberta that there is in Saskatchewan.

Another point I want to make, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the fact that to date this year, the North — and again I'm reiterating on the fact that the member from Saskatchewan Rivers and myself are from the North — that we've had no rain, or little rain. And that's from spring till now.

And also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the wintertime we had very little snow. In fact around the Big River area, which is also part of my constituency, there was forest fires there that were burning in the ground and they burnt all winter.

Now normally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the amount of snow that we should be getting, those forest fires wouldn't have been burning during the wintertime. But they did because we weren't getting any moisture. You add that to the dry conditions of the spring and no fire . . . or no water or rain or precipitation in this year's area, and the fires are that much more hazard to the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the forest contingency fund that was put in place in 2000 and 2001, I believe was in the neighbourhood of \$50 million. Last year, according to the budget, they put in a . . . that there was going to be \$40 million in the forest contingency fund.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year's budget, if I recall right, there was no entry of any forest contingency fund. So that \$40 million that was set aside last year for forest firefighting is not there this year.

(16:00)

Now in regards to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the 40 million that was allocated for forest firefighting last year, they used approximately 7 . . . or, pardon me, \$6 million. So some \$6 million from 40 million gives you a figure of 34 million still left in the forest contingency fund of the year 2001.

But as again, Mr. Speaker, I point out that the Finance minister did not have that entry in his budget this year. So where did the 34 million go?

That begs the question of why the member from Carrot River stood in the House and asked the Finance minister questions in regarding how much has it cost to date and how are they going to pay for it. For the simple reason, where is the money going to come to fight the forest fires that have been accumulating in the province of Saskatchewan this year? And, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister didn't give us a clear answer, other than it was costing 17 million.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that it cost a lot more than that because last year they spent somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$40 million on forest fighting — 6 million from the contingency fund, plus the other fund that they had for forest firefighting. With the fires that have accumulated this year are up somewhere near of 100 more fires and they've got less money to fight forest firefighting this year, where is the money going to come? And that's what the people of Saskatchewan want to know.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would think that the deputy . . . or the Finance minister, the deputy, could come out with a better

answer than 17 million that have been spent to date.

Now, Mr. Speaker, around the town of Spiritwood in my area, there's been a number of fires, as I mentioned at the start. One that kind of hits home is the forest fire that was at Turtle Lake. Now in that fire at Turtle Lake, there was a number of cabins lost. I think there was a total of 56 cabins taken at that time, plus three homes from the adjoining reserve.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we don't know how the fire started. All we know is that it took a large portion of the Horseshoe Bay resort area and it burns it right to the ground. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the member from Lloydminster lost his cabin in that so-called fire. And I also know a good neighbour of mine from Medstead lost his home in that fire also. And that was his home, Mr. Deputy Speaker; it wasn't a cabin.

When you lose a cabin, yes it's a great loss. But you don't have the personal belongings in a cabin as you do in a home. And when this gentleman and his wife lost their home from Turtle Lake, everything was gone — everything. And that's a great loss.

Now that fire would have still been burning had it not been for the voluntary firefighters of the Turtle Lake area and the voluntary fire department from other areas that joined together with the water bombers and whatever have you to contain that fire. And they did a great job. And that's the case with all forest fires in the area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the province we need the help and the work of the local firefighters plus the other firefighters in putting out the fires that we have in the province today.

Another fire that hit close to home, Mr. Speaker, around Spiritwood was the one at Belbutte where just a fire was burning — they were going to cook some marshmallows and wieners for some kids — and the wind come up. And as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when you light a fire it creates its own wind. And it started circling and the fire got away and it started burning an area that was coming toward the town of Spiritwood. And again the local fire department went out there and spent countless hours putting out this forest fire that was coming towards Spiritwood.

And this is the case, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to people in the province of Saskatchewan. And I couldn't understand why the minister of SERM at that time — mind you as the member from Saskatchewan Rivers said, they flip-flop back and forth; we don't know really who is the minister at one given time — that they should have come out with a ban on forest fires or fires of any sort in the province of Saskatchewan a lot earlier, being the fact that it was so dry in the North that the chances of forest fires and fires of all natures was going to be extensive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to forest firefighting in the province of Saskatchewan, one has to look at the forest itself.

Now we know in the province of Saskatchewan we have a problem with the embargo between Canada and the United States and it also hurts the province of Saskatchewan because of the embargo and how our softwood lumber issue was hurting us. Then on top of that we have forest fires that are containing a lot of that wood.

One of the things I want to point out to the members is the fact that a lot of the salvage wood that is left standing now in areas where the forest fire has gone through — what is the present government going to do with all this wood standing there? There is some good use from this wood. But there's a time period of about approximately two years when that salvage wood has to be dealt with.

Now I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a lot of wood operators out in the province of Saskatchewan, and specifically the North whether it be Beauval, La Loche, Chitek Lake, Meadow Lake, or whatever, that would like to get their hands on this salvage wood and make it . . . put it to some good use.

Well I think the problem is going to be, Mr. Speaker, that by the time the government deals with coming up with a study or a survey of what they're going to do with it, it's going to be long past the two years, and again that salvage wood is not going to be utilized.

And, Mr. Speaker, or Deputy Speaker, when you look at the amount of fires and the amount of wooded areas that has been burnt in the province of Saskatchewan, there is a lot of salvage timber that we could be utilizing. But again, it's going to take initiative from the government to get off their butts and do something to look after it right away.

It brings to the fact the wood product area up in Meadow Lake, and there was a mill up there, it was called Clearwater mill. And they were set up some, I believe it was six or seven years ago, strictly to look after salvage timber, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And for the first couple of years they were granted salvage timber to keep their forest industry going. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it wasn't that long ago, some two or three years ago, that they shut down.

Why did they shut down? Well they couldn't get their hands on any salvage timber. Why couldn't they get their hands on salvage timber? Because the government was standing in their way.

These members up there were set up to look after salvage timber. By the time the paper work that the government had to do to grant Clearwater mill the objective to get that wood was way past two years. So therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the wood was not of any use to them. And therefore they couldn't get the wood to keep their mill going and subsequently in the city of . . . or the town of Meadow Lake, there is no more Clearwater mill products.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just north of my town of Chitek . . . of Spiritwood, in a town of Chitek Lake, there's a proposal on the table by, put forth by the government, that they're going to set another mill up at Chitek Lake to deal with salvage timber.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the timber rights that were lost back then to Clearwater mill is going to be the same for the Chitek Lake people. Now when you look at Chitek Lake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's right in the heart where there's been forest fires. If the mill was set up and going, that timber mill could be utilizing this salvage timber as a result from the forest fires that's been going on this year.

But again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's going to take the initiative of the government to put forth a plan so that our forestry products are utilized. And that seems to be the problem. We have an industry and a resource base sitting out there, and when something like forest fires damages it, then the government sits on their behind and does nothing with it. Well that's wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's lots of small timber companies out there that would like to get their hands on it and could utilize this and put it to good use.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, forest firefighting as the colleagues from the opposite side mentioned about volunteerism and stuff, I do want to say that all members here do agree with the fact that the initiative of the forest fighting people from all over the province should be hailed and thanked for the job that they do, especially the volunteer people.

And I'm no different, Mr. Speaker, being a forest fire myself . . . fighter myself at one time and fighting some local fires. I know what it takes to be a forest firefighter and the job and the requirement that they do to protecting our forests.

So there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd just like to say that from the member from Saskatchewan Rivers put forth an amendment, and I do want to take this time to second that amendment because it was a very good amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And therefore at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

Motion negatived.

**Mr. Goulet:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to of course stand in here to support the motion and to oppose, of course, the changes that were made by the members.

And of course the motion as has been read is the following:

That this Assembly praise the heroic efforts of our forest firefighters and that it recognize the government's forest fire suppression program developed over a number of years, a program whose efficiency is a model for the rest of the country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I stand with the rest of the government members to pay tribute to the tremendous abilities and record of our forest firefighters in the province of Saskatchewan. We have utilized the word heroic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it is indeed heroic when you consider the dynamic situation that the forest firefighters have to contend with. There is tremendous danger that they have to contend with. There is a lot of hard work and sweat in the heat out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is also the help that they generate in regards to the community from the smoke, you know, that comes in as well as the hot fires that sometimes threaten many of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about quality, you know of our people, I don't spend any time like the Saskatchewan Party in talking about the problems and trying to make backhanded compliments in the great work done by our people. I'm straightforward in saying that indeed they are the best, not only in Canada, but also in North America. And I'd like to start that out, Mr. Speaker, by looking at the commendations that have



been made over the years.

I know from an historic basis, as a person who fought forest fires in my hometown area of Cumberland House when I was 16 years old and watching, you know, the evolution and the development of it from the '50s on to the present, it is indeed been a tremendous success story.

I looked at the amount of praise that have been given to our forest firefighters, not only from internal in our province, but external. So I'll start out by reading some of the compliments that have been made about our forest firefighters.

And as we developed the new program, starting with the big fires back in '95 and 1998, we did some new improvements at that time. But even by that time, by 1998, we had a tremendous record and also acknowledgement by others that indeed we were leaders in forest firefighting.

Here's an example of it in a letter written on June 23, 1998 by a Lester Rosenkrance, the director of office of fire and aviation from the United States Department of Interior, the bureau of land management from Boise, Idaho. And this is what he had to say. He's writing to, of course, the director, Murdoch Carriere, who is a Cree Métis, of course, from Cumberland House, from my hometown.

(16:15)

Dear Murdoch: (he says)

WOW! What an experience! The recent trip of our BLM delegation to Saskatchewan was remarkable in many respects. First was the friendship and kindness you and your organization showed to us at every step of the way. Second was the high degree of professional expertise and pride that everyone we met exhibited. Third was the opportunity to see not only your organization and facilities, but the beautiful and broad land of northern Saskatchewan area.

So here you are, Mr. Speaker, somebody from the United States recognizing the tremendous work and organizational efforts of our forest fire suppression crews, you know, throughout this province.

And I might add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many of our people fight forest fires across Canada. They are asked to go into Alberta; they're asked to go to BC (British Columbia); they're asked to go to Ontario, Quebec, and other areas.

But they've also been asked, as I said before, to go to the United States. Some of our forest fires have gone to California and many of the northern States. So, Mr. Speaker, that's the first, you know, strong example of the quality of our people when you get international recognition.

Now I look at this other one from Australia and New Zealand. This is a certificate of an appreciation on behalf of the forest management . . . forest fire management group of Australia and New Zealand. And it says:

In recognition of your role in fostering international

cooperation and understanding through the sharing of knowledge with the 2002 Australia/New Zealand Forest Fire Management Group's Wildland Fire Management Study Tour.

So here you have two other countries recognizing the significance and quality of our forest fire management group here in the province of Saskatchewan.

I would say, as well, that I mentioned in my preview to the international context the recognition from different provinces. Here you have from the Minister of Natural Resources from Ontario and also the director of fire management over there, saying:

On behalf of the Province of Ontario, we want to offer sincere appreciation and gratitude to your agency for the invaluable assistance provided during our summer forest fire emergency.

National and international resource sharing agreements are extremely important of course, you know, from our viewpoint. It says here that:

. . . Ontario would have been in extreme difficulty this year, had it not been for the quick and generous assistance of the best forest fire emergency support network in the world.

Here again, I will look at another document from the BC Forest Service. It says:

In appreciation for your assistance and resource sharing support in combating many of the 4083 wildfires in British Columbia in 1994.

Again we have some internal type of appreciation, a certificate of appreciation:

. . . bestowed upon the Saskatchewan Forest Fire Management in recognition of your support at our annual Officers Convention, March 22nd, 23rd and 24th (at Melfort, Saskatchewan

By the Saskatchewan Association of Conservation Officers.

And again, another certificate of appreciation by the same conservation officers in March to April 1, 2001 convention which was held in Moose Jaw.

So, Mr. Speaker, we recognize the tremendous excellence and quality of our people. And I'd like to, as well, look at the dimension, not only from the international experience that we have had in regards to forest firefighting and letting them know some of our skills and our organization abilities, but also in regards to the issue relating to the economic sphere.

A lot of people recognize that in Saskatchewan we have approximately a \$700 million forestry industry. And I know how very important forest firefighting management is to the industry. The industry also in return knows that information. And they have been, of course, looking at the evolution and the development of it over the years. They recognize the support of the forest firefighting units within government and the numbers

of volunteers that are out there.

So I would like to start out by saying that as we're doing the recognition internationally, there is recognition from the different forestry companies. And here is an example of one. It says, from the vice-president in Saskatchewan, Stephen Smith, this was written in September 10, 2001, from Weyerhaeuser and it's written to the minister, the member from Athabasca. It says:

I have been reviewing the forest fire statistics for the 2001 season and wish to offer my appreciation for outstanding performance by your department and particularly Murdock Carriere's Forest Fire Protection Branch.

Now just in case those people figure that it is last year, I would like to read another letter, in March 2002. A lot of people recognize that there are a number of fires this year, an additional number of fires. But for the member's information, just on that point, when I listen to the member from Saskatchewan Rivers and I listen to the member from Shellbrook-Spiritwood, they did not know the history of even the past 10 years when they were complaining about the amount of money, which I will deal with right after this.

But I would like to say that even this year, as they were trying to give a, you know, a backhanded compliment, you know, to what's taken place this year, I would like to show you for the record what the business community has to say from the forestry industry. And again, this is from Stephen Smith, vice-president Weyerhaeuser. Again, to the minister . . . And also, this letter is directed to the Minister of the Environment, to the Minister of Economic and Co-operative Development, and also to the Minister of Finance. And I might add that the Minister of Finance on this year's budget added another 9 million, contrary to what the Saskatchewan Party members had said.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Goulet:** — It says in the letter, "I wish". . . and I quote:

I wish to begin by providing a strong endorsement for Saskatchewan's forest fire detection and forest fire fighting capability, as well as its demonstrated success, particularly in recent years.

He said . . . I said that before I was reading the Weyerhaeuser statements of 2001. Now I am reading Weyerhaeuser statements of 2002 for the information for the Saskatchewan Party members.

Just on that point. As I was listening to the Sask Party members, here they were last year when we made an exceptional record on forest firefighting last year and we had approximately \$50 million in the budget. And we looked at the average over the years, with about 50 million, but they forget that in '95 and '98 there was over \$90 million spent by the provincial government.

The coalition government takes care in regards to the economics, the health and safety of the community, and recognize when money is needed the money is there. So we put in over \$90 million twice in the past 10 years. Now when I'm listening to the Sask Party members they talk about

accountability, and a lot of them are former Tories and do not know very much about accountability.

And they simply don't get it. They don't know exactly, exactly how and what type of commitment we have made on a yearly basis. And they should just look at the record, look at the record, look at the estimates, look at what was actually . . . the record speaks for itself.

This, this coalition government provides tremendous support in forest firefighting. And also contrary to the Saskatchewan Party members, we do have the best forest firefighting team in the world, both at the ground level and also at the air support level, and also in regards to the communication systems level.

You know, whether somebody is a worker in forest firefighting from the operations, from the radio operators to the central, you know, communication systems to the work on public education done by people like John Cook, it is quite a tremendous system. And they operationalize their system and they combine the attack teams at the various different levels and do an exceptional, an exceptional job.

And I must say that as I looked at the record, you know, from the international level, from the level of the business community, that a lot of the people in northern Saskatchewan are also very, very supportive.

And I must read this. And it says, from the Keewatin Yatthé Health District on October 1998, this is what the health district in the North said, and this is to the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, fire management and protection . . . forest protection. It says:

In appreciation. Thanks for taking care of us.

And to me again, it shows the appreciation of all northerners, and all the people of this province in regards to the excellence that we do in our forest management and protection crews.

I would say as well that as I listened to the Saskatchewan Party members, and I've been looking at their debates, it's interesting that we made the \$9 million improvement this year on the budget to deal with the question of management in environmental situation, they voted against it.

I remember, and they were very, very specific last year too, when they talked about doing away with highways workers, and then they complained about the highways. Then they also in that . . . when they fought that budget, it would have done away with forest fire workers as well. And they had very derisive comments about bureaucrats and things like that, during that period of the debate, and it was very, very negative. They didn't learn to appreciate, you know, the aspect of the contribution of our civil servants throughout the province, you know, whether they are in regards to the forest firefighters, or to the social work people that help out in the communities, the health people who help the elderly when they have asthma, etc., and move them out of the community.

So that indeed in many cases we have all kinds of civil servants helping out in the forest fire situation. You have of course, the Minister of Northern Affairs and his people helping out in the

. . . through the Northern Affairs situation as well. And it's been very, very, very . . . it's been quite an era of excellence over the past few years, and over the years to see our people work together with the forest firefighting crews on an interdepartmental level.

I might add that as I was talking about the economy, and I heard the member from Saskatchewan Rivers talking about us taking jobs away from the private sector, the forest firefighting system is a combination of public sector and private sector. And I don't think he understands that many of the . . . there is private sector planes and helicopters that are contracted from time to time. When we move in there that's very important.

But they forget that the people in forest firefighting have to eat, they have to get goods and services. Where do they buy it from but from the stores in this province. That indeed, when I was the Minister of Northern Affairs, and now pursued by the Minister of Northern Affairs, we had a northern procurement plan meaning that indeed the tremendous amount of neglect that the previous Tory government had done with the forest businesses in northern Saskatchewan was such that it was quite a disgrace.

(16:30)

And this time we made sure that the people from northern Saskatchewan at the business level were indeed a strong part, not only of policy but in regards to practice on getting the goods and services to the forest firefighting people.

So that's also a tremendous aspect you know vis-à-vis to the North. And it's contrary to the information that the Saskatchewan Party says that it doesn't help out the private sector. Of course it helps out the private businesses. And with our new policy with this government, which was very different from the Tory policy, we made sure that northern businesses were involved, not only in the procurement but being part of a forest firefighting team.

I must say that when we looked at the development and evolution over time, after we'd had the '95 fire and the '98 fire, and we spent over \$90 million, we had another review in the forest firefighting system.

And we were doing it in coordination with the educational institutions as well and making sure that Woodland Campus was involved. And we were starting to look at an integrated approach between forest fire management and also the forest fire economy . . . I mean the forestry economy.

And in that sense, we had a program that dealt with integrated resource management. So we had an integrated resource management program which has as a component of it of course the forest firefighting. But lately we have looked at extending the program on a two-year program and come out with actually a forest fire suppression program.

And that's very, very important. It shows you that we, as well as our institutions in this province, are keeping up with the time in making sure that not only the international community recognizes our quality forest firefighters and hire them in the different provinces and the different states in America. But that

our institutions as well develop the expertise within Woodlands as well as Northlands in evolving a system that'll be recognized not only for forest firefighting capacity, but forest firefighting training.

And I think that's very, very important. One of the things . . . one of the other commentary that was made by the members from across was — of course they had their usual Alberta-envy comment on the amount of money the Alberta was spending, you know, this year. Over \$1 million a day, they said.

Well what the member doesn't understand is this: when indeed your forest firefighting team is not a quick attack team and your fires spread quickly and you do not control them over a certain length of time, you're going to have huge fires. And when we were doing the . . . that development, we were able to put out a lot of the fires.

And I looked at a performance evaluation that was done at 2001. There was 717 fires, which was significantly greater than the 10-year average of 556 fires. That was this . . . I'm talking about the evaluation of 2001. It says expenditures stayed roughly in line with the five-year average. The forecast expenditures of 50.34 million was just slightly higher than the average of 51.23 million.

And here's the important point. The escaped fires rate was significantly reduced over 1995-2000 average despite significantly higher levels of starts. An escape rate of just 1.1 per cent represents extremely high performance. The strong performance in reduced escape fires translated into exceptional performance with respect to area burned by wildfire — 32,000 hectares burned was just under 20 per cent of the 10-year average. It was 20 per cent of the 10-year average.

In other words, the organizational work, you know, from that has been done from our air attack teams, our ground attack crews, our communication crews. The dynamic that has been created there has helped to stop those fires quickly — more quickly than in Alberta.

And I looked at the fires because Alberta has relatively the same type of situation as we do have, and theirs was . . . when we were at 90 million, theirs was at over 200 million. They were spending over 200 million. And a lot of the Alberta crews came over to see what we were doing. They knew that we were cutting the time factor down; that our crews were attacking quicker, and that the type of coordination that we were doing, from the communications down to air attack, was simply one of the best.

So many of the people have recognized that indeed . . . excuse me, that yes, Alberta spends more on fires but they're trying to find out why is it that we are able to spend less than they do but are able to put out the fires quicker.

And that is why indeed there was co-operation . . . and that's why you got the letter from Weyerhaeuser co-operating, seeing the letter written to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Economic Development and co-operation and also the Minister of Environment because of the great coordination not only out there on the field but also in government to be able to deal with the situation. And it's been quite a record, you know, for us in

this province.

And as I look at the situation we would like to of course form a northern members and visitors . . . I would like to explain some of what I said in English in Cree.

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

As I was relating some of the comments as well in Cree, I was mentioning the tremendous pride that northern people have had in being part of a forest firefighting suppression team.

And when I was growing up, I mentioned earlier on, I was 16 years old when I was forest firefighting. My mother had died that year and I needed something to do for the summer. So I had one of the people that I knew in the conservation officer side and I went forest firefighting.

Of course I probably said I was 18 or something like that, but it really didn't matter. I think many of them were very compassionate to me, you know, given the situation I was at that time of having to do something.

So there I was forest firefighting, but it was interesting because we were paid \$4 a day. I didn't say \$4 an hour; it was \$4 a day. And I had tremendous experience. It was exciting for a young fellow going into the forest firefighting situation.

You know, I heard about this big fire out there and I was anxious and gung-ho to get out there. And so I got to this forest fire area and there was this guy that was name, the late Joe Macaulay, and he used to be the tower man. And he had shown us where the fire was and he had worked with a team and we . . . and so we got over there and it was very interesting because it was the very first time I had gotten into a helicopter. So here I was, you know, overseeing the fire and riding in a helicopter for the very first time.

There were some fairly unique little experiences. I remember they were dropping off our goods and supplies and we had a . . . Sometimes trees are burnt off at the top and they were dropping off one of those great big boxes of bread. And when they dropped it from the air, it happened to hit one of the trees. So we had one of those boxes of bread hung up on a tree, so we sort of had to chop it down to get at our bread.

But there were some times we had to stay in the muskeg areas, so the mosquitoes are like airplanes in Cumberland House. I mean they were huge mosquitoes. So you learn how to stay and learn how to live out there. And I remember they had not brought in our supply of insect repellent, so we had a lot of fun.

Of course we used to be in front of a tent and we used to do a little fire and we used to put some type of material there, certain types of smoke to get the mosquitoes away. So we were in quite the situation. I was in quite a situation when I was young, you know, dealing with a forest firefighting aspect.

We learned a lot of things about when the fire rolls, the dangers of the fire. You know, we learned about when fire is dropped you know from the air, that you have to lie flat because a lot of things, you know, will fly in front of you and you could get injured. And so we learned how to do the forest firefighting you

know from direct experience.

And later on as . . . and it evolved. And I talked to Murdoch Carriere of Cumberland House. We learned from those years and we've trained people now. And it's been quite the record.

So I would like to say that, in going back to the motion, I was very, very thrilled to be part of this debate and to say again a special thank you to the forest firefighters of this province. You know, to the people who do the work right from the communication systems and the people who do the telephone calls and from the radio operators to the people who do the situations on all the different aspects, a special thanks from all of us, from the Government of Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible) . . . And I would like to say I would like to move to adjourn the debate.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(16:45)

**The Deputy Speaker:** — The member . . . There's already been a motion that has been defeated. That motion has already been defeated so there has to be an intervening motion. So I can't accept that motion.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, it's nice to enter this debate here on the motion that's put before us and the amendment made forth by our side.

It's kind of interesting to enter this debate, Mr. Speaker, because where I am, we don't have a lot of forest. But we have fought fires and I know how dangerous they are and how hard they are to fight.

And I just wanted to get up and talk about how we, on this side of the House, recognize the importance of firefighters and want to agree with the motion and the amendment on this side, that not as been . . . that we should recognize the firefighters on there.

I can remember talking about how scary fires are, Mr. Speaker. There was one in Bladworth this spring and how fast . . . coming home on a Friday and seeing the smoke and then realizing that it was the town of Bladworth. And there, all the fire departments around that area are all volunteer. There is . . . The nearest paid fire department would probably be, I would say, 60, 60 miles away. It would be in Saskatoon or Regina. So basically, everything that is done out in our area is on volunteer firefighting, Mr. Speaker.

And in Davidson fire department there is probably I think 20, 25 firefighters. In Bladworth, we don't have a fire department any more, but the whole town I guess you would call volunteer firefighters. And as the word spread throughout the community that there was a fire, that it started from a burning barrel and it started spreading through the town, I mean the people started coming from all over.

And just seeing the smoke and knowing that it was in . . . approximate in the town, close to the town, that if . . . the town could be in danger, people always . . . if they see it being so dry this spring, that they just automatically, if they seen smoke and

if they knew if it was close to a farmyard or a town, would always go to investigate, which at this particular time, Mr. Speaker, was a very good thing.

It took . . . that fire department there came about . . . the volunteer from Davidson came about 1:30. And I remember people coming with shovels and whatever they had — old coats — to beat the fire out, and it was scary. I remember it jumping the road and having some volunteers there. And it took quite a while to fight, to put it out. And also it . . . the fire department stayed through the night because of the hot spots that flare up because it was very, very windy.

And I could . . . I couldn't even imagine the conditions that the firefighters in the forest . . . in the . . . that are facing in them fires. And the winds that we've had this spring would be very, very scary indeed. And it takes probably a special breed of person to fight that kind of fire, Mr. Speaker. And that's why on both sides of the House we recognize that and believe that they need all the help they can from this government to fight these fires, especially in the dry conditions that we have had.

I mean, thank God that we do have some rain coming. Now I've been hearing that even up north now that we've had some rain, and in fact yesterday was the first rain we've had. But even up to a couple of days ago too, we've had this rain out our way.

It's hard to believe that in the middle of June that a fire could still get away and it could. Like I mean, there were still the RMs (rural municipality) around us that put fire bans on, not to do any burning anywhere in the RMs. Just basically, just being that dry. It hasn't been that dry out our way since the '30s which is scary at the end of it, Mr. Speaker.

And now the . . . talking about the forest fire budget, I know that we've had a few members bring up some questions about it. Has it gone over budget? Has it gone under budget? I mean naturally with the amount of firefighting to go through . . . And I mean we agree with the government on some respects, that the most important thing is to fight the fire and get it out. But the next thing is to also be accountable to the people in there to make sure that they have the money available to fight it. Also that they have the equipment to fight it.

I know the number of equipment it would take, and water bombers and helicopters. I remember watching the fire on TV, about the one in Nipawin, and seeing . . . I didn't realize that they used helicopters to fight hot spots, taking water to fight that, which was very interesting.

And I think it . . . just recently at . . . because the lakes were so cold this spring, at Blackstrap, my constituency, the water bombers were doing test runs there, doing some practice runs in the spring which was very, very unusual.

I think I had a call about that to my . . . one of my offices about . . . that they were doing that there. And they were . . . the person was just wondering what was happening, why they were doing it. Because I guess usually they do the practice up in the fall there but . . . or not in the fall, in the early spring, but because of the . . . being so cold the ice was froze over. So I believe that they were using Blackstrap which was interesting for some practice runs, some training, at that end of it.

And I know the one person that phoned wasn't sure what was going on at first. And then I think I phoned and found out that that's . . . they were doing some testing at one of the lakes there.

But so the training that goes into it for the professional firefighters plus all the volunteers up there that are probably on alert at this time of the year would probably be quite intensive, Mr. Speaker, at that end of it.

And I imagine the drain on the budget too will be quite costly, I think, as the bills come in over the next month or two. And with that, I was just questioning where is it going to come from. I know that with the one thing, the government had to back up on the one health thing, taking approximately \$7 million from the Highways department. And I know that this government is running very tight on the budget restraints, so there's going to be questions.

Where is that money going to be coming from? Is it going to be coming more from Highways? Will Health suffer more unfortunately? I mean, we can't stand any more budget out of there. Or will the province have to go into more debt, you know?

And one of the things I have heard, talking to some of the members up north, is the equipment that's up there — 30-year-old water bombers we're hearing — you know, World War II vintage. And, you know, that must be a little scary taking planes of that age up to fight these fires. And we're going to need money to replace these planes.

And there's . . . another question to the minister is, where is the money going to come from? Are they looking at slowly getting more planes?

Or another option is the private industry. I know I have a friend that, I think he's from back home there, that fought, that worked for a private company that fought fires in Manitoba till the NDP government took over there. Now they've switched to trying to buy their own planes. And he said it hasn't worked out as well as they thought it would be. The private companies that were hired, he used to go there and work six months of the year fighting fires and the company he worked for did a very good job, and they controlled the fires there. So that's another option that the government should be looking at, is letting the private industry in there as much.

And I'll admit I don't know that much about it. But I also know just talking to him, that in Manitoba it worked very well there, the private industry.

And another suggestion is, how does inter-provinces work? Do they help each other? I would imagine that they trade equipment, equipment and firefighters back and forth, but a year like this when it has been dry constantly across the Prairies, each province is fighting fires.

And I was wondering if they'd of . . . There was talk one time of bringing the army in which is a very good idea. I mean that's what they're there for — emergencies. I can remember, was it Toronto brought them in for snow clearing. And I mean that's important but I don't think it's important as fighting fires, Mr. Speaker.

And I mean any time we're in an emergency situation, I wouldn't know why the government wouldn't . . . the federal government wouldn't volunteer them, or even our provincial government be talking to them to bring them in, their equipment that's there. I know at the army base at Dundurn there, is very big and it has a lot of equipment there, a lot of planes, a lot of . . . in fact a lot of people that would love to go out and fight fires, you know to help. Because that's when they go into the army, I mean that's what they're there for — to help in emergency situations, do a lot of peacekeeping things.

And I think a good thing for this province to be looking at is to maybe do some training with the army and with pilots back and forth. Because I mean there . . . (inaudible) . . . very many air force pilots, Moose Jaw pilots. We have the air force base in Moose Jaw, helicopter pilots in Moose Jaw that would probably be looking . . . they would be looking for practice runs to get more air time. Because I think that's something that the province should be exploring very, very good there, Mr. Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** — They had the military out helping with the flooding in Winnipeg.

**Mr. Brkich:** — As the member pointed out, the military was out in Manitoba helping the flooding. So they should be out . . . they should be helping in firefighting. And if this situation has reached a very dangerous level — an emergency situation has arisen I think throughout the North with I think a record number of fires this year — that they should be looking at bringing them in.

Now one other thing that we're talking about is emergency debate on emergency assistance for the fire at Nipawin, also for the fires at RM. A lot of RMs have been fighting fires for the number of . . . this spring, have had some very dangerous fires.

There was one just on the other side of my constituency where a farm was bought . . . where a farm was lost basically. And that fire was very dangerous coming alongside the lake, very dangerous of . . . endangered a lot of cabins there. And the RMs just don't have the fire . . . (inaudible) . . . capability or the money or the finances to fight these fires. So they have been looking towards the government for a number of years.

Plus the fire . . . the local volunteer fire departments. I know the one in Kenaston and Davidson, in my constituency, that are always constantly raising money trying to buy new equipment. The trucks in Kenaston are as old as the water bombers, are as old as the 30-year-old water bombers that our pilots are flying up north. And that's what they're expected to fight fires with, Mr. Speaker.

And that's . . . and I know that they receive very little funding. The only funding they get is through per capita, through the towns and the RMs. And unfortunately, under this present government, with the people unfortunately leaving, your per capita has been dropping so they've been getting less money from the towns. And the province has been downloading on these towns and these RMs, that they unfortunately can't supply funding for . . . to keep these firefighters going.

And they don't . . . And a lot of them don't have equipment. I

know that they throw like say, a lot of fundraising just to have the proper equipment or trying to raise the proper equipment to save their lives to fight these fires.

Some of the fundraising that the member was asking was dances, selling tickets. I was at a demonstration in my constituency, that was about three weeks ago. There was the fire department and the EMO (Emergency Measures Organization) threw on one. They kind of had them in different districts. How they . . . how the car . . . They'd set up a car accident, just a scenario, and how they basically cut the roof off, the fire department comes and puts it out.

And they just . . . basically they raised . . . It took them I think four years to raise money to get a Jaws of Life there, and which probably has last year saved one or two lives, Mr. Speaker.

But those are the conditions that our local and my volunteer firefighters are facing all the time. They're out there laying their life on the line with antiquated equipment that unfortunately this government can't seem . . . won't seem to want to help them too.

And then also . . . There's also dealing with the cost of cleanup, Mr. Speaker, when a fire is over. Who assumes that, Mr. Speaker?

I know up north, my member was talking about — what's the word called there — they use fire, fire burnt wood when it's done. And I know that there's been, over the years many local little companies or just individuals that have made money from it. But now I understand that the government isn't issuing as many permits for that. And I thought that's what this government was for, was trying to help small business, small individuals, especially up north where they supply a lot of jobs, Mr. Speaker, at that end.

I understand that that's . . . that has helped the individuals over the number of years make a living there. And now I understand that the government has been making more . . . is making it harder on them to attain these permits, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Order.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — It now being slightly past the hour of 5 o'clock, in order that members might have a little break before resuming debate, this House stands recessed until 7 p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.