

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another petition signed by the citizens of the province of Saskatchewan regarding Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation's announced premium increases by as much as 52 per cent and more. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to have Sask Crop Insurance reverse the 2003 premium increases and restore affordable crop insurance premiums to our struggling farmers.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are from Lucky Lake and Birsay, and I'm pleased to present it on their behalf.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today on behalf of constituents who are concerned about the highway, Highway 49 from Kelvington to Highway No. 35. And the prayer reads:

Where your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway No. 49 in order to address safety concern and to facilitate economic growth in the area.

The people that have signed this petition are from Kelvington, Lintlaw, and Invermay.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to present some unsolicited petitions I have received on the issue of the scenic old bridges over the North Saskatchewan River between Battleford and North Battleford, the prayer of which reads:

Your petitioners humbly pray that the Minister of Highways preserve the old bridges between Battleford and North Battleford.

Your petitioners today come from Saskatoon, Battleford, and North Battleford.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the deplorable and alarming lack of a hemodialysis unit in the city of Moose Jaw. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take necessary action to provide the people of Moose Jaw and district with a hemodialysis unit for their community.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Regina, Caronport, Moose Jaw, Wolseley, and Holdfast, Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of people of my constituency. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 47 South in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by people from Estevan and Torquay.

I so present. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of citizens of the constituency of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about the deplorable state of the highways in our constituency. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary repairs to Highways 13, 35, 18, 28, 6, 34, 334, and 36 in the Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency in order to prevent injury or loss of life and to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area.

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

And the petition is signed by residents of the towns of Weyburn, Lake Alma, and the city of Weyburn.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of constituents concerned with the condition of Highway 22, particularly that section between Junction 6 and Junction 20. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 22 in order to address safety and economic concerns.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Earl Grey and Bethune.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions

have been reviewed and are hereby read and received:

A petition concerning the preservation of the historic original twin bridges between North Battleford and Battleford;

A petition concerning repair to Highway 49; and

Addendums to previously tables petitions being sessional paper nos. 12, 13, 18, 19, 27, and 36.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 28 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Revitalization: what is the total amount of money that the provincial government has spent on the ACRE Committee since its inception?

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Easter Greetings

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this weekend people from across this province will be enjoying a long weekend. For most people it will mean an extra day off work. For students, no school. However, for many Saskatchewan residents it will be a time to gather together with family and friends to celebrate the Easter season.

More specifically, Mr. Speaker, this weekend will also be a time when many Saskatchewan residents gather together with their church family to celebrate the life of Christ and at this time remember his death and rejoice in his resurrection. In view of the current turmoil in our world and the ongoing prayer for peace, I trust that many people will experience the peace the Prince of Peace offers.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our caucus I would like to extend to all members and staff of this Assembly and the people of Saskatchewan our wishes for a Happy Easter weekend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I wish all people a joyous and Happy Easter season.

The season began last night with the celebration of Jewish Passover. For people of all walks of life, the desire for homeland expressed in ancient Passover ceremony is something that still stirs emotion in us all. For Christians, the desolation of death leading to the promise of rebirth and rejuvenation embodied in the central Easter story reminds us that no defeat is final and that hope springs eternal.

While many people will be spending the holiday with their family and loved ones, whether it be in a religious or secular fashion, Easter provides us with an opportunity to reflect upon a number of themes which are relevant to all people. Suffering,

wisdom, sorrow, joy, death, rejuvenation are strangers to none of us. They are a part of life, of every person's life. No matter one's faith, we can take comfort in the lessons of Easter — out of death comes life, out of anguish and suffering comes wisdom, out of sorrow springs joy. But the essential message, Mr. Speaker, is that of hope.

Mr. Speaker, it is on this note that I would like to wish members of this Assembly, the staff of the legislature, and all citizens of Saskatchewan a very relaxing weekend filled with feelings of hope and renewal. But above all, let us take this opportunity to consider how fortunate we are to live in such a wonderful, plentiful, and most importantly, peaceful province where we are free to enjoy a holiday with our loved ones in relative safety and security.

Mr. Speaker, Happy Easter to you and all members of this Assembly. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Historical Events

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, April 18, is a date that marks some truly memorable historical events in the history of our province and our world that I would like to draw to the attention of the members of the Assembly.

On April 18, 1838 Wilkes expedition to the South Pole set sail. And on April 18, 1846 the telegraph ticker was patented. On April 18, 1868 the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed. On April 18, 1909 15th century French heroine, Joan of Arc was beatified at a ceremony at the Vatican. On April 18, 1910 Walter R. Brookins made the first airplane flight at night. On April 18, 1924 Simon & Schuster published the first crossword puzzle book. On April 18, 1934 the first laundromat opened in Forth Worth, Texas.

And, Mr. Speaker, on April 18, 1948 another historical event took place. Heaven and earth celebrated in joyous harmony as our Sergeant-at-Arms, Patrick Shaw, was born.

Patrick, we want to wish you the very happiest of birthdays, and may your day be joy filled.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Contractor Safety Awards

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. SaskPower recognizes and values the role contractors play in helping to provide safe and reliable power to customers across Saskatchewan.

I'm pleased to tell the members of this House that SaskPower recently recognized some of its finest contractors at the 13th annual SaskPower Contractor Safety Awards.

These safety awards, developed by a joint SaskPower/Contractors Committee, are given out annually as part of SaskPower's safety action plan. The plan outlines how the corporation and its contractors work together to improve and maintain the highest possible level of workplace safety.

Acknowledging the safety achievements of its contractors with these awards is one way to highlight the importance that SaskPower and their contractors place on safety.

Recipients of this year's Safety Excellence awards were: Achen Construction of Regina, PMP Powerline Construction Ltd. of Assiniboia, Asplundh Canada Inc. of Regina.

Recipients of the High Performance Safety Achievement awards were: PMP Powerline Construction Ltd. of Assiniboia, Galbraith Powerline Contracting of Kindersley, K-Line Maintenance and Construction Ltd. of White City.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this Assembly to please join me in congratulating the 2002 SaskPower Contractor Safety Award recipients.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Women of the Year Awards

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week the Quota Club International and SaskPower sponsored the Women of the Year awards in the city of Weyburn. Mr. Speaker, four very deserving Weyburn women were honoured by their community.

The SaskPower Workplace Excellence Award is an award presented to a female employee or employer who has exceeded their expectation in the workplace by displaying a superior effort and a true desire to significantly improve their work environment and workplace. This year's award went to Donnita Maas who is a key person at the Family Place and is instrumental in creating a loving, caring environment for both children and their parents.

The Quota International of Weyburn Community Service Award is an award to recognize a woman, who on a volunteer or salary basis, has demonstrated a commitment to enrich her community. Mr. Speaker, this award went to Josie Klein who is involved with many volunteer organizations in the community, and through her gift of her time makes Weyburn a better place.

Access Communications Exceptional Entrepreneur Award is presented to a woman who shows exceptional leadership innovation in starting and operating or owning a business. This year's award went to Gail Bartlett and Monique Huebner who own and operate Snup'N Mo's children's clothing.

Investors Group Young Women of Distinction Award went to Miranda Spencer, a young woman in Weyburn, who works with violence intervention and safe houses for Women.

I'd like all members of the Assembly to join me in honouring these women.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Business Awards

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, last evening I had the pleasure of attending the Samuel McLeod Business Awards in Prince Albert and I was pleased as

well to join the Speaker, who was also in attendance.

This event is a way for Prince Albert, the business community, to measure the success and it's also a way to showcase the future of business in our city. These awards come at a time when we are seeing 11 straight months of job growth in Saskatchewan.

I want to say as well, Mr. Speaker, there were many categories and many winners last night. I'd like to congratulate them all. But today in particular I want to mention the winner of the Business of the Year Award, Carleton Trail Railway.

The event also presented the Legacy Award to honour individuals or businesses that have made significant contribution to the Prince Albert business community. This year's winner was the Lemieux family of Econo Lumber.

Vic Lemieux started Econo Lumber in 1970 and later his son, Curtis, joined the company to add to their growth. They're now operating in La Ronge. Vic has been very active in the community involved in many volunteer organizations. I want to congratulate the Lemieux family and all of the other nominees and all of the other award winners.

Mr. Speaker, Prince Albert is on the move. It's a vibrant and a growing community and it's pretty obvious, Mr. Speaker, that in Prince Albert the future is wide open.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Disposal of Potatoes

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP (New Democratic Party) has already admitted to misleading the people of Saskatchewan concerning the SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) investment. The government says that all the bad news has come out. I don't think so.

The question remains, what became of all those high-priced rotten potatoes? According to some news reports, they were spread out on the fields. I don't think so. As I was crossing Wascana bridge this morning, I noticed the air rising from Wascana Lake. Mr. Speaker, the geese are getting drunk. We could start an ethanol plant right there on the bridge. So what is causing the fumes in Wascana Lake? Twenty-eight million bucks worth of rotten spuds that make black French fries can cause quite a stink.

My theory is that the NDP tried to dump all those potatoes in Wascana Lake, and they thought we wouldn't notice. Mr. Speaker, we need to clean up the environment.

There'll be an election soon. And when there is, when there is, the letters NDP will be emblazoned across this province — no dumping potatoes. This will be the environmental slogan of the 21st century.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, let's clean up Saskatchewan — dump the government, not the spuds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskEnergy Natural Gas Rates

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the smell of rotten eggs this morning has nothing to do with the Easter bunny; rather it has more to do with a 33 per cent increase in the natural gas rates for the people of the province of Saskatchewan. But part of the problem in our province traces back to NDP handling of this whole issue, back to last year.

Mr. Speaker, according to the NDP's own government budget documents, the average market cost of natural gas — this is the government's figures — in 2003 would be just . . . last year would be \$3.78 per gigajoule.

Mr. Speaker, if the average cost for natural gas was 3.78 a gigajoule, why did the Government of Saskatchewan force SaskEnergy customers to pay \$5.44?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well first of all, SaskEnergy has provided for some of the coldest months in the year, amongst the lowest rates in all of Canada. If that member, Mr. Speaker, says that SaskEnergy was charging that, if those were the rates — three dollars and some cents — I ask this question: why was Vancouver . . . in Vancouver charging \$8.30; why were, in Edmonton, they charging 8.49; why in Calgary are they charging 9.01; why in Winnipeg were they charging 6.34; why in Hamilton 6.15; and why in Toronto, 8.01?

Mr. Speaker, the point is SaskEnergy has provided stability and amongst the lowest rates in all of Canada, through the coldest months of this past winter, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the NDP's own budget documents say natural gas cost an average of \$3.78 a gigajoule last year, \$3.78 last year, but they sold the natural gas to taxpayers at \$5.44, a much higher price, will the minister explain how the NDP managed to rack up a \$30 million loss on those sales last year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I say, SaskEnergy has provided amongst the lowest rates in all of Canada, through the coldest months of the year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me make this point. The only thing lower, Mr. Speaker, than SaskEnergy's gas rates was . . . consistently lower, Mr. Speaker, is the popularity of the Leader of the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. That's been the only thing that's been lower, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — And you know what, Mr. Speaker? You know what, Mr. Speaker? Even SaskEnergy can't operate on those margins.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, here's the question again. And the minister needs to answer this question for the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Last year, according to its own figures, the Government of Saskatchewan said the average cost for natural gas, \$3.78 a gigajoule. But what price did the NDP charge Saskatchewan people? What price did Saskatchewan pay — \$5.44 a gigajoule. Yet, Mr. Speaker, they managed to rack up a \$30 million loss on those sales, a \$30 million deficit in the gas cost variance account. And that is a lot of the reason why today taxpayers and customers face a 33 per cent increase.

Will the minister just answer the question. How is it that the cost for gas was 3.78, the government was charging 5.44 a gigajoule, and they still lost 30 million on the sale?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well here we go again, getting advice from the expert from Swift Current, the member . . . the Sask Party member, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, you know how popular that was last year when he provided that advice, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the point is . . . The point is that SaskEnergy has provided the lowest rates in Canada; in fact, if you look across North America, amongst the lowest rates in North America over the last six years for the people of Saskatchewan. The people of Saskatchewan want and appreciate stability in price, Mr. Speaker, and that's what they get from SaskEnergy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, what the people of Saskatchewan want is a competent government, a government they're not getting from the NDP, Mr. Speaker. That's what the people of the province want.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, this morning the NDP announced that they were going to be increasing Saskatchewan . . . SaskEnergy commodity rates by 33 per cent. Now SaskEnergy customers will be paying \$7.25 a gigajoule for natural gas, even though — even though — the NDP's own budget documents say that the average price of natural gas this year will be \$4.29 a gigajoule.

Mr. Speaker, if the NDP Minister of Finance thinks natural gas is only going to cost \$4.29 a gigajoule, why would the NDP Crown corporation . . . Why would this minister authorize SaskEnergy to charge Saskatchewan families \$7.25 a gigajoule?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I say to that member and I say to the Saskatchewan Party, if they are advocating a model that exists in Alberta and many other jurisdictions in Canada, Mr. Speaker, they should just come straight out and they should say it because last year, Mr. Speaker, in the coldest months of the year, Mr. Speaker, the rate spiked as high as \$15 a gigajoule. The average high price was 10 to \$12, Mr. Speaker. Here in Saskatchewan, they paid \$5.44.

I've pointed out that in jurisdictions like Alberta and Ontario, right now, they're still paying 9 to \$10, Mr. Speaker. Here in Saskatchewan, we're asking for a 22 per cent increase to bring us more in line, but we'll still be amongst the lowest rates in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning at the press conference we found out that the NDP managed to lose \$30 million last year selling natural gas, even though SaskEnergy, even though SaskEnergy was charging its customers almost 44 per cent more than what the government's own budget document said the gas cost, Mr. Speaker.

And this year, the NDP has decided to increase natural gas rates by 33 per cent, up to . . .

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

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And this year they've decided to raise rates by 33 per cent to a price of \$7.25 a gigajoule even though the Minister of Finance told . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I'm finding it very difficult to hear the questions being posed by the members and I would ask members just to . . . Order, please.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the NDP are going to charge Saskatchewan families \$7.25 a gigajoule even though the Minister of Finance hopefully would have whispered in the ear of the minister of SaskEnergy that he is predicting the price to be \$4.29 a gigajoule.

Will the minister please tell Saskatchewan families why he's going to be charging them 7.25 but only paying the Minister of Finance \$4.29?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well welcome to the Sask Party's wacky world of deregulation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, let me . . . let me say this. I refer to the *Leader-Post* article of May 27 . . . or March 27 of this year, Mr. Speaker, where it says, Sask Party Crown Investments Corporation critic, I quote:

. . . Brad Wall said (that the) regular rate adjustments seem

like a good idea.

He figures that the idea that Alberta has where the rates jump up and down on a monthly basis from 3 or \$4 to 15 or \$20, Mr. Speaker, is a good idea.

We think not, and I think the people of Saskatchewan think that rate stability is a good idea.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this is amazing. The quote the minister just read was myself commenting on the opinion of, the opinion of the president of SaskEnergy, the hand-picked president of SaskEnergy that works for the minister. So I wonder if the minister might want to tell the House if he's lost confidence in his president over there at SaskEnergy, because that was his opinion.

And while he's on his feet, Mr. Speaker, while he's on his feet, he ought to answer this basic question. This government racked up a \$30 million loss in the sale of natural gas last year even though their own average cost for the gas was 3.78 and the price they charged to . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Wall: — We'll give the minister a chance to clarify whether he still supports his president of SaskEnergy and also why, why the gas cost variance account, the loss on the sale of gas last year, topped \$30 million. All the while they were paying \$3.78 or at least that was the average cost per gigajoule, but charging Saskatchewan people \$5.44. How in the world did that happen? Will the minister explain that to the House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the question was being asked by the member, the Minister of Industry and Resources leaned over and asked me to advise the member from Swift Current not to blow a gasket, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the point is, the point is that through all of the cold weather that we've had, SaskEnergy has provided the lowest rates, stable rates for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And all they're requesting today is to bring their rates more in line with what's been charged across Canada, which are still in the middle of the pack, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope you're taking very, very special note of the fact that the minister refuses to answer this question — this question that goes to the heart of the matter of whether or not Saskatchewan families paid too much for their natural gas last year, and whether or not that NDP mismanagement has exacerbated the situation this year.

So I'll ask the question one more time, Mr. Speaker, for the minister. The average cost for natural gas last year according to the government's own documents: \$3.78 a gigajoule. The price that the NDP charged the Saskatchewan people: \$5.44 a gigajoule. And in the bargain — in the bargain — they

managed to rack up a loss of \$30 million on those sales. Will the minister please explain to the House how in the world that happened?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well if the people . . . if the members of this legislature would listen, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite, if the members of the Sask Party would listen to the answer, Mr. Speaker, and understand the irrationality of the argument that that member is making. That member says that we should adopt the Alberta models which regularly change the rates, Mr. Speaker, regularly change the rates.

And I look at the rate comparisons across Canada. I see Vancouver, Edmonton, and Calgary in the 8 to \$9 range, Mr. Speaker. I see Ontario over \$8. Here in Saskatchewan, we've charged consistently through the cold weather \$5.44. And now we're asking for an increase up to 7.25 — still below those rates, Mr. Speaker.

He says that they want to privatize is all they want to do. They want deregulation, they want privatization, they want sale of our Crowns. That's right.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:30)

Mr. Wall: — Well I'm sure people listening to the minister don't know whether to laugh or cry, frankly, Mr. Speaker. He's got no answers so all he can do is fearmonger. That's what he can do.

And, Mr. Speaker, the other thing the minister does is make a mistake. He talks about deregulation when, Mr. Speaker, it is that minister as the minister for SaskPower, as the minister for SaskPower, that has actually deregulated the electrical market in the province of Saskatchewan. That minister is actually the minister that's been doing the deregulating here in the province, Mr. Speaker.

More to the point, this morning the NDP announced that rates are going up by 33 per cent for Saskatchewan families. Customers will now pay \$7.25 a gigajoule even though the NDP's own budget document forecast the cost of that gas at \$4.29 a gigajoule. Mr. Speaker, if the NDP's Finance minister thinks the price of gas is going to be \$4.29 why, why, is SaskEnergy about to charge Saskatchewan families now \$7.25 a gigajoule?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well that member from Swift Current, from Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, says I'm fearmongering. Well am I, Mr. Speaker? I look back to the 1980s when that member of the Sask Party from Swift Current worked for the minister of privatization, Mr. Speaker. He was a key policy adviser during those years.

What did they do, Mr. Speaker? What did they do? They sold off gas reserves. They sold off gas reserves. If we still owned those, you know what? We could have even lower rates, Mr. Speaker. We've had amongst the lowest rates in all of North

America. We could have even lower rates. He says I'm fearmongering. I think not.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Consultation on Land Use in the Great Sand Hills

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of the Environment. Last night a meeting of the Great Sand Hills Land Use Strategy Committee held a meeting in Swift Current and, unlike earlier meetings, this meeting was open and accessible to members of the public interested in hearing the proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, at last night's meeting people were told that the committee is considering holding more public meetings where the issue of land use in the Great Sand Hills region would be further discussed. Mr. Speaker, will the minister confirm today that the land use committee will hold more public meetings on the issue of land use in the Great Sand Hills, and will he tell this Assembly where and when these meetings may be held?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know where and when these meetings will be held. Mr. Speaker, this is a tremendous interest by people of the province in what kind of land use the NDP is considering for the Great Sand Hills, and they want to be assured that their concerns and input are not only heard but also considered and reflected in the recommendations the committee will present.

Mr. Speaker, the concern of people now is that although there may be more public meetings held by the committee, those meetings will not seek input from the public but instead will only have the committee present its recommendations to the meetings for feedback.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell the Assembly if the Great Sand Hills committee will continue to seek original input from the public, or if they will only present recommendations at these future meetings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to that member of the Saskatchewan Party that we have been waiting for a Saskatchewan Party position. We've been waiting to hear any of their position on the Great Sand Hills. And, Mr. Speaker — zero — there has been zero position on what they feel is necessary for the Great Sand Hills and the future of the Great Sand Hills and the environmental importance of the Great Sand Hills to the area and to the people of Saskatchewan.

I will point out from my perspective, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we have a position that we will sit down; we're going to review what happened in the last 10 years; we've invited 350-plus people to give us more information on what they feel the aspirations of the Great Sand Hills should be, Mr.

Speaker. We're on line in terms of the information from well over 40 groups that have made presentations to the committee, and, Mr. Speaker, we have agreed with the committee's work, that we should have additional public meetings, Mr. Speaker.

In all this time, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan Party and that member have never put one position forward, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I'd like to remind the minister, if it wasn't for my colleague, the member from Cypress Hills, all of the meetings would have been held behind closed doors; the public wouldn't even have known what was going on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — So, Mr. Speaker, I think the government has a lot of work to do. Mr. Speaker, there is definitely concern from people interested in the future of the Great Sand Hills that the committee take the time to seek as much public and scientific input as possible before finalizing the recommendations and report.

The Speaker: — Order, please, members. Order, please. The members will come to order.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But they are very uncertain as to the direction and the time frame placed on the committee by the NDP government. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: when is the final report of the Great Sand Hills Land Use Committee due to be presented to the minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, what we have found from that Saskatchewan Party is that when they're in Calgary they'll say something to the oil patch and then when they're back in their riding they'll say something different to the cattle producers.

And what I'm going to ask those members is . . . We have agreed to have several public meetings. Those dates will be forwarded and the locations will be forwarded to that member and that Saskatchewan Party. And I want to them to participate, Mr. Speaker — to come clean to the people of Saskatchewan, what is their position on the future of the Great Sand Hills, Mr. Speaker?

We believe, we believe we have to take the pragmatic steps of making sure we sit down with both groups and involve as many people to protect this environmentally sensitive area, and if they respect technology and science and opportunity to further develop the province, well then let's look at that as well, Mr. Speaker. Those Saskatchewan people cannot — Saskatchewan Party people — cannot continue to skirt the issue. What is your position, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, the minister is responsible for the environment. The opposition, with the great work done by the

member from Cypress Hills, has gone out into those communities and talked to the people involved in that. The government has not done that.

Mr. Speaker, what the government has done is hid behind closed-door meetings. If it wasn't for the work done by our member from Cypress Hills, no one in the public would know what's going on in the Great Sand Hills area.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to know from the minister when these additional meetings will be held and where will they be held. Because I believe they don't have to be held necessarily in Regina. They should be held out in the area where the people live and are concerned about these very important issues.

And I'd like to ask the minister again, when will the recommendations be presented to the Assembly?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I'll point out in terms of the question, that we had anticipated by the end of June that we would receive a report, or a report card if you will, of some of the findings of the committee.

Now as a result of some of the additional public meetings that the committee has agreed to do . . . And we will advise the dates and location of those public meetings, and we will anticipate that they will be there putting forward their positions, Mr. Speaker.

But I would say that since we have additional public meetings that perhaps we can expect a later date than June in terms of receiving a final recommendation, or a report card if you will, of some of the findings and the review of the Great Sand Hills issue.

But I'll point out, Mr. Speaker, this — we'll advise the member of the dates and the locations and the times if that member and that Saskatchewan Party will come forward and give us a presentation and a position on the matter as opposed to going to Calgary and saying one thing to the oil patch and then going to ranchers in the affected area and saying another thing, Mr. Speaker. Tell the truth — what is your position?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responsible Gambling Features in Video Lottery Terminals

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last session I spoke about the new VLT (video lottery terminal) machines in Nova Scotia with the responsible gambling features which include a permanent clock, cash displays rather than credits, and a mandatory cash out after two hours. Now the provinces of Quebec and Alberta have joined Nova Scotia in adopting the new machines to curb problem gambling.

I again ask the minister: our VLT machines are now 10 years old; will he commit that, as they are replaced, he will install the new ones with responsible gaming features?

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I really

appreciate the advice from the Saskatchewan Party, but the people are recognizing that they don't have any good advice for anyone.

In answer to the question from the member from North Battleford, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise that member that our VLT distribution is presently on a rollout, and they do have the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order.

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I just want to confirm that those responsible gambling features are in fact included in the rollout of the VLTs as they are presently in progress throughout the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is disingenuous at best. The new technologies being introduced into Saskatchewan are about protecting the house, not problem gamblers. There are new technologies being introduced here, but that is to identify people who are a problem for the house.

Mr. Speaker, I think that any social democrat, even a newly minted one, would be embarrassed — would be embarrassed — to admit that Ralph Klein has more social conscience and is more socially progressive than the Saskatchewan NDP.

If Alberta can introduce machines designed to curb problem gambling, how can Saskatchewan just sit back and rake in the dough without a thought for social consequences?

Mr. Speaker, our VLTs bring in enough revenue to finance the departments of Justice and Environment all on their own. Will the minister think back to some of his statements when he was opposition Gaming critic, and commit that the machines now being used in Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Quebec will be introduced in Saskatchewan?

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

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not certain . . . Obviously the member from North Battleford doesn't get out much at all. If he did, he would know that we have engaged in the new video lottery terminals all the gambling features, all the responsible gaming features that have been included in Nova Scotia. That's where we got the ideas. Those were the people that initiated it. We looked at those ideas.

Let me just . . . In case he sees a machine, he will recognize it shows wagers in dollars. There's a real time clock. There's a pop-up reminder responsible gaming message banner, Mr. Speaker.

We have been committed to responsible gaming. I believe we've met those commitments, Mr. Speaker. And we are probably ahead of the member from North Battleford's friends in Alberta. That's who he should be joining.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government in a very open and accountable way to table response . . .

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start again. I'd just like to tell the members of the House that I'm extremely pleased to stand on behalf of the open and accountable government to table responses to written questions 134 through 139, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, and 139 have been submitted.

(10:45)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 9

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Serby that **Bill No. 9 — The Agricultural Implements Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to take a few minutes to speak on this Bill today because I think it's a number of changes that are made in this Bill that have been long overdue, but there is some questions.

The Bill, Mr. Speaker, talks about the changes to the requirements of the agriculture dealers in Saskatchewan, and the definition of dealer and distributor are expanded to include those who provide leases. And I think that's much overdue, Mr. Speaker, because many machinery dealers right now are dealing more probably in leases than they are in the actual sale of a piece of equipment.

The new Bill, the changes give the Ag Implement Board the ability to review these leases and strengthen the notice of revision in the cases of compensation claims. It also gives the board the discretion to determine the penalty fee for flagrant and repeated violations of this Act by certain dealers, and the maximum award level is raised from 5,000 to \$10,000 which possibly, Mr. Speaker, could have even gone higher.

One of the questionable parts of the amendments in the Bill, Mr. Speaker, are fines that are now levied and collected will flow into the General Revenue Fund and not to the board,

which, Mr. Speaker, I guess is something we've seen this government do more and more and more, where they pass any kind of fines or levies or collections into the General Revenue Fund instead of into parcels where they can be collected and used later by the board themselves. So I think the government has to explain why that provision is in there, Mr. Speaker.

It also gives the board members liability protection and increases the fine for operating without a dealer's licence to \$10,000 from the current 2,500.

And part of the amendment in the Bill, Mr. Speaker, gives the minister unlimited power to impose any additional condition on dealer's licence that he or she sees fit. That's concerning, Mr. Speaker, because once again we're giving the minister the power to make changes without coming to the floor of the legislature and amending the legislation itself, and change by . . . through regulation or just at the whim of the minister. And that's scary, Mr. Speaker, because we know how the members on that side of the House actually act.

It also removes the requirement for dealers to charge according to prices set out in the price list. And I think this is a plus, Mr. Speaker, because what this can do is actually create competition between dealers and be a very positive for the farmers that are actually purchasing these parts.

The 72-hour time limit to deliver repair parts to farmers now includes Saturday, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's a positive. It gives the dealers the right to add additional charges for emergency services, makes the dealers and manufacturers jointly responsible for late-delivered emergency repairs. And I think that's important, Mr. Speaker, because many of the cases where parts are late is not the fault of the dealer, but is the fault of the manufacturer so they should also be held responsible.

It also gives dealers the first option to provide replacement equipment, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's a positive, rather than having the farmer go to an opposing dealer without giving the first dealer the actual chance to replace that equipment.

It also makes inspections of dealerships optional rather than mandatory.

And the warranty clock — and this is important, Mr. Speaker — the warranty clock starts ticking on the first day of use rather than the first day that a machine is purchased. And in many cases, Mr. Speaker, farmers purchase a piece of equipment — say, like a combine — in December and at the way it was before, that warranty would start at that point. Now it won't start till . . . if he doesn't use that machine for the first time till September, that's the day the warranty starts. And that's a very positive thing for the farmers of Saskatchewan.

It also takes away the onus on dealers to provide contracts and customers in the first language if they don't speak English, and I think that's a positive.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are still checking with farmers and dealers all across the province, and at this point we would like to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 15

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 15 — The Saskatchewan Insurance Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The same with this Bill, Mr. Speaker. We were checking with a number of members of the public and what we are doing is waiting for their feedback, so at this point we would like to adjourn debate on that Bill also.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 16

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 16 — The Coroners Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to discuss The Coroners Amendment Act.

This is really a housekeeping Bill that seeks to streamline things for coroners. It makes their jobs more efficient and effective, and any time the government shows that type of initiative, we are really very encouraged by it.

One of the more prominent amendments in this proposed legislation is that in cases where it's known that an individual inside a provincial facility has died from natural causes, there will be no longer a requirement to hold an inquest or an investigation since it's known what the cause of death is.

This was a result of the jury's recommendations following a coroner's inquest in July 2002. And we're very pleased that the NDP has seen fit to implement this recommendation. This really negates the need to hold undue inquests and thereby using up resources and manpower that could be targeted for use in other areas. It's really imperative however, Mr. Speaker, that in those cases where an investigation must be conducted, the legislation remain in place to guarantee such activity.

Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged when I heard the Minister of Justice outline the framework for a coroner's system. He said the system was designed to ensure that unnatural deaths would be investigated to determine the facts surrounding this and to make recommendations to avoid preventable deaths in the future and to maintain public confidence that deaths that occur in unusual circumstances are examined. Mr. Speaker, we're pleased that this amendment is allowing those procedures to stay in place.

One of the other amendments that will allow . . . will allow coroners to obtain bodily fluids taken from individuals prior to his or her death, particularly in those instances where the samples can be crucial to an investigation. In the past, health facilities have been reluctant to release that type of information because they didn't have specific authority to do so. And this legislation will allow them to do so. The proposed legislation is really going to clarify this issue.

Of course we wonder why it took the NDP so long to finally get around to doing this but we are encouraged that they're moving in the right direction. Anything that makes somebody's job more efficient or effective is something that we're really encouraged by.

One of the other minor amendments deal with the issue of making photocopy records and confirmations that when referencing evidence given through oral testimony in an inquest, it can be done through a telephone conference call which was not previously possible. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is going to facilitate the task that people who are going to be giving testimonies have. They won't have to make long journeys to attend an inquest and it's going to definitely simplify their lives.

Again, both these amendments should facilitate the processes and procedures involved in the inquest.

We are very pleased that this Bill will accommodate people living great distances from the place where the inquest will take place. Again, since anyone who's been involved in a coroner's inquest is already under a tremendous amount of stress, anything that will make things a little bit easier for him or her will certainly be appreciated, Mr. Speaker.

Overall we're very encouraged with the intent and the nature of this Bill, and we still feel that more consultation and review is necessary. So at this time I move to adjourn the debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 17

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 17 — The Land Surveys Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 17, An Act to amend The Land Surveys Act, 2000. This Bill purports to provide certainty within the definition of the expression, legal description; to provide flexibility in requiring a surveyor to conduct a field inspection on a survey that is more than two years old; and to enhance the provincial survey system by requiring surveyors to re-establish lost monuments in some situations.

Defining the legal description may help shed some light on who actually owns the land. As many Saskatchewan citizens have reported, the new \$107 million ISC (Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan) land titles system certainly could use some help in that area, as it apparently has difficulty in determining who actually owns the land and who doesn't.

Well defining the term, legal description, may be an indication that this NDP government has begun to understand the defective nature of the land registration system in Saskatchewan. It's quite clear that they have a long way to go before actually making the system work properly. The Bill will finally allow for flexibility in requiring surveyors to conduct a field inspection on a survey that is more than two years old. It is clear that the two-year period is not long enough and common

sense dictates that this type of duplication is both unnecessary and costly to the user.

It is refreshing to see, Mr. Speaker, that this government is finally recognizing the folly of the land registration system and the great expense of unnecessary duplication and allowing for the use of some common sense. But as the \$107 million land titles debacle shows, they have a great deal of work to do before the system works properly.

The Bill also proposes to deal with the replacement of lost monuments at section corners. Well, Mr. Speaker, like the other common sense provisions of this Bill, it is too long overdue. Many of the monuments marking the section corners have been damaged or removed over the past 100 years and it hasn't been a requirement that surveyors replace these markers. It would seem that for the shoddy land titles system to begin to work properly, it would probably be a good start to have these monuments in place in order to have an accurate determination of the boundaries of the land in question.

This government has fumbled the ball when it comes to enhancing the land titles system, at an astronomical cost to the Saskatchewan taxpayer. Hopefully the new provisions of this Bill will begin to slow down the ever-increasing financial toll of this government's mismanagement of the land registry system. The failings of the New Democrats' ISC program are many, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately they are too many.

What started out as a laudable idea that was to cost less than \$20 million to computerize the system is now costing the taxpayers of Saskatchewan \$107 million. That's a 500 per cent cost overrun, Mr. Speaker. And surely that is high, Mr. Speaker, even by this government's very loose standards.

It's not surprising to see cost overruns and taxpayer monies being mismanaged by this NDP government, Mr. Speaker. There are far too many examples. You will recall an infamous cost overrun project that the NDP was involved in — that was the closure of the Plains hospital in Regina. The final tab on that was around \$50 million over budget. Who was overseeing that for a time? The current Justice minister, who is also now overseeing the ISC debacle. I see a pattern, Mr. Speaker, of cost overruns on the projects that fall within the responsibilities of that minister, Mr. Speaker, and also a pattern of denial regarding cost overruns, Mr. Speaker, that flies in the face of the facts.

The NDP also said that ISC would be something that would be in demand around the world. The people involved globe-trotted, trying in vain to make at least one sale. They went everywhere from Albania to Orlando. How many sales did they make of this much anticipated system, Mr. Speaker? Not one — not one. Not surprising when almost every jurisdiction in the developed world was ahead of us in computerizing their land registry systems and they had systems in place that actually worked.

And that's what makes us even sadder, Mr. Speaker, is that the system does not even work properly. Only the NDP, Mr. Speaker, can spend \$107 million on a project that will not differentiate between two people with the same last name . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . \$107 million, I'm reminded by the member from Swift Current.

Our offices are deluged with calls, e-mails, faxes, and letters from people province-wide complaining about ISC. The members opposite know about that. They know because they must get the same calls that we do.

So what's in the NDP solution? Well let's get the taxpayers to bail us out again. Let's raise fees; let's make the people of the province pay for our errors. Well, Mr. Speaker, the people have long memories and they will remember this mistake come election day.

(11:00)

Mr. Speaker, many people and groups are currently studying this Bill because, like so many other projects, when you get on the phone and say the NDP is doing something with land titles or ISC, people either break into laughter or tears.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, as this Bill 17, an amendment to The Land Surveys Act continues to be under further study, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

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

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I seek leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My ever-diligent caucus colleagues point out that in fact it is a guest, not guests that I am introducing so I trust that members will forgive me for that.

I'm very pleased to introduce the grandmother of one of our pages who has joined us in the gallery. Luke McWilliams' grandmother has come to make sure that her grandson is at work today and her name is Mildred Young. I'm very happy to welcome her here and to advise her and assure her that he is doing a very fine job for us here in this legislature. So you can make a spot for him at the Easter table this weekend and he'll be there. So I'd invite all members to join me in welcoming her.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 18

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Higgins that **Bill No. 18 — The Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak on a labour Bill since I've changed my critic area. It gives

me an opportunity to continue to speak out on labour and WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) and all the areas that are concerning those very important Bills that we have in front of us.

Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 18 basically changes the legislation to make the assumption that firemen who eventually develop five different forms of cancer — that would be brain, bladder, kidney, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and leukemia — got these diseases due to their place of work and will be compensated for their illness. And it changes it; the reverse onus is now, instead of the firefighters having to prove that they've developed these cancers because of the work, now WCB will have to prove that they did not develop these cancers at their job site, which as we know is a very dangerous profession and they work under very hazardous conditions. And now we know that there are other illnesses that they develop that many other people in industry and on the job, jobs around the province, do not get.

The firefighters have been fighting for this change since 1991. And the Saskatchewan Party caucus has met with the firefighters on numerous occasions and they've constantly brought this problem up and we take it very seriously.

Mr. Speaker, in the most recent presentation to the WCB review board, firefighters were turned down again, as they have been many times in the past, and basically this Bill, as I understand it, will override that decision. And as we know, the government has relatively few Bills on the order paper today and the majority of those are not very important but this is one that I think is a substantial piece of legislation.

This Bill is a important piece of legislation not only for the brave firefighters who have fought for it for so long but is also important because of the long-term ramifications for WCB that we should discuss in this legislature and get the full picture of where the minister and the current government believe WCB is heading.

Mr. Speaker, as for the changes we are seeing for firefighters, especially we see similar changes being made in other provinces as well, and obviously, Mr. Speaker, the science involved in making this type of decision has come far enough that the government, not only in Saskatchewan but other jurisdictions, feel comfortable that this is a responsible decision and we as the opposition recognize this.

We do, however, believe that there should be more time to study this Bill thoroughly and compare it to what is going on in other provinces and other jurisdictions. And as we know that Alberta has introduced similar legislation and we want to check and see what their legislation is all about before we finish with our work as a responsible opposition should do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, for instance we notice that in some cases colon cancer is added to the list of cancers that are thought to be caused by firefighters working in their dangerous environment, and it's not included in this list, so we'd like to get some clarification on that matter as well, Mr. Speaker.

And of course on the other side of the coin, we think it's responsible to take into account some of the opinions of the people in this province and see what they . . . if they have any

concerns about the legislation.

And, Mr. Speaker, as we know, when we include more items under WCB or allow more cases to go in favour of a claimant, there's also . . . that opens the door. And in this particular case it opens the door to claims from other professions that may feel that they have similar health concerns in their industry and in their workplace. And we need to take a good look what the implication of opening WCB up to these other illnesses and make a calculation of what the costs would be to WCB, and ultimately to the employers of this province.

And so it certainly . . . we certainly feel it's very necessary to protect the firefighters and other workers in our society that have been or may be working in hazardous conditions in the future. And we have to offset that with the cost to the employer or cost to society. As we know, firefighters are paid by the municipalities and so ultimately the taxpayer of the province will be paying for these higher premiums. So there's a balance there.

We definitely recognize the importance of this legislation to the firefighters. And since we've only had this Bill for a week, we need more time to consult with all the stakeholders — talk to firefighters, talk to other people in society about the implications of . . . these changes to WCB, not only specifically with the firefighters but also to other industries and employees and employers across the province. So at this time I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 13

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 13 — The Parks Amendment Act, 2003** be now read a second time.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up to discuss this Bill, on Bill 13. It's a very varied Bill. It deals with a couple of different subjects which I find the NDP has . . . they do this seems quite often. They'll . . . with one Bill they'll put two or three things on it that basically doesn't pertain to each other, instead of splitting them up. And I wish they would kind of split the Bills up a little more.

They seem to put a few good things in but then you never know what they're going to be sliding in underneath. So we do have some questions with this Bill.

There's very many, various aspects of this Bill, so I'd like to kind of start on touching about the fact that they're changing the grazing permits is one of the things . . . first things that this Bill deals with. And on the surface, I think that seems like a very good idea, Mr. Speaker, changing the grazing permits on it.

I understand right now before it was only a one-year lease which I find, which I find was very hard, that they would even have that in because it . . . ranchers dealing that, because I take these are grazing strictly permits. It's very hard to only plan for a one-year grazing permit. And I find it very hard that they would not have changed this years and years ago when they first brought this in. You'd think that they would have expanded

it then, Mr. Speaker.

I think they're changing it, I believe, under it to five years, which is good. It gives a rancher some time to plan because in the cattle industry, it's not an industry, Mr. Speaker, that you get in and out of very easily. It's something that details a lot of planning. If you have a one-year lease, you buy some . . . you expand your cattle herd, you also have to worry about expanding your fence. Some of the . . . I imagine a lot of these grazing permits, these areas aren't fenced, or maybe the water isn't developed there. So it . . . over a five-year period, it would give you some time to develop your water on it, to dig a dugout, to put some expenses into it, and then to be able to recover them back over the . . . over a number of years on that, Mr. Speaker, and also, give you a little, little more chance when you're planning your cattle herd. You're expanding it — it's very hard to . . . if you get in and out of cattle very quickly, you can lose money.

You happen to buy, if you get a permit, the one year, on the one-year permit, you buy, you buy some extra cows. Let's say they're allowing you to maybe put 30, 40 extra cows grazing on that. You buy them in the spring when bred cows and calves are usually up and then in the . . . you find out next fall that you don't have that permit and you don't have the pasture for them next spring. So then you have to unload them and sometimes if the price is down, you will take a loss on it.

So this Bill apparently deals with extending the lease on it to five years on it straight across, which on the surface seems very, very well. We've sent this Bill out to various cattlemen association and stakeholders in the area. We still haven't seen that response on it. The initial response, I think, has been good. Some of it . . . feedback comes back would be, you know, why not 10-year, 20-year leases on the government through PFRA, (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) through government leases on other pasture are expanded to 10, 15, 20-year leases. I'm wondering if this Bill, they plan to expand a little further than that. That's something they could look at expanding past the five-year permit.

I was wondering on all . . . and another question I'd like to ask the Environment, which I will be in time to come, does this apply to all their permits — grazing permits on the one-year lease — or does it only apply to some of them that were mentioned here in the Bill? Does this apply straight across the board which are some of the questions later on we'll be asking. We hope to get some answers on that.

The last two years, out . . . especially in the Northwest, which I think this . . . with this Bill particularly deals with a lot of the parks in the area, they've had a drought up there in the last two, maybe even three years and not a lot of snowfall, I understand, in some of the areas there. So this Bill hopefully will be able to address . . . that they'll be able to address water concerns because over maybe five, six, seven, eight years ago there was a lot of water, a lot of snow runoff in the North. They've always been noted for having a lot of snow, a lot of water.

I know the last two years in our area, we've had more snow — and we haven't had a lot in our area — and we've had more than the northern part. They've really gone through snow depletion, and water depletion of dugouts.

So I know some of the ranchers we've met in the area and we've had some complaints. Some of the MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from the northern part have mentioned that some of the people that have these leases over a number of years have a . . . the last two or three years that had water on these leases, were dry.

So you're looking at a one-year lease beforehand, and now you've got to . . . you're faced to either digging a dugout at a cost of . . . and they're fairly expensive, or trucking in water, and the expense of it. So you hate to develop a water system over this and only knowing that next year somebody could come in and take that lease and what you've developed under it, from underneath you in . . . on your development.

So I know that was a huge concern, and I think it was raised the last two years, especially up north because of the drought conditions there. One of the main concerns was they wanted to develop some water, some extra water resources, dig some deeper dugouts, maybe dig a well, find out some . . . to enhance the property — which it does, for leasing further on.

So this, from initially, I think this is a very good Bill and what we've heard . . . not of . . . of that part of the Bill discussing again why they bring in other things. And I don't know why they just can't bring in one separate piece of legislation that would deal with that, and then the other legislation that deals with actually removing some polices, some . . . excuse me, pieces of the park to . . . either to the private sector, also to some native bands, also some movement in adding some.

And I wish they would kind of, in the future, would separate them Bills instead of putting everything together. And a lot of them don't really deal . . . the Bill doesn't really deal with . . . some of the things that were done here don't actually affect one another. So in the future, as a comment to the minister, that I wish he would kind of bring maybe two pieces of legislation on this end of it.

Also going into another aspect of the Bill — and I may come back to the first part of it — going . . . reading through it, deals with the removal of some land from some of the parks in the area. That information, we still haven't received any information from the stakeholders on it. We've sent the Bill out to the stakeholders that are dealing it.

(11:15)

I know one piece of land is around the Meadow Lake area. In the Bill I think it mentions it as agricultural land, but it doesn't say how that land will be dispersed, whether it will be dispersed through a tendering project or will it be dispersed to the adjacent landholder or even is the land going to farmers or is it going . . . it doesn't really specify where that land is going.

We hope that if it is agricultural land, that it is put up for tender, that the surrounding farmers or ranchers have the right to bid on it. We hope that that's what that part of the Bill deals with and we'll be asking the minister further on, on that.

And then another part of the Bill going on, some of the other land it deals with also deals with moving the land to a . . . moving some of the land to Native reserve, which is fine if they

can use it. We've sent them out a copy of the Bill and we'd like a little feedback from them to see if they've requested it. But if they're going to be paying for this land, Mr. Speaker, or is it being given, at that end of it, that's something that needs to be looked at.

But, Mr. Speaker, with that . . . And there is a few other things we've gone through with this Bill. The permit process is some of the questions I would like to ask. When the five-year lease . . . is it changing on that, on the permit, and what they pay?

I know one of the concerns that was raised with us when I did meet with some people up there and talked to them on the phone was the way the permit process was that they had to pay taxes on this land. And they felt that that was unfair, that they had to pay the taxes plus the permit, and they said a lot of it was putting it out of the reach of the cost of it. So they would also like that to be addressed, and we're hoping that the minister was dealing a bit with that.

So I'm going to be . . . We'll be asking some more questions on it. I know some of the other members also have some concerns with that. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will move that we adjourn debate on this particular Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, with good wishes to all members of the House that we'll have some time at home with our families to also enjoy the optimism and the good spirit of fellowship that comes with celebration this time of the year, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Assembly adjourned at 11:19.

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