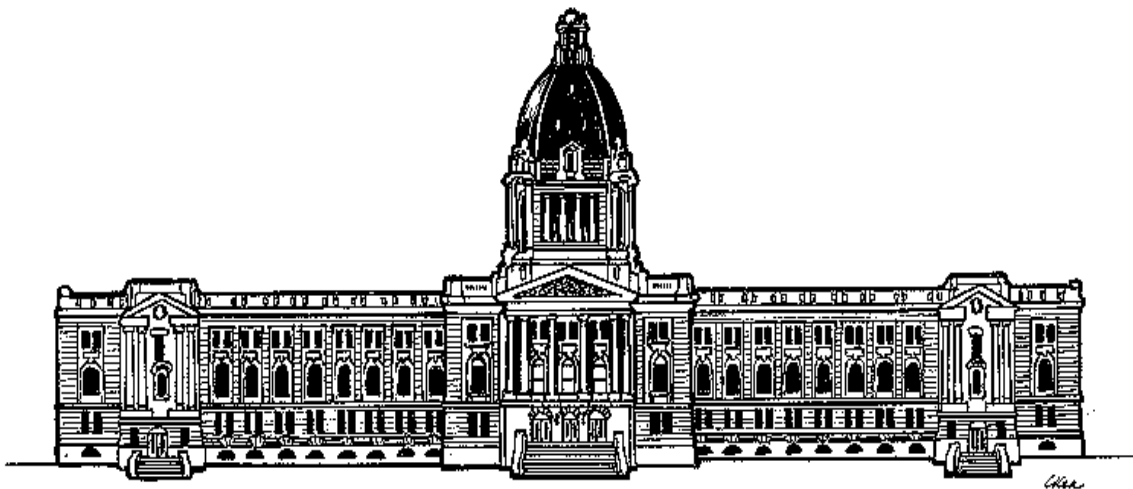




# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY**

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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Ms. Nancy Heppner  
Martensville

Ms. Victoria Jurgens  
Prince Albert Northcote

[The committee met at 09:00.]

**The Chair:** — Well good morning, committee members. Being 9 a.m., I'll call the committee meeting to order. This morning we have with us the Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Highways. Pardon me. My apologies, the Minister of Highways — got to get my glasses on here.

The agenda for this morning will be considering the estimates and supplementary estimates for Highways and Infrastructure, vote 16; Highways and Infrastructure Capital, vote 17; Highways and Infrastructure, lending and investing activities, vote 145; and Environment, vote 26. That's for today.

**General Revenue Fund  
Highways and Infrastructure  
Vote 16**

**Subvote (HI01)**

**The Chair:** — This morning we're going to begin with vote 16, Highways and Infrastructure, central management and services, subvote (HI01); vote 17, Highways and Infrastructure Capital; and vote 145, Highways and Infrastructure, lending and investing activities.

Minister Reiter is here with his officials. Mr. Minister, I would ask that you would please introduce your officials. And also a reminder to the officials, when you're responding to a question, at least the first, just to give us your name and, just for the sake of Hansard, that would be appreciated. So, Mr. Minister, please introduce your officials and then you can make your opening remarks.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my right is our deputy minister, Rob Penny; to my left is our assistant deputy minister, Jennifer Ehrmantraut; behind me, our assistant deputy ministers, Ted Stobbs and George Stamatinos; also my chief of staff, Jason Wall; ministerial assistants, Ashley Anderson and Jarret Coels. I have some comments I'd like to read into the record, Mr. Chair, and then we'll be available for questions.

There is significant momentum in Saskatchewan. Our population is growing like never before. There are more people moving here than ever before. This population growth is being driven by a strong economy that's leading the nation. Transportation plays a critical role in our provincial economy. About two-thirds of provincial GDP [gross domestic product] is derived from exports. And the major sectors of our economy like energy, mining, and agriculture all have an export orientation. Given how far we are from many of our export markets and port facilities, these sectors are all sensitive to transportation costs. An efficient transportation system makes a big difference to their competitiveness and their profitability. In short, our province needs a strong transportation system.

When we came to office in 2007, we faced many significant challenges, including many miles of crumbling highway. We also are now faced with the challenges of providing major upgrades and enhancements to support a growing economy and a growing population. We have a lot of work to do, but we've made a good start. We've upgraded 668 kilometres of rural

highways. Another 110 kilometres of upgrades is currently in progress. We've completed 1400 kilometres of repaving on the provincial highway system. And over the last four years, 77 kilometres of newly twinned highway has been opened to traffic between Saskatoon and Prince Albert on Highway No. 11. Just this past fall, we opened the Lewvan interchange. This is supporting the growth at the Global Transportation Hub and the residential and commercial development in southwest Regina. And we're close to finishing the Yorkton truck route that supports the new crushing plants in that city.

In addition to infrastructure, we've been focused on making the transportation system work more efficiently. We've expanded the primary weight system by about 5000 kilometres, generating cost savings for truckers and shippers alike. Through the New West Partnership and a memorandum of understanding, we've improved the harmonization of commercial trucking legislation with Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba.

We're also proud to support our municipal partners. We've made \$2.2 million in funding available for improvements to community airports. We've provided \$150 million to urban municipalities through the urban highway connector program. This has helped fund important work like the south Circle Drive project and the new bridge in Saskatoon, the Highway 1 and 4 interchange in Swift Current, and the twinning of Highway 4 at Battleford. And we've provided \$115 million to rural municipalities under the municipal roads for the economy program, giving the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities a direct role in recommending priorities and administering the funding.

As you can see, we've made significant progress in virtually all of the key areas of our transportation system over our first mandate. With this year's budget, we're laying out the first year of our plan for our second mandate. It's a plan that once again will see us fulfill our commitments and make significant investments in transportation. The ministry's budget for this year is \$581.5 million, making this the second largest highways and infrastructure budget in the province's history. This is a four and a half per cent increase over last year. In our first four years in office, we invested \$2.2 billion into the provincial transportation system. This year's budget puts us on track to meet our election commitment of investing another \$2.2 billion over the next four years.

While my ministry is working to enhance the provincial highways system, other programs are helping to ensure there's also investment in other modes of transportation. This helps ensure our communities and regions have access to a range of transportation services. The community airports partnership provides grants for improvement to community airports that aren't eligible for federal funding programs. Funding for this program will be continued this year at \$700,000.

Our government is also proud of its record in continuing support for urban and rural municipalities. This year we will again provide \$23.5 million in funding to MREP [municipal roads for the economy program], and we will provide \$7.9 million this year to municipalities under the urban highway connector program. This is in addition to the record

unconditional grants the province is sharing with municipalities.

This budget provides funding for 320 kilometres of repaving on highways like Highway 1 east of Indian Head where 17 kilometres will be done, 20 kilometres south of Chamberlain on Highway 2, and 18 kilometres on Highway 55 between Nipawin and Love. It also provides for 675 kilometres of work like seal coating and micro surfacing to protect our investment in provincial highways.

The budget also provides significant funding to continue our work in revitalizing our bridges and culverts. This year we will invest \$38.5 million for bridge and culvert replacements, rehabilitation, and preservation, including 29 major projects and four major bridge rehabilitation projects. And we will continue repairing damage caused by last year's flooding.

In August of 2011, our government announced \$66 million to respond to widespread flood damage across the province. This year we will invest in an additional \$18 million to continue that work. This will be used for work like bridge and culvert replacements and the grade raises on Highway 123 to Cumberland House.

In addition to repairing and maintaining the highway system, we're going to make a number of upgrades and enhancements. These investments respond to the demands of a growing province. We're going to invest \$70.5 million to upgrade 150 kilometres of our rural highways. Last year we introduced a program to ensure funds were available to improve access roads to small communities and tourist destinations.

This year we'll finish work on the Laird, Wakaw, and Anglin Lake roads, and we'll invest \$10 million to upgrade additional community and tourism access roads. We will start work on the Estevan truck bypass. This year we'll complete the pre-construction work including the right-of-way purchase and the necessary utility moves. We'll also tender the contract for the grading portion of the project. And depending on contractor availability, there may also be some grading work started late in the construction season.

Work will continue on the St. Louis bridge, with \$20.7 million invested in the connecting roads and the bridge structure itself this year. As the Global Transportation Hub continues to develop, we continue to build the necessary road infrastructure. We'll continue work on the new interchange at Highway 1 and work on grading the new lanes including a rail overpass from Highway 1 to Dewdney Avenue.

We'll also take some important steps to increase capacity and improve safety on the province's busiest highways. This year we're going to complete the twinning of Highway 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Grading is mostly complete. Paving still needs to be done from north of Rosthern to north of Macdowall. Thanks to some funding assistance from the federal government, we're wrapping this project up four years ahead of schedule.

While we've been working on Highway 11, we've received many requests to enhance safety and respond to growing traffic volumes on other highways — highways like No. 10, Highway 6 and 39, Highway 16, and Highway 7. One of the ways we will

be doing that is with a passing lane initiative. We will be investing \$3 million to begin the design and aggregate work for passing lanes on Highway 10 between Balgonie and Fort Qu'Appelle.

Mr. Chair, that's an overview of our budget for the coming year. It's a budget that's focused on keeping the Saskatchewan advantage. Now my officials and I would be pleased to answer questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The floor is now open for members who would care to ask any questions. Mr. Belanger.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just for the sake of the officials that are here, I want to welcome them of course, Mr. Minister, and also to give them a kind of heads-up as to some of the areas I'll be asking you questions on specifically.

The Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation, there'll be questions on that. The northern community access program, we have questions about that. The major initiatives of the P.A. [Prince Albert] to Saskatoon double laning, we've got questions on that. The Pacific-Asia business corridor, the federal-provincial agreement on that, we have questions on that, and general questions on staffing and the spending patterns, and so on and so forth.

So just for the sake of . . . I understand that there are a number of people up in a couple of northern communities that are going to be paying interest to this particular committee hearing because they obviously want to hear some of the answers the minister may have.

So for the sake of those that are listening, if you could just quickly if you can for me, explain basically when you talk about a multi-billion year plan or project, how's this year compared to the overall billion dollar statement that you make on occasion in terms of the spending pattern? Like year one, we spent this amount; year two, we spent this amount; this year we're spending that amount, we're 70 per cent completed on the 2 or 3 billion dollar price tag that you often refer to in your spending.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — You're talking province-wide, the entire budget?

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, right.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — When during the election campaign in 2007, we campaigned on a commitment that if we were given the privilege to form government that we would spend \$1.8 billion on highways in our first term in government, we actually spent in excess of \$2.2 billion. Last November I was with the Premier in Yorkton when we announced the commitment for the upcoming term if we were given privilege to serve as government again, and that was again, as you mentioned, it was \$2.2 billion.

This year the budget is at \$581.5 million. So you can see I guess, just obviously patterns will change a little bit, but just simply at a quarter of the 2.2 billion, you can see we're on

course to meet our commitment.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. And basically on the \$1.8 billion over your four-year mandate, you're obviously in your fifth year, and the target that you've spoken about is the \$2.2 billion that you spent so far. How would you account — of the total overall budget, let's take the \$2.2 billion price tag that you've identified here — how much of that is ongoing costs on an annual basis? Like what does that translate into the overall spending? Because obviously as a department the \$2.2 billion that you've alluded to is not spent on construction. There are a number of other things that the department pays for. And if I can get a breakdown of the 2.2 billion that you alluded to, basically concentrate on the new construction versus the ongoing costs, whether it is staffing, whether it's engineering, whether it's equipment, kind of a breakdown of that sort so people out there can understand exactly. When we say 2.2 billion, sometimes they get the impression that's all new highway construction because that's what people tend to assume. So if you can get that kind of clarification for me, that would be great.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Sure. I'm going to consult with my officials in a minute, and I'll give you a much more detailed breakdown, but just broadly your point is right. Part of that \$581.5 million budget will be capital. I think in the opening comments, the Chair had referenced which votes. In Highways, there's a vote 16 and a vote 17. The vote 16 refers to, you know, essentially the operations side of the equation, and the vote 17 refers to the capital side. Our capital portion of the budget this year is \$275 million, so you're looking on the operations side somewhat slightly in excess of 300 million. Having said that, I'll talk to my officials now, and I'll give you a more detailed breakdown as you requested.

[09:15]

I'm going to ask Jennifer to give you that detailed breakdown, but first I just want to clarify something. There is the vote 16 and 17. There are some items under vote 16 that I think intuitively people would assume would be considered capital. For instance, a couple of the programs that I mentioned — the municipal roads for the economy program which is used for municipal road construction, or the urban highway connector program which is used for highway construction — intuitively people would assume that on the capital side, but it's actually on the vote 16 side. So there is a little bit of crossover on some of those that probably could be confusing to people. So I'm going to get Jennifer to just give you a little bit more detailed breakdown on that.

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — Good morning, my name is Jennifer Ehrmantraut. I'm the assistant deputy minister. So I'm going to walk through each of the line items on estimates, and I'll do a brief description of each of them.

Central management and services, 21.382 million. Central management and services provides direction, centrally managed services, areas of finance, geographical information, land management, communications and other operational services including head office programs and accommodations required for the delivery of the ministry's mandate. It also provides capital improvement for accommodations such as equipment

storage buildings, vehicle inspection stations, and the largest part of this is the accommodation side of things.

Strategic municipal infrastructure, 36.976 million. In there, there's a lot of capital items in there. One of them including the MREP program, the municipal roads to the economy program, that's \$23.5 million of that. And that's really working with our partners in order to have the proper flow of traffic management from the rural system back into the provincial system.

Operations of the transportation system, 87.384 million. And this subvote provides safe access and operations of the transportation system through the delivery of a range of services including pavement marking, signage, lighting, mowing, snow and ice control, ferry and provincial airport operations, information technology management, systems support, compliance with transportation laws, and it provides related operational services such as engineering standards, traffic engineering, and testing services.

Preservation of the transportation system, \$150.82 million. And this subvote provides for preventative maintenance on provincial highways and bridges. It provides for program delivery; for planning, engineering, maintenance and preservation of capital program and capital construction. It also includes road and bridge engineering for municipalities. The biggest part in here is that maintenance of our highway infrastructure.

We have transportation planning and policy, 3.879 million. This subvote provides for planning and policy development and ensures a modern and competitive regulatory framework for transportation that aligns with the Saskatchewan regulatory modernization initiative. It assesses the efficiency of Saskatchewan's transportation network and the development of transportation plans, and it includes technical advice for shortline rail and provincial rail.

We have machinery and equipment capital, 5.75 million. This is for the replacement and acquisition for new machinery used to maintain and operate our transportation network.

And then we have our vote 17, which is 275.300 million, and that is for new capital construction.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much. So in terms of the new capital construction at 275, I'm not very good at math, but what would that be in percentage terms of what the Department of Highways spends on an annual basis?

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — It's 47 per cent.

**Mr. Belanger:** — 47 per cent. Okay. So the whole notion is that 47 per cent of the budget itself is actually maintaining the current system. So when we . . .

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — 53 per cent would be maintaining the system.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Sorry.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — 47 would be the capital. Again though, I would just like to point out my comments earlier that some of

those items that people intuitively think would be capital — the construction done under the MREP program, the urban highway connector program — are included in the 53 per cent.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. No, I think that's a very important point. And certainly I think it's incumbent upon a lot of us to explain that there is that deviation factor somewhat. But by and large, it's probably 50/50 in terms of operational cost versus new construction cost if one were to be generous on the new construction cost perspective to up to 3 per cent.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — You know, certainly you can kind of ballpark at 50/50 in the cost. I would just point, I guess you know, as you're well aware, a former Minister of Highways, the maintenance side is very important. There's the normal thing you would, people would assume, you know, would think about like snowplowing, that sort of thing. But there's also, I mean the pothole filling and the line painting, and all those sorts of things are very important as well.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, I'm not going to deny that the maintenance and the process to maintain our highway system is just as essential as new construction. There's no question about that because obviously, you don't maintain the highway system, it's going to cost you a lot more in the long run. And so I want to concentrate a bit on the new construction or the actual construction itself of highway.

And before I do that, I just wanted to ask the question, in terms of my breakdown today, my presentation, I want to work on the overall perspective from the province. Then I want to go to specific areas. And then of course we want to do the northern perspective, which I think is important that I do as a northern MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. And then I want to talk a bit about the staffing and how the process is going to proceed in the future as to how Highways is going to be spending their money.

But in general terms, if you look at the activity happening in Saskatoon right now — which I think is the Asia-Pacific or Pacific-Asia business corridor plan that the federal, provincial government signed a number of years ago — are you able to give us an update? Because I know in the last few months of our term in government that we made several announcements in Saskatoon, and the construction has been ongoing since then. There's a number of major arteries being developed in Saskatoon.

And I'm just wondering where that particular project is because I know at one time it was called the Asia-Pacific business corridor, but obviously names change and processes change and monies change. Maybe give us an update as to how that particular program morphed into this program so people can get an idea of what's happening in Saskatoon.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — I think the project you're referring to is the South Circle Drive project. There was funding provided by the province. Also under the federal stimulus program, there was funding under that. That project is actually managed by the city, not by the ministry. But I'll just talk to my officials, and hopefully we'll have a little bit more detail we can provide to you.

I'm just going to ask our assistant deputy minister, George Stamatinos, just to give you a brief background and give you a little bit more detail on that project, again because there's several moving parts there. There's a city, as I said, managing it and helping fund, funding also from the provincial government and from the federal government. So, George.

**Mr. Stamatinos:** — Thank you, Minister. If I may, I'll just give a little bit of background. George Stamatinos, assistant deputy minister for planning and policy with the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure.

If I may, Mr. Belanger, I'll give you a little bit of background on the Asia-Pacific gateway initiative. It started way back, I believe back in 2007. And there was some, it was part of a much larger program. At that time, I believe it was a little over a billion dollars that the federal government offered for the development of the Pacific gateway in terms of developing the port system and the transportation network that links to that port system from inland provinces, much like ours and Alberta.

Specifically at that time we looked, as a province, to put forward a couple of projects. One of the projects was in Regina. The current Lewvan interchange, it was part of that project. And we can talk about how that project was finally brought through federal assistance.

The other project was a couple of interchanges that now form part of the south Circle Drive corridor in the city of Saskatoon. And my memory serves me correctly, there's about \$20 million of federal money went into those two interchanges. One of them I remember was Clarence Avenue, and there was another one as well. And I apologize. I can't remember the second one, but there was two that were funded through that federal initiative.

As you will probably know, the South River, Circle Drive crossing project is close to around \$250 million, and the balance of that was funded under another federal program called the gateways and corridors initiative under the Building Canada plan and funding. So as Minister Reiter indicated, that particular project, all of it, including the piece that was under the initial Asia-Pacific corridor project, was managed by the city of Saskatoon.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. Yes, there's no question that I am aware of a lot of the detail that you speak about. And I guess to break down the . . . Because the theory at the time was the fluid movement of goods and services, you know, to build a greater economy. That was the theory behind that particular . . . those projects, whether it's the Lewvan or the Circle Drive project in Saskatoon. And you obviously don't want — I remember this phrase — you don't want four to five semis driving through family areas so you obviously have to have a better system.

So all that work was certainly moving forward, but in terms of the principles when you sit down and talk to Saskatoon, the city of Saskatoon as a minister or as a department, much of the principles have not been changed in terms of the original plan of the fluid movement of goods and services in the safety perspective. It's not as if we turned around and said, here Saskatoon, here's the money to do this project. Do as you wish. There were some certain guiding principles and some

concessions given to the overall plan attached to the Asia-Pacific corridor initiative. Is that correct?

[09:30]

**Mr. Stamatinos:** — That's correct.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Now in terms of the dollars that may flow either out of the Department of Highways to the city or to the cities versus the money flowing in from other partners such as the federal government, are you able to give us an idea as to what we give out in terms of dollars to the city of Saskatoon, to this particular city here and other cities versus what we get in the federal government to get these projects under way? Or does the federal government fund them separately through their own channels? How does that work?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Sorry, just to clarify, you're asking . . . So for example, this particular project, whether the federal money flows to the province and then the city or directly to the city? Is that . . .

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Okay, I'll talk to my official. In instances where both federal and provincial monies are going towards a specific project, it gets a little convoluted because sort of every program is somewhat different. You know, in some cases some projects, money, federal money flows through the province and then out to municipalities. In other cases, the agreement is directly from the federal government to the municipality and also the provincial government to the municipality. In some cases it's sort of a tripartite thing. So in this specific instance because it's sort of a couple separate projects, Clarence and then the other one. I'm just going to get George to detail that for you.

**Mr. Stamatinos:** — Thank you, Minister. It is a bit convoluted, but I'll try to explain how the funding was actually managed. In the case of the Asia-Pacific gateway corridor initiative for the Clarence Avenue interchange, and there was actually two interchanges that were really close together. The way it worked is the province entered into an agreement for our share of the funding direct with the city of Saskatoon. And then Canada, the federal government entered into a separate agreement for their share with the city of Saskatoon. It's just the way they structured the programs. I don't know if that helps.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. Now what I'm getting at here, just so you know my motive here, is to try and see, based on what you have indicated you spend on an annual basis, is there any federal funding flowing specifically for the overall Highways spending in the province of Saskatchewan — not including the initiatives as we discussed with the Canada Asia-Pacific corridor money, as in the Saskatoon and the Lewvan project; let's set that aside for now — but is there any money the federal government gives you today for highway infrastructure construction?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — To get to sort of the broad point of your question, I guess, and I'll still use that Saskatoon project as an example, and then I'm going to get Jennifer to give you the detail on the entire province, the whole budget. I appreciate you

clarifying where you're going with that.

For example that South Circle Drive project, I'm rounding off, but it was in the neighbourhood of \$100 million of federal funding and provincial funding. In that example, it wasn't as if the federal amount of that funding, the 100 million, wasn't included in dollar amounts you saw in provincial expenditures. It wasn't like it inflated that amount. The 100 million of provincial funding was, but not of the federal funding. Now having said that, there is some federal funding involved, so I'll get Jennifer to give you the breakdown on that.

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — For the federal funding that's flowing back through the General Revenue Fund for the projects that the ministry is completing, there's \$23 million that's flowing back to the province. And I'll give you a breakdown.

The first one is for the major infrastructure component, and that's for projects such as Highway 1 and Lewvan interchange, Highway 39 Estevan truck route bypass, Highway 11 twinning. So we're expecting to have \$14.6 million flow back to the province this year for capital expenditures that we're making that are eligible towards those projects. We have our gateway border crossing fund. And the gateway border crossing fund is for the Regina West bypass supporting the Regina infrastructure, and we have \$8.4 million flowing back to the General Revenue Fund for those capital projects.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. And so in essence then on those specific projects, you're getting \$23 million from the federal government flowed through the General Revenue Fund. Is that correct? Okay. Now what does the federal government collect in terms of the estimation of what we refer to as the gas tax? And I'm assuming it's GST [goods and services tax] on gasoline purchases. But on the gas tax itself, what is the estimated revenues that the federal government sucks out of our province?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — We have the provincial gas tax numbers, but we don't have the numbers generated by the federal government. That doesn't fall under our Ministry of Finance. I assume we'll probably be able to help you with that. But we have the provincial tax numbers, but not the federal ones.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. But I think it would be safe to assume, if they're roughly \$200 million 10 years ago, they're probably anywhere in the neighbourhood of 250 to \$300 million this year alone, just based on consumption and so on and so forth.

So we often hear that number being expressed on a number of fronts, you know. So if it is indeed between 2 and \$300 million a year that the federal government does get from the province in terms of what we all referred to as gas tax, I'm just trying to determine how much have they put back into Saskatchewan, based on all the gas tax the people of Saskatchewan pay. That's the purpose of the question. But we'll certainly ask our critic for Finance to get those answers for us because I think that's an important part of what we're trying to achieve here.

Now I would ask the . . . In terms of the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation, I want to shift gears here a bit. Could you explain to me in terms of last year, there was a \$700,000 allocation in the budget for shortline rail sustainability, but

there's nothing in this year's budget. However, earlier this month, you announced \$700,000 for shortline rail sustainability. Can you explain what's happened here?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Absolutely, because there was some transition. Just for clarification too, I wasn't expecting questions today on the Grain Car Corporation because, while it falls under my file, it's not a Ministry of Highways file. So I don't have officials with me from Grain Car Corp for any detailed questions, but I'll certainly attempt to answer any of the questions I can.

The \$700,000 on the shortline sustainability program, we think, is very important. You know, when you boil it right down, it's as simple as this: more product, more heavy loads that move on rail instead of our highways. Just saves a large amount of wear and tear on the highways and it's better for all of us. We think that's money well invested.

The reason you're asking about this, sort of the line item expense, is that as the Grain Car Corporation sort of moves forward with this mandate, we find them doing, sort of having more and more contact, doing more and more work with the shortlines and it just seemed that it probably was a better fit and was just logical. So that funding, the reason you're not seeing the line item in the ministry estimates any more, it's actually in the Grain Car Corp estimates now. They actually will be paying that money out to the shortlines. But rest assured the shortlines will still be getting that sustainability grant.

[09:45]

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. So the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation entity itself, they are not borrowing that 700,000. That money is actually granted to the GRF [General Revenue Fund]? That's my question, I guess.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — That money is actually from . . . They're not borrowing it. They actually have that cash on hand.

**Mr. Belanger:** — And that cash came from the GRF?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — No, it would have come from revenues of the Grain Car Corporation.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So obviously the Grain Car Corporation leases out these grain cars, right? And I'm not sure if that's still the arrangement now, but you lease out the grain cars to a different shortline. Is that how the revenues are generated? I just need to know where the \$700,000 is coming from.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Yes. We've made sort of . . . In the last few years we've made kind of a concerted effort to make the hopper cars available to the shortlines. We just think it makes sense. So you know, broadly speaking I'm sure there's some other sources of revenue I'm not thinking of, but generally they make the money from leasing, yes.

**Mr. Belanger:** — And in terms of the hopper cars themselves, I know that there was an effort and I think we've done it as well, in terms of selling some of the cars to different groups and different organizations that had an interest overall. And I'm just trying to vaguely . . . The thought is certainly vague in terms of

what was done in terms of the argument for leasing versus selling some of the hopper cars that we had in our ownership. How is the ownership perspective of the hopper cars now? Is there 50 per cent owned by us and 50 by different shortline rails or is there a process to sell them or is this going to be a lease on a continual basis?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — If you're talking about the actual hopper car fleet that the Grain Car Corporation controls, no, we haven't sold any of them. And I, to the best of my knowledge, I don't believe it happened under your government either. The leasing I was referring to was the cars that are owned and controlled by the Grain Car Corporation are . . . Some of those are leased to the shortlines and then that generates the revenue back.

**Mr. Belanger:** — No, I just understood that there was some discussion on the actual purchase of some of the railcars over the process of time. I didn't realize whether we'd done it or whether it was fast-tracked under your government. I just understood that there was that concept out there. So I guess just to reassure folks out there that there isn't a large-scale sale of the hopper cars to any private interest, that the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation owns these hopper cars and they'll continue owning them, and the revenues that they generate from this is basically how they operate their . . .

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — You know, I'm struggling to think back, you know, the comment you made about some of them being sold under your tenure. I don't remember that happening, and as of right now it's business as usual. We're focusing mostly on, you know, obviously the leasing, some of it to the class 1's, but we've made more of a concerted effort to lease those to the shortlines.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. No, I can just recall that there was some discussion on the sale versus the lease on the hopper cars and that, you know, obviously I wasn't certain as to whether that was a practice that was continued or the discussion continued after we were out of government.

But I want to focus now on the P.A. to Saskatoon highway. And I just want to know when was this actual project announced, the first time that there was a plan to twin the highway between Prince Albert and Saskatoon. I want to know basically what year that began.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — To your point about the project announcement, we don't have the exact date, but I get what you're driving at. I believe you're testing my memory now, but I think the project was announced under your administration with a completion date. Again we don't have it with us, but I believe 2016, 2017, something like that. Under the Building Canada fund infrastructure agreement which brought the federal funding into play, that was signed in April of 2008, and that in turn helped us to accelerate the project to a much earlier completion date and it will be completed this year, this construction year, 2012.

**Mr. Belanger:** — No, I think it's absolutely important that the people of Saskatchewan know that the double laning of highways, whether it's from Lloydminster to North Battleford, whether it's from North Battleford to Saskatoon, whether it's improving Highway No. 1, whether it's improving the highway



between Saskatoon and Prince Albert, these are all very essential for the fluid movement of goods and services and safe travel of folks. I'm not disputing the fact that the month and the year to point out who started it or not, but certainly I think in the overall perspective that there is that good investment in double laning a lot of these highways. And these processes take time. And obviously people are very encouraged and happy when the process moves along further and faster. And certainly I think some of the work that has been done and will continue to be done is the whole notion that our highway system has always needed improvements over the years and it'll be a multi-year, it will be years and years before you're able to finally get the highways to the condition that people of Saskatchewan will be happy with. So it is certainly an ongoing challenge.

That being said, I'm just trying to figure out, in the last four or five years on an annual basis, what have you committed to the twinning projects between P.A. and Saskatoon? Like obviously there's money set aside in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010. And where are we in terms of the next year or so in terms of future spending . . . [inaudible] . . . project?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — We'll just check those numbers.

On the twinning from the whole project from Prince Albert to Saskatoon, the entire project cost is estimated to be 150 and a half million dollars. We don't have that annualized breakdown here, but we can certainly provide that to you if you like.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — And I would point out, I think your point was how much spent in twinning per year. We'll provide that. I would point out though that I believe 2008 there was, on top of the work being done in this project, there was also work being done on, Highway 1 was being completed as well. So we can provide that to you as well.

**Mr. Belanger:** — All right.

**The Chair:** — If the committee's in agreement, we'll take a short 10-minute break.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**The Chair:** — I'll call the committee back to order, and we'll resume debate on the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. Mr. Belanger.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I just want to again point out that I think it's important, just in terms of developing capacity as a province and certainly talking about sustainable development, that we continue, certainly from our perspective we want to encourage a continued construction of highways throughout the province. And certainly I think double laning highways between Prince Albert and Saskatoon are essential for the long-term health of our economic plan, so to speak. And we need to continue some of that work, so it's with a great amount of interest that we look at the Highways department and look to the spending patterns and so on and so forth to make sure that that work continues because, as I mentioned, it's one of the biggest, important investments that we make as a province.

Now the question, I want to shift a bit of focus now to the northern part of our province. And as you know, Mr. Minister, I have been very critical over time of the lack of spending in northern Saskatchewan. And the reason I've been critical is simply because we don't see the amount of construction happening in the North overall because, you know, obviously it is a concern. And it's a grave concern expressed by a number of people in communities all throughout the North.

Now I think as a minister you're very aware that when you throw out a number, as ministers do, people sometimes will believe that number and most times won't. It doesn't just happen in the North; it happens all over the place. So when you speak about a specific budget item, a specific budget item, say for example, the northern roads allocation — I want to shift focus, being a northern MLA, for a second — when you say, we have committed X amount of millions of dollars for the North, I would like you to kind of break it down between maintenance of those roads, as you've done with your overall provincial budget versus actual new construction. And the reason I say that is because a lot of people in the North need to know which highways are going to receive priority over your five-year plan and which highways are not because obviously everyone would like to see their highway fixed.

So for the northern highways budget itself, what amount of money is being allocated? And of that allocation for northern roads, what amount is being spent for new construction or paving of some of the roads in northern Saskatchewan?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Thank you. I'm just going to back up a minute before I address that. Our officials tell me your question previously on the detailed breakdown on the twinning projects, we hope to have those numbers for you before we're done today. And I'll certainly provide those. If by chance we don't, we'll provide those in a follow-up. And I will get to your detailed question on capital in the North in just a minute.

As far as that breakdown between capital and other planned expenditure, planned work for this year on major capital is just over ten and a half million dollars in the North. And major preservation, just a bit of a different category, but again what everyone would view as major capital projects is 4.9 million. So you're looking at, you know, between 15 and \$16 million. Then there's a category called partnership expenditures of a million and a half, and then other work in the North would be \$25.5 million.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. No, I think it's important that, as you probably are aware, there are many First Nations and there are many municipalities in the North that have always expressed the need for more and more highways being constructed. And I need not tell you, Mr. Minister, the fact that in northern Saskatchewan that our roads are in deplorable condition. They are. And we can certainly go back and forth in terms of your comment, well you could have fixed them when you were minister, and I can say, well you're the minister now. But that wouldn't be productive. It wouldn't be productive because we can do that all day. However, however I would say to you today that the North has got to start being in the train of thought through your ministry, primarily because of a number of issues that I want to express today.

Number one is it's important for the economy of our region. As you know that the uranium mining industry is huge. The tourism opportunity is huge. And of course you've also got some of the other opportunities in the oil and gas. So the people of Saskatchewan would say, well why would we want to invest that kind of money into a highway system in northern Saskatchewan because exactly what's the benefit for us overall? Well it's a huge opportunity for the economy in general.

And the second thing is that in preparing for that growth — we talk about growth in general; both parties do it — we want to be able to make sure that our highway infrastructure, in terms of preparation for the opportunity for an improved economy, that we have a good, safe highway system developed. And I think people will be patient even if it takes a number of years. We've always maintained that.

Another good opportunity, I would suggest, is the Fort Mac [Fort McMurray] road, McMurray, Alberta. If that road were to open up in our region, it would be a tremendous opportunity, not just for people to travel on a road to go work in the oil sector, but for the traffic back in terms of tourism, investment, and so on and so forth.

So when we speak about improvement into our highway system, I guess the biggest message we would have for you as the Minister of Highways is we need to make sure that northern highways receive your attention. It's not an area of the province where we can neglect. And some would suggest because of the political situation, which I don't buy at all, it's not an area of the province that we should forget because the opportunity for the province overall on an economic basis is huge. It is huge and we can't continue to ignore a solid northern road strategy.

In fact when we were in government, and this is prior to me becoming the Minister of Highways, I think the Minister of Highways at the time was Eldon Lautermilch from Prince Albert, or it may have been Maynard Sonntag from Meadow Lake — one of them anyway. But they embarked on this ambitious goal. And some of the goals, of course, identified within the Highways ministry was the twinning projects we spoke about. And we're glad that the twinning between Prince Albert and Saskatoon is proceeding and proceeding quickly. We're happy with that.

[10:15]

But the key component of that strategy, in terms of highway and transportation improvements overall, was the northern investment. And I think at the time it was \$65.5 million that was set aside for what they called community access roads.

And I would be, I'm sure I'll get a lot of grief from the member from Cumberland if I didn't mention some of the other roads that he's also spoken about, like the Stanley Mission highway, the Sandy Bay highway, Pelican Narrows road, the Cumberland House road. These are some of the issues that he's raised overall.

And so from the economic perspective, Mr. Minister, northern Saskatchewan cannot be ignored any longer. It's going to create a huge problem for us — all of us — not just the northern communities, but for all of us.

So if we park the political argument aside and look at this from the economic perspective whether it's good, safe highways for industry, for people; whether it's the opportunity to make important connections to Fort McMurray, Alberta, to the whole northwest region; or whether it's to develop tourism and opportunity for the northeast region, there's incredible potential there. So from the economic perspective, investments into northern roads is, I think, key. And it's a solid argument to make.

So my point to you today, Mr. Minister, is will you put northern Saskatchewan's priorities back on the map and start investing in some of the highways and the challenges that we have so that we can become a stronger and more independent people? And it's good for the economy overall, and that's the point that I'd like you to respond to, please.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — You know, your point about sometimes a political debate isn't particularly helpful, I certainly would concur with. But I don't want anybody watching this to get the wrong impression, and I feel like I need to clarify some of your comments. For instance your comments when you were in government, the NEIS [northern economic infrastructure strategy] program you're referring to, first of all it's interesting to note there was federal funding involved in that as well.

And also just to clarify, I don't want anyone getting the impression that under your administration there was huge amounts of capital flowing into the North and now suddenly there isn't. That just simply isn't the case. I have the breakdown in front of me — major capital, major preservation. Your last full fiscal year in government, you're looking in the neighbourhood of 5.8 under major capital, and ten and a half under ours. 4.9 for major, less than half the amount of capital flowed into the North in your last full fiscal year in government, than now. So again that may not be particularly productive, but I don't want anyone watching this to get the wrong impression of what's going on there.

As far as your comments about the North — you know, the future — I agree with you. Absolutely the North is, I view it as very, very important to the future economic growth of this province. I guess how I see this isn't particularly so much as a separation between the North and the rest of the province, I see this as an overall highways issues. You're absolutely right. There's some highways in the North that are desperately in need of reconstruction, but you know, as you've raised in question period lately, the CAA [Canadian Automobile Association] worst roads contest, there's people in other areas of the province that would certainly argue that they have highways that are in badly need of reconstruction.

As you're well aware, you're a former minister, I mean we have a lot of highways. We have over 26 000 kilometres in the province. It's a huge task and I think, I think we've made a very good start. We've accelerated capital funding greatly. We're doing a lot of highways work. Do we have a lot left to do? Yes, absolutely we do.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. This is the way I see the way of the land or the lay of the land right here. Okay. Now there are many people out there that believe — and I'll give you an example — that the money allocated for some of the northern projects were

taken off the list for highways to be improved. And there are a number of people that believe . . . And a good example I would use is the Wollaston Lake road which is a 112-kilometre investment that we were prepared to make as a government. I just want to go there for a second. Because you chose to go there, I'll go there as well.

And there are people believe that the money allocated for the Wollaston Lake project, which the province at that time committed to doing on their own if the federal government wouldn't put any money into it . . . And so we were prepared to go alone on the Wollaston Lake road for a number of reasons and the least of which was political consideration because Wollaston Lake has always been a great community and has always been great for us as a political party. However it was greater than that. It was to help improve opportunity economically. It was to help address the rising cost of food because, as you know, the choice we made as a government is do we spend money on food freight subsidy or do we spend money on a highway system that will allow people to go in and out of these communities and shop at places that have lower food prices? Because at the end of the day, the investment has to be into highway infrastructure. That's the long-term solution. As painful as it was, money was allocated towards highway construction as the overall solution to the high food costs of northern Saskatchewan.

This was the same vision attached to the Far North access program. The Far North — I'm talking about Black Lake and Stony Rapids, of course. And there was a lot of discussion on the south shore connections for some of the other communities, being Uranium City and Fond-du-Lac and of course the complement of barges and ice roads and so on and so forth to really begin to address the transportation needs of the Northwest . . . or the Far North, sorry, and in general addressing the high cost of fuel and food and so on and so forth which was a traumatic challenge for many northern and far northern residents.

So our plan as a government was to spend money on highways so they can improve access to these communities and therefore reduce their costs overall for food and fuel, giving them access to southern markets. That was the whole vision. And we got a lot of grief at times and some people were impatient with the process, but there was that plan. So there was money set aside for, I'll use the example of Wollaston Lake, Hatchet Lake. Now there are some believe that now that the amount of work being done on Hatchet Lake road or Wollaston Lake road has been slow walked to a point where there's little or no progress.

So the question that I would say, Mr. Minister, is that there was money allocated and you chose to use that money elsewhere. And last year I asked you during committee how the process works when you make an allocation for a budget. And you explained to me, and I concurred with you, that's how the process works when a minister makes an announcement for highways, is that you don't just do willy-nilly announcements and do announcements tomorrow morning if you wish. There is a very, very rigid process in place for highways to be allocated resources.

So when I say to you today that Wollaston Lake was an identified road that the province was prepared to build on its

own, with or without federal funding under the northern access program, the money was there. Under Cumberland House, as an example, when we made announcements for the roads, the money was there. When we made announcements to pave the road through Pelican Narrows First Nations, the money was there.

And I can remember having a discussion with the mayor and the MLA for Cumberland when we spoke about the Cumberland House highway, and the mayor indicated to us at the time that, when he called your ministry, your office, to ask you why the project for Cumberland House was never proceeded with, one of your department, one of your office staff, I'm not sure who it was, advised the mayor that the money was never there. And that to me I think is poor politics. Because when we make allocations under a certain program, as current minister and as a former minister, you can't go about making announcements unless the money has been allocated to your department and your department has received your approval to fund those projects.

It's not just one day we decide to get up and pave a road somewhere. There's a process we have to go through, as you described last year and as I concurred that's how it works. So the Wollaston Lake project, a question I would have today: why are we slow walking that project when the money was allocated to complete that highway to improve access to that particular First Nations and community overall?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — I wonder if you could clarify something for me. You've used the terms the money was allocated, the money was set aside, and the money was there. As you well know as a former minister, that it's an annual appropriation.

You know, I have the dollar amounts year by year that was spent on that. In 2005-06, under your tenure, there was \$14,000 spent. In 2006-07, there was \$134,000 spent. In 2007-08, which would have been your budget, 574,000. The next four years would have been under the watch of this government — there was \$2.3 million spent; following year, \$726,000 spent; following year, 3.1 million; and then \$3.3 million spent. So you can see clearly that the spending under the tenure of this government far exceeded the spending under your government.

But I was wondering if you could just clarify because as you know as a former minister, you make the announcement; you set the priority. But as far as saying the money was set aside, that's not the way the process works under this government or under your government, so I'm wondering if you could clarify your comments, please.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I would say this. At the outset you indicated \$1.7 billion four-year mandate. That's what you said as a minister: our plan in the last election was to spend \$1.7 billion on highways over the term of our government. So that's a multi-year statement you made. And then you said, we're actually 2.2 billion over that four-year plan. Well I would suggest that as a former government and as a former minister, we were afforded the same opportunity to make multi-year commitments.

In terms of your comment about this is what we spent in this year, well, Mr. Minister, you would know that in developing a

highway there's ramping up, there's environmental processes, there's design work, there is consultation with the impacted community. In those initial few years, the investment is not huge to achieve some of those goals. Eventually our plan is, and has always been, to get the road through to Wollaston Lake.

Now you have to accept the fact that a minister and a government can make multi-year commitments. Even though your budget's allocated on an annual basis, you're allowed to make multi-year commitments and you can identify the money set aside within that four-year time frame to do that. And we set aside \$65.5 million over the term of two or three years to address the northern community access roads. And as a minister, you're allowed to do that even though your allocation is on an annual basis. So when you say that, it doesn't make sense why you would accuse us that we can't do that, yet your opening statement, you're saying that's what we're doing.

So again I would ask the question: how important is the Wollaston Lake project, the completion of that project, to your ministry? Are you going to get the road done? And secondly, have you been . . . This project has been slow walked the last several years. And the question that people of Wollaston Lake and I know my colleague from Cumberland would ask, why are we slow walking that project? Some people, and I might as well let you know, some people are suggesting to me that the resources allocated to the Wollaston Lake project has been redirected to the P.A.-Saskatoon project. Now I can't confirm that with them, nor do I encourage it. But that's what the general belief is from a lot of different quarters and different people that are out there.

So I guess I would ask the question. Have you reallocated money from the Wollaston Lake project, which was set aside over a multi-year commitment, to redirect those funds to the Prince Albert-Saskatoon double laning project?

[10:30]

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Just to back up a minute to some of your earlier comments. You know, you spoke in terms of our commitment, our election commitments. And certainly as a political party, you have every right to make commitments, to make promises so people know what to expect when they make the decision who they're going to vote for. I am certainly not debating that point. In fact your party did a great deal of that in the last election. You committed to building highways everywhere for everyone and building bridges, and the commitments ran into the billions of dollars. And the people evaluated that and decided who they wanted as their government.

The point I take exception to though is to constantly refer to it in terms of the money was set aside; the money was there. It gives people the impression that somehow there's a pool of money sitting in an account waiting to pay for the Wollaston Lake road. That simply isn't the case. There is allocations done every year in a budget done annually, and priorities are set by the government and projects proceed. Now you very clearly made the case that the Wollaston Lake road was your number one priority. I understand that.

The issue that we have, of course, is . . . Our first Finance

minister in our government was fond of saying that if the decisions to be made were between good projects and bad projects, the decision would be easy, but frequently it's between good projects and other good projects, which makes decisions on where to proceed and where not to proceed very difficult. That's the choice that we face continuously in Highways.

Absolutely, we want to see the Wollaston Lake project proceed. That's why I, you know, when I read through the numbers, the amount of money, there's been millions of dollars spent there. I mean it's an enormous project. So again it's a choice of, as we make our decisions year by year, which projects are going to proceed and to what extent that year. It's very difficult. There is pressures all over the province with people asking for projects, projects that you have raised yourself in the House. You know, you mention the thing with the bridge. You know at the same time the Wollaston Lake people are wanting more work done on their road. People of Prince Albert are wanting a second bridge. There's demands for, because of the growth in the economy, for more infrastructure all over the place. You raised twinning of highways earlier today. There's demands for more twinning.

And then of course there's a lot of roads that have deteriorated that need to be rebuilt as well. So it, as you know, I mean you were faced with those same decisions. There's a lot of demand and a finite number of dollars.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I would point out what's important at the end of the day is that as a minister, and certainly as a government, you have the opportunity to make multi-year commitments. Even though the budgets are allocated on an annual basis, if a government chooses to make a commitment to (a) in this instance to Wollaston Lake project over a period of seven or eight years, they can certainly make the announcement and they can make the project happen. And once they make the commitment, every single year they've got to allocate the proper resources through the Treasury Board process.

So when you say money is allocated on an annual basis, you're not allowed to make multi-year commitments, well I disagree with you. As a former minister and as a former member of the former government, we are allowed to make multi-year commitments as you are allowed to make multi-year commitments, as you've indicated you have.

And you talk about the pressing priorities of construction of highways. Well you just said today that, well we start off with 1.7 billion but we spend 2.2 billion. So you're kind of conflicting with your earlier statement to this statement. So I'll kind of explain it to you if I have to. Number one, as the Minister of Highways, you can indeed make multi-year commitments. You do it every day. You do it every day. As a government you can make multi-year commitments.

Now if a new government comes in later on, it's within their right, if these commitments aren't hard and legal, that they can change the priorities of those commitments, which I suggest that was done on the Wollaston Lake project because we don't see evidence of the continual funding and priority of the Wollaston Lake project being displayed by your ministry and certainly your government.

So I want to clarify to those that are listening or people that might be interested in this particular issue, that absolutely you can make multi-year commitments as the Minister of Highways. And absolutely your government has done that. We had the same right to do it, and we did it.

Now I think it's important to note that from the NDP perspective, we have spent a lot of money over the years on highways. You're going to spend money on highways. It's a fact of life for every government.

And yes, we do support the bridge, the second bridge in Prince Albert. I think there's a lot of people that support the second bridge in Prince Albert. A lot of people have supported the twinning of North Battleford to Saskatoon. A lot of people support the improved highways in northern Saskatchewan. And the thing about it, Mr. Minister, is that we can achieve all that because it's not going to happen in one year as you keep talking about. It's going to happen over a multi-year point or a multi-year strategy. So that's my point, is we're allowed to make multi-year commitments. And I would suggest to you that today when you made the reference that the dollars we spent on the Wollaston Lake projects or other northern projects was minimal, that was a ramping up to the actually construction phase.

And yes, we made commitments as a government and we made commitments as politicians. And certainly during the last election, I made a very clear commitment to communities — such as Turnor Lake which is Birch Narrows, to Dillon which is a First Nations community, to English River which is also a First Nations, known as Patuanak, and to Canoe Lake — that if we got elected and if we got support, we'd pave those roads. We'd pave those roads. That's a commitment I made as a candidate. And I would suggest to you today that had we won the election, we'd have got the job done. We would have got the job done.

Now that's not a commitment from a political perspective. It is a clear commitment to recognize the fact that many of these communities, these thousands of First Nations people that travel on those roads — on your roads right now — at great risk to their family and at great cost to the economy overall and huge damage to their vehicle, that they're saying today that they want to be treated much the same as the rest of the province in terms of having access to safe highways.

So I'm not going to apologize in any way, shape, or form for my commitments to pave those roads for those four communities within my constituency that I've identified. I don't think the member from Cumberland is going to apologize for wanting highway commitments that were made under the previous government followed through. That's all we're asking for, is follow-through.

So I think the point that you raised today is that it's multi-year commitment. You're all allowed to make multi-year commitments. I would suggest that when the Sask Party took over our office that the North was taken off the radar, and I think you guys made chronic or made clear choices as to where your money for the highways was going to go. And some of those projects identified under the previous NDP [New Democratic Party] government were taken off the construction

list. And I think that's . . . That's the point I tried to raise earlier, that the North needs their roads repaired.

These First Nations communities have every right to request and demand paved roads. And to top it all off, I would suggest to the people of Saskatchewan, it's absolutely great for the economy. The hundreds of people that work at the northern mines from southern points, the huge demand on the uranium industry for repair of their vehicles that when they haul out all the resources, that the damage to the NRT [Northern Resources Trucking] trucks is just phenomenal. These are all good, solid arguments for one simple message: let's fix those northern roads and let's concentrate on them. Let's not forget them.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — I just would like to clarify a point that you made on several occasions, that you said that I said that we can't make multi-year commitments. At no point have I said that. We do multi-year commitments all the time.

The point that I was making was that you referred on several occasions, you used terminology such as, the money was set aside. That gives people . . . I get the politics, that you want to make grandiose statements for the constituents listening. But that gives people the impression that there somehow was, the entire amount of funding was put aside in an account and it got spent somewhere else. You as a former minister know full well that that is not the case.

And I at no point said that governments can't make multi-year commitments. It's part of government. We've done it many times. We'll continue to do it. My exception I take is to your comments and your explanation of the money being set aside, which simply is not the case.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well you made the reference to the NEIS program, NEIS. And I think that's the northern economic infrastructure strategy. And a big part of that was \$65.5 million northern community access road project. That \$65.5 million, where has that money gone to, Mr. Minister? Where is that 65 million bucks?

[10:45]

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — To your question on \$65 million, the ministry has provided me with some actual numbers spent. In 2005, '06, and '07, as your multi-year commitment, you spent some money in that. There was just over 1.8 million spent in 2005, a little over 2 million spent in 2006, and 6.8 million spent in 2007. But again that was out of an annual appropriation. The \$65 million you speak to — and I just want to clarify this — it's not like that was a pool of money sitting there. That was a commitment your government made which you were completely entitled to do, but it would have had to go through the annual budgetary process. So it's not a case of, well what did you do with the rest of the 65 million? If, you know . . . I'm assuming that if you'd have been successful in that election, you would have went through the budget process and asked for another segment of money to continue on with that.

But I just want to clarify that that \$65 million wasn't sitting in an account somewhere waiting for this. Again there was an election was held. And you were certainly entitled to campaign on that as one of your commitments, just as during this last

election you listed a number of other capital commitments that would have been your priority. But there wasn't an allocation done for the full amount of the money.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I guess we're going to agree to disagree. Because at the same time we made commitments to different projects, and I spoke about that earlier — the projects on the Lewvan here in the city; the south Circle Drive project in Saskatoon; the work being done on No. 1, because obviously safety on No. 1, the Trans-Canada Highway, was a huge problem — and we proceeded to commit on all those fronts. And we've seen great work being done by the department over time. As long as they had the commitment, the department can do well, and they did good work.

And so we see those projects proceeding, and that was my earlier point. Prince Albert to Saskatoon twinning was announced many, many years ago. The Lloydminster to North Battleford twinning was completed, I'd say, maybe four or five years ago. The No. 1 Highway improvements, of course they're a work-in-progress, but there was a lot of work being done and completed during our term in government. And south of No. 1, our chances of getting support and getting an MLA out of there are pretty tough. But as our former Premier said, we govern for all of Saskatchewan, not just our respective constituencies.

And that's the message I would like to leave you today, is that you govern for all of Saskatchewan, so don't ignore the North. Because the North . . . Not just from people's safety perspective; that is an economic argument as well. That's my point today. And you're allowed to make multi-year commitments, you know. And my point is, you've just got to provide the leadership to achieve that.

And I think you took the money and used it somewhere else. That's what I think. Because despite what you may think, you're not allowed to do that. The \$65.5 million was identified, and it was announced by, at the time, Premier Calvert. And you said earlier, \$2.2 billion dollars over the next four or five years. I don't know what billion dollar figure you alluded to, but you said that. And you have every right to say that as the Minister of Highways. We've done the same thing. I'm just saying, the difference between our announcement and your announcement is you're allowed to make multi-year commitments. The problem I see is that you took our northern commitments that spoke about Cumberland House, that spoke about Wollaston Lake, that spoke about English River paving project, that spoke about a number of other initiatives, and you cancelled it. You cancelled it. You took the money elsewhere. That's my assertion today.

Now I'm imploring you now again, as I mentioned at the outset, we can sit here and debate this whole thing through. Now is that constructive? I don't know. But I would say this though, from the economic perspective of northern Saskatchewan, even if you don't want to recognize the North from a political perspective, you can't deny from the economic perspective that the mines are asking your government — I know you've had meetings with Cameco, with Areva, with some of the northern businesses — that are asking you to improve the highways.

And the one point they're saying to you is that in order for us to extract the resources from the North in a safe, affordable

fashion, we've got to get our northern roads fixed. And that's a good point from the northern mines, absolutely. And I want to say at the outset that the northern uranium mines are very well supported. And we think that Cameco does a terrific job in employing northern people. Now I can tell you where Cameco is really upset with your government is on the northern roads. We've seen pictures of semis loaded down with fuel, with acid, with yellowcake, stuck in mud because they can't get through some of the roads.

Now the people of Saskatchewan, if you can envision that, if you can see that picture in your mind, you've got to ask the question, well why aren't they fixing those roads while they're taking out the resources? And that's exactly the northern people's point. At the very least, if you're going to extract the resources and get dollars from them as a government, my point, at least have the decency to fix our roads so they can extract them in a safe fashion and not threaten our communities and our people. And at the very least, some of the things left behind for the North once some of these mines are depleted is at least we'll have a decent, safe highway infrastructure. That's the point.

And today if you so choose to make a multi-year commitment as a Minister of Highways, you can do that right now. And you've done it before. So my point is, we've made multi-year commitments on twinning a number of highways in the province. Those highways have continued to be worked on as we speak, under two governments. They made the same multi-year commitments on a northern road strategy, also the northern road strategy stopped under your watch. So it just simply leads one to conclude that you took the money and put it somewhere else. That's what I conclude, and that's what a lot of northern leaders conclude.

And I want to give you a good example of what I'm going to be doing in the next couple of weeks, what I'm speaking about. I'm going to rise in the Assembly over the next several weeks to present a petition. This really encompasses my point. And this petition is really on Highway No. 165. Now Highway 165 is in the Beauval area, and Beauval skirts a northern First Nations, English River because the community of Patuanak's 80 miles away from them, but they have a treaty land area that's been set aside, and that's where a lot of the English River people . . . It's part of the English River First Nations. So they are neighbours, Beauval and English River, and both the communities want to undertake to upgrade a section of highway that they share, Highway 165. So both the mayor — and there's a new chief obviously, and I haven't spoken with him yet — but the old chief was quite adamant that these roads get fixed, especially that impact his First Nations members.

So why are they asking for this particular stretch of highway to be improved? Because they say to you — and I want to say this clear as I can — the amount of heavy-haul traffic through their community, both Beauval and English River First Nations, is a tremendous strain on that particular section of highway. It's only about 10 kilometres, maybe 15 at the most. And they have mine trucks going back and forth hauling all kinds of chemicals, hauling yellowcake I'm assuming back, and the traffic there is pretty steady. And that highway is beaten up pretty bad. So the mayor and I'm assuming now the new chief is saying, we have some serious concerns as to the traffic volume on that road and the fact that it's all these mining trucks.

So the petition I'm going to read in the Assembly over the next couple of weeks are going to be signed by both First Nations members of English River and by the community of Beauval. And they're asking you as a minister, and this is what's important:

That the Highway 165 between Beauval and English River First Nations has become a very busy thoroughfare with heavy truck traffic coming from uranium mines as well as local traffic and a large amount of pedestrians; and that there's no room for pedestrians travelling between Beauval and English River to walk safely alongside the highway and on the bridges that are on that stretch of highway; and that there's no proper lighting to allow safe walking, at night especially, as well as traffic.

While this is being treated as a heavy-haul road, it is not properly paved for the amount of heavy truck traffic going to and from the mines. And immediately after being repaired, the road will quickly begin to break apart and is in constant need of resurfacing. With the exception of even more traffic travelling to and from the mines in the coming months and years, the road will only get worse faster if it's left in its current state and that the safety of the residents, pedestrians, and drivers in the area is constantly at risk due to these four conditions.

So the mayor and the leadership of English River have sent this petition forward, and they're asking you, as a minister:

Therefore we, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan undertake to upgrade the section of Highway 165 between Beauval and the English River First Nation by adding proper lighting for pedestrian traffic, by adding space for pedestrians on the highway and its bridges, and by properly servicing the road with the material needed for a busy, heavy-haul road.

I'm going to be presenting that petition every day, Mr. Minister, so you know the background of the petition.

The mayor of Beauval is a very neutral political person. He doesn't get heavy into politics. He worries about his community. That's what he does. But he has brought this concern forward by saying, look, Mr. MLA, there's a huge risk here to citizens of Beauval and English River. There's huge strain on this particular stretch of highway. From what? Uranium trucks hauling dangerous chemicals to the mines and hauling yellowcake back. It's not water you're hauling in these trucks. It is acid. It is fuel. It is a lot of other chemical that the mine needs. And they're not hauling flour back. They're hauling yellowcake back. And so when you get most of the supplies from Alberta, these trucks drive down 155 and they go straight through 165, through Beauval and through English River on their way to the mines.

[11:00]

Now the mayor is saying to you today — what's the date today? — the mayor of Beauval is saying to you today, April 27th, Mr. Minister, that if nothing is done to improve the lighting, the safety, and integrity of that road, that he fears that the lives of his community, lives of the people within his community and

English River are at extreme risk. These trucks are travelling to these communities with dangerous loads. He's simply asking you today to upgrade the roads for passing lanes, for proper lighting, to look at the bridges that these trucks haul or drive over, and that if something happens in the future, then he wants you to know beforehand that that danger is very real and that threat is there.

Now every single day I will be presenting this petition to you of people that have signed this, and he wants you to know first-hand that again, not being political on his part, this matter has to be addressed. He's probably written you a letter, but he wants you to know that this is a serious concern for people in that area. So I'm going to ask you the question today: will you accept the mayor's predicament of this danger attached to this highway, and are you prepared to do something to address the points that he's raised in this petition and through this venue?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — The safety is absolutely of the utmost importance to this government. I will ask our ministry officials to have a look at that particular project to see if there is anything that needs to be done for us to improve safety. As far as the rebuild of the road, as you know, there are many, many miles of road in this province that need a rebuild. And again, projects need to be evaluated, but safety is of the utmost importance. I will ask my ministry officials to look at that to see if something needs to be done to improve the safety there.

You raised a number of different points in your last comments. And I just, I need to go back to the beginning of that though. I can't leave that unchallenged. You once again, even though I clarified it, you referred to me, you said I made comments that we couldn't make multi-year commitments. I have never said that. We certainly do make multi-year commitments. We make them all the time. The exception I took to your comments was inferring that somehow there was this pot of money at the end of the rainbow that you had set aside for that project. That just simply wasn't the case. That's all I was doing was referring to that.

As far as making commitments, you're certainly entitled to do that. Your party, as I mentioned earlier, went all over the province making commitments to everyone about everything during the last election campaign. That's your prerogative. But frankly some of the commitments your government, when you were in government, made in the past and not following through, questions the credibility.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Well obviously, we're not going to get anything on that front. But the point I would raise is that I made my statements, and I'll certainly stand by them. But that being said, there's other things I want to address in this last hour we have in estimates.

I will just want to just quickly share with you what the situation is on the Beauval- English River road, what 165 is all about. So as you travel north . . . Well, you're actually travelling east when you pick up your supplies in Edmonton, whether it's acids or whatever the case, and NRT, I think is the carrier there. And the NRT trucks, they travel down 155 to the Beauval forks and then the Beauval forks juts off northwest and that continues on 155. If you go straight through the junction, that's where 165 ends — or starts, sorry — and then it's about maybe 10

kilometres into the actual community of Beauval.

So these trucks, laden down with all these chemicals, are bouncing along that road at speeds that, you know, that are posted. And generally, NRT trucks are always aware of the safety rules and regulations, and you're not seeing any of them being careless in that sense. And then as they hit the community of Beauval, there's a lot of traffic in the community. The community is off to one side, but the arena — which recently burned down and they're certainly, I think, undertaking to rebuild — is on the opposite side of the road. So that's where all the traffic is. People going back and forth to their community arena on that busy 165.

So you've got all these trucks bouncing back and forth. You have the regular traffic, and you have people walking back and forth to the arena. And after they bounce along that section — it's pretty rough — these trucks continue going. And there's 1,000 people live in Beauval.

And then after you pass the community of Beauval, which is roughly about a couple of miles long in terms of where the community is, then you go down a dip because down the dip is the Beaver River. And as you come down, just as you pass Beauval, you're going down a dip and there's a sharp turn. And in that sharp turn, there's houses there of course. In that sharp turn, you hit a bridge, and there's two kind of streams there. The river forks off further down, and there's two bridges that cross those streams, and those bridges are stressed to the absolute limit. So after you go down through that little valley, they hit those two bridges, then they go up another large hill again, and then that's where the English River First Nations is. It's only about two or three miles apart. But you can see the winding, twisting road, the stressed out bridges, the huge population, and the poor road and the heavy traffic and the products they haul. Those are all the points that I think the mayor wanted to make.

So you're acutely aware as a Minister of Highways what exactly he's talking about and what I'm going to be talking about when I present my petition on a daily basis. So I just wanted to draw that picture out to you to show you exactly what the mayor is dealing with. So they're asking for a proper road, proper lighting, passing lanes, and also to address the bridge issues, because this is a huge risk to not only his community but the First Nations as well. So I want you to know that's exactly what he's talking about and what I'm talking about.

Now I want to shift focus a bit to the Prince Albert bridge if I can. And obviously you're aware that this Prince Albert bridge is an important issue for not only Prince Albert but the North in general. Prince Albert certainly has worked hard to get the title of gateway to the North. And Prince Albert is a great city, got great people, and it's a very vibrant part of our province, and they're growing. And most recently, the whole region was compromised in many ways, shapes, and form when the one bridge that they had to connect the north to the south, the Diefenbaker bridge, was found to have a crack in its girder, one of the main girders that protect the integrity of the bridge. Now obviously that crack appeared, and people started worrying about the risk to the public in general.

So today now I guess I would ask the minister in terms of a

update, an update as to what the findings were on the integrity of the bridge itself. Because obviously you work with the city, but you have engineers within your department that could give the city a lot of good advice. So how safe is that Diefenbaker bridge today, as we speak, for regular traffic and of course the industrial traffic as well?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — The question's specific and it's, as far as the safety side of it, it's a technical engineering question. So I'm going to ask Ted to comment on that.

**Mr. Stobbs:** — My name is Ted Stobbs. I'm the assistant deputy minister with regional services division with the Highways and Infrastructure. Thank you for your question.

Safety is, as the minister had alluded to, is very important to everybody in Saskatchewan, and in particular there was a lot of focus on that Prince Albert bridge to make sure that when the motoring public was crossing it, that it would be safe. The bridge itself is under the jurisdiction of the city of Prince Albert, but we have been working with them on the technical side to make sure that, you know, the analyses are completed and ensure that safety is not compromised for the public.

So today, as you probably know, the weights have been restored to normal regulated weights. We are inspecting the bridge on a weekly basis just to make sure that it continues to be safe for the public. The cracked girder that you referred to before has been repaired. So there was a lot of work completed by a contractor to jack it up, put some steel in place, weld and bolt it to it to complete the repair of that fracture.

This is an older bridge, so there's some things that we can continue to do to make sure that that doesn't happen again. And so there are plans by the city of Prince Albert to continue with those mitigation works, I guess if you want to call them, to, you know, provide a longer life for that bridge. And that will involve some more work. I think they're planning between May and August this year.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now I'm assuming, and correct me if I'm wrong, but you would be in charge of the engineering work within Highways?

**Mr. Stobbs:** — Yes.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Now from the engineering perspective . . . Obviously I understand that the city of P.A., that's their bridge, but obviously I'm assuming that there is collaboration with the Department of Highways in terms of a go-forward strategy from here. Now from a structural or an engineering perspective, what caused that crack in the girder? Can you give me some . . . for laymen's purposes?

**Mr. Stobbs:** — In laymen's purposes is that when we examined the failure, it looks like back in 1958 when it was constructed that the detail that they used in the weldings and how they support the bridge is different than what we would do today. So it was, I don't want to say substandard because that was the standard of the day, but certainly we build them differently today. And it's because of those details of how it was constructed that it led to a point on the bridge, and there's a number of points on that bridge that takes a lot of strain, and so



it was a just a fatigue-type of failure.

**Mr. Belanger:** — And that's the important point. Not obviously as an engineer and as an official, I'm asking you point blank that can this current bridge, given the standard of the day of the '50s, is this bridge subjected to further cracks and failures of that sort? Because you indicated in a very professional manner that you're trying to mitigate the challenge and not create a challenge to safety in general. But from a structural engineering perspective, can another crack appear, given the same circumstances over time?

**Mr. Stobbs:** — Well I think the obvious answer is yes, that another crack could appear. But there are a lot of steps that we've been taking to ensure that it won't happen again. And I can certainly tell everybody that the bridge is safe to use at the regulated weights today.

**Mr. Belanger:** — However you can't say, no, there won't be any cracks or challenge to the integrity of that bridge in the future from a structural engineering perspective.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — I don't think that any bridge at any point in time anywhere, that anybody can ever say that nothing will ever occur.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, but my point being that the age of the bridge and the fashion in which it was constructed is outdated. It wasn't at the time, but today now, according to the engineer, there are some different methods in how they construct these bridges. And my point being that the bridge, it's still there. It's still in the same age, and it still uses the same basic standards of the day which are obsolete today.

So my point is the possibility that there may be another crack in the girder or the integrity of the bridge be compromised to a point where safety is being threatened. Now I'd like to from the engineering perspective say, no, we're fairly confident that won't happen, or yes, that's always a possibility. That's what I'd like to know from an engineering perspective.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — It's very clear where your line of questioning is going. I mean you want to make the point that it's an old, outdated bridge and make your case for a new one. But the fact of the matter is our engineering staff do excellent work. They're looking at it on a weekly basis and they're reassuring us that it's safe.

[11:15]

**Mr. Belanger:** — That's why I'm asking the engineer the question. I'm not asking the politician the question. I'm saying from the perspective of the safety of the bridge, from the engineering perspective — I don't need a political answer — are we and can we expect that there may be that possibility of further erosion of the integrity of that bridge given its age? That's the question I have.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — He answered your question. And you're saying you're asking an engineering official, and you're putting an engineering official in an awkward political position, and I won't let that happen.

**Mr. Belanger:** — I'm asking him an engineering question. How is that . . .

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — He answered it.

**Mr. Belanger:** — I'd like him to reaffirm it. I didn't hear it completely.

**Mr. Stobbs:** — I just want to reiterate that engineers certainly take in the safety of the public when they do their work. And we've done everything to ensure that this is safe for the motoring public to use at regulated weights.

So your question is, would this ever happen again? And I would say from an engineering perspective, it's a very low risk of it happening again because of all the work that we have put into ensuring that it won't happen again, but I could never say never. But it certainly is safe to use today.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Now that being said, in terms of the process of building a second bridge in Prince Albert, the mayor is starting a campaign in Prince Albert to propose a second bridge. Now I know that both the MLAs from the Prince Albert area, the comment they made when it talks or when they were asked about the possibility of a second bridge for Prince Albert because obviously it's important to the North and to Prince Albert, I think the phrase that was used was it is inevitable. Not the exact word, but I think the phrase inevitable was what was characterized as the response from the two MLAs from Prince Albert. So I guess that is a question to the minister: how soon are you going to start constructing a second bridge for Prince Albert?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — The comment from the MLA that you're referring to, the word inevitable was used, but it was also used in the context of, you know, making the assumption, which I think is very reasonable, is that the population and the economy in that area is going to continue to grow and the needs will be there. And certainly I'm comfortable with the record of our government on meeting infrastructure demands as our economy and our population continues to grow.

As far as where it's at with the second bridge, I've met with the mayor about this on more than one occasion. Our officials have a very good working relationship with the city of Prince Albert officials. We've agreed that what needs to happen is we're in the process of beginning a study to assess the needs and timing and possible location of a second bridge. That study involves a steering committee which consists of ministry officials, also city of Prince Albert officials, and also the surrounding municipalities. I believe a consultant was either about to be or is hired and will commence that study. Work will go on over the next few months, and we expect a report back, which I look forward to with interest over the next few months.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well it's obviously something that's really important because the mayor has obviously undertaken the effort from the city of Prince Albert with the chamber of commerce and is starting this whole process of a campaign to build a second bridge. So they want a second bridge. Prince Albert I think needs a second bridge. And based on the challenge with the Diefenbaker bridge, I think obviously the safest and the most sound manner in which we deal with the

challenges to Diefenbaker is to lessen the stress on that bridge and build a second one, thereby having the solution achieved.

So on that point, on that point, I think it's imperative that you know as a minister that they're expecting a second bridge, not 5 or 6 or 7 or 8, 10 years from now, but soon. Is there a time frame that your ministry would be able to give the city of Prince Albert and the northern people whom, I might add, the mayor is doing a remarkable job of engaging?

You talked about the RMs [rural municipality] in some of the neighbouring communities, but he's dealing with First Nations. He's dealing with northern mayors from further north. I understood he made a presentation to some of the northern mayors that were meeting in Prince Albert, and he attended a meeting there and got their support. So the mayor's working really hard to try and get this bridge done or accomplished. Is there a time frame in which your ministry can give them an answer as to yea, the bridge is a go and it will be completed by this time frame, and no, we're still in the process of trying to figure this out?

But I'll say this though, I'm not sure what the future may hold. But if you make a long-term commitment to that bridge in Prince Albert, then I think whatever government, if there's a shift in government within the next four to eight years, whatever the case may be, we'll honour that long-term commitment that you may make, if and when we're back in government because this is important for Prince Albert. So is there a time frame that you can express today to the people of Prince Albert as to when they can expect to see the construction of a second bridge happening in their city?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — I think probably one important distinction that I'd make between our government and the previous government is that when we make a commitment, we ensure that we follow through on it. We're not about making commitments randomly to whoever's asking at a given point with no intention of following through. As far as a timeline on the commitment, as I mentioned, the study is going to address the needs, the timing, and the location for a second bridge. So you know, to be throwing out dates right now would be just premature. I look forward to seeing what the study says.

As far as this government's commitment to the city of Prince Albert, Prince Albert, again it's the gateway to the North, and the North holds huge economic potential. You know, you mentioned in an earlier question about the Diefenbaker bridge. I think it'd be important for people to understand that it wasn't very many years ago when repairs were needed to that bridge. And I have a news report from December of 2003 where it's talking about a conflict that the city's having with your provincial government over just wanting 50 per cent of the cost of repairs to that bridge. And I'll just read part of that news story to you. It starts with the mayor saying:

"It's very clear — 50 per cent. It's easy to take the total price and divide it by two. That's the price. I'm not willing to negotiate."

And then it goes on to say:

However he's running headlong into provincial Highways

Minister, Mark Wartman, who's equally determined his senior government won't part with a thin dime because, among other things, the bridge isn't an integral part of Highway 2, but merely an urban connector road exclusively within municipal jurisdiction.

Certainly our government does not agree with that at all. You spoke to the need for repairs to the Diefenbaker bridge. This government recognized that, and this government is pleased to be providing 100 per cent of the cost of the repair work on the Diefenbaker bridge.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Obviously I want to just reiterate the point with the Prince Albert bridge, when you say you're not about to make random announcements. This is not a random announcement. This is an essential part of what I explained earlier in developing the infrastructure to make sure that Saskatchewan continues to grow. And I don't believe that the people of Prince Albert would view this as a random announcement. This is a pretty crucial part of what they're asking this government to do is build that second bridge. So I'm not asking you to make a random announcement. I'm asking you to make a solid commitment towards the construction of a second bridge.

And as I mentioned at the outset, it's going to provide . . . It's going to take leadership, leadership. And I don't think leadership is going back and blaming the NDP for all your challenges today because, as I mentioned to you in the Assembly, it's time to take the training wheels off this government, and you guys figure out how you could be a government.

And so far I would point out that this whole notion of a random project, I don't think Prince Albert would like to be characterized in that sense. This is a serious threat to not only the economy but the people that use that bridge on a constant basis. So it's a safety issue. It is an economic issue. It's much the same principles as the north, east, west, southern part of our province. There's so many things attached to the need for a proper and a good transportation system. So again, the point I would raise — and that's why it's important — is that it's all about providing leadership and distinct leadership on this project. And characterizing it as a random announcement I think is unfair.

I want to shift focus, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, on the matter in terms of the contracting of engineering services and the number of highway engineering employees that were fired from this government and the portable highway labs that are maybe sold off and so on and so forth. So I guess the question I would ask the minister is, why are you firing all of your employees?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Well the short answer to that, and I'll come back to it, is we're not. Very clearly I would suggest you're the only person in the province that seems to think that. But I need to again — and I'll address that further — but I need to again back up to your earlier announcements. You do a very good job of political partisanship where you make broad-brush statements and then bridge to another topic.

My reference to random announcements was not specific to the P.A. bridge. I very clearly said that study will be under way,

and it includes the needs, timing, location. And it would be premature for me to make an announcement as you are suggesting I should.

When I talked about random announcements, I was talking about things that your party, whether in opposition or in government, have a history of doing. I was there when the premier of the day, Premier Calvert made the great announcement, and it was met with a lot of support that, for instance, the status quo in education property tax funding wasn't on. And I was there the following year when he announced it again, and yet there was no follow-through on it. We're all well aware of a number of pronouncements that your party's made all over the province with, again, with the Humboldt Hospital. I'm not sure how many times you folks announced that thing and never got around to building it. Well this government, when we make an announcement, we follow through and we actually see the project to completion.

So now having said that, as far as your comment about why we are firing all the Highways employees, we aren't.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So why does your budget say you have 200-and-some less FTEs [full-time equivalent] in the last couple of years? Where are these folks going? Are they quitting? Are the positions coming up and not being filled? Like why are you seeing a drop in the FTEs?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Yes, we're always looking for ways to be more efficient. We aren't firing people. Generally the reduction in the FTEs is being done by attrition. We have, as you've raised in the House in the past, the question about consulting engineers. In many cases, if someone leaves and our officials believe that those services can be provided more efficiently through a professional consultant, in those cases we'll certainly acquire the services that way.

**Mr. Belanger:** — One of the points I would raise is that as you have less and less employees within the ministry — now you talk about attrition; you talk about not filling certain positions in certain areas, and you look at layoffs and all this sort — you use different languages. And the bottom line is, what we're seeing on a continual, consistent basis is your department is losing a lot of FTEs over time. You're seeing the reduction of staff and personnel within your ministry.

Now we can sit here all day and play politics, but the fact is you've lost a lot of staffing positions within the Ministry of Highways in the last couple of years. And that's why I asked you in the Assembly, how goes your privatization plan? Is it on track? And you obviously said, we have no plans to do so. Well your activity and your actions within the department suggests otherwise.

So there's 200-and-some employees less that you have working within the ministry. And you look at some of the points that I raise is, why are you letting these positions go by the wayside and not filling them with Highways workers? And you say, well we're contracting out some of that work. And you also alluded to the fact that we've done that as well, and I agree. But the point is, between the private engineering and the contracting services, when it was intended to complement the work within the Ministry of Highways, not to compete and take over

positions. That's a significant difference.

The fact of the matter is, as much as your caucus colleagues can giggle across the way, in the FTE column within your department it shows a steady reduction of FTEs under your watch as a minister, and it shows an increase in the engineering services that you're contracting out. So if I can recall one comment that one person made — I won't tell you his name — he said, well when I was in the private sector, working for Highways was better salary, so I started working for Highways. Nowadays working for Highways isn't. We're not appreciated nor are we being paid properly, so now I'm going to go to the private sector. So you've got these people all confused out there.

So if we look at the situation, Mr. Minister, the bottom line is that the employees within the Department of Highways are being either terminated or some of the services are being contracted out or you're not filling these positions. So I guess the question is I asked earlier is, why aren't you supporting and backing up your employees within the Department of Highways?

[11:30]

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Certainly I am. We have many great staff in Highways and many of them are sitting with me at the table here today. Just the whole premise of your question I disagree with. When we can find ways to be more efficient, and if that means by doing it by professional consultant engineers instead of in-house staff, certainly we're not afraid to do that. This government doesn't feel that somehow private business is bad or a dirty word as you and your colleagues seem to think. We have a thriving engineering sector in this province. As far as, you know, where we're going to be going in the future, we will always have engineers in the department for oversight. We need to ensure that we're knowledgeable owners, and we'll continue to do that.

But as far as sort of when this whole process was accelerated, I don't know the exact year — I believe it was about '96 or '97 — when a move was made to do more work with consulting, professional consulting engineers. And again I would just reiterate, you know, engineers do their work to a high standard, whether they're in-house engineers or consultants. And if it's more efficient in a particular case, our ministry staff, when a position becomes vacant they evaluate it. They determine whether or not that's the position that we need in order to do proper oversight to replace it. If that's the case, we do replace the person. If not, if we think we can do it with a private consulting engineer, we certainly will look at that as well.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Before I go on to my next question, I want to get clarification and clarity for those that may not know what a portable highway lab is. Maybe get one of the officials to really clearly explain what the portable lab from the engineering perspective is all about.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — On the specifics of a field lab, I'm going to get Ted to address that.

**Mr. Stobbs:** — A field lab is exactly what it sounds like. It's a trailer that we pull out into the field on our highway

construction projects. And so we have, I would say, three different types that we actually have.

So we'll have field labs that are pulled into a crushing site. And in those field labs, we'd have all the apparatus, the engineering apparatus, that we'd be able to do what we call sieve testing of the aggregate. So as the aggregate is crushed, we'll take samples periodically and take them to those field labs and run some engineering tests on them to ensure that the contractor is crushing the aggregate to the specifications that we require in the contract. So that's one type of field lab that we have.

Another type would be one that we use for grading. So on a grading contract, you're building the bottom of the highway basically out of dirt. And in those labs, we'll have again some engineering apparatus that will allow us to test the soils that we're using for the construction of that road. So that might be things like tables that we can actually examine the soil with, look at things such as, you know, how much clay is in it, whether it's a till, whether it's a silt, how much moisture's in it. So we have drying ovens in them and that type of thing. Of course there's also they come equipped with scales, you know, so that we can weigh things. We'll have collection pans and pails that they can use to collect the material in, from the field or from the road.

And I would say the third type that we have is labs that we pull out to asphalt projects, so the projects that have paving on it. And the paving structure itself of course is just not the asphalt on top, but there's also a sub-base that we put down and a base and then the asphalt on top. Inside these labs, we'll have again a whole set of engineering apparatus and tools that we can use to test the asphalt as it's coming out of the plant or test the base that's coming out of the crusher or test the sub-base that's being produced to place on the road. And again they would include pails and pans and scales and thermometers and ovens to dry it, and so on. So it's a whole bunch of engineering apparatus that gets pulled out so that you can use it in the field.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Just before we go on to the next question, if I could — I'm going to get you two to switch if you would — if I could just back up. Earlier you had asked a question about amount of money spent on 11, I believe it was, year to year and we didn't have the numbers available. The staff now have those. I'll get Jen to run through those, and then we'll go back to the question.

**Ms. Ehrmantraut:** — I believe you were looking for the amount of money we spent on twinning in the last four years. So on Highway 1 East in 2008, we spent 14.9 million. On Highway 16 in 2008, we spent 22.1 million for a total in 2008 of 37 million. In 2009 on Highway 1 East, we spent 2 million; on Highway 16 we spent 200,000; and on Highway 11, we spent 22.8 million for a total in 2009 of 25 million.

In 2010 on Highway 1 East, we spent 900,000; on Highway 16, we spent 300,000; on Highway 11 twinning, we spent 24.3 million for a total of 25 million.

In 2011 we spent 150,000 on Highway 1 East; and on Highway 11 twinning, we spent \$36.6 million for a total of \$36.7 million.

In 2012 through the budget, we're expecting to spend \$25

million, 24.8. And that's a combination of new appropriation as well as money carried over for Highway 11 twinning.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you. Now back to the labs, if I can. Thanks for the information, by the way. But back to the labs, if I can.

I guess I understand the difference in terms of the different role that each of the labs would play, as you described. They do everything from soil analysis to the aggregate to paving and so on and so forth. So how many of these labs do we actually have within the highways? Like is there 20 or is there 30 or is there 4 or 5? How many of them are there?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — I believe that there's 57 lab trailers.

**Mr. Belanger:** — And the value of these lab trailers — these are really important — the values of these lab trailers again, given the different dynamic that each of these labs offer, are you able to give us a ballpark figure between the lowest value of one such lab versus the more expensive labs? Is there a range there?

[11:45]

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — You know, I'll consult with my officials in a second here. Well I'll see what we can do about a range. I think probably the problem with it's going to be is much like, you know, putting a price on a used vehicle or a used anything. You know, it's a little bit arbitrary, but I'll have a discussion and see if they have an idea.

It's, as I mentioned and my officials have concurred, it's very difficult to put a dollar amount on it when you're dealing with a used item like that. But in an effort to answer your question, very rough numbers, very ballpark is they're telling me that an older trailer that's depreciated would probably be roughly in the \$20,000 range, right up to a newer one, well-equipped, would be more likely in the \$100,000 range. So while those numbers are very, very rough, I hope that gives you kind of the range you were looking for.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. So the last couple of years, and I guess in the out years that we were speaking about today, has your department sold any of these labs? And is there any plans to sell any of them?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Our officials aren't 100 per cent sure whether there's been any sold in the last few years as per your question. If there has, there would've just been a few in the normal course of sort of rotating stock, if you will. We do have a number of trailers right now that the ministry doesn't have any more use for. And they're older, and we will be looking at selling some of those.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. I believe my colleague has a few questions, so I'm going to allow him to finish off a few questions. I just want to thank the officials and yourself for answering some of the questions I had. And there's a lot more questions coming forward of course, and over time we will certainly ask them. But following the original plan when I spoke earlier is we are going to be presenting those petitions. And you're acutely aware of what the challenges are.

As I said at the outset, the North needs to have that focus because there's so many resources and opportunity, and it's great for the economy, the safety of our First Nations and Métis people. And it's good overall for the province to boast a nice network of highways that includes the North as well. And I've made my points with you on that front. And of course, on many fronts, we've agreed to disagree.

And I'm very disappointed we only got three hours with you. I wish we had about 30. But that being said, my final comment is, fix that . . . get the second bridge going for P.A. And now I'll turn it over to my colleague.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the minister.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — If I may, if I could just on a couple of those issues, and I certainly enjoy spending time with you as well. As to the project and the petitions, I have already and I will again just reiterate that to ministry staff. Safety is absolutely important to our ministry, and I will ask them to take a look at that project that you've raised to see if there's anything else we can do sort of in terms of safety. And thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — I now recognize Mr. Wotherspoon.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. One area that you and I certainly do agree is that we're both disappointed with that Boston Bruins' loss here this week. But I hope there's other areas that we can find agreement on as well. And one of those areas is the inundation of traffic, heavy-haul traffic, on Dewdney Avenue in Regina, Dewdney specifically. Certainly there's other arteries, McCarthy Boulevard and Lewvan, that are also seeing it. But specifically Dewdney Avenue. And I might say I guess McCarthy as well are seeing heavy-haul truck traffic like they just have never seen before, over the last two years.

I understand some of the logistics that are causing this heavy-haul traffic. But I have to say, Mr. Minister, it's unacceptable to continue to let this go unabated without action on behalf of government. And the reason I say that is, unfortunately, certainly it does compromise peace of mind for residents along Dewdney Avenue from the perspective of their homes shaking and vibrating, and noise. Very difficult to even conduct a conversation beside a home or in front of a home — even, to be frank, inside the kitchens and dining rooms of those homes along Dewdney Avenue. So certainly there's a peace of mind concern.

But what needs to inspire action is the concerns around safety. And we have heavy, big freight moving at significant speeds, with slower stopping, challenges to stop in an efficient fashion, in the same area where we have children that are being transported back and forth from activities, back and forth to school, where children are at play on the sidewalks and streets. So it's a huge safety concern that we see along Dewdney Avenue. And to date, the ads that are being run on the radio aren't enough; we need action on this front.

I think there's other questions that should be analyzed about the infrastructure itself, and whether or not it actually is up to the task of carrying that sort of freight and what sort of wear and

tear it's experiencing. It's certainly deteriorating in a significant way, but I'd ask I guess the minister to speak significantly to the, I guess, the unacceptable heavy-haul traffic that's occurring on key Regina streets, specifically Dewdney Avenue and McCarthy Boulevard. What's his ministry's plan to address this in an expedient fashion?

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — You know, I can certainly appreciate people's concerns. It's traffic patterns that weren't there before. I guess if I could, you know, I think the overriding message I'd like to send here, that those concerns are temporary though. And I'm just going to get Rob to elaborate on why the haul, the way it is right now, and where that's going to be in short order.

**Mr. Penny:** — Rob Penny, deputy minister of Highways and Infrastructure. And thanks for the question because I know that it is a concern and there's no doubt that there is heavy traffic. This is part of the Global Transportation Hub and the relocation of the CP [Canadian Pacific] intermodal facility. And right now Loblaws and their partner, Canadian logistics systems, are located in the Global Transportation Hub, but CP rail is in the process of moving their intermodal facility out to the Global Transportation Hub.

But until CP has re-established their intermodal facility from downtown Regina in its current location along Dewdney between Albert and Broad, until that happens there will be heavy traffic that has to move back and forth between Loblaw and the Global Transportation Hub and the CP intermodal facility in downtown Regina. Updates, we had a meeting just as yesterday, I believe it was, with CP, and they're on track to open up their new intermodal facility out at the Global Transportation Hub by December of this year, 2012.

In addition, for the provincial government, we are building — and I think we've outlined it in the minister's opening remarks — part of the . . . and expanding what Pinkie Road west Regina bypass from Highway 1 up to Dewdney Avenue. As well as we've contracted for an interchange, new interchange construction at the west Regina bypass on Highway 1, which will allow most and a lot of heavy traffic to completely bypass the inner part of, the downtown part and the residential parts of Regina to actually move to the intermodal facility and not have to use Dewdney Avenue.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you for that answer, and certainly the, I guess the relief that will occur hopefully at December of this year will certainly be welcomed. It's still my concern that there's undue hardship and safety concerns that exist, and I would urge you, Mr. Minister, to look at what can be done to mitigate this in the interim. And maybe there's not an answer that you bring to the table here today, but it should be more than us planning towards December of this year and crossing our fingers.

It's been over a year here now of this sort of hardship, the sort of risk that exists. And it certainly comes down to the safety concerns that are front and centre. There are other concerns that I believe exist as well where we have anecdotal sharing of concerns around cracking of foundations in homes along that stretch during this period of time, some other aspects that certainly appear to be related to this heavy-haul traffic on a membrane that seems ill-fit to carry that sort of weight. But I

think that that's a whole other piece and we can focus on that as we move forward, looking for resolution on the fronts as far as damage to property. But specifically the safety concerns can't go unabated. We need to have a plan in place that mitigates this.

[12:00]

You know, it would have been . . . It seems that the cart was ahead of the horse on this front as far as planning the hub but not having a plan in place for the flow of traffic. So I don't know if there's alternate routes that we need to . . . And it might be some hardship to the traffic flow, the heavy-haul, the trucks. From my perspective I could care less about that.

What I care about is the safety concerns that are there. And I could care less if it takes an extra 10, 15 minutes to get through the city in the interim period of time, or even longer. Because what's going on on that membrane and on that artery is unacceptable and puts forward safety concerns that need to be addressed immediately by way of some sort of plan of mitigation. So whether that's alternate routes, whether that's some ability to figure out how to slow down that traffic and direct it in another fashion, it needs to be addressed. And we can't simply cross our fingers and wait till December 2012.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Your safety concerns, obviously safety is the most important factor here, and our ministry certainly recognizes that. The situation though is that Dewdney Avenue is under city control, not Ministry of Highways control. But again, I mean, safety has to come first. I'll ask my officials certainly though to express your concerns to city officials. I would assume that, you know, city officials have done everything possible from a safety perspective. But again, just with an abundance of caution, I'll ask my officials to pass your concerns along to the city.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you for that. Certainly I've discussed this with city officials, and they're well aware of the concerns. They're doing, I think, much if not all they can do within their authority and within their resources. Their hands are tied on many fronts when it comes to resources. This is a provincial project from an economic perspective, and this is something where we need some leadership and in fact a hand offered from the provincial government to city, I would urge, to the city. And I would urge for that to occur, to figure out how do we mitigate this. How do we provide safety in the interim before the undue hardship is entirely addressed in December? But thank you for the comments, Mr. Minister. I'll pass it over to the member from Cumberland.

**The Chair:** — I recognize Mr. Vermette, and just a reminder there's five minutes to reach the agreed-upon time with debate.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister and officials, I just have one, I guess, concern that has been expressed about safety in northern Saskatchewan, Highway 102 going north of La Ronge. It's heavily used for transporting goods and services into the mine and a lot of the residents along there are starting to be concerned.

NRT does an excellent job of hauling goods up there, whether it's wide load, they have the proper trucks and everything else. But there are some companies up there that are actually

travelling at night, certain times that they're going through. And they're not using the wide loads, and they're pushing people right into the ditch. And it's a safety concern I think people are really concerned about.

So they're asking, is there a way with Highways and Transportation to maybe go up there and do more monitoring, check out exactly what's going on, and are there companies out there? I mean a lot of companies do follow the regulations, the rules, and they do an excellent job. But those that aren't doing it are causing serious concern, and you know could end up causing a death on this road.

So I want it for the record and to make sure the minister and your officials are aware of it. It's been brought to my office to my attention, and I want to make sure I pass it on here just to, you know, see what your feelings are and see if you can check into how often do Highway Traffic Board go up and check on those roads so trucks that are following the regulations.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — Again you know on the safety aspect, I would say that the vast majority of companies in the province certainly comply with regulations, but, you know, if we hear instances where that isn't the case, that concerns us greatly because of your safety concerns. The traffic compliance officers, we don't know exactly how many times they've been there in the last, you know, period of time, but they are up there periodically. And I think the short answer to your question is, I've asked Ted, who's in charge of the compliance officers, to make sure that they are aware of your concerns so they can consider that when they're doing their scheduling.

**The Chair:** — Having reached the hour of agreed-upon time of debate and now being 12:10, the committee will recess unless there's a closing thank you. First of all, thank you to the minister and his officials for appearing before the committee, before we recess. Mr. Wotherspoon.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you for the time spent with us today, Mr. Minister, and certainly officials of the Ministry of Highways — important infrastructure to our province. I appreciate the answers and the work that's going to be forthcoming in the year ahead.

I know this past year on my wife's birthday, I took her, we went on a romantic drive up to Earl Grey to join producers that were concerned about the Wheat Board. Now that road, Highway 22, Highway 22, well that was quite the drive. And I've been on it before, Mr. Minister, and I know you're well aware of Highway 22. But that drive to Earl Grey, up from Southey and over to Earl Grey, it wasn't as romantic of a drive as I was intending, Mr. Minister. I'm hopeful that over the upcoming year that that infrastructure that's so vital to the many people that make their lives on that highway, that are commuting on that highway and that important economic infrastructure that exists there, that that's going to be rectified, Mr. Minister.

But thank you for the time you've taken. Thank you to your officials, and we look forward to that work being addressed in a very expedient fashion.

**The Chair:** — I recognize the minister.

**Hon. Mr. Reiter:** — If I could, Mr. Chair, I'd like to mention that that's the most odd closing comment I've ever heard in all the years I've been involved in committee. And if I could just briefly deviate, I would like to let the member know I'm sure he'll be delighted to hear that that project's moving forward. There'll be some work done this year, full-scale construction next year, and some point down the road I'm sure. Why his wife would want to go on a romantic ride with him, I'm not sure, but he will have that opportunity.

I would like to thank the members for their questions, all committee members for their time here today, my officials for their time today, and all the staff for their time, Mr. Chair. And thank you very much.

**The Chair:** — This committee is recessed until 1 p.m. in which we will be discussing the Department of the Environment.

[The committee recessed from 12:12 until 13:00.]

**The Chair:** — Being now 1 p.m., I'll call the committee to order. This afternoon we have with us the Minister of the Environment, and we will be considering estimates and supplementary estimates for vote 26 of Environment, central management and services subvote.

**General Revenue Fund  
Environment  
Vote 26**

**Subvote (EN01)**

**The Chair:** — Minister Duncan is here with his officials, and I'll invite the minister to introduce his officials. And as well just a reminder to the officials, if at any time you're speaking directly to a response, to give your name for the sake of Hansard. Mr. Minister, you can introduce your officials. And then if you have some opening comments, please feel free to share them.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to you, Mr. Chair, to committee members. Here with me from the Ministry of Environment, to my right is Liz Quarshie, deputy minister. To my left is Mark Wittrup, assistant deputy minister of environmental protection and audit.

We're also joined by Donna Johnson, the assistant deputy minister of environmental support; Kevin Murphy, assistant deputy minister of resource management and compliance; Laurel Welsh, acting executive director of finance and administration; Bob Wynes, executive director, forest service; Darryl Jessop, director, wildfire support section; Todd Olexson, the acting director of lands; Sam Ferris, executive director of municipal; Lyle Saigeon, executive director, fish and wildlife; Jennifer McKillop, director of Aboriginal affairs; Kim Graybiel, director of climate change; Kevin McCullum, the chief engineer of the technical resources branch. As well joining us this afternoon from the Watershed Authority is Wayne Dybvig, the president; Bob Carles, vice-president, corporate services; and Susan Ross, vice-president, legal, regulatory and Aboriginal affairs.

The 2012-13 provincial budget is a balanced budget and is

about keeping the Saskatchewan advantage. The provincial budget continues to strengthen Saskatchewan's economy and make life more affordable for Saskatchewan people. The budget is about building on the Saskatchewan advantage to create a better life, quality of life, and more opportunity for all citizens of this province.

The Ministry of Environment's budget for 2012-13 aligns with the government's direction by addressing the environmental issues arising from the significant growth in the province, achieving security and sustainability of our natural resources, and keeping its promise to the people of Saskatchewan to take action to address existing and emerging environmental challenges.

The 2012-13 budget represents an investment of \$185 million to help protect the province's water, air, and natural resources in order to achieve a high environmental standard and to support sustainable development in the use of these resources. There is continued support for the implementation of the results-based regulations, recycling, forestry, the Go Green Fund, and the boreal water management project and the province's climate change plan.

The new results-based model of environmental regulation will improve protection of the environment while promoting innovative new tools in environmental management. The goal is to develop a modernized regulatory system that encourages prosperity, innovation, and opportunity while at the same time protecting public health, safety, and the environment. The result will be regulations that are more conducive to our fast-changing world, cost less, and are more effective and more flexible, promoting competitiveness and innovation.

In 2012-13 the ministry plans to continue its transition to results-based regulation by continuing with legislative and regulatory amendments, developing the Saskatchewan Environmental Code, modernizing the information management systems, and addressing the ministry's readiness for change. To support these efforts, the 2012-13 budget includes \$4 million in capital funding to continue to transform and modernize the ministry's information technology/information management systems.

The ministry is implementing an information management system that will allow clients to access permissions and registration activities and to satisfy their reporting requirements online. The first permission type will be in client pilot testing early in the new fiscal year. The ministry will also continue to work on the environmental information management system and the enforcement management system to support the results-based approach. We expect to complete this transformation work by 2015-16. The transition to results-based regulation has taken quite a lot of time, work, and effort by many people throughout the ministry and is still a work-in-progress.

In 2012-13 Sarcan will receive a grant of \$21.8 million to support its operation of the beverage container collection and recycling program. This represents an increase of 1.1 million in operating funding over 2011-12.

The 2012-13 budget includes an increase of \$800,000 in

reforestation to restore the forest renewal funding to a level that will support a comprehensive forest plantation tending program to ensure that plantations, previously established, survive and thrive. Continuation of this government program sends an important signal to the industry about the government's commitment to sustainable forest management and economic growth.

In 2012-13 the ministry's budget includes \$1 million to continue with the second year of the five-year boreal water management project. This project is aimed at assessing and maintaining the ecological integrity of our northern watersheds which host some of the highest quality freshwater resources in the world. These areas of the province are subject to near- and long-range transport and deposition of acidifying emissions from industrial activities within and outside Saskatchewan, and this project will enable the province to monitor and protect these precious resources.

The budget also includes 4.5 million in go green funding which will continue to focus on the priority areas of water quality and conservation, the protection and conservation of our natural resources, supporting successful programs that have multi-year funding commitments, such as Aquistore and THREATS [the healthy river ecosystem assessment system] and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Saskatchewan's climate change plan will foster investments in low carbon technology by large emitters and encourage research and demonstration projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the provincial target of 20 per cent reduction from 2006 levels by 2020.

We are continuing to develop regulations and a code chapter for greenhouse gas reporting under *The Management and Reduction of Greenhouse Gases Act*, and working with the federal government to negotiate an equivalency agreement to meet federal requirements under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* and ensure money for the technology fund remains and is invested here in Saskatchewan.

In 2012-13 the ministry's wildfire management branch will continue to manage fires based on the fire management strategy zones with priority placed on public safety, communities, viable commercial timber, and other values at risk. Funding of \$64.6 million is provided to ensure the protection of people, communities, and the commercial forest, and to renew the province's aerial firefighting fleet. This represents a decrease of \$3.8 million over 2011-12, a reflection of recent years fire trends as well as impending completion of the second phase of the aerial firefighting fleet renewal program. The ministry will receive \$7.529 million in 2012-13 to continue phase 2 of the aerial firefighting fleet renewal program, which is a planned reduction of \$802,000 from the '11-12 budget year, as this phase of the renewal program is nearing completion. Fleet renewal efforts are currently focused on continuing the turbine engine upgrades to the CL-215 tanker aircraft. The first of the converted aircraft was delivered in March of 2011, with the three remaining aircraft scheduled to be delivered March of this year, October of this year, and May of 2013.

The ministry's 2012-13 budget responds to the government's commitment to reduce the size of the civil service with a

reduction of 58.9 full-time equivalent positions, none of which will involve the layoff of any permanent employees. The total number of FTEs in the ministry is 930.6, a reduction of 6 per cent over 2011-12, putting the ministry on track to meet the four-year commitment.

I will now turn and speak for a few moments on the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's grant increases in 2012-2013 by \$7.8 million to \$12.234 million, largely the result of an increased funding for flood damage reduction and prevention. The Watershed Authority has a number of other revenue sources and has budgeted total revenues of 28.5 million. The Watershed Authority will spend some of its surplus it has accumulated in previous years and has budgeted total expenditures of just over 33.8 million. Maintaining a sustainable water supply is of fundamental importance to the future of the province. With this budget, the government is taking steps to help the Watershed Authority implement its 10-year water management infrastructure renewal plan.

Our budget provides the Watershed Authority with \$2.1 million, an increase of \$1.4 million, to enhance its dam safety program. An owner of dams must ensure that they can operate and that they are safe. The increased funding for dam safety and the approval for the Watershed Authority to hire two additional engineers to work on dam safety issues will allow the Watershed Authority to get its safety program to industry standards. These include completing emergency preparedness plans for Rafferty, Alameda, and Gardiner dams and conducting safety reviews and inspections of dams.

The 2012-13 provincial budget also authorizes the Watershed Authority to invest \$6.7 million, up from 4.1 million in the last fiscal budget, to rehabilitate provincial dams and water supply channels. Priority work will occur at Alameda, Gardiner, and Moose Mountain dams as well as the Upper Qu'Appelle water supply channel. The budget authorizes the hiring of two additional new engineers to manage this increase in its infrastructure rehabilitation program.

The importance of the Watershed Authority's infrastructure is hard to overstate. Gardiner dam and associated works are the most important structures. Lake Diefenbaker is the source of drinking water for more than half the provincial population. It also supplies water for mining, industry, irrigation, power generation, recreation, and other uses. Other dams are important to regional water supplies.

The new funding provided in this budget is an investment in ensuring continued ability to provide water supply and flood control benefits. The investment in the infrastructure is also an investment in public safety. While the risk of a dam failure occurring is very small, consequences of dam failure are potentially quite large. Increased investment in these structures will help ensure that the dams can meet industry standards for safety and operability. Besides water supply, our dams and other structures help us with flood management. As we all know, we saw unprecedented flooding last year. Our major dams helped reduce flood peaks and investments will ensure that they can do in future floods as well.

Last year the Watershed Authority initiated the emergency



flood damage reduction program to assist communities and individuals to prevent flood damage — 1,230 individuals, municipalities, and other groups requested assistance under the emergency flood damage reduction program. I am pleased to report that 91 per cent of clients indicate the program helped them reduce or prevent flood damage. We have a small number of files yet to review, but information that we have reviewed so far indicates more than \$10 in damage to property was prevented for each \$1 the government invested in this program. Further a majority of clients were able to construct permanent flood protection works that will protect them in future flood events as well.

While the risk of flooding is fortunately much less than it was in 2011, this budget does provide the Watershed Authority with \$5 million to continue the emergency flood damage reduction program through 2012. In spite of the low runoffs, some areas of the province especially in the Southeast, but also in areas like Corman Park, are still quite wet and properties would be vulnerable to flooding if we receive substantial spring rainfall. However if that does occur, the Watershed Authority will be able to provide assistance.

The Watershed Authority will also continue to work with several municipalities where high water still continues to be a threat or where efforts to make temporary protective works permanent could not be completed in 2011. The Watershed Authority programs funded by its direct revenues are essentially maintained at the levels budgeted in 2011-2012.

In closing, Mr. Chair, I'm very pleased to be here, and I want to thank committee members and my officials for postponing our last session, our last scheduled meeting, on very short notice. And we would be pleased to take your questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. At this time I recognize Mr. Belanger.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, and welcome to your officials, Mr. Minister. And of course we've got you for the afternoon.

We have a number of questions. And I just want to quickly give you a heads-up, as I afforded the Minister of Highways this morning, that some of the issues that I want to speak to are the environmental code, get a very good explanation of that, for there's a number of people that have a lot of interest in that. And I also want to talk about Fort McMurray in terms of the environmental challenge it poses to the northwest part of the province and therefore the entire province. I want to talk a bit about forestry, obviously the wildfire cuts. I want to talk about illegal draining. As you know it's a huge issue. I also want to talk about the water problems with the water and sewer challenges in Meadow Lake. I think there's in P.A. and Yorkton where this has been an ongoing trend. I want to talk a bit about Lake Diefenbaker in terms of the challenges that we heard about this past year. And of course there's also some of the northern matters that I want to discuss.

However at this time, I think my colleague from Cumberland wants a bit of time with you, so I'm going to ask the Chair to recognize my colleague, and then we'll go into the agenda. And we'll be bouncing around. I won't follow the script as I

presented it in terms of the issues I want to talk about, but that's generally the area I'm going to go.

[13:15]

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Belanger. I recognize Mr. Vermette.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Again, Mr. Chair, thank you to the minister and your officials. Thank you for being here. And I guess I will be asking some questions, but I guess also I'm going to educate myself on some of the processes that you went through to how you came to some decisions and conclusions you have come to in northern Saskatchewan.

And starting out with that, it's been a huge issue with our Northern Trappers Association. They're trying to move their organization. We see the price of fur going up. There are some, I guess, opportunities for young people with the culture part of it that they go on the trap lines. And there's been some regulations have impacted those young people, men and women who have decided that, yes, they want to follow the traditional, I guess, trapping as their grandparents did, their grandparents before there. You know, so it goes on generation to generation. And it is a concern, and I'll get time to go through it. I don't want to go into a bunch of it. I'm going to start out with that area — trapping is a real concern — and why I say that.

Right now I know the Northern Trappers Association is trying to figure out, how do they best serve the trapping members that they serve? And I believe there's about 3,000 trappers in the area of northern Saskatchewan.

So I guess my question to you: can you explain and maybe your ministry, your department, what your relationship is with the Northern Trappers Association? And just give me some background on your dealings over the last while so I can have a better understanding to ask proper questions to make sure we can try to assist them as best we can.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well thank you for the question, Mr. Vermette. Certainly we have made a number of changes over the last couple of years that I think have been positive changes for northern trappers. First of all that comes to mind is we are moving towards removing royalties that trappers pay on the fur that they do sell. I think it's, in terms of the lower revenue that it means for the province, it's not a significant amount that the province doesn't gain in revenue. And I think in light of the fact that fur prices are going up, it's just I think a step that we could take to help put some additional dollars into the trappers' pockets.

We've also moved to, in terms of those trappers that have leases, their trapping cabins in northern Saskatchewan. I believe up until about a year ago, maybe two years ago, it was a yearly renewal that they had to go through. We've now moved towards a long-term lease for those individuals. I know that I've had a couple of conversations with, in particular, Vice-chief Brian Hardlotte with the P.A. Grand Council who has indicated that they would like to make a presentation to the ministry and to myself about how we may be able to further our partnership into the future. I haven't had an opportunity at this point yet to do that, but I think we did offer a ministry official to meet with

him in Saskatoon to go over the presentation. My understanding is that they've asked for some dollars not just for their convention but also some staffing issues. And you know, we'll certainly look at that presentation.

And I believe at their most recent northern trappers' convention, I believe we did reimburse some of their costs for the educational programs. When the funding ended, the agreement ended for funding the northern trappers' convention. We did make a commitment that if they were going to continue with educational programs, that's something that we would be interested in funding, and so I believe that that has taken place. I don't know if Kevin has anything further to add to that . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Thank you. Do you have an idea how much you said, you know, the royalties on fur? Can you give me an actual, do you know a number? And if you can't provide it today, can you make sure that we have access to that? Because I'd like to know exactly what the amount was.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I think in the last year that we collected or in this last year that we would've collected royalties, I believe it would be under \$50,000. We'll get the exact number, but it would be a number under 50,000 a year roughly. It may be closer to 30 or 35,000, but we'll get that number for you.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Now I appreciate that if you can get that information. You changed some regulations, and I don't know maybe if it was changed about whether someone born in 1971, if they were born prior to 1971, they were grandfathered in. And I don't know so much if it was the regulation was changed or your department decided to enforce the regulations. So I want to be clear on that, and maybe we can get some clarification on that. And that was in order for somebody who decided that they wanted to go on the trapline, follow their grandparents or their parents and decide, you know, they want to. So they're born in 1971. They would have to go through a training. They would have to have hunter safety. There was a number of different things you required in order for them to get their fur licence to go out on a trapline and, you know, go ahead and start trapping.

I've heard a lot of concerns, a lot of frustration. Young people . . . And we say that somebody who's in the age of 40 years old who has lived on the trapline and actually with their grandparents, you know, may have been raised on the trapline. There's a lot of different things. They have the knowledge, the expertise, and could probably train anybody in how to set traps, how to survive in the wilderness, and how to do the trapping. And they're required before they can actually get a trapping licence, once the regulation was enforced or the date that it said it now will be enforced. So somebody who is 40 year old, who's lived on a trapline and had the experience, they're asked now to go through a training course before they can continue trapping. It just doesn't make sense. They're frustrated they can't.

Some are going ahead and getting the training, and they want to continue, so they have no choice. The frustration, whether it was brought in by the department, I'd just like to know how you went about whether enforcing it, and it may be a regulation that was there prior, or you just started enforcing it. I'd like to know

who you consulted within the trapping industry and whether it would be northern trappers because that's what I'm talking about. So I'd like to see how you got to either enforcing or coming up with the regulation and just why. And I guess I'll leave it at that, let you answer that. That's enough information probably to deal with.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Chair, I'll have Kevin Murphy answer that.

**Mr. Murphy:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Vermette. That regulation previously would have been in place for anyone new into the trapping or hunting community, of any age. And through some level of consultation, we determined that changing it and grandfathering some folks that were older, born prior to '71, could now begin to undertake that activity without work. I don't know how extensive or exhaustive the consultations would have been, and I believe that we're certainly open to working with both trappers' associations in looking at certification.

One of the things that we've mentioned through environmental code is looking at registered groups like trappers' associations, outfitters, and others, perhaps even falconers, groups like that, in being able to do some level of certification internally, given that they have the skill sets and the knowledge base to be able to do so. But it was in fact opening up, so it may be frankly just a level of education and understanding about the conditions and the enforcement of that that is causing some of the reaction at present.

**Mr. Vermette:** — No, I appreciate that. And I realize I don't know how much consultation went into the decision, whether it's enforcing. And I know that there are some of the trappers and some of the executive and people that I've talked to — I've been to a lot of trappers meetings — and the frustration is, here we are; we live off the land, you know. And some of them do. Traditionally that's where they go. They have their trapper's cabin, and they live their life with their grandkids or their kids.

And the frustration, again I'll go back to this. If there's a way, and if I hear you're saying, they've been trying to say, is there a way they can work with us? And if they bring forward a proposal and saying, we have a better . . . whether it's a Northern Trappers Association or the zones that can . . . Because they have an executive on each of their zones. So if each of the fur blocks and their zones that they're running . . . Maybe you can say, yes. If there's some way of working it out where they could say, we know who we would say we would trust, saying that they're certified and could go out trapping — we know that; I mean they know who they are — rather than going through a course and educate. And I think that's been some of their concerns. How do they get across? And maybe that needs to happen more.

And today before, I guess when we're done, I wouldn't mind getting a card from yourself if I could because I'd like to provide that to them to make sure that some communication goes with yourself. If the department and the ministry is willing to open up further discussions on that, it may not be a big issue as we think. We can work through the regulations saying, well we could give a grandfather clause or we can authorize, saying this individual, we know who he's been trapping with, and

we're comfortable he knows the traditional way.

So if there's some way of working that . . . And that's what they've suggested to me. They'd like to work with the department. They understand somebody maybe young coming in doesn't have the experience. Maybe they need to take that and it's good. So they are agreeing there are some good things in there. They're not all saying it's bad. It's just some of the, I guess, some of the individuals that are caught in it, their concerns that they're dealing with. So maybe we'll do that.

That's one area, so I'm glad to hear that because I know I've been serving petitions in the House and that's why I've been presenting the petitions in the House every day is exactly that. They want to be, before regulations, legislation is passed, all they're asking for is a little bit of . . . Communicate with them, and, you know, maybe we can come up with a legislation or regulations that work really good for the northern trappers. And that's all they're asking for. They're not saying they don't want to follow regulations. They know they need to have those rules and regulations, and they agree with some of them. And they've said that, but they want to make sure they're effective for the industry and where they're at. So again I thank you for that willingness to hopefully work with them.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We'll follow up, Mr. Vermette, with you on that one. And just before I forget and while it's fresh in your mind, 2010-11 fur royalties collected by the province were \$31,194 — so 31,194 — and '11-12 we estimate roughly 30,000. The final number isn't known yet.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay, thank you for that. Another area I want to go into, and I don't know how much conversation between the ministries responsible for Northern Affairs and First Nations and Métis Relations, ministries responsible for Northern Affairs. How much conversation do your departments have with that ministry? Because I'm curious to see because they're supposed to look after the North and . . . [inaudible] . . . and it was put up for a certain reason and try to work with the ministries. And I want to make sure that that's happening. And if that isn't happening, that's unfortunate because the ministry was designed to do that.

And they were supposed to work together, communicate, and make sure that northern issues that are affecting northern people . . . the Ministry of Northern Affairs would have worked with your ministries and the other ministries to say this is going to have a hardship or this is going to cause some problem. And I don't know much communication's happening, and sometimes I think after the end I see regulations and rules and changes and cuts. I wonder, you know, do the ministries actually get together and have some discussions on that way, and I'm not trying to say they don't. I'm just saying, I don't know how effective it is or if there's ways we can work or have northern leaders, if there's ways we can . . . [inaudible] . . . so it is working better. That's all I'm trying to find out.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Chair, I'll have Jennifer McKillop, the director of our Aboriginal affairs branch, I guess try to address some of Mr. Vermette's comments.

**Ms. McKillop:** — Thank you for the question. The Ministry of Environment and the mandates of the Ministry of Environment

and the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations intersect at a number of different points. We certainly work very closely with our colleagues in both the First Nations and Métis Relations part of that ministry as well as Northern Affairs. For example, the environmental quality committee, we participate on those, and those are led by our Northern Affairs colleagues.

We have a number of cross-ministry groups that we work with that where FNMR [First Nations and Métis Relations] is the lead. And we participate quite actively on those groups, for example with consultation and accommodation. And certainly almost, I would say, on a weekly basis we're in touch with our colleagues in that ministry.

**Mr. Vermette:** — So then if I hear what you're saying, and I just want to be . . . You work closely with I guess the Northern Affairs ministry. you work well whether First Nations and Métis Relations responsible for Northern Affairs. So I want to be clear. So you work closely.

So decisions that would impact northern Saskatchewan, if you're saying weekly you have discussions with them, they should be aware of regulations or situations that are affecting the North. They should be well aware then. So there should be no surprises that they say, oh no, we don't know. I just want to make it clear for the record here. And I want to make it very clear that if you're saying it's weekly almost those communications are happening, you should be working pretty close. And if it's weekly, I mean obviously issues facing northern Saskatchewan, your ministry would know about then.

[13:30]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Chair, I certainly believe that that is the case, whether it be through at the official level, as well as the discussions that take place between cabinet colleagues, but if there's a specific issue that is a concern we'd be pleased to address it. But certainly there is a lot of collaboration and co-operation between the two ministries.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay, I wanted to be clear because that takes me to my next question. How is it that your department came about to shut down two offices and the conservation offices in northern Saskatchewan?

And before you answer this, I would ask your officials, please explain to me what those conservation offices and the officers did in the communities of Pelican and Cumberland House. Those offices are scheduled to be closed, shut down. I would like . . . I have a list of all the services that were provided to the community members, First Nations, the Métis people, the trappers, the fishermen. And the list is very long. And I find it very frustrating, to be honest, to hear them having to say, why? The leadership are very frustrated with the closure of those offices because of the services that the office had provided to the community members, First Nations, Métis. It's a large community over there. It's a large section. So they're being asked now . . . I would just like to know how that decision was made, and if you could explain to me what those offices did.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well thank you to the member for your question. Certainly this is an issue that has arisen from the most recent budget. We did make the decision to close three offices

across Saskatchewan. The member's right: two in northern Saskatchewan, one in Moosomin. But I don't want it to be left, the impression to be left with the committee or the members of the public that this somehow is going to decrease the services for these areas.

One of the challenges that we found with the one-officer offices is that they're not staffed regular business hours. The times that the conservation officer is in the office means that he's not out in the field where we believe that more focus needs to be put. In terms of staffing, I know that it is difficult to try to arrange for vacations and holidays for those members because it leaves a void in those areas.

We believe that services can be provided through the closest available offices where positions will be staffed and which will allow conservation officers in settings of more than one CO [conservation officer] to have some presence both in the office during the office hours, while at the same time having some, having staffing levels out in the field where I think that we need to put more focus.

Maybe, do you have more to offer on that?

**Mr. Murphy:** — Certainly.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Okay, sure. I'll ask Kevin Murphy.

**Mr. Murphy:** — So certainly it is not our intention to see a reduction in the presence of those officers in the communities or in our ability to enforce.

I agree that the relocation of some of the services out of the immediate community may be difficult. But one of the things that we are looking at, in addition to the things that the minister has mentioned in terms of ensuring flexibility and patrol coverage, was also looking at being able to provide the service on a more regular basis. Many of our smaller office locations we can only staff part-time, and we're looking to create office environments where we have the office open during all regular business hours. We're also looking to be able to deploy services by telephone and email now so that people can access after hours.

But the intent is for us to actually be able to hopefully increase the level of service, if not locally in the community, throughout Saskatchewan. And as I say, we are not reducing the number of officers in the field, and it is our intent to keep those officers in those patrol areas and visiting with the resource users who are actually utilizing the resource.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay then, for the record, and I want to say this for the record, I would like to know who you consulted with out of the Northern Affairs ministry, and out of the northern leaders, who you consulted with when you made this decision.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Chair, thank you for the question. Certainly as a matter of determining the office closures through the budget process, it's not something that was necessarily taken for outside consultations. But we're more than willing to have discussions with those northern leaders, or to any of those areas that were affected by these closures, to discuss what our

focus was going to be going forward in maintaining service levels to those areas that have been affected by the office closures.

**Mr. Vermette:** — I know myself, I've had calls. I know there's concern from some of the leaders. So I'm going to ask your officials and yourself as a minister, have you heard any concerns at this point? Have you had anybody approaching you with the concerns of closing the offices down? And I would like to know who has contacted you and if you have had anybody approach you on it? Because if not, that's going to be interesting because I think you're missing, or we're just not directing the leadership or individuals who are concerned to the ministry or yourself as the minister responsible for the closure of the office.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So when the decision was announced in the budget, contact was made with, I believe, with the northern mayors of the two communities. Certainly they provided their feedback at that time. We have received, I believe, a petition from the Cumberland area and certainly questions from yourself and from members of the legislature. So far there hasn't been, I don't think there has been much feedback, certainly not negative feedback from the Pelican Narrows area.

But letters were sent to those northern areas to community leaders. And I suspect if we haven't heard from individuals that have concerns about this, that we, you know, certainly it's foreseeable that we will at some point.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Yes. No, and I know there is. So I'll make sure that the letters that I'm receiving and the phone calls and the concerns that I'm dealing with from some of the leaders to make sure that . . . You know I just assumed, you know, with the petitions that we've been serving and different things that are happening, I can make sure that that happens. And I will follow up on that because I think it's, you know, I want to make sure that I know that from Pelican there was quite a bit of concern raised.

And which serves as from the fishermen, the trappers, and all the different, you know, I guess the services that were provided over there. It's quite a list if you look at the list. I have a list that was provided to me in detail in my office. And I know that, so I'm going to go through that list. And I know that I'm a little . . . I guess when you say that the decision was made and maybe you didn't reach out, you made a decision internally that you . . . And I know your explanation.

But if you look at the amount of, I think, services that that office provided. And unfortunately whether it's cuts to staffing, decisions that are made, northern Saskatchewan — and I say this with the resources we have, whether it's fishing, the trapping, the fur, all the different resources that we have — it's unfortunate to see an office as isolated as the one that was in that area that, you know, serviced quite a large population that utilized the office, to have, you know, to see the office closed. And really, it's very frustrating. It almost, I think for a few of us, was a little shocking that it was done. But then I go back to it, and I don't want to throw the politics into it, but some people are saying that's the frustration they're seeing with it. Doesn't do me no harm. Trust me; it doesn't.

It actually makes people start questioning why an office that was used as . . . You know, my understanding of the amount of fishermen, the trappers that are in that area would have utilized the services that — I've seen the list that they accessed — to ask them to go to Creighton now, I just, it's going to be a hardship for some of the traditional trappers, the fishermen. It is not easy to get the, I guess, the services that they were provided in their home community. It was something pretty . . . to lose that, I think, is shocking.

But anyway, having said that, I'll go back to it. You say you decided to shut three offices down. Two were in northern Saskatchewan and, you know, that's a little shocking to see. You would think with the services that are going on — whether it's hunting, the fishing, the trapping that go on, outfitters, all the different things that go on — and the opportunity the North has with the tourism and investment that you would pick two offices in northern Saskatchewan to close down, sometimes just . . . I don't know. Anyway, a little disappointing. And maybe it was an office that had a small community and, you know, wasn't utilized or didn't have the population. I just, I'm a little actually shocked at it, and I think other people are. So I'll leave it at that on that one.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Chair, if I, just to follow up just on the member's point. Certainly it's a point well taken. But I think it's not, I don't want the committee to be left with the impression that it was, that this is a northern issue.

It was three conservation offices that are single conservation officer offices. And as I said in one of my previous answers, we have certain challenges when it comes to those offices in terms of providing, I think, adequate coverage, providing flexibility in terms of ministry staffing, flexibility for those employees, flexibility for the communities. And so I again don't want to, wouldn't want the impression to be left that those areas are being abandoned by the Ministry of Environment.

We're certainly going to work very hard to ensure that our conservation officers are, as intended by this change . . . One of the intentions of this change is to ensure that our conservation officers are out in the field more. And this will allow for more coverage out to do the good work that they do in protecting our natural resources, while also ensuring that there is the availability to perhaps talk to a conservation officer at the office. That was, I think, one of the challenges around the single-officer offices in that they weren't, as I said before, they weren't open during all normal business hours. And when that officer was out in the field, it meant that there wasn't an officer in that office following up with some casework, doing paperwork, or there to meet the public.

So we're going to strive to, with the surrounding locations that do have conservation officers, to ensure that coverage isn't missing in that area, those areas.

[13:45]

**Mr. Vermette:** — Well that takes me back to thinking about it in this way, and I appreciate your comments and that you're trying to . . . but then if that was the case and you're looking at, why wasn't that consideration done then? Okay if we want to shut down two offices, could there not have been an opportunity

and look at the usage of that office, saying well maybe we need to have two staff over there? Maybe we need to make sure that that office stays open by doing something else? I mean, I know it's a choice of picking and choosing, but unfortunately I think maybe there could have been a better decision to serve the community.

And if you're saying it's closed because it's only a one-man office, could you not have considered some other option rather than just shutting it down? Looking at the services it provided, enforcement and all the other things, I mean you say that that's . . . So I'm a little confused why that option was. And maybe you guys did look at that. And I think that's the frustration, if that's the reason, because you're shutting down the three of them. I just look at, and I want to look at the two in northern Saskatchewan, why there wasn't other options that could have been considered. And maybe you did, but unfortunately it didn't go. Maybe there would have been a better argument from individuals, from the people in the community, a leadership explaining why. And I don't know that happened. I don't think it happened. Because I have a list of all the different services that they provided, and I will provide you with that as soon as I can so your officials and you have that list of the service that was being provided by that office. I'll leave it at that.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — And to the member, certainly the Ministry of Environment looks to, not just in this area that we're responsible, but for all areas, what is, in this case what is the most effective use of our compliance dollars, and looking at how can we most effectively deliver the services specifically in this case. And this was the decision that we made.

**Mr. Vermette:** — And I realize your ministry and the government, you know, the people have given you the opportunity to act on behalf of the province, and I say that. And we are the official opposition to make sure we express the concerns of constituents, organizations, and we bring it forward to your attention so that you're well aware of it. So when I say that, you've made some decisions and your government has made some decisions on other priorities and cuts. And you're talking about that. So if we're going to go using the best way to use your resources, you're saying, which are limited, your budgets . . .

And I guess some people see, you know, you talk about the advantage, and we talk about the prosperity of our province, and everything's going good. And you know, it's really positive in some areas. Some people are doing really well. We know that, and that's a good thing. Some businesses are doing really well. Some of the outfitters are doing really great. There's other areas.

But our trappers, our fishermen, some of them are struggling today, and they're struggling because they are not feeling the advantage, the boom, some of the excitement that other industry and other individuals and organizations are feeling. So there is a group being left out. And that group, I have to honestly say, if you look at the trappers, if you look at the fishermen, they're not feeling like they are a part of the boom, and a lot of other people in the province. When I say that, you pick and choose as a government, and I understand your budgets. And you know, it's all right to say everything's going good in some areas. But when you're making cuts like this that impact a lot of people,

then you have to understand there's going to be the frustration from those individuals coming that are not pleased. And they're asking why, when it was a service that they were provided to them and it was a service that, you know, did a lot for them. So it's pretty frustrating.

But I mean on that point, you've made your decision. It's unfortunate that's the decision you went. I realize it's your government in power, and they have the budgets and the dollars, the resources, so we have to accept that for now. But I just want to make it very clear for the record the frustration that people are feeling when you close and you impact, and that's why I talked about the regulation changes.

Now I want to go to another area of questions and for the fishermen. And I've mentioned them a number of times, and I know there's been some work and you've tried to work with individuals. I know there's been meetings set up. Can you give me a little background information on the last, since you've been the Minister Responsible for Environment, and your dealings with the fish, northern fishermen's association co-operative. Can you give me some background on where you are today, just so I have a better understanding to make sure I'm not missing something?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And just, if I could, just as a final statement before we move on, we are going to, the Ministry of Environment and our compliance staff are going to do all that we can do ensure that those people that are in those affected areas by the closure of those offices, that we provide the most efficient, timely responses that we can so that those people at least as possible feel the effect of the closures.

In terms of the commercial fisheries issue that you've discussed, we made given notice of our intentions a couple of years ago to withdraw from the federal *Freshwater Fish Marketing Act*. That took effect of April 1st of this year. So those regulations have been amended to enable us to do that. I had the opportunity to meet with a group up in Prince Albert last fall — I don't have the date but it would have been last fall sometime — to discuss some of their issues. Next week I understand that there is a conference that's taking place and at that time, while it's already been communicated to their leadership, at that time we'll announce that royalties on commercial fish are being removed by the province. So we've made a number of steps to facilitate those that are in this industry.

**Mr. Vermette:** — I know that they were looking at of course their own plant, and they were trying to get the ministry to work with them to assist them. And where are you right now with that plan?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We would be . . . I mean certainly Ministry of Environment is a part of government that is working on all of these issues as it relates to commercial fisheries, alongside with, I know, First Nations, Métis Relations, that ministry, as well as Enterprise Saskatchewan. But in terms of a fish plant, that's something that at this time it's not something that is a part of the Ministry of Environment's budget.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay. So you're talking about as far as a

physical building. But you may assist them in regulations then. Would that be correct? That would be the role of the Ministry of Environment to be working with them as far as reaching out to any other markets that they want to if the monopoly's gone. Is that what you're saying?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes, that would be correct.

**Mr. Vermette:** — How much discussion have you had with Northern Affairs department when it comes to fisheries? Can you give me an idea of the discussions you're having about the file itself?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. Certainly on this file, there has been discussion between those three ministries that I mentioned earlier — First Nations, Métis Relations, as well as Enterprise Saskatchewan and Ministry of Environment — as we have been trying to move this file forward since the request came in from the commercial fishers to withdraw from the federal Act and from the monopoly.

It's something that in terms of . . . I don't know if it's formally classified as a working group, but certainly officials are engaged between those three files. It's been a discussion that we've had, the three ministers have had and it's certainly from our point of view, from my point of view, Ministry of Environment, our role in this as a larger issue was the actual removal from the federal Act and from the monopoly, and that has taken place.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay. Thank you for that. I want to go back to an area where you touched on earlier. And you talked about the leases, 21-year lease is actually what it is. It goes from one year \$15 to a 21-year lease.

And I know the trapper, just a letter. I've seen the letters. I know that trappers are not signing them. And I think there's kind of confusion in the letters. And I've checked into it with you, sending out correspondence and phoning to see what some of the offices in P.A. and I think I contacted individuals there as well. People are concerned about signing these 21-year lease because they're not sure, after 21, if it's getting renewed. The yearly one, they're fine with.

If there's a clause in there to actually hand it . . . Right now traditionally, they can hand it off to one of their grandchildren, their children, somebody who's living a traditional lifestyle. They can hand it off and pass their trapper's cabins, is what they've done, from my understanding.

Can you give me a little background information on that? I think it would be good to know, and I think some people are confused with it because I'm hearing different things from some of the, you know, information we're getting from the ministry itself.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes. Certainly this is one where I will . . . I will admit that some of the concerns that were brought forward are a little bit . . . Certainly I don't quite understand the concern. We had the situation where it was a yearly lease. So from year to year, the trapper didn't know whether or not government was going to say yes to renew that lease. And there was a fee attached to it, a \$50 fee, I believe, what it has been in

the past.

We undertook the decision to extend that into a 21-year lease with no fee attached to it, largely to provide some certainty for those individuals so that they essentially know going forward that, rather than year to year, this would provide them with the ability to know for a great many years down the road where they stood in terms of that lease.

**Mr. Vermette:** — And I think when you go into the regulations or provisions, whatever is in there about the 21-year lease, and whether it's a year, I don't know the regulations. And I'm not going to try to say that I know them offhand right now, but what the concern is very clearly was I know it was a year, and every year they would renew their lease and they'd have to pay the \$15. Some chose to waive that and not pay it. And some believe it's their traditional rights and they're going to be challenging that, that they should have never paid that \$15. It was done under treaty rights entitlement to have a traditional trapline and to gather sustenance for themselves and their family.

So I've heard the different issues, arguments back and forth. And some pay; some don't. Some get advised by leadership, I wouldn't worry about it; don't pay it, it's a traditional right. Then you go to every year \$15, they renew their lease. They pay their \$15. It's there for another year.

I haven't heard anyone say that they've lost their lease as a trapper. I can't say that I've heard someone say with the year-to-year that they've lost their provision or that the ministry has ruled against them that they can't renew it or they've taken it away. I'm not aware of any. So more when this 21-year lease came out, some of them are concerned. And I hear you, you're saying, well every year, and we haven't heard any concerns. All of a sudden there's discussion that the 21-year lease, after you serve the 21 years, that's it. Like there's no provisions in there anywhere.

And I've asked this from some of the officials to provide that to me, and they couldn't provide it to me, because we're just . . . We assume it's going to be a grandfather clause. It'll just go over; we assumed it would just be renewed. Okay. We just assume that's going to happen. They apply like they do with the yearly, but on the 21-year.

So people are a little concerned when they see those letters come in the mail. I'm telling you, I've had some that just will not . . . They're nervous to change what they were used to. What are you guys up to? So that's what I'm hearing, so I'm just trying to share it with you. Now whether it's information that we have your ministry clear up with the trappers, with the leadership. I think maybe that's what's going on. And you might say that it's a good thing, but some of them are just . . . anyway.

When somebody comes and gives you something: hi, we're from the government; we're here to give you something free. People really . . . It's amazing how it's, why are they giving this to us? What's . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, you know. Anyway, there are concerns. Just so you're aware.

[14:00]

**Mr. Murphy:** — Kevin Murphy. So I would say first of all that we do need to do a better job of communicating what the intention is here with the northern people that are utilizing this service. I would say that the original \$15 fee was cost recovery for processing. And in looking at that, we determined that if we turn it into a 21-year lease, which we were advised is sort of a maximum level of lease that we can provide under our regulation, then we can waive that fee. And that's really what this is all about, is providing better service to northerners and allowing them some certainty, as the minister indicated, about their holdings. In no way is this intended to be something where we're taking away any kind of livelihood rights or access to the land. And we do need to do a better job of communicating what our intent is here and what some of their continuing access will be.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Because just for the record right now, this is what I was told. If the option is to go to the 21-year or stay at the one-year, they have that option, is what I was told when I phoned the P.A. office with your ministry. The individual I dealt with said very clearly . . . I had a letter from one of the trappers that was in and we talked about it and getting the option of signing to a 21-year lease. And the one individual did and everyone else that has done it has said to me, I'm not doing it. So they're going to stay out of it because they're concerned about it.

But having said that, can you give me the numbers if you have — and I know, I mean, I don't expect you today get it — but at some time provide, I would love to have the numbers, how many people have switched to the 21-year lease versus the yearly lease?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Vermette, we will certainly endeavour to get those numbers for you. I don't think those would be numbers that we would have with us today. But we'll certainly provide those numbers to you.

And I would just say, if there is concern that the intention is for us to cancel leases, government certainly has the ability to do that on the one-year lease which we don't do. So if somebody's concerned that we're going to terminate their lease in 21 years, we could do it next year if we wanted to, but that hasn't been the practice. So as Mr. Murphy has said, I think on this issue we need to maybe do a better job of communicating why we made this change. It's certainly, it's one that we look to provide some stability for folks up north.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Now one other area I want to go to, you talk about education dollars. And you guys have been working with the trappers, be it fishermen. And proposals would come forward to educate, whether that's for training or . . . And I hear you. You're saying that you're willing to do that, your ministry is willing to work in that way. So when I hear that, is there a budget that you have allocated to education training for the traditional trappers, fishermen at all? Or is it just, you take it out of your ministry? I'm just curious to see if there is something there.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — What we had indicated to the northern trappers was that if they were to continue with their conventions and that there was an educational component, that we would reimburse them for some costs. So I believe at this last

convention after the fact, we did reimburse them for, I believe it was, less than \$10,000 for an educational program that they did put on. In terms of the proposal, my understanding of what would be coming or what has come forward from the northern trappers for ongoing support for their convention and some, I believe, some staffing issues, it's not something that we would have built into this budget. So it's not something that we are funding this year.

**Mr. Vermette:** — So then to go further. So if you had decided you wanted to co-operate with them and find favourable to their proposal, there would be dollars there. You could find some dollars, maybe free up somewhere to provide that for them if that proposal was to . . . Not trying to put you on the spot. I'm just trying to be clear that I hope that, you know, there is hope for them, that there's an option. And I know it's not a big amount of money that they're asking for, but I also know that you have to live within your budget. But if there's provisions, I know that they're working hard trying to work as an industry to make sure that they do an excellent job. And I know there's accountability, that any dollars they get, I know they understand they have to be accountable to the government who provides those dollars, and will be if what I'm hearing from them.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes. Certainly it's not something that we have funds earmarked in this budget for. But if it was a decision in this budget year to go forward with their proposal, we'd have to find it from other programming.

**Mr. Vermette:** — Okay. That's good. I guess my last area, whether it's issues or not, I know there's been an invitation to the Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations to come and do a tour of some of the northern communities — Sandy Bay, Pelican. And I have said that and offered that, and he has taken me up on it, and I'm hoping we're going to schedule that.

And at that same time I would like to extend to you because you're responsible for a lot of, I guess, the impact and whether it's economics and the spin-off in northern Saskatchewan and the offices that, you know, service Pelican, Sandy Bay. So maybe when he does that tour and visit with me — I offer, extend that to you as well as the minister — to see what's going on and see where we can work in a positive way to help northern people deal with some of their issues. So I extend that to you.

And again I just want to say to your officials and yourself, thank you for answering the questions and providing me with the information later. These are not easy for us either in northern Saskatchewan to deal with. Some people are very frustrated. And at the end of the day when people are frustrated, they react. And I say that not to . . . I see the frustration with some individuals. They're feeling like they're not being heard and they're feeling like they're second-class citizens.

And I've said this before, earlier in my comments, some people are doing well in our province. And we wish them well and I'm glad that some of the industry, some of the communities, and some individuals are doing well. But a lot of people in northern Saskatchewan are not feeling the boom, and they're not . . . So when they have issues and they see things happening to them, it goes a little harder because of the struggles that they're facing. So when we make even minor cuts, it has a great impact in

northern Saskatchewan because of limited resources, access they have financially, economically.

So I just want to share that and again say to the ministry and your officials, thank you, and to the committee, thank you for allowing me to bring some of the concerns from northern Saskatchewan here today.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — If I could just, Mr. Chair, thank you for your questions, Mr. Vermette. And certainly when you have a date with Minister Cheveldayoff, let me know and hopefully I can also take part in that. Thank you.

**The Chair:** — I recognize Mr. Belanger.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the minister and his officials for being here today to answer a number of questions. And I basically gave you a rundown of some of the issues that I wanted to bring to your attention. I want to add the notion between SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], how do we deal with forest fire — particularly with SARM — forest fire costs in the event that there is a fire within the RM? I want to have specific questions on that and the whole notion of land ownership as it relates to cabins and TRU [traditional resource use] leases in the North in general. But as I mentioned at the outset, those are the two items I want to add to the agenda. And there's so many things I want to talk to you about.

But the first one of course, if you could very quickly in a snapshot explain to us the most recent announcement. I was privy to a lot of discussion at the chamber of commerce's annual assembly at the Hotel Sask. And we had our own forum as members of the opposition, and we had some very good discussions on the environmental code in general. But a lot of folks out there, if you and I begin to talk about the environmental code, they may not understand what this is about and the impact. And perhaps if you can quickly, in a snapshot kind of way, explain what the environmental code is all about in layman's terms for those that may be watching because there are a few students watching this today.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. I guess as quickly as I can, the code is really key to the results-based regulatory approach that we are taking. I believe that it's a tool that we can use to increase transparency and have stronger accountability where we focus our attention, more attention on what would be considered higher risk activities. I believe the code will encourage innovation. As I said, it will add increased accountability for not just industry but municipalities where we really are focusing on, I guess, the results or the outcomes in terms of environmental regulation.

The code itself, at this point which is still in draft form, we are in a period, the period of public review has ended. And we'll be releasing here in the short, not-too-distant future the wrap-up of the public review, consists of 19 chapters dealing with essentially 19 activities that are currently undertaken by industry and municipalities and individuals. And it will, essentially what it will do, it will clearly outline what are the environmental outcomes that are expected for that activity and will also allow either to, I guess, follow the, I guess, two



avenues. One is to follow the acceptable solution to the activity or provides an avenue for an alternative solution. If you have new technology that you want to use that you believe and that a qualified person believes can achieve the same or better environmental outcomes, then that's an avenue that wouldn't exist in today's regulations.

We haven't really gone through, I guess, this comprehensive of a change in environmental regulations in probably 30 years, so it's been a big change. And I don't know if the deputy minister or Mark want to comment further on it. I will just say it's involved a lot of people, not just within our ministry but stakeholders that have been involved. And a lot of hours have gone into developing this, and it's really a first of its kind in Canada. Does the deputy or Mark have anything else?

**Ms. Quarshie:** — Liz Quarshie. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The environmental code is an innovative tool to manage environmental issues. Essentially, it's the first of its kind in Canada. It's designed to allow alternatives. So typically, the environmental management, as you know, you know, we stick to the things we know. So we know this works. And if you bring in alternatives, there isn't very much room in the process that allows you to consider that.

So the code establishes clear objectives and clear outcomes in terms of what you want to meet. It also sets what will be an acceptable solution, which will be the things that we would normally know about. And then it also describes alternative solutions. And the alternative solution is designed to incent innovation so that if there's a new technology or a new way of doing business, you're not saying no, but you're saying that these are the objectives that you have to meet. And it should be the same as the acceptable solution, and you have to demonstrate that it needs that.

It is being looked at very closely by other governments. And we know certainly that the federal government is also looking at that really closely. And it was worked on with different groups, about 200 different stakeholders including NGOs [non-governmental organization] and First Nations industry folks, our ministry staff, other government agencies, and federal government entities and so on. So it's a very comprehensive consensus-based approach to developing regulations.

[14:15]

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. And it's not by accident that I'm leading with the environmental code because I can appreciate, as certainly you can, in terms of the incredible challenge that there is in ensuring that the environment is first and foremost in all of our thinking.

I think in general the public is probably a bit disappointed when politicians use the word adapt to climate change and accept the different weather patterns and the changing systems because they feel that there's still an opportunity to reverse some of the environmental damage that's occurring. And yet they find out that it isn't. We can't reverse that. We simply have to adapt to it. And so there's a bit of a grudging acceptance that there is impact on the environment as we move forward in populating this great Earth of ours.

That being said, I can sincerely appreciate the challenge that you in particular have to face between agriculture, the economy, and the environment. And if memory serves me right, the Minister of Environment is above and beyond political interference when it comes to assessing an economic project. Whereas you cannot be told, this is an economic project; it doesn't meet the environmental code but look the other way. I think out of all the ministries you're probably the most independent minister in terms of your role as the minister responsible for the protection of the environment. So I read a bit of information I want to get from you, but more so, I want to add a few components I think that will be helpful.

Now the environmental code, as I understand it, is an opportunity for the private sector, based on your consultation, to say, look we have these set rules and regulations that we have always followed within government. We are now opening up another chapter for yourself or other groups and individual people to follow this other route, and while we have the same standards, we're going to give you the opportunity to show us how, through innovation or technology or different approaches, how we can achieve the same objective and therefore the same protection of the environment, either using your system or ours. And that basically what the environmental code offers a lot of the players out there is the flexibility to go down route A or route B, but the end result is the same standards are to be met. Am I correct in assessing that properly?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I think that that would be overall, that would be a fair assessment, so long as on that kind of your option A or option B, the option B that provides you an avenue for innovation or new technology, so long as a qualified person signs off on it. So and depending on the activity, it'll be a different, what we would consider a qualified person. But it's not just the company that is going to say, we think that that technology will work. The qualified person would have to sign off on it before we then as Ministry of Environment would sign off on it.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now and that's fair because I think to a large extent when we had our discussions with the chamber and the focus was on the economy and engaging the private sector and all the innovation that they bring to the process, I don't think, that's not, it's not something that they will take lightly. I think they'll really engage themselves and that there is perhaps room for innovation. But to be very clear, this is not a compromise of the principles and the rules and regulations as some people may perceive it as being. I just want to make sure I qualified that.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — No, I don't think it's a compromise at all. I think that, as you . . . So using your wording of A and B, so on the one hand you have the acceptable solutions, which are essentially the regulations as they exist today, just repackaged differently. And on the other side, you have the alternative that industry or municipality can pursue, provided they have a qualified person that has signed off on it. And you know, one of the things that I think we should keep in mind on that is that that qualified person isn't just responsible to the industry, the proponent that has hired them. In many cases, they're responsible to their own professional organizations. So an engineer is going to be pretty, I think, pretty careful about signing off on something. They're going to want to know for sure that it's going to do what the proponent believes it will do.

Because ultimately not only is the proponent responsible to the Ministry of Environment, but that engineer or whatever other qualified person, whatever their professional designation would be, is ultimately responsible as well to their own professional body. It's their own career that they have to be mindful of as well.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. And I can certainly agree with that position because many of them are guided by their professional conduct and ethics, and I appreciate that. So obviously it's not going to be something that they'll do and take lightly.

On that sense, while the focus has generally been on the private sector who have the resources and certainly have I think a very solid position saying, look we can do things differently without compromising the principles and the integrity of the rules and regulations, so let's look at that avenue. And I think the chamber of commerce advocated for that, and there was a lot of good points that they raised along the way.

So we've learned from the private sector as to how the environmental code would work. And then you have the government process, the bureaucracy, I guess you could say. And you'd use the word bureaucrats because . . . But the bureaucracy in general, they also have their standards and their training and their education to say these are the correct measures here.

My point, when I say I had a little additional advice on the environmental code, is we need to engage the landowners much more. I'm sure that you've probably had consultations with SUMA and SARM. But there are probably consultation with the producers, with the farm groups, and the different environmental groups that are all throughout our province.

And I would further add that I think part of that social fabric or the social players that are out there when it comes to the environment in general that aren't organized and don't have the resources that government nor industry have, that they would like to also look at this environmental code and say, well how could we plug in a third or fourth component? And that goes back to my earlier comment and my colleague's comment about how we engage the trappers, the fishermen, the agricultural sector that use our land, that make a living off the land. How do we engage the wild rice growers, the people that I think . . . And I've often referred to the trappers as the conscience of the land because they will tell you what the effect that a large-scale forestry operation has on their immediate area. They may not tell you the science of the entire area, but on their immediate area. And it's a bit of micromanagement on their part, but so be it.

So that's one of the reasons why I think both myself and the member from Cumberland constantly harp about the value of the commercial fishing industry, about the fishing industry in general, the tourism opportunities, and the trappers. Now the trappers, like he mentioned at the outset, they feel that they're not being allowed into the process. And it's a real shame because they do have some really solid points that they want to raise. And we need not look at the trappers as a problem group that'll get in the way of a forestry company. The integrity of the environmental code, if you will . . . Even the word code dictates that we have this honour attached to it and part of the honour, I

totally believe, is that you engage in the smaller players and those that don't have the resources, but have just as much vested interest in the land.

That's why positioning the trappers association was so important to us, and now they're not getting that support. And you're seeing from some of the discussions a lot of the time, they're feeling frustrated. That's why the commercial fishing activity is so important because there's a ways and means they manage the fish population in the lake. They're not killing off tourism opportunity. They're sustaining a lake. So all these issues of smaller players, I would suggest would be an excellent source of advice to you as a minister and to the officials because we could learn off these particular industries.

That's why the engagement was so important to us as a government and certainly continues being so as a opposition member. Do you concur the feelings and if you do, is there any way that you could look at ways and means in which we could support them better? I'm talking about the impact that the industry has, I made reference to.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Just if I could speak, I guess, broadly to the member's question. We have since I believe it was the summer of 2008, I believe August 2008, public consultation and public dialogue has been ongoing since that time in various forms. We endeavour to meet with any group that wishes to. Obviously the preferred avenue would be to go through groups that have, you know, official bodies. It's easier to get to more people that way.

So I believe that just, you know, if I have a few moments, we had public reviews; meetings in Regina on January 30th, in Prince Albert on February 2nd, Saskatoon on February 3rd. About 325 people attended those three morning meetings and then at those three dates we also had specific periods of time in the afternoon for First Nations individuals to come in or groups. We had about 45 attendees come through those groups.

We've had two educational sessions with SUMA. On February 8th there was about 50 members of both SUMA and SARM that were invited to attend an information meeting. I myself met with the Prince Albert Grand Council on February 14th of this year. The SARM board had a meeting with our government officials on February 23rd as well. And we just try not to restrict it to those groups or larger groups. We've offered or I believe there are pending meetings with a number of individual RMs that have some concerns.

So I know it's probably not a process that we are going to be able to contact or have a formal meeting with every individual that comes forward, but a part of the process was the public review that's taken place from about the middle of January to the middle of March where we've invited people to bring forward their submissions. So we've tried to be in touch with as many individuals and groups that either have an interest in the code, have concerns about the code, may have mistaken impressions about what the code is going to do.

Certainly I recognize and the ministry does that this is, while it's not on its face changing very much the actual regulations, there may be an appearance that it is, and so we've tried to get as much as we can the message out of why we're doing this and

what the regulatory piece is going to look like in the future. And so, you know, if there's . . . And we're certainly as a ministry, we're certainly open to being in touch with anybody that we may have missed.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, and I think just, I guess, the point I would raise is I was quite pleased and very satisfied at the chamber of commerce's forum because I felt that forum to have the private sector/industry present their perspectives on the environmental code was good. But the chamber of commerce has adequate manpower. It has money. It has memberships. And it can do a job effectively.

Some of these smaller fringe groups, such as the trappers — who I think are just as valuable in this process, and I think the minister concurs — they don't have the resources to travel to Regina, nor do they have the organization to go to functions in Prince Albert. And many of them may not even view their role as going to these functions to talk about environmental codes and so on and so forth. They think that's something that is not up to them to decide, but they know that they should be playing a greater role. So they end up not doing it.

So they have these conventions, and we don't have the participation of SERM [Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management], Saskatchewan Environment, to the extent we should. And it's a very small gesture I think, having some high profile people at these functions because you learn off them. And it comes to a point where as an MLA when I go to these functions, they give me all this advice, and they give me all these points. And it's good.

[14:30]

Like the one point this gentleman raised, and he said, well I have a commercial fishing licence and I'm told by the lodge owner I can't fish in that area no more. He's an outfitter. And I said, well the outfitters are allowed to harvest what they're allocated to harvest and that's it. He doesn't own the lake. He doesn't own the land. He's allowed to harvest X amount of animals or so many pounds of fish. He has no right to tell you that you can't go there if it's considered a commercial fishing/tourism lake. And the gentleman was quite surprised at it, but obviously I wanted to bring that case forward. And he said, well I'm going to talk to my family first because he was quite upset.

So things of that sort go on. And the outfitting industry is valuable, but so is trapping and so is commercial fishing. And you not only layer all those interests over the demand on the land, and you've got to program in the support to it, then you've got to figure out the time frames. And it gets kind of difficult at times.

But going back to the venue that the trappers have. And I want to read a letter to you from an elderly trapper. And he said, I don't have the voice, but you do, he said. And he wanted me to read it out loud at the trappers' convention, but they had so many people bring up so many issues that we never got the opportunity. So what I said to him: during the estimates, when we have the opportunity, I will read your letter to the minister so he knows first-hand what your issues are. And you'll have to forgive me because I'm going to read it word for word. And

basically this is an elderly gentleman who hadn't had a lot of schooling. But you know, if there's ever, if I was ever stuck in the bush, I'd want him beside me, you know. So a pen and paper wouldn't do me no good there, but having him there would be very valuable. But the letter is dated March 2012, and it says:

Re: logging, closing off roads, bulldozing, planting trees, etc.

I am writing this letter in regards of the above items. As I mention the above, it is of great concern to me and other people, re: the fir block 13 conservation area, Canoe Lake, Cole Bay, Jans Bay.

Logging has become a way of life for the companies doing the harvesting of logs. When the areas of logging have been completed and etc. — I believe it is done by SERM and Mistik — to close off the logging roads, bulldozing, flattening, and planting trees, this has become a big problem for the users of this land. Whoever, Mistik or SERM? Making these decisions are not accepted by the trappers and hunters and all the Natives using this forest by harvesting for food. They are just destroying our way of living.

When planting the trees, the trees cannot grow to its normal height because they are planted so close to each other. When the trees reach the height 6 to 8 feet high, they stop growing because there is no room for them to grow. They are just choked. The logging roads have been blocked off with dirt and debris. Tree stumps being ploughed or pulled off, making big holes, making it dangerous for the wildlife roaming around for feeding.

It would be appreciated if the logging areas could be left at the way the loggers left because nature will take over in due course. Trappers, hunters, harvesters then could use the land for trapping, hunting, and harvesting berries and herbal medicine. So we hope this request could be looked at.

As an elder, trapper, harvester, my name is Ralph Corrigan, trapping block N-13, Canoe Lake area.

And, Mr. Minister, I'll forward a copy of this letter to you. But that's exactly the point I raised earlier. This gentleman, Mr. Corrigan and many others like him, they know the land intimately. I think Mr. Corrigan is 72, 73 years old, in fantastic shape, but he has a strong desire, like any other farmer or rancher, is to make sure they protect that land. It's the same principle. And that's my point about the environmental code. The word code infers honour. The word honour should be inclusive of all those that use the land, such as our producers and such as our trappers.

So I indicated to him at that point, it's the honourable thing to do is to give him the opportunity to get your letter and give him the chance to respond. So I want to give you a copy of this letter and advise Mr. Corrigan that we did present it to you. But the big thing that I would point out, when we speak in northern Saskatchewan, from trapping, commercial fishing, wild rice, building cabins, we're not there to destroy nature. We're there

to protect it. And we just need those industries recognized not just by government, by industry as well because if you want achieve a balance, then you've got to use the people that live off the land and the people that want to extract the resources in a co-sharing way. And many trappers and fishermen feel that that's not the case now.

So I don't know what advice you'd have for Mr. Corrigan. Obviously he would get copies of this presentation. So if you have the opportunity to say what you'd like to say to him, what would it be?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well, Mr. Belanger, thank you for reading his letter. I look forward to looking at it in more depth and responding to the gentleman that wrote it. I think that, as a former Environment minister, you will recognize the, I guess, the challenges of different competing interests in not just northern Saskatchewan but all across the province. And, you know, we try as we can to balance those interests off in a sustainable manner.

The code itself I think is, and it is my hope that, as we can relay more information about the code as hopefully later this year we will put it into place, that it will become or be seen by the people of Saskatchewan as being first and foremost a living document. The code is, as I said, right now it's 19 chapters, but I can tell you that work is already under way on future chapters. It's informed by a number of different stakeholders, not just those that served on the code development committee. I believe it was 19 individuals, 19 individuals from all different areas of the province representing different interests. We had everything from a well-known individual like Wayne Clifton chairing that group. Ann Coxworth from the environmental society was on that group. It was a consensus group. They worked diligently, the hundreds of people that took part in the work to develop the individual codes.

And what I hope that will come out of this is not just greater accountability and transparency for those that use our natural resources and that operate in this province, an avenue for the government and as the regulator to focus more of our attention on those high-risk activities while ensuring that those that are deemed to be lower risk are duly reported to the government so that we can do our due diligence in terms of audit and inspecting those operations, and I think that we'll be seen as a model for other provinces to follow.

But again, I appreciate you sharing the letter, and I look forward to responding to the gentleman's concerns.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Now I just want to again, with the environmental code being the basis of our discussion, there's so many attachments to it, and obviously I want to bring up the land ownership perspective as we go down this path. But what I think is an important component of the environmental code is how we then use this new tool, as you described, to foster new approaches based on the same principle of non-compromise of our rules and regulations and our targets.

Now I don't know how that's going to affect and impact us on the interprovincial perspective because some of the trappers and the fishermen and those that watch the land, one of the most immediate threats right now to our area is the impact of the

Alberta tar sands project. And Fort McMurray, as you may or may have been given the information on, they are looking at ramping up an incredible opportunity for Alberta as a great, fantastic opportunity for Alberta, but many people are very shocked to learn that 70 per cent of the pollution attached to those projects within the Fort McMurray area — and I'll call it Fort Mac just for brevity's sake — but in the sense that Fort Mac's activities in the oil sands is creating a significant challenge to the integrity of the environment overall in the Northwest.

So if I can recap what I've picked up from a number of sources, 70 per cent of the current pollution attached to the Fort McMurray oil sands projects is being dumped on northwestern Saskatchewan. That sphere of what I would call the pollution from these projects is actually gradually expanding. Soon it will begin to hit Meadow Lake area and maybe perhaps P.A. But as they ramp up some of the extraction on some of the oil sands in that area, we actually have the pollution come into the province of Saskatchewan.

Now we know that there is monitoring going on, and we know we're going to say they've increased the monitoring, but I think it's much greater than that. I think this whole challenge is that if we are adopting this whole environmental code and this notion that polluter pays, are we going to have discussion and consultation with Alberta to do one thing, to tell them, stop polluting our land? And if you're going to pollute our land, then we're going to be paid for cleaning up that land and mitigating the damage you're creating to our province and our land. And so far, none of that discussion has been public. And I guess the question I would ask you today, is there any consultation between Saskatchewan and Alberta under the environmental code we spoke about to tell them to do two things: (1) stop polluting our lands; and (2) if you're going to pollute, you're going to pay, so we can mitigate? And the sooner we adopt the second stance then we have to start doing baseline studies to see what's being dumped on our lands. So that's basically the point I would ask you right now for some of your comments.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. First of all I would say that we have a boreal water management project that we are at the beginning of year no. 2. I think one of the challenges that we have to specifically address your concerns is, Mr. Belanger, you speak of baselines. A lot of that information doesn't exist because we weren't doing much in the way of testing in northern Saskatchewan. We've made significant progress in year 1 of this project. We have, and I'll just if I could highlight for the committee members, we have sampled 227 northern lakes for acidification, we've done sediment studies for changes since pre-industrial times, we've done remote sensing tools, put in place remote sensing tools developed to monitor water quality, inventory of soils at 110 locations in the boreal region. We're beginning a joint study on the eastern Athabasca regional monitoring program and taken wet and dry deposition samples at 11 different locations.

And I would like to share with the committee, we just released this morning our plan for year 2 of that initiative. Year 2 will emphasize baseline and historical studies, utilizing traditional knowledge, legacy data, and development of tools. Just in a moment I'll have Dr. Kevin McCullum, head of the technical resources branch in the Ministry of Environment, speak further

to some of the work that he's involved in.

But just my final comment to this point would just be that we know we have a lot to make up for. We have I think lost some considerable time over the last number of years in not addressing at least monitoring in northern Saskatchewan, and I'm very pleased that year 2 of what I would hope, what I do expect would be a five-year project, to continue. \$1 million last year, \$1 million this year from the government. There's some other partners that have put dollars in place. And if Dr. McCullum wants to speak further to some of the work that's being done.

[14:45]

**Mr. McCullum:** — Thank you. Kevin McCullum, Ministry of Environment. One of the things to add into it is that last year we actually officially joined Wood Buffalo Environmental Association as a full member. So we now sit at the board. We authorized some of the payments last year, the \$11 million, the monitoring in the northern regions, specifically in Alberta because that's where they concentrate their efforts. But being on the board we can actually now start to make some of the changes to say we have to push the monitoring into Saskatchewan and paid for by industry. So that's one of the things that we are working with them on that side. In addition to that, we negotiated our MOU [memorandum of understanding] with Alberta last year. And we actually, two weeks ago, sat down with the Alberta environment and water staff and negotiated our work plan and so forth for there. So that was part of again some of the monitoring money that they have and where we're going to partner and go forward with some of the monitoring in the North as well as down the side, the borders and see where some of the transboundary issues are.

In addition to that, we also sat, we have two of our members that sit on the federal oil sands monitoring panel. So with that, we sat with Environment Canada, Alberta Environment, and the Northwest Territories and discussed the different monitoring programs that are going to happen — the transboundary monitoring programs, the water programs, the terrestrial programs. So all of these pieces that we've actually got a step up on. And we've been doing a lot of the work last year as part of the phase 1 of the boreal program. And these are some of the pieces that we're going to follow up with into continuation of the year 2.

But some of these pieces, these are money that's coming from the federal government, from industry, that is going to start putting some of the monitoring in the North for us, and that's including one of the new super CAPMoN [Canadian air and precipitation monitoring network] stations that's going to go at the Pinehouse Lake site, at Island Falls. And we're negotiating the last site. It was either going to be the Meadow Lake or the Buffalo Narrows location to set up that one.

But there's different locations that we're talking about sampling and that's money that's coming from this program, not from our projects. So with the continuation with the boreal initiative and as we continue through that, there is many pieces of this. And it's a multi-faceted program what we're looking at, not only just the water quality — the air quality, the soil quality, the ecosystem health. So there's many pieces of it that we're

coordinating with many different groups, many different industries, many different ministries, and different government agencies as well as the public in addition.

One of the pieces that I can add on to that one is we have worked with the trappers association, Saskatchewan Trappers Association, with some of the terrestrial studies, specifically on the otter study, to look at early warning systems in the water system.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well no, I think this is really important work, you know. And I guess I would ask the question, and this is important, given the prevailing westerly winds — and I made a statement earlier and you perhaps have that information; maybe you don't — but is it fair to assume and continue saying that 70 per cent of the pollution attached to the Fort McMurray heavy oil sands activity, that it is being dumped on in northern Saskatchewan? Is that a fair assessment, given your experience and given the access that you'd have to the different data that's out there?

**Mr. McCullum:** — That study was a paper that was presented in 1996 using 1986 data. A lot of things have changed since then, including the study that was done. It was originally identified that 70 per cent, or the terminology that's used now is 70 per cent of all emissions are blowing into Saskatchewan. But in actuality, the paper identified it was sulphur dioxide that was one of the culprits that they were looking at. Since then there's been a lot of flue gas desulphurization units put on to the industry to reduce the amount of sulphur that's coming out of the stacks.

So what we've engaged with as part of the MOU with Alberta is the remodelling of some of that exercise. That was a model done using the RELAD [regional Lagrangian acid deposition] model. So now we've moved forward into the CMAQ [community multi-scale air quality] model. And in our meeting with the Alberta environment and water folks two weeks ago, they presented us the 2006 model, which is the ground truthing model, and they are now looking at the 2020 model to go forward and look at the potential future.

So we do have some of the places that we are looking at and verifying where we're sampling in the right locations. But the 70 per cent terminology, that was one of the things that we were concerned about because it's something that we're finding is just not true right at this point.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Based on the flue gas as you indicated, right?

**Mr. McCullum:** — The flue gas desulphurization units.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Now under the CMAQ model, I'm assuming — I haven't seen the model — so I'm assuming there is a model out there. But is there an opportunity under that particular model to assess the net impact from where the activity began in the '70s to where it is now? Because I obviously encourage and have spoken and advocated a baseline study. Because it's much like you'd do a . . . You start a fire, and you have some ash. And then you keep adding wood to the fire, and your ash continues to build, right?

And so I'm thinking the same thing applies to the activity in

Fort Mac because obviously they've been going on since the early '70s, late '60s. So obviously the accumulated environmental deposits as a result of that activity over time is probably significant. So if we do a baseline study now, we would have lost 40, 50 years of environmental deposits, negative environmental deposits to some of our northern lands, if we use the 70 per cent model.

Are you able to ascertain, based on some of the modelling that you're talking about, where the deposits began and if they're able to be mitigated? And is there a value attached to that?

**Mr. McCullum:** — It's not just the modelling that we're talking about from the historical perspective. It's also looking at some of the coring work that was done as well. With the coring work that's done, you actually cut down into the sediments of the lakes. And then you actually slice each different, very thin layers, two and a half millimetre layers. And it's equated to so many years of history as we go back through. So using different radionuclei testing parameters and different parameters as we go forward, we can identify how much has been deposited in that area over a period of 100 to 200 years. But on top of that, that's just in the water system, what's feeding into the water system. This year one of the pieces we were looking at to go forward with was the dendrochronology and the dendrochemistry to look at the tree coring work to be able to ascertain, are we seeing the trees picking it up over the 40- to 50-year time frame as well? Or if we have older trees, we can look at the longer time frames as well.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So you're able to adequately and with a certain degree of confidence the net accumulated impact of that activity on not just the land but the soil and the, and in this case, the trees over the last 40, 50 years with, again with confidence.

**Mr. McCullum:** — Some of the work that's being done, you're again having to put a varying confidence limit around it. But we definitely are able to look at what is the trend. Are we seeing it increasing? Are we seeing it decreasing? Have we seen a certain impacted area? And that was one of the bigger questions. Do we see the impact area this size, or do we see the impact area much larger? So that was one of the bigger questions that we were looking at as well.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — And if I could just add, Mr. Chair, I think that that, it's why the boreal monitoring program that we started last September and will continue over the next four years now, five years in total, I think that that's why that program that was started last September is so significant

Because I guess the challenge that we would have, and getting back to I think some of your earlier questions, was, prior to any of this monitoring taking place and some of the paleo work that Dr. McCullum has talked about, is that if the Ministry of Environment had found a lake that had been acidified or that acidification has taken place, prior to any of this work taking place — and I know that there is much more work that needs to be done — the challenge would have been to say, it would have been difficult to point to anybody, including Alberta, to say that we knew what the cause was. Because I think the challenge we would have is to prove what the lake was like 50 years ago, 100 years ago, back further than that.

So I think that that's why some of the work that Dr. McCullum is talking about is so significant in trying to determine what, as best we can, what these lakes would have been like pre-industry.

**Mr. Belanger:** — But based on, again based on the products used and the processes used since the '70s at the Fort Mac area, you probably could make a strong connection that, you know, that sediments, or their interaction with trees in this instance, that you could probably trace it back to what industry may have used in the Fort Mac area. Because would that be easy to do based on some of the research that you speak about?

**Mr. McCullum:** — Some of the research right now has been very localized, and it's been very close to Fort McMurray. So they have been able to look at some of the tracers nearby. But the evidence that we're seeing right now is that the sulphur triggers that we're looking at drop out very quickly, within about 15 to 20 kilometres from the exact source. So to look at some of the other pieces, including in the boreal study, is to look at the snowpack as well.

It gives us a chance to look at it over a longer time frame so that we can see what's dropping out through the atmosphere and landing in that snowpack over the time frame. So far we've only had two snowpack studies done just because it's difficult to get. One year we actually lost it because we lost . . . We had an early melt. And then we got the other two years. But we are definitely looking at some of the different pieces to fit. And can we see this in a chronological, some sort of time series sequence, to see if there is impacts?

The other part is that we have to be able to distinguish between some of the other confounding factors of it. So for instance, for the snowpack, we get, when it melts it will have that, what you would call an acid slug effect just from the nature of the rain as it settles into the snow. It's already naturally acidic. So we have to distinguish between the fact that, is it something that's been compounding for thousands of years or is it something that's more recently affected?

And some of the pieces we were missing in that equation was actually the runoff pieces. So now last year we've actually had 110 sites of soil chemistry done. And we have not had that. So now we have some more of the pieces of the puzzle.

**Mr. Belanger:** — No, and that's very interesting work because I know that there are students in Buffalo Narrows that are paying a lot of attention to this. We actually had a presentation from them to me as the MLA. La Loche students are also doing some analysis out in the field. I think it's being done by the Clearwater River Dene Nation high school. They're actually doing collection point. So I'm not sure whether that's on a continual basis.

But I know that the Buffalo Narrows students are quite concerned about it. They talked to me about it. And I know that the La Loche students have done some studies. Now how extensive their studies are, I'm assuming that it's probably their high school chemistry teacher that's asked them to do this or maybe their social science . . . I'm not sure which class they'd be taking this through. But they have done some of the monitoring. So I think there's a lot of interest in this particular

field despite the fact that people may not think so.

And the other important factor is that as the Aboriginal population north of Fort Mac — I think it's, is it Fort Chip? — they have a lot of travel back and forth. It's primarily Dene people. They're interrelated. They travel back and forth. And they speak about the ongoing environmental problems that Fort Chip has in terms of, you know, just the general health of the population, the problem they're having with their rivers and streams. And it's very easy. You can see how it leads to well, it's the oil companies that are doing this. What's happening in your area? Well I think you better start warning people about that. That's the message that a lot of people are getting from their Alberta counterparts and cousins, so to speak. So it's going to be a bigger, bigger issue as time goes on.

So I'm pleased to see that there is the initiative to undertake this and that your work, Doctor, is very, very important and that there are people that are going to be paying close attention to this stuff. So I guess the question I would ask is, are some of your findings available to the public? How are you going to report your findings? Is it going to be through the website? Is it going to be through the . . . just to the schools or is going to be to the public? I guess the question I would ask is, is it going to be shared, and in what manner will it be shared, your information?

[15:00]

**Ms. Quarshie:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well as the minister said, we have collected a year's worth of data. This is year two of the study. I always say that scientists, we need to be cautious when you start drawing lines between one data point. That's a little risky, so we need to be sure that we have enough data collected to be able to provide appropriate interpretation. And the intention at the end of the five years would be to produce a state-of-the-environment report just on the boreal. And that report, of course pending the minister's approval, will be made available to the public. Yes.

**Mr. Belanger:** — And now if I can in a closing comment . . . Did I understand we're going to have a break? If I can just very quickly because I'm hoping to come back to this for a few more minutes after the break. But I would suggest that Buffalo Narrows be considered for the monitoring site. It's much closer. I think it would be more reflective of the land that we are trying to understand, as opposed to Meadow. Not because Meadow's not a great community, it is, but given the ecosystem of Buffalo Narrows is much similar to the area of Fort Mac. So I would certainly want the ministry to consider that as well.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. We've been sitting for a good period of time. With the committee's agreement, we'll take a five-minute break. Be back here at 10 after.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**The Chair:** — If I could have the attention of committee members and staff, we'll begin with the second half of our discussion with the Minister of the Environment. I'll recognize Mr. Belanger.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And again, I want to come back to the Fort McMurray study in general

because there's a lot of things that I want to ask. And certainly I will, I'll do so, but at a later time.

I want to shift my focus a bit to the forest fire situation. I know the ministers had discussions with SUMA and SARM, in particular SUMA. And I'm just trying to check with the minister, as these RMs have fairly large expanses of land in which they are, you know, they basically have to look after, what is the relationship between SARM, an RM, and your ministry when it comes to things like forest fires in particular, but other issues — waste management, illegal dumping — like how, like what are some of the processes that you use to connect with SARM?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Mr. Chair, if just . . . Apology to Mr. Belanger. Sir, could you just repeat the question? You're asking about the forest fighting, forest fire fighting services in relation to when RMs may require assistance or . . .

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, the three areas. I know that you meet with SARM on a regular basis. What is the relationship with the forest fire fighting situation that on occasion happens? I shouldn't say on occasion but steady. There's also waste management matters and there's also illegal dumping or concerns on wildlife management. Like is there a process in which you communicate with SARM on a regular basis? And on those three specific issues, what kind of agreement, if you will, have you established on those three fronts?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In terms of the first part of your question, in terms of forest or fire control in an RM, we wouldn't have, I guess, an agreement with SARM. We deal with municipality by municipality depending on the individual circumstances based on cost-recovery of what services that we do provide.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now in the instance of a fire, obviously there's a number of RMs that may have gone through that. So if there's a fire and I'm a reeve of the RM and we obviously can't fight this fire, we can call on Saskatchewan Environment to help us fight this fire. Is that correct?

[15:15]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — That would be correct.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. Now when you're called in, do you help cover some of the costs for the RM or is it all their cost? Because obviously RMs can't afford to fight fires on a regular basis.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So we bill back to the RM based on recovering our own costs. And then should the circumstances arise where the RM doesn't or the municipality doesn't have the financial resources to pay back, there is the ability at the minister's discretion to write off all or some of the costs.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Have you done that in the past, say two to three years? And if you can, give us an idea as to which RMs were impacted and which were the amounts.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Okay, so just in the last year, so in 2011-2012, I'll give you a list of the RMs. So the RM of Beaver

River, the RM of Lakeland, the northern village of Ile-a-la-Crosse, the northern village of Pelican Narrows, Turnor Lake, La Loche, and Patuanak, yes, if I'm saying that right, okay. Patuanak.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay, based on that model, you're saying that these communities could not afford to pay for the costs. So it's something that the ministry does on a case-by-case basis that you would forgive these costs. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jessop:** — So the minister stated the municipalities that were identified where there was cost-free assistance — Darryl Jessop, by the way — where there was assistance by the ministry in last year of 2011-2012. So what is billed to a municipality in order to support a municipality when they do request our assistance is our actual costs on that fire for fuel, that kind of thing, and not capital replacement costs of equipment, aircraft and so on. So that list of communities were the communities where there was assistance and where there was a decision to send cost recovery invoices.

There were a few municipalities that received assistance as well from going back to 2010 all the way back through to 2007. And the bills were not very large. Those bills were anywhere from a little over \$400 to the highest was \$9,700. So from 2007 to 2010 there was assistance to roughly 10 rural municipalities, reasonably small invoices, and they were all invoiced and paid.

**Mr. Belanger:** — No, and I certainly concur that the reason why I'm asking the question is that I know that RMs have difficulty in paying some of the fire suppression costs in the event that there is a wildfire within their boundaries. So I would want to certainly support the notion that, in the event that this creates financial hardship to the point where the RM is severely compromised from operations per se — as the northern communities are, as many other communities are — then I think it's a very wise choice that the minister makes in terms of writing off those debts because in particular the RMs have struggles. The northern communities have struggles as well.

And when you hear some of the northern communities are getting bills for fire management costs, it becomes very discouraging to me because they simply don't have the resources to maintain what they have there now. And to have this added cost attached to their operating budget, it's simply not something that they can do. Any of the northern communities or the RMs that can't afford to fight fire on their own, I think it's very wise of the ministry to (a) fight those fires to stop the spread and to minimize damage and threats to lives of course, but (b) is not to recover any costs from them because it's simply something that they cannot afford. So I'm pleased to hear that the practice is there and that I hope that all the communities are treated fairly and properly and with the attitude that we certainly don't see them being able to afford those costs.

And the other issue is under the forestry fire fighting aspect when there was an announcement to lose a lot of the fire suppression members. Could you tell me, in total, how many FPWs [fire protection worker] we lost as a result of the decision by SERM to take one member of each of the crews? And where are these crews located now, and again the net effect of job losses for some of the northern forest fire fighting crews?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So in total, it works out to 14 and a half FTEs [full-time equivalent], and we can also provide a list of the crews that.

**Mr. Jessop:** — Darryl Jessop again. So, Mr. Belanger, the 14.5 FTEs for reducing the crews to four-person ministry fire fighting crews results in 38 positions. So that affects 38 positions. And that is going to be accomplished through attrition, through vacancies and attrition. And the ministry is already at 25 of those 38, did not return to work or retired, so that's 66 per cent that the ministry is at already. And in the last four or five years, traditionally we have been seeing around that 30 mark of individuals not returning to work, going on to other jobs, going on to other industry — mining, with the forest industry, coming back so mining and minerals and so on.

**Mr. Belanger:** — One of the things as well, I think it is important just from your perspective, as a minister as you would know, that you had some very valuable employees, people that have years and years of experience. And when we see cuts of this sort, it really, really hurts a lot of the morale of the team because they have a team. And it really affects of course the lives of the individuals that either are forced to retire or decide not to come back for a number of reasons.

We pay very close attention to this file because we see it in our communities every day. But one of the things that's really important I think is this physical test that we do for some of our employees. At one time, the employees that were getting older were grandfathered where they didn't have the same standards as a young, new person, which is fair. And we understand now that some of the physical testing that's being put in place to push even more of the employees out of the employ of forest fire protection is now that protection for the grandfathered employees is now gone. So many of these older employees have to take this physical test, and thereby they may not be able to pass it, and as a result of that, they may lose their job. I don't think it is a very wise thing to do to the staff out there, especially the elderly staff that have dedicated many years of their lives to help protect communities and the lives and property and of course the forestry industry.

So is there an opportunity, Mr. Minister, for you to reconsider forcing older employees to take a physical fitness test of which they were exempted previously so that they don't lose their job because they can't basically pass a fitness test that perhaps you and I might have difficulty passing?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, and to Mr. Belanger for your question. Just on the first part, in terms of how we are achieving our FTE reduction targets in this branch, as Mr. Jessop has said, we are doing this over a couple of years so that in fact we can do it through the annual attrition that we do just through natural means — people moving on to other positions, people retiring. So that's why we've taken two years to do it so that we aren't having to let anyone go that otherwise wanted to come back. And I'm pleased to hear the numbers, that that seems to be working out well this year.

And I'll ask Mr. Jessop just to talk a little bit about the physical fitness requirements.

**Mr. Jessop:** — Okay. The fitness requirements had changed



this year for the first responders initial attack crew. Saskatchewan, along with all of the Canadian provinces and national parks and Northwest Territories, hired a group to actually review the entire fitness programs right across the whole country. So with that, there was some scientific rigour applied to a company that was hired, and they actually worked with each province — well, worked with the crews in each province — to do some of the testing to establish what a test should be and using new knowledge and new scientific data and new testing procedures.

And so an export standard was established so that under occupational health and safety all the provinces know that they're receiving firefighters, when they do request assistance, that will meet the standard that they require in their province. Now each individual province had . . . So there's a higher standard for export because it was based on an average across the country. Each province has a fitness standard as well. So the fitness standard changed for Saskatchewan, and it is not as high as British Columbia where you have the mountainous terrain, but it is similar to Northwest Territories, Manitoba, and Ontario.

So with that standard, that replaced the old fitness level that we have. So being that the firefighters are in the initial attack and particularly are involved with dangerous work and work that certainly requires a lot of physical exertion, the concern for health and safety is something that we are very concerned with as a ministry, and so have moved to the new standard that has been established for the province that meets all the tests, meets all of the case law tests. There was one . . . One is a Meiorin decision so it meets all of the standards. So that is being implemented.

And so with that, there are 46 grandfathered positions that were grandfathered when the initial . . . because the province has had a fitness test for many, many years. It was initially introduced in 1998, then 1999. The grandfathering was with the existing staff at that time, in 1998. 1999, any new staff coming on had to meet the fitness standard of that day.

Now that fitness standard has changed. And interpretation that we've received from Justice, and legal as well, is that if we're going to meet our occupational health and safety requirements that we have under legislation, that if the same people are going to be doing the same job, they're going to have to be treated the same as far as fitness standards. And you really won't be able to make exceptions if you're going to have them doing exactly the same work, working side by side. So this new test does a number of things.

We also have a standing blood pressure test before they will even be put through that test. And we've had a number of staff that had to go and see the doctor after that, that we wouldn't put through a test. And this is good for looking after their own health.

But grandfathers, we had about six that couldn't take the test because of blood pressure. And even the non-grandfathers, there was around six. So those staff all had to see a doctor. Some of them have come back with a clearance from the doctor and have actually then taken the test and passed it. So we have all of these rigours in place to do the best we can to really ensure the

health and safety of our firefighters.

[15:30]

**Mr. Belanger:** — You see, one of the things I think is important is that, as a minister, I don't want to compromise your position ensuring that you have employees in adequate physical fitness to be able to achieve the objectives that are expected of them. Nobody's asking the minister to do that.

What I'm asking the minister today is that there is a difference between export standard physical testing for some of the FPWs that work in your employ as dedicated men and women, and they do a great job. There are grandfathered employees that have given years and years of their life and their service to this particular government service, protecting families, homes, and property. And now we're requiring them in, I think, in an unfair way to take a physical fitness test that may not be required if they are assigned to light duty as an example.

So we're not sending these guys to climb mountains in BC [British Columbia]. They may be able to fill a support mechanisms role in the fire base in Buffalo Narrows or La Loche or whatever the case may be. I don't think that was the right decision to take the grandfather clause away from some of these employees. Re-designating them to light duty may be the opportunity.

One could counter-argue that removing one member from the team is also contrary to the MARS agreement which is the mutual aid response system. That may be contrary as well. So we can't justify one action as being necessary through attrition and savings and yet do another action saying, well because of occupational health and safety we have to this. It doesn't fit. It doesn't jive, so to speak.

So in that sense, is there an opportunity, Mr. Minister, to look at the option of having those grandfathered employees excluded from the rigours of natural testing, understanding we're not sending them to fight fires in BC, climbing mountains, so to speak? But the same token that there is an avenue for light duty so they're able to fulfill their job in a dignifying manner over the next 5, 10 years, whatever the age may be, so they don't lose their job because they can't pass the physical fitness test that is required from Manitoba or Ontario. And I'd go so far as to lay this challenge. If I pass the physical fitness test that is required of the FPWs, would you back off the grandfathered employees today?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for your question and for your offer. I think it's important to note though that Public Service Commission works in conjunction with the Ministry of Environment in determining the circumstances on a case-by-case scenario. It looks at what positions may be more appropriate for those individuals. I think it's, in terms of those that are actually boots-on-the-ground firefighters though, I'm not sure if you could just try to classify that as a light, in terms of a light-duty position.

I think it's positive to note that 12 of the individuals that were in those grandfathered positions have passed the exam and that the ministry does provide a six-week training period to help enable those individuals to get into a position to pass those

exams. And I think too it's worth noting, as Mr. Jessop has noted in one of his earlier answers, that in a number of individual's cases the new standards in fact encouraged and recognized that a number of those firefighters had some health concerns that needed some attention from the medical community, and so I think that that's been a benefit. And I'm sorry I didn't actually quite catch your offer at the end, so if you want to repeat that.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay, when I say light duty, I'm not, obviously, out firefighting and carrying hoses to the bush. That's not light duty. It's fairly rigorous, demanding work. I'm talking about a support base or a support team at the fire base making sure that there is an opportunity for some of the older employees that can't pass this physical test, that they can contribute in other ways, given their age. They had a grandfather clause. They were protected under this grandfather clause, and now your department's telling them well, thanks for your years of service, but we got this new rigorous testing model in place because occupational health and safety requires you do that. So you take this test, otherwise you're dust. And I'm glad to hear that some of them have passed it.

But as we proceed down this road, the manner in which we're discarding some of these older employees is not fair to them because they really love their job. And the fact of the matter is that they're not only there just to fight fire, and they've contributed greatly over the years when they're younger, but as they age they have a lot of experience in how to fight fires in a different way. They can give good advice to young people. They can help you with some of the geography, you know. They have a history of being able to fight the fire or can contribute to fighting fires in many ways, shapes, and forms, as opposed to being in the bush carrying hoses through thick brush. That's a point I would make.

And today if there's 4 or 5 or 6 or 10 or 12 of those people that have the challenge of being able to pass that exam, that were grandfathered prior, if they can't pass the exam, then they're out of a job. My suggestion is perhaps we look at light-duty work to play a supportive role to the people that are able to pass those physical demands of that particular task. Why take the grandfather protection away from these long-term employees and offer them the choice of passing this test, otherwise they're gone? I think it's very fair treatment to the employees in general. So that's the first point I would make.

And the second point: it's probably a rigorous test, but if I take it and I pass it, then leave the grandfathered people protected under light-duty response to support the staff out there. That's an offer and challenge I have to you as a minister.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well again thank you for your question and your comments. Not a surprise, I'm not going to take you up on that offer, although I appreciate it. And I would just reiterate that in those cases we try to work as best we can through the Ministry of Environment, through the Public Service Commission to continue to employ those members that will have difficulty in passing the physical fitness exam and move them as much as we can into what would be considered light-duty activity when those positions are vacant.

What I would say that I'm not in favour of though, is that if

they stay in active duty in terms of in the bush fighting the forest fire, I wouldn't, frankly I wouldn't feel comfortable knowing that we have individuals in the forest fire complement that we knowingly have put into harm's way because of some health challenges and concerns. But again I'm sure the ministry will work diligently with the Public Service Commission to try and find those positions that are vacant that they can move people to suit their circumstances.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, certainly you don't want to put your employees in harm's way. I'm certainly not advocating that in any way, shape, or form. I'm just indicating to you that there's got to be respect and consistent treatment for the people that gave us years of service, years of dedicated service that have attributes and skills and knowledge that could be a complementary role to the people or to the boots on the ground, so to speak. And that we needn't, we need not discard them simply because they can't pass their physical test, which is probably demanding.

So that is my point and that's the offer that I've raised to the minister. And the testing itself, the physical testing, I'm not sure how the testing is done, but I can tell you that a lot of these employees will try their darndest to pass it. And it's just their age. And I can almost guarantee you, Mr. Minister, that out of the seven committee members we have here today, there's probably four or five of us that have high blood pressure. Does that disqualify us from this particular job? And perhaps it should. My point is that we have to work with people that have given us years of dedicated service, and that we can't find an excuse to let them go based on the fact that they're aging, and that they can contribute in many other ways. That's my point.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I appreciate that. And I would just again offer, that if in the case of those members, that if the issue is high blood pressure, I'd much rather the ministry find that out in them not succeeding in the fitness exam, rather than finding that out in a much worse circumstance in the middle of a forest fire when they're trying to carry around 100 pounds of equipment. And when that happens, we'll do all we can to help them to, first of all, become healthy or address the health challenge that they do have. And failing that, if there's an opportunity to retain them in the service in some capacity, we'll certainly do that when possible.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay, and I'll just ask the minister to exhaust all those avenues. I appreciate you said, when possible but, Mr. Minister, I think you need to exhaust all those avenues and to minimize the amount of people you're letting go, especially those that may fail that test, that you find other capacities in which they can work. Because these are dedicated employees that have given not just this government, but other governments, years and years and years of valuable service.

I want to shift . . . And I probably could pass that test, but why take it if there's no net effect at the end of the test? So that's why I challenge you today to the test. All right. And if the minister wants to do a test together, I'm most certainly willing to do that.

Mr. Chairman, I want to talk a bit about, just to shift costs or shift focus on the illegal draining issues. As you know, Mr. Minister, you've been subjected to some of these comments the

last several days and that there are many people, including the chamber of commerce, that are advocating for a comprehensive water management strategy. And they have indicated this on numerous occasions that in many ways that their message is that we've got to develop a comprehensive water strategy that is really, really visionary and far-reaching and beneficial for many, many years.

Now the last several days, especially during the question period, you were speaking about some of the illegal draining that's occurring primarily in the Lake Lenore area. And we've had families that are coming to the Assembly, and this has been an ongoing problem. It's not something that occurred overnight; successive governments have been battling with this particular issue. And then of course you have the ongoing challenge of the feast and famine of our water supply. Sometimes there's no water and sometimes there's too much, and it becomes very confusing.

So at the end of the day, I know that people are asking the question that, how are you going to address this whole illegal draining issue? Because as we speak, there's a lot of activity happening in many ways, shapes, and forms, illegal as well, the manner in which water is being drained from land. And it's creating a huge problem, not just in that particular area but all throughout the province.

So is there any kind of statement or comment or vision that you want to share with us that deals with this particular issue and other issues that affect our water supply and quality of water control?

[15:45]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Mr. Belanger, for your question. I think I'll maybe start by saying that, as you have noted already, this isn't probably a new challenge for government. Certainly all governments from time to time struggle with the issue of drainage, more specifically illegal drainage.

Certainly this last year has caused significant concern when it comes to drainage across the province. We had it partly born out by the fact that we had, you know, a number of municipalities that were declared disaster or emergency situations, landowners and property owners that were significantly impacted. The drainage issue is one that we are looking at as part of an overall water management strategy that I've spoke in, probably, not a lot of detail in the past.

We started out, under the Ministry of Environment about a year ago, conducting some stakeholder consultations as we look to have a new water management strategy for the province, initially, as I spoke at a number of events, initially guided around broad principles of water quality, water quantity, allocation. Certainly drainage is a part of that and issues around drainage. We have, under the auspices of the Watershed Authority that is largely the main government agency around this issue, we've certainly had a number of discussions broader around the water strategy, but more specific on the issue of drainage.

What I've tasked with the Watershed Authority to do is look at

what options we can pursue. Governments, past governments have treated this issue differently. I know that back, I believe under the Blakeney government of 1981, the decision was made to just grandfather every single drainage project, whether it was a legal one or illegal one.

We had the Watershed Authority looking at some alternatives when it comes to enforcement, looking at, you know, what tools the Watershed Authority currently has, whether they're sufficient or not. I think the assumption is, is that in a year like we've had this year, in the last couple of years, then maybe those tools aren't appropriate or adequate enough. So we've tasked the Watershed Authority to look at all options in terms of their enforcements, in terms of the legislation and regulations around drainage.

I think one of the challenges — and I think, Mr. Belanger, as you'll recognize — is that with 50 per cent of the arable acres in Canada, it's not really an issue of staffing levels because there's just so much land to cover that we'd have to have every single government employee, not just the Watershed employees, looking out for drainage. As well, the Watershed Authority is looking at some new tools, some new technologies, some satellite imagery to help in this area. So it's one that certainly is top of mind.

I'm going to be sending out a notice or a pamphlet, information material, to every landowner in the province talking about, under the current regulations what, I guess what is legal, what is illegal, how you go about getting a permitted drainage project, what the consequences are of illegal drainage, and who to contact if you have some concerns or some issues. So it's one that we're working on actively right now.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Right now. So I always fancy the notion that you go into the southeast corner of Saskatchewan and lift it up and let all the water drain over the height of land and then put it back down again to even out the land use . . . sorry, water use. Because I think that you see the drought happening in the midwestern area of Saskatchewan, yet they have a ton of water in the Southeast. And it just seems that there's all the different problems attached with either no water or extreme amount of water, and you have the contrasting problem.

Has there been any discussion between Manitoba and Alberta and Saskatchewan in terms of your water management strategy as to whether there's going to be any kind of major Western Canadian plan to address this whole issue of water control and water quantity and water management? Are those ongoing discussions on a grand scale, or is it just basically on a smaller scale? How would you describe those discussions?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you to the member for the question. This is an area that has been discussed, beginning a couple of years ago, right basically at the top with the Western premiers. They looked at ways that the Western provinces could work together on water management issues. That then was elevated to the Council of the Federation, a discussion amongst all Canadian premiers about water stewardship. As well the Prairie Provinces Water Board has had significant discussions. I'll maybe ask Wayne Dybvig, the president of the Watershed Authority, to maybe talk a little bit about that.

**Mr. Dybvig:** — Thank you. Wayne Dybvig. So yes, as the minister mentioned, the premiers did establish this Western Water Stewardship Council and now there is a national stewardship council with representatives from every province getting together and seeing what we can share as information and knowledge about water from across the country. And this group has now just been recently, just established last fall at the national level. And it's now informed by a national advisory committee that has 12 distinguished academics and business leaders across the country also, providing advice to this stewardship council.

In addition, as the minister mentioned, there is regular discussions at the Prairie Provinces Water Board, which involves both Canada, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. And issues like drainage are often discussed at the board. The board actually has a drainage task force that looks primarily at some of the issues between Saskatchewan and Manitoba. So there is quite good engagement between the jurisdictions on some of these issues.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So as part of the ongoing discussion that you have, whether it's a national or a regional basis, there's no discussion as a three-province plan to kind of address this problem? Because I think right now we have the trouble of having too much water. But I can suggest to you that within the next four or five years it might be not enough water. And there are many people that are saying that Alberta is considering looking at options on how they can build a network of reservoirs and man-made lakes in which they could hold back some of the water that we typically get from the runoff, right. So I don't know if those are rumours, but there's been several people that I hear on the radio talking about that possibility that Alberta simply wants to keep more of the water. And right now there's so much we don't worry about it.

But in the long run, I think we have to really be careful that we don't simply look at the situation now, that we look at it 5, 10, 15 years from now as to where we would be as a province. We don't have a comprehensive water strategy. And that I think was the chamber's point. That I don't know if there's a price tag attached to it, but any discussion on holding back water from Alberta, as an example, for their own purposes, that would have to be . . . would have the agreement of all the three provinces because I'm assuming we still have the water flow agreements, right? So has there been any kind of discussion or inkling or promotion of that idea from any of our other partners?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I'll just speak generally to that, and then I'll have Mr. Dybvig follow up in some specifics. You know, I think certainly we recognize that while we may be dealing right now at a time of too much water, certainly our focus can't be on that for the long term. I think that it's the consensus that the Prairie provinces will be dealing with drought more than surplus water going forward into the future.

As well I think it presents both opportunities and challenges for the province. I think that it, in terms of challenges, I think one of them that I think we should be mindful of is that Alberta, in particular southern Alberta, is . . . The demands for water are continually going up. And you know, I think they have some difficulties with allocations and maybe have overallocated the water that they do have, and so I think that that presents both a

challenge but an opportunity for Saskatchewan to look at, you know. I think it's pretty clear that not only because of a growing population, a growing province, but also growing demand from industry, that our water demand is going to be going up as well. And I think we need to be mindful of that. I think that that's one of the areas that we're going to focus on as we work towards releasing a water strategy for the province. You know, I think one of the challenges, as we've seen in this last year, is in times when we do have water, often we have too much water, and it's not in the areas that we need it to be. And I think that provides us with some challenges in terms of moving water around the province. Maybe have Mr. Dybvig speak more to the issues with Alberta.

**Mr. Dybvig:** — Thank you, Minister. Yes, in terms of the relationship between Saskatchewan and Alberta, we've had the Master Agreement on Apportionment since 1969, which is an agreement between Canada and the three Prairie provinces. And that sets out how we will share the natural flows of the river systems like the South Saskatchewan and the North Saskatchewan. And there's always been various rumours about Alberta wanting to take perhaps more than its share and talked about perhaps doing that, doing things that would allow them to do that.

But Alberta has always made a very strong commitment to the master agreement. And in their water strategy that they have, they call Water for Life, I believe the number one commitment that they have is honouring the Master Agreement on Apportionment. So they've been very public about their commitment to the agreement and really, that's all we can do is go by their word. And they certainly have given their intentions to honour that agreement.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. I would just say that from the perspective of Alberta giving us what a lot of Albertans think is their water, you know, through the master agreement, you know, we've managed them not to stop the flow of water because it flows westerly. Right? So I'm just thinking from the perspective of those rumours, those continual rumours that Alberta controls the water flow into Saskatchewan and we control the water flow into Manitoba, and there's all the discussion going back and forth, those rumours are persistent that they want to do something to retain more of their water because of their population. Their demands in southern Alberta is a good example that you raised.

The other issue that we're hearing a bit about is that there has been a lot of discussion on the Free Trade Agreement, trying to identify water as a commodity as opposed to part of the natural environment. Is there any kind of international or national protection of our water resource in general to not seeing large pipelines starting to be developed for a lot of Canada's water and Saskatchewan's water being piped into the States? Is that discussion out there? Is that one of the threats as well that we need to incorporate in our overall thinking?

[16:00]

**Mr. Dybvig:** — Wayne Dybvig. So yes, the issue of export of water has been something of a discussion for many years. And about in 1999, the federal government organized, got together with all the provinces and started a campaign to try and get all

the provinces to work together to come up with legislation that would prevent, as much as possible, the potential for export of water.

And so coming out of that actually every province did develop legislation attempting to be in conformance with the Free Trade Agreement as much as possible, that should prevent the export of water to United States. And similarly Saskatchewan, in *The Watershed Authority Act*, has legislation to do that.

**Mr. Belanger:** — No. So my point today is that, based on that Act, there's nobody right now that has water permits for mass export to the States. And none of the northern lakes are being tapped in for any of this fresh water. I just want to make sure I'm clear on that point.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes, you'd be correct on that. There's no permits or anything of that kind.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. And I want to make sure, Mr. Minister, because we've been getting some calls that there is companies that are looking at trying to get larger quantities of water through the permit system for sale, and that they're targeting some of the northwestern lakes. Now these are calls we are getting on a continual basis and I'll get you the information, and I'll ask you to investigate that information. Because if that is occurring, then obviously I think it's in contravention of the legislation. I think it's the national interest to protect our water supply, and we shouldn't have jurisdictions that are doing things opposite to what the public I think would expect us to do, and that is to make sure that we protect our natural water supply for years and years to come.

So I want to again, speaking of water, I can appreciate, Mr. Minister, the draining issue that you speak about. I can appreciate the water management strategy that is needed and it's going to be a huge proposition and perhaps a huge, huge cost. And we're also talking about the demands that industry may have on our water supply. So this problem of water management, as indicated by the chamber, has got to be one of the biggest challenges we've faced right now because our economy depends on it and our wildlife depends on it and our environment in general is impacted by it. So it's a huge task ahead of us.

But staying on the water issues, I want to go to the water problems we're having with communities like Meadow Lake, like Prince Albert, like Yorkton. I'm assuming it's still under the Ministry of Environment that we've had our share of troubles in North Battleford, as the member can probably recall. But now we're seeing this consistent problems in Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, Yorkton. I've got other communities that are calling about these problems. And these are not problems that are lasting for two or three weeks. They're lasting for two or three months, and I'm not sure how long P.A. lasted, but I think it was over a month that they're under a boil-water advisory.

So I just need to get a breakdown of which communities are having trouble now and how long have they been having this trouble and what is the trouble they're having with the safe distribution of their water to their residents.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Okay. Thank you for the question. I will try to identify some of the issues that the member may be referencing. As I think the member will know, there's some, as he's correctly pointed out, there's some larger communities that have had both precautionary drinking water advisories and in the case of Prince Albert it was an emergency boil-water order. And then from time to time there's smaller communities, whether they be some of the longer standing issues that we have with the smaller communities, or communities that have new water treatment plants that are coming online and so it may take a little bit of time to get their plants up and running and abiding by the regulations. As well as some seasonal communities that, you know, when the spring begins and people start returning to the resort community, they have those issues from time to time.

But in terms of the larger communities, Prince Albert was an emergency boil-water advisory. That was on from . . . It began as a precautionary on February 3rd, and on the 7th it was elevated to an emergency boil-water order. And that was rescinded on March 16th. That was giardia cysts were detected in the treated water samples and I believe that was the reason for the emergency boil-water order. Meadow Lake was issued on March 5th. That was issued because the water treatment and filtration system wasn't able to consistently meet drinking water standards.

I can advise the committee and to the member, the city of Weyburn where I live, we were under a precautionary drinking water advisory. That was issued . . . There were actually two of them. One of them was issued earlier this year, I believe, it was early to mid-February. And then the second one at the end of February, and that has since been lifted. There was an upset at the city water treatment plant and a failure of the alarm system that didn't notify the operator, or an operator. And that has since been worked out, and significant work between . . . It was undertaken by the city of Weyburn and some consultants that were brought in, as well as the advice of the Ministry of Environment.

You know, I would just say in these cases the . . . I'm not sure if it's a unique situation to have this many communities or of this size of cities that have undergone some problems. But I would say that what it tells us is that the system is working and that the Ministry of Environment, in coordination with these communities, are doing all that we can do to ensure that the drinking water supplies are safe for human consumption.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So how do you attribute, whether it's Weyburn or Yorkton or Meadow Lake or Prince Albert, is it a mechanical breakdown? Is it poor quality of water getting in and perhaps the opportunity for more of the bugs getting through the system? Is it an archaic distribution system? Like obviously there would be different problems for different cities here. So I guess the question I would ask is: where are the problems persistently coming from when it comes to boil-water advisories throughout our province? And I appreciate the system is working. I'm not saying it isn't. But what is the problem? Why is there so many of them having this problem?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well each of them will have specific reasons why it's taking place, but it could be a variety of one or all of those different things. Whether it's the age of the infrastructure . . . In the case of Weyburn it was, there was an

issue and their system failed to . . . They don't have, my understanding is the city of Weyburn doesn't have an operator at the water treatment plant around the clock and so they have an alarm system. The alarm system failed and so the operators weren't notified for a number of hours after the upset took place. But I'll maybe have Sam Ferris maybe walk through on those three specifically of what the issues are.

**Mr. Ferris:** — Certainly. Sam Ferris, municipal branch, Ministry of Environment. Thank you for the question. In the case of Prince Albert, as the minister mentioned, that one started out on February the 3rd and was lifted for the city itself on March the 16th. That incident occurred while there was a major upgrade ongoing at the water treatment plant. The city has started, or did start some work in the wintertime which had to be undertaken in the wintertime because they had to take part of their filtration system off-line. And what happened there was simply an equipment failure in a valve in one of the filters that the city was continuing to use to protect the water supply. And that was simply an equipment failure. Those do happen from time to time.

One of the trends that we've noticed through all of these events and through the more routine events that the minister mentioned is that problems and upsets do occur but we've seen trends towards increased responsibility of our operators that run the water plant at the municipalities that take care of it, in reporting the upsets. So that is in part why we're seeing more advisories come forward.

So in the case of Prince Albert it was a valve failure. In the case of Weyburn it's simply as the minister described. They had set an alarm system to work. It failed to call one of the cellphones that was at the home of one of the operators, and the turbidity — which is a measure of water filtration efficiency — went above and beyond the standard levels and we eventually did find some giardia cysts and some crypto cysts in the water supply, and that necessitated some work. The city of Weyburn had actually just completed an upgrade of what I would call half of their water treatment plant. They upgraded the 200 series filters, and those are the filters that are now in service. They're going to do some more work on the 100 series filters. Problems happen from time to time. It's just the way it is.

In the case of Meadow Lake, that city has upgraded its water treatment plant recently, and what happened there was on March the 5th, an advisory issued because of an alarm that tripped. The city of Meadow Lake has what's known as a SCADA system, supervisory control and data acquisition system, which is basically a system that controls, to a large degree, the operation of the filtration plant. That system tripped and which was fine; they were able to subsist on the reservoirs in the community, one at the water plant and one farther away. But in that case the water quality, the well-water quality of city of the Melfort, or pardon me, Meadow Lake has a number of well-water reservoirs that are taken from the reservoir, and as the water level went down in those reservoirs, it represented some challenges to treat.

The city went to extraordinary lengths to try and improve the treatment of that water quality. They brought in an engineer out of Regina to have a look at the system and right now the suppliers that provide water treatment chemicals are looking at

developing possibly a specific chemical to help treat that water. So in that case it was just a product of changes in raw water quality.

But what we have seen in Meadow Lake recently is that the filtration system has returned to normal operation as of Monday this week. Flushing of the main reservoir at the water treatment plant began Tuesday, on the 24th, I guess. And as of Wednesday of this week, flushing of the system began. So they are well on their way to recovery and the city is looking at expanding the capacity of their well-water storage reservoirs to try and avoid this problem in the future.

There are a variety of reasons, but I think the good news overall is that we are tracking the problems. We are reacting to them. And we are advising the members of the affected communities about the quality of the water so they can take the necessary precautionary measures.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now just focusing on Meadow Lake because obviously I'm assuming that many of the recommendations as a result of the water inquiry in North Battleford are still being followed, where all the municipalities have to report any kind of difficulties or water quality reports have to be in on an annual basis. So I'm assuming all those comments and all the hard lessons learned from North Battleford are probably being utilized.

But the one point I'd like to ask about is actually in Meadow Lake. When you talk about the raw water quality itself, that there's going to be a configuration of different chemicals being used to bring it up to the proper standard for distribution, is that an unusual change? Because obviously there's four or five contact points, whether it's the intake of the natural water from the environment, the treatment of water, the distribution system within the community, and of course, the home itself. There's four places you can get, I'm assuming, you can get contaminated water. But that's an unusual circumstance in Meadow Lake where your water, the raw water quality, has changed. How did it change? If I understood you correctly?

[16:15]

**Mr. Ferris:** — Sam Ferris, Ministry of Environment. At this time we're not certain what caused the change. It could have been the wet conditions that have occurred over the last year and a half or so. We simply can't tell. We did see that there was a similar problem, I think it was in either in 2002 or 2003, which resulted in some problems at the water treatment plant and the ability to treat water quality. It just seems to be a phenomenon that happens.

We haven't been able to quite yet figure out what the problem is. But it may be related to an increased run-off. The water supply, fundamentally the raw water, is affected by the forest ecosystems to some degree in the surrounding area. And they add certain substances to the water that can be difficult to treat, humic acids being one. It gives it a slightly tea coloured — you're certainly familiar with that — from time to time. And that's one of the challenges. If I had a good answer for you, I would certainly provide it.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. No, I think we have to really pay

attention to that because I don't assume that based on the fact that you have this raw water quality issue, that you can figure a new chemical mix to correct it, because that's just kind of not addressing why you're having that change in the raw water quality. So I think Meadow Lake's in this problem for a long time. I just want to make sure that people are aware of what the circumstances are. Because as best as the media's able to cover this, it's still a lot of information that people in Meadow Lake need to find out, what exactly is happening to their water supply. And that is a certainly alarming point that is being raised here today in terms of the changes in their raw water quality. It's something that I think that we need to pay attention to.

In assessing the sewer systems throughout the province . . . I know this may appear to be a loaded question but it's not. We know that the use, the end of life, for many of our water and sewer systems in many of our communities — Weyburn, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Meadow Lake, Yorkton, many of the older sections in town — some of these water and sewer systems are quickly reaching the end of life. You know, there's communities out there that are going to have some significant problems in the future.

So I guess the question I would ask, based on what SaskWater may know, the assessment of what the systems are out there today, how bad is the problem in terms of the need to repair water and sewer systems not just in our cities but our towns and our villages and our communities in general?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you to the member for his question both on water and waste water. Currently on the water side, treated water side: 81 currently don't meet standards, although 64 have plans in place to upgrade; 7 perhaps will have the opportunity to be classified as hygienic works; and 11 — let me just see here in my notes — the remainder of that which I think would be, I think 11, perhaps have the ability or the option to optimize their system.

On waste water it's a combination of in some cases it could be age of the system, or as well just a capacity issue in terms of growing communities or putting more stress on the existing system. And we will endeavour to get a number. We think we have an estimate of about 75 sewage works in the province, but we'll try to get a firm number on that for you. I don't know if you have anything else to add on that, Sam.

**Mr. Ferris:** — I don't have anything else to add, no. Well maybe I should say one of the things that we've initiated has been work on the Canada-wide strategy for municipal waste water effluents. And this work came out of a declaration of ammonia and chlorine residual as toxic to fish, and that work was done through Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

Over the last year or so, we've been working with 91 or 92 communities across the province to conduct testing to characterize their waste water effluent. It's not so much on the side that deals with the infrastructure itself, although you do need adequate infrastructure to meet standards, but the idea is to deal with that and improve those waste water discharges to protect fish, to protect fisheries, and to protect the aquatic habitat. And we've done some toxicity testing at about 22

communities around the province of their waste water effluents, and we'll be wrapping up that work with some more sampling and monitoring this spring and this fall.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So I would assume then at this stage that you're deriving the information of 81 communities versus 75 from the annual . . . Is it the annual tabling of some of the state of the communities' water and sewer systems that we get? Or is it being done through SUMA? Like who is doing this kind of work? Who is doing that work to assess which communities are in need of a new water distribution system or a sewage system?

**Mr. Ferris:** — Okay, in terms of looking at the water systems over the last five or six years, we've had two rounds of waterworkssystem assessments done. That's vested right in the drinking-water-related regulations. And we've asked municipalities, pipeline owners, and owners of private waterworks that the Ministry of Environment regulates to go out and have a look at what are the condition and quality of their waterworks. That only applies to waterworks. It doesn't apply to sewer works. And that is part of the means by which we've taken and developed our own listing of those 81 communities across the province.

On the waste water side, simply that is work that's been carried out by Ministry of Environment environmental project officers that visit and inspect the waste water systems across the province. And we've made a listing and tracked the status of those systems because protecting source waters, protecting aquatic environment is important to sustaining healthy ecosystems.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Am I able to get a list of all those communities that had the problems identified, in particular the water distribution model and the ongoing sewer distribution challenges? Because I'm sure there's a price tag attached to it. And is there, if you're able to share that price tag, that would be appreciated as well.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We can certainly provide you with a list. I think the price tag may be difficult to ascertain just for a number of reasons depending on which options communities decide to pursue, which options are actually available to them. A number of those communities on the water side that have plans to upgrade, a number of those are communities that would have received federal-provincial dollars that are working towards putting in place new water treatment plants. But we'll endeavour to, we'll provide you with the list of communities.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, I think that's important because one of the things that I wanted to do, as I mentioned at the outset, was lift Saskatchewan up from the southeast corner and let the water flow to the central west area. And the second thing was to develop a system where it took dirty water and cleaned it all up and pumped it back into the rivers and streams, but that's of course, you know, something that's more of a dream than anything else.

But the fact of the matter, the water distribution systems, whether it's in our cities' water systems or sewer systems, the basis our rivers and lakes, we've got a huge problem looming in front of us. When we talk about the water strategy, people often know it's not just the quality of water but the quantity, the

distribution systems. There's tons and tons of work being done in this regard. And the reason or work that needs to be done, and the reason why it's important that we look at the compliance and the enforcing the rules and regulation, it goes back to the environmental code.

In many instances we're not paying enough attention and due diligence to how we look and treat our water supply as a whole. Like there's demands from industry, there's demands from cities. There's demands all over the place, but I don't think, I don't see in any way, shape, or form the corresponding, the corresponding effort to educate the public at large about this looming problem. Because I'm assuming that there's a lot of internal discussion within the ministry, but how important is the ministry going to then impact and influence the rest of government to start paying attention to this water challenge we're going to be facing fairly soon?

Has there been any kind of consistent message or discussion around what the chamber of commerce — I think should be commended for — is imploring the province to do a comprehensive water strategy plan? Has there been those discussions at great lengths within cabinet to talk about that issue?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes, absolutely. This is a high priority for government, certainly for me as minister. Cabinet has certainly given their blessing towards doing the work that it will take to bring forward to the province a comprehensive water management strategy. Consultations have taken place. I think we need to do some more work on that front, but I'm certainly very encouraged by the priority that cabinet has placed on this file.

As well I think it's not just a priority for cabinet, I think certainly we're seeing great interest from organizations like the chamber of commerce, like a number of municipalities that are doing good work on their own on this file. Certainly when you look at the plans that are in place, for example here in the city of Regina when it comes to upgrading their waste water system, so I think all of those issues are important. And I can tell the member and the committee that the water management strategy is indeed a high priority for government and for me as minister.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay, one of the things I think is really important is I do really want to see the list of some of the communities that are in need of having their systems retrofitted or brand new systems put in place, because we're talking, if not millions and billions of dollars overall.

And I'm sure that these communities understand that. And I think we need, as a province, to grasp that reality that this is soon going to be coming to us. And that's one of the things that I think is really important. I would say, from the perspective of protecting our water source, I just pray and hope that there is that ongoing national commitment to protect our fresh water system that we have now from any effort to export that water anywhere else in the world.

I know that the states are on a constant or are constantly asking Canada to allow that to occur. And that's why I'm going to forward you some of the concerns I'm hearing in terms of the water permits that I'm hearing that are being issued. Because if

that starts in that regard, then you can see how this thing could really quickly snowball. So I'll make sure I get that to you, and we can ask the questions in the appropriate forum to find out exactly what's happening there.

Now I want to shift my gears again, my focus here. And just to point out, in closing this particular segment, that the water systems in our province, water and sewer are going to be a huge demand later on as we continue to grow as a province, and that the least you can do is certainly let the people of Saskatchewan know that's going to be an ongoing challenge that we all have to work together to collectively meet. And I'm not saying that just governments have to do this on their own. The consumers have to do it. The communities have to do it. And hopefully we have a good partnership with the federal government as well. Because these problems are going to only get worse. All right. Thank you very much on that front.

I want to go to just a bit under the greenhouse gases issue. It's amazing that you understand the need to protect our environment — and we sometimes like to pick on Alberta based on their oil production and so on and so forth — but we see now that Saskatchewan has 10 per cent, 10 per cent of the country's emissions of greenhouse gases as of 2010. So the rest of the country views Saskatchewan as one of the highest emitters of greenhouse gases.

So I guess I'm going to ask the question straightforward: what are some of the concrete steps that we're taking as a province and as a people to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions? Because we're guilty as 10 per cent and that's fairly significant. So what are we doing to mitigate this and address this in trying to work with other jurisdictions because Saskatchewan has a black eye when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions.

[16:30]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to the member for his question. Certainly this is an issue that we have taken some significant action on in the first term of our government. The member is correct in that, and I think perhaps some of the media that we've attracted on this over the last couple of weeks probably doesn't show Saskatchewan in a very good light. But I will say that when we formed government in 2007 there was a lot to do. I know a recent report points out that between 1990 and two thousand and I believe it was eight, emissions rose in this province by nearly 70 per cent. So we know that we're starting from, frankly, not a great position on this.

We've done a number of things under this administration, including that legislation passed two years ago, *The Management and Reduction of Greenhouse Gases Act*. We do have draft regulations that have gone out for consultation. We expect another round will take place. We have set targets for what reductions that we do want to see in this province. We have invested in low-carbon technology, both through the Go Green Fund, through projects that we're doing in terms of private sector providers of energy options. And in fact we, through the auspices of SaskPower, have invested significantly in a carbon capture and sequestration project at Estevan, which will significantly reduce SaskPower's emissions.



So we know that there is still more work to be done. We are, through the Go Green Fund for example, we've invested in a number of projects. One is the Aquistore project. That one we're particularly pleased about, especially in light of the federal government's decision to increase their investment or add investment into that project. But as I said, significant work has been undertaken, and there is more to do on this file.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I think the point that I would really want to raise on the 10 per cent of the emissions, obviously that, you know, a lot of these things are thought out. Our Crown corporation, SaskPower has got some very intelligent and very capable people within the Crown corporation. Have they identified, like, targets? Have they said, look we can reduce 1 per cent or 3 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions over this period of time? Has there been that collaboration with your ministry as it compares to SaskPower's operation? Has it been that consistent communication?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well there is quite a lot of communication back and forth between the Ministry of Environment and SaskPower, especially in light of the federal government's coal-fired regulations that are currently in CG1 phase right now. SaskPower will know, though, that we as a provincial government have set a target of a 20 per cent reduction from 2006 levels by 2020. So they're certainly aware of that. And I'll maybe ask . . . I don't know if the deputy or Mr. Graybiel can add more, perhaps the deputy can.

**Ms. Quarshie:** — Liz Quarshie. So we have ongoing engagement with SaskPower to talk about the proposed federal framework which is what the minister referred to — the federal government's coal-fired electricity regulation which is in CG1 [Canada Gazette 1]. We know what the proposed content is. And we have the provincial reg, and of course there's CG1 document is out for comment. Saskatchewan provided comments by a letter from the minister late last fall, around October. We're still engaging with the federal government in terms of discussions on those targets and how that would affect Saskatchewan. SaskPower is part of these discussions that I'm talking about. We've participated in economic impact analysis of the regulation on SaskPower and the province. SaskPower has also been at the table with those discussions. We now have to see what the revised regulations would be when it comes into publication in CG2 [Canada Gazette 2]. This is supposed to happen sometime towards the end of June or somewhere June, July, something like that.

At the same, as a province, we are not waiting for the federal system to come into play. As the minister said earlier, we have the legislation which you know was passed in 2010. We have the draft regulations that we're working on currently, and we are very close to finalizing that. We have done extensive work with the Canada Revenue Agency in the last two years to be able to recognize a proposed contribution into the technology fund as a deduction for the companies, and we are finally beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. That is maybe a very positive move for the province and companies.

At the same time, we also have the foundation which is geared more towards research and innovative technology development and that kind of thing that would support the climate change program. And we are not just working with these two entities.

We're also working closely with Alberta to be sure that the climate change programs would be aligned to the extent possible. And the rationale for that is we don't want any of our companies operating in Saskatchewan to be at a competitive disadvantage, particularly if they operate in the two provinces, so they'd have different rules in Alberta and in Saskatchewan. So to the extent possible, we're trying to align those regulatory environments to make sure that it happens.

And the minister also mentioned, under the Go Green Fund, investments in different technologies to reduce GHGs [greenhouse gas], so one of course is the CCS [carbon capture and storage]. The other one is the Aquistore project. We've also invested heavily in some of the renewable portfolios — I can't remember the exact dollar amount off the top of my head; I'm sure Kim does — and things like that.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. There's no question. There's only about seven or eight more items we want to talk about including outfitting, forestry, animal health, alternative energies, conservation and the wildlife management zone, and protection of the land, so we're almost another couple of hours and we'll be done.

I wanted to ask about the energy conservation perspective because it was during the hearings that we had in the alternative energies discussion through the central and Crowns agency where we travelled throughout the province to hear alternative energies presentations on how we could really begin to address the greenhouse gas emissions problem, that Saskatchewan basically has a negative when it comes to the rest of the country because people frown upon us for that particular reason. And we kind of, you know, we kind of tout that we're doing all these things to address it, but the fact of the matter is it's still a number of years away before we can have a great amount of confidence in saying that we're dealing with these problems in a responsible way as a province. So it's hard for us to scold on one front when we're contributing to the problem on a significant basis on the other hand.

So I would say that the alternative energies perspective . . . Has your department done anything in regards to addressing the greenhouse gas emissions problem that we have as a province to tell CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] and the Crowns that — look — especially SaskPower, you've been given tons of advice: net metering, you know, and wind and solar and conservation efforts to build the homes better. The whole panel process was actually very exciting, and I was privy to all those discussions and the benefits of natural gas, you know, and some of the challenge of coal. Coal was challenged there. And people out there gave a ton of advice to that process, and I certainly paid a lot of attention. And each of those avenues that they spoke about really had a significant change of the greenhouse gas emissions that were positive for the province.

So that's the reason I asked the question, is how good is your communication with SaskPower? I'm not sure the minister responsible — I think it's Norris — whether you're having those ongoing discussions because sometimes the departments like to get into the stovepipe mentality where they're going to do what they want and that's it. And it takes a more senior Department of Environment to begin to engage those

departments in a constructive, intelligent manner.

So how tough are you on some of these other departments in trying to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions? That's my question.

[16:45]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well I appreciate the question from the member. First of all I would say under our legislation, SaskPower as a corporation in this province is captured by the legislation and the regulations. So they will come under our regulations, and they will either, depending on how they choose to go about their business . . . And we know that they're making significant investments in CCS that will reduce their emissions. But like any corporation in this province that will be captured by our legislation, they'll either choose to reduce their emissions and/or pay into the technology fund or a combination of both.

SaskPower I think is doing good work and I think should be applauded for some of the initiatives that they've done on their own accord. I think that by either next year, 2013 or 2014, somewhere in that time frame, SaskPower will have doubled their wind power capacity in the time that the government changed in 2007. SaskPower will also continue with a number of programs. The net-metering program is going to continue into the future. That's one that has been a Go Green Fund project for the last number of years.

Through the Go Green Fund, if I could speak to the good work that we've done, we have provided ongoing funding to a biomass heating project at Meadow Lake, a wind power storage project at Cowessess First Nation, the Aqistore, as I've spoke about already which I believe our contribution will be \$5 million over a five-year period. The federal government, in fact the federal minister, Joe Oliver, was just at the University of Regina. I had the pleasure of attending an event with him where he announced the federal government was going to be investing significant dollars over the coming years.

So I think — and specifically to your question — Ministry of Environment, as the deputy minister has pointed out, we worked very closely with SaskPower, especially lately on the coal-fired regulations from the federal government, and we'll continue to work with not just SaskPower but other Crown entities, and there are some good things that are being done.

I can tell the committee that SaskEnergy is beginning a project. Beginning at the compressor station in Rosetown, they will be capturing the waste heat from the compressors at the Rosetown compressor station, and that will equal to about . . . The amount of electricity that they can generate by doing that will equal to about 25 per cent of the entire corporation's electrical needs. And probably by 2015 or 2016, by expanding this to other compressor stations in the SaskEnergy TransGas fleet, by about 2015 or 2016 SaskEnergy as a company will produce and put onto the grid as much electricity from the capture of waste heat as they use as a company, which is a significant addition to the grid. So there's a number of initiatives that are being done throughout government.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. And there's no question that, as I

mentioned to the Crown and Central Agencies Committee, the hearings that we had we were subjected to some great presentations, some phenomenal people involved with a number of the alternative energies field. And you know, I just found it utterly amazing at some of the ideas and concepts and the science and technology attached to some of those ideas and concepts were just really well thought out. And it gives me great confidence that there are the alternative energies out there and that we need to embrace them. And we need to also make sure that the public out there is aware of what opportunities that they present over the long term.

Now under the coal technologies, I'm assuming that coal, the burning of coal — which I'm assuming is considered a fossil fuel — and that contributes a great amount to the greenhouse gas emissions overall. I think we understand that. And in saying that, when people make reference to the clean coal technology and the questions I get asked of that, I'm telling that they have what they call scrubbers within the smokestacks, and they remove certain chemicals. There's a lot less pollution as a result of burning that coal through this process, but I can't quantify it, nor can I qualify it with real information. So for the sake of the public consumption today of this committee hearing, can you explain what the difference is between the clean coal technology and the initiative that you were speaking about earlier versus what was originally in place.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well thank you, Mr. Belanger, for the question. I'll take a stab at it, but I will from the beginning say it's probably a better question for officials at SaskPower as they are the proponent of the project. But my understanding is, I mean the stacks that one would see either at Boundary or Shand or Poplar River power plant in Coronach, they would have scrubbers for different types of things that come out of the stack.

That is different from what SaskPower is contemplating to do, and that is at Boundary dam 3. And in fact construction is already under way and it's going to be a significant new addition to the horizon when you're driving to Estevan. It's quite a large facility. But I won't even begin to try to convince members of the committee that I know how the technology works, but it is simply I guess grabbing the carbon prior to what it normally would be emitted out of the stack, capturing it and then, through pipelines, transporting it into the nearby oil fields and sequestering it underground. Very similar to what I think the member would be used to or would be knowledgeable of what takes place south of Weyburn at the, used to be Cenovus and now it's Encana sequestration project.

My understanding though is that it's a little bit different. Whereas Estevan, the Boundary dam is carbon capture and sequestration, the source at south of Weyburn for Cenovus is a coal gasification plant at Beulah, North Dakota where they take coal and somehow — again I won't try to explain it — but they take coal and turn it into natural gas and then take the carbon, capture the carbon and transport it to Saskatchewan.

But I don't know maybe if Kim wants to take a stab, or Liz, if you want to take a stab and explain what, or try to give a better explanation of carbon capture.

**Mr. Graybiel:** — Kim Graybiel from the climate change

branch at the Ministry of Environment. It is properly a question that SaskPower officials can best address, just because they're very directly involved in that technology now. But the minister is correct; it is a very innovative process that's used. It's an amine solution that's used to separate the carbon dioxide from the other flue gases. It's then dehydrated, liquefied, and then transported either to the deep saline aquifer close to the power plant or transported to a nearby oil field where it can be used for enhanced oil recovery.

What's really notable now is that SaskPower of course has chosen the Shell amine solution technology for Boundary dam 3, but they're not stopping there. They are doing further research and demonstration to see if there are better technologies for future CCS projects. So I think the minister referred to the meeting he attended with Natural Resources Canada Minister Joe Oliver recently where SaskPower announced a \$60 million project jointly with Hitachi to look at other potential carbon capture and storage technologies that would be demonstrated at the Shand power plant. So there may be other technologies that will work as well or better than the current Shell amine solution technology.

So that's a symptom of the challenges we have. We need to reduce the costs. I think we . . . Some of you may have heard yesterday that the TransAlta carbon capture and storage project at the Keephills 3 power plant in Alberta has now been terminated, partly because of the high cost of capturing the carbon.

SaskPower realizes that to develop a cost-effective technology we are going to have to really push the envelope to see what the best solutions are to capture the carbon. And at the Shand power plant I believe there is going to be an opportunity for private sector companies who are vendors of that technology to actually come and demonstrate, you know, the best available system.

So in the future . . . This is a long-term problem; it isn't just a question of Boundary dam 3. We have the other units at Boundary dam. There's the Poplar River plant. Even in the future, Shand, we're going to have to look at options there as well. So it's really a long-term solution that we're going to need.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Yes. I would point out that there are a myriad of opportunities that not just SaskPower could look at, but SaskEnergy and a number of other private sector players in terms of how we could begin to reduce our overall greenhouse gas emissions, because they are quite high. I was surprised they're at 10 per cent. And as I mentioned, that doesn't bode well for a lot of our arguments on a national basis for trying to do the responsible thing for the environment as a whole.

Now I promised to go back to the Fort Mac issue. And I want to talk more about the greenhouse gas, but I see our time is running short here. I want to quickly go first to the forestry file — because I had outfitting; I had animal health; I had conservation; I had about 15 more things to go through here.

But on the forestry file, I want to get some questions on that if I can now, Mr. Minister. Now when we assessed forestry overall, I think the process . . . I don't think it's changed all that much,

but when you do forestry allocations, you look at what the land is able to sustain in terms of harvesting. And it's a fairly complex science. Again, I'm a hockey player; I'm not a forestry scientist in any stretch of the imagination. But it's only fair that you do an assessment of the stock that's out there now, and then you determine that based on the stock that's there — I'm talking about the tree stock — that you can adequately harvest a certain amount of cubic metres within a defined space of land over a period of a year.

Most recently the Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Boyd, said that “We are now increasing the harvesting to accommodate Big River and P.A.'s mill in our region from what was determined at that time to be a 200 000 cubic metre harvest per year within the northwest communities' forestry allocation.”

And Mr. Boyd turned around and said, well it's 440 000 that we can adequately harvest. I'm not sure if he found a hybrid tree that can grow overnight but how do you double — double — the annual harvest allocation amount from an area, based on new science? I just want to know where that figure came from.

**Mr. Wynes:** — Bob Wynes. Yes, I was anticipating that question. That number was calculated in the forest service and using, as you mentioned, the science as well as some art. Frankly, forestry is not all hard science. One of the challenges we have in forestry that is a constant, and the letter from the trapper that you read earlier really hints around a lot of the areas that are of concern that are not necessarily hard science, but a real balance between ecological values, economic desires out of the forest, and social values. So it's a cost and balance that we are seeking to achieve there.

Specifically related to the Northwest, and I can't explain why, but the licence volume that was put into the TSL, the term supply licence for that area when it was initiated, when that TSL was initiated, only reflected a portion of the sustainable harvest level. So it's not that the cut level has miraculously doubled, it's just that the licence only reflected a portion of the available volume in the area.

And I can't explain it. It was before my time as the executive director of the forest service. Why the previous executive director chose to only license a portion of the volume, I'm not sure.

The other thing that's really important to note, as you mentioned, it's very specific to different geographic areas. And I assume you're talking specifically about the northwest licence area, supply area. It's broken down, and the accessibility of different portions of that — the east and the west block of it — is very different, so one of the things that we will be ensuring is that the harvest is appropriately distributed between those areas as well. The access to the western block, for example, right now the economics of it are very poor. So to achieve that whole volume that you were referring to you'd have to harvest from the whole area, part of which at this point in time is difficult to access.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Now I would, so you're saying that based on the information that you have now, is it more concise information or is it a larger piece of land in which Mr. Boyd

makes his assertion that you can double the harvest?

**Mr. Wynes:** — Actually it's the same inventory information and it's the same area. What's different is, that reflects the whole sustainable harvest from the area. The previous number, the small number you referred to, is the original licence volume and it was only for a portion of the available harvest of the area. It didn't reflect . . . I went through that with a fine-toothed comb myself with my staff reviewing it, just to ensure that I could answer this question confidently. The number could have been a bigger number right from square one. For some reason the decision was made to make that licence volume smaller. The available volume out of that area has always been sustainable at a higher level than the licence reflected.

**Mr. Belanger:** — Okay. So based on the sustainability issue, what are some of the parameters or the hard data that you would need to determine that volume on an annual basis?

**Mr. Wynes:** — It's a large list and I suggest one of the things you'll want to watch . . . You mentioned earlier the Saskatchewan environmental code, five of the initial 19 chapters relate to forestry. One of them is a very key area for long-term sustainability, which is the forest management planning code chapter. And essentially what that forest management plan code chapter is, it's like a table of contents. And it gives you a good idea of the areas that we need to concern ourselves with to factor in to wood supplies to make sure that we're considering not just sustainable timber but other forest values, some of the concerns people have around lakes, issues like caribou, for example, wildlife habitat in general, a whole variety of things that we need to consider in wood supply. So the forest management planning process is a much more rigorous process that industry needs to go through. There is not yet a forest management plan done for that area and there needs to be one.

With the interest from companies now we anticipate an increased volume, so yes, we will be requiring a forest management plan for that area just like we have for each one of the FMAs [forest management agreement]. Historically the FMAs have had about 95 per cent of the wood volume that's harvested in the province. And they all have forest management plans which are a much more detailed look than the rough calculation that we do. But we do consider things like yield curves, the inventory of the forest, the age class of the forest, maintaining some old forest, retaining some retention, some trees within cutovers; all of those issues are factored in, not just in the long range forest management plans but also in the essentially the preliminary numbers that we do internally within the forest service.

[17:00]

**Mr. Belanger:** — Well I certainly believe you, as opposed to Minister Boyd. Let me point that out. And I know you're not going to make any comments, but I'll share that with you. But the thing I would point out though I think is important, is that what we see is that many people are saying that cutting and even thinning out closer to the lakes wasn't done before. But now they're doing that, cutting close proximity to rivers and streams. They're allowing that to happen now, and you're seeing much more, larger patch of cutting in general.

If you travel the road I travel as you head out north of Big River, you know, and I'm not exaggerating and you can go and have a look. They probably . . . I think it's on YouTube. You see large swaths of land, just there's one skinny tree every couple miles. Now I'm assuming they're going to be reforesting that area and that you'll see growth. I'm assuming that, you know, because you obviously want to make sure you assume on the right side.

But you're saying to me today that the volume that is being increased does not mean that there is a compromise of the integrity around a lake, river, or stream, where you're not allowed to go harvest close to that area, or for aesthetic purposes not close to highways and so on and so forth. Is that correct?

**Mr. Wynes:** — Bob Wynes again. No, that's not correct. This leads into a big discussion that we need to have where we're started the process of developing the detail standards under the code. And these are the issues that need to be discussed. We've established a code content committee, going to be getting environment groups involved in this and going through a public review at the end of it, but essentially we're reviewing all of the rules associated with this right now.

Please indulge me, I can't pass up the opportunity to mention that one of the concerns I have, and a really good example of a problem we have, is the perception that we need buffers along highways, along travelled roadways to hide cutblocks. I personally feel that's a wrong approach, and I think we're doing a disservice to the forest.

I think one of the things that we really need to promote is an understanding that in a naturally driven system — and I'm sure the trapper that you referred to would confirm this — in a naturally driven system, a lot of the forest is actually young forest. And although cutblocks are, you know, pretty unattractive for the first year or two, they are the young forest that's growing. They're essentially the kids of the forest, you know, the young trees. And my preference strongly is to do good forest management, and then not hide it from the public. We get a lot of criticism when we do leave buffers that, aha, found a cutblock behind the buffer along the road. They're just trying to hide this mess.

I would rather do a good job of forest management, leave not just the odd skinny residual tree, but leave nice patches of trees more emulating the pattern that's created by forest fires, which all of our wildlife for example has evolved with, and use that as a model for how we're planning forest harvesting. Do a good job of it and then show it off, and not leave buffers along the road. That's the wrong approach.

Lakes and rivers are a different situation. There is sensitivities there where you're running heavy equipment near water, you need to be very careful about that. But the other side of that coin is that we need to ensure the renewal of forest in those areas. I've travelled around quite a bit, out in the Big River area for example, and you see the effects of past forest management practices where we've left buffers around lakes. Those buffers around lakes are not natural forest any more. They're much older forest, and they've succeeded into a stage of a lot of balsam fir in them, which is not the natural situation.

And I'm concerned about the long-term forest health and the effects of the habitat around the lake for birds that nest in those trees, for ducks. I think we need to be looking at ways to manage for an appropriate age-class distribution around those lakes. How do we get renewal? How do we ensure the long-term integrity of the habitat around those lakes? We need to ensure that there's both young and old forest in those areas. How do we do that in a sensitive way to make sure that we're not creating soil damage from equipment for example? Fires don't create compaction, for example, equipment does. We need to be very careful about how we do it.

But we need to figure out . . . We need to help people understand that we need to get that renewal. This idea of leaving buffers along highways or permanent buffers around lakes, that's not natural. Those areas are disturbed by fires. We're now putting out fires in a lot of those areas. If we don't replace that disturbance, the forest turns into something very unnatural.

And I've spent a lot of time in one of our provincial parks, and I've seen the forest in that park degrade significantly because of the lack of disturbance. It is not a natural forest any more, and I'm personally very concerned about that. That's why I want to retire here in Saskatchewan. And the forest is deteriorating badly because of a lack of disturbance, and we need to think about how we're going to replace . . . The disturbance we're preventing by putting out forest fires, how do we replace that appropriately in the right amount with logging?

**Mr. Belanger:** — You were the guy that fired my workers in forest fire protection. No, no, I'm just kidding.

The other point I would raise is that you're saying that — and I need to get this figured out — a naturally occurring fire-killed area of our forest, it'll grow radically different than a harvested area. Is that what you're saying today?

**Mr. Wynes:** — No, what I'm saying is that we need to . . . The forest that we have in Saskatchewan has evolved after glaciation about 10,000 years ago. And all the wildlife, all of the ecological processes out there have evolved with the pattern that has been created by disturbances such as forest fires. And what we need to be doing is understanding those patterns, both at stand level and at landscape level and trying to emulate them more closely.

So the issue you raised in the letter earlier about the density of, the density of trees in an area, my answer to that would be to look at the natural stands that are coming back because there's a lot of clues about the ecological values in things like the densities of the trees, the size of patches. For example, if we create all small harvest patches today, we're going to have small stands of trees in the future. That is not good habitat for caribou, for example. We need to think about a landscape approach to forest management and understand what all of the wildlife out there has evolved with and try to emulate those patterns as best we can.

There is lots of differences with fire, I'll be the first to acknowledge that. Fire is a chemical process. Harvesting is a mechanical process for a lot of the fibres taken to a mill, but there are lots of things that we can emulate and come closer to,

and it's a much more humble approach to forestry, recognizing a lot of the ecological values in the forest beyond just wood fibre.

**Mr. Belanger:** — So you're asserting today that the only reason you have some concerns about harvesting around lakes and rivers and streams is more for the chemical possibility of say, for example, fuel leakage and so on and so forth, as opposed to maintaining the integrity of the forest by properly harvesting as for emulating the historical treatment or historical activity of fire as an example?

**Mr. Wynes:** — No, actually I would add to that. That's one of the concerns. The differences between harvesting equipment, for example, and the risks of compaction, for example, are different. So that is certainly one of the differences. From an ecological, strictly ecological standpoint I think we need to be renewing those forests.

I mentioned earlier that some of the other concerns that we need to consider, and we do consider, are social values. People like to look at mature forest when they're out in a boat fishing, for example. How does that influence how much old forest we leave? I don't believe the right answer is leaving it all an old forest. I think we need to have discussion with the public through consultation processes, requiring the industry to have consultation with stakeholders like the trapper, hear their concerns, what trails are they using, and also their values, social values around lakes for example, and how that might influence. It's not just the ecological concerns, but from a social standpoint, maybe we want to leave a little bit more old forest than we would have natural.

**The Chair:** — Having reached the agreed-upon four hours of debate in Environment, I would like to thank the Minister and his officials for joining us this afternoon and responding to the questions that have been presented.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And just if I could quickly here, I just want to thank all members of the committee and yourself, Mr. Chair, for the questions and the wide-ranging debate. I also want to thank the officials that are here today, Mr. Chair. Obviously the number of officials that are here, both from the Ministry of Environment and Watershed Authority, are relatively small in number compared to the nearly 1,000 employees that we have just in the Ministry of Environment alone. So they're here representing all those people that do such a great job for our province each and every day, and I just want to thank them for being here.

**The Chair:** — I would now entertain a motion of adjournment. This committee stands adjourned until Tuesday evening, May the 1st at 7 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 17:10.]