

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

April 22, 1985

**EVENING SITTING
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE**

CONSOLIDATED FUND BUDGETARY EXPENDITURE

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Ordinary Expenditure – Vote 8**

Item 1 (continued)

MR. THOMPSON: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions, Madam Minister, regarding northern Saskatchewan and the schools up there, but I first want to ask a few questions about group class-rooms that you have in the province, or group class-rooms that are in Saskatoon for sure. I wonder, Madam Minister, if you could indicate just how many of these group class-rooms that we do have in the province of Saskatchewan.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, if the member could clarify what he means by a group class-room. Are you talking about a multi-grade class-room?

MR. THOMPSON: — No. It's a class-room . . . The one in Saskatoon has strictly grade 8 students. I would like to know the number of students that you have in there, and the number of teachers that are in that group class-room. I believe it's called a group class-room.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Are you talking about a group home?

MR. THOMPSON: — I'm talking about a group class-room where there's one room, and I believe you have 80 students in it, in the city of Saskatoon, and there are two teachers who are administering to the approximately 80 students. Surely there's somebody in your staff that would be aware of what is taking place there.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I hate to be so difficult, but I really don't know what you are talking about when you talk about a group class-room. Are you talking about an open class-room? It's not a group home. Is it to do with the survival school, or an alternative school?

MR. THOMPSON: — No, it's not, and I may be wrong in the word "group," but it is a grade 8 class, and I believe that there's approximately 80 students. They are encompassed in one class-room, and there are two teachers in charge of these students. Now it's not the survival school. It's in a regular school system in the city of Saskatoon. And what I wanted to know is when you talk about your five-year plans, is this an experiment that's going to go on for five years, or are there going to be more group-type class-rooms opened up in the province of Saskatchewan?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I can't even begin to answer that because first of all, I'm not aware of a situation where it's entitled a group class-room, nor am I aware of a situation where there are 80 students in the one class-room. I would have to go back and consult with either the Saskatoon public or the Saskatoon Catholic board.

MR. THOMPSON: — Okay, Mr. Chairman, what I'll do is leave it at that and I don't want you to put the — I don't want to put the word "group" on it and I don't want to put the number of 80 students. I do know that there are two teachers and they are teaching a large number of students in one class-room, and that they are grade 8 students. They're all grade 8 students.

I want to just ask a few questions in northern Saskatchewan and when you . . . That's as far as

we're going, Madam Minister, on that one? As far as we're going on that?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I will find out what I can from either one of those boards, and perhaps if we are out of estimates by the time I get the information I'll give you a call in your caucus room.

MR. THOMPSON: — I want to turn to some of the smaller schools that we have in northern Saskatchewan, and it has been rumoured that there would be some of these small schools closed down and the children bussed to the nearest larger school unit. I wonder if you could indicate if there are any plans to shut down such schools as Michel village. This is one school that I've been told that would probably be shut down, and also a school of Poplar Point in the town of La Loche.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I am not aware of any plans that the Northern Lights board may have, or Ile-a-la-Crosse, or the Creighton board of education, in terms of closing of schools. The department has not been informed, and I have not have had any indication.

MR. THOMPSON: — The particular school of Michel village, you are not aware that there will be any closure of that school and students transferred to St. George's Hill?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — No, I'm not, Mr. Chairman.

MR. THOMPSON: — Mr. Chairman, I want to ask the minister a question on funding in education in northern Saskatchewan. I have travelled around to a number of the schools, and the complaints that I'm getting is that a lot of the schools are understaffed by half a teacher, or by one teacher, at the present time, and they have been told — and I would assume that they have been told by the Northern Lights School Division — that they are going to be cut another two teachers, and this has become a major concern, a concern with a lot of parents in northern Saskatchewan and a lot of the teachers, because the teacher-pupil ratio is just going to get impossible to work with.

Some of the teachers right now are working with classes of close to 30 students, and I think that when you start cutting back on teachers — and we've seen where they were going to cut, when they were going to get rid of all the janitorial services in the schools — and I feel that this is very unfair, and I would like your comments. And I'll like you to guarantee that there will be no cuts in staff, but that the schools like La Loche, where the enrolment is very high, that they will be able to keep up the staff in order to keep the teacher-pupil ratio at a workable level.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, first of all I cannot give the member a guarantee of what kind of staffing component is going to be in the North. There are school boards that are elected, have the responsibility and the authority to make those kinds of decisions. However, I can give the member an indication of the kinds of moneys that are going for instance to the Northern Lights board this year, and some of the program areas that they will be able to take, have access to. You know, they are looking at an increase this year of approximately \$796,000, which is about a 6 per cent increase.

Also with the three categories out of the Educational Development Fund, they would be able to access approximately \$1.7 million. So I would suggest that the funding level for the Northern Lights board this year is relatively stable. However that is not to recognize that they have some unique problems that most boards in this province do not have.

I know that the Northern Lights board has found itself in what is termed a relatively severe deficit situation, and we have had some discussions with them on it, and some of the factors that have led to it. They are having negotiations and discussions to do with the rental fees of the teacherages. Even the numbers of the teacherages up there are in question. And perhaps we will be looking at trying to address at least a beginning of that problem this year through the capital construction budget.

So basically their funding is going to be relatively stable this year. But a minister of education cannot guarantee any community that teachers will not be cut. That's not the role of the department nor the minister. That is the role of the board of education: to determine the staffing component and what the pupil-teacher ratio will be.

MR. THOMPSON: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, you indicate that funding will be relatively stable. Would you not agree that if there was going to be any cut-back in services in any school system, the last place that you would want a cut-back would be on staffing?

And as I've been told by teachers up there, and I think that your officials are aware, that there are schools that are understaffed right now, as I indicated, some by half a teacher and some by a full teacher. And they have been told by the Northern Lights school board that they have to cut back, in the one particular school, another two teachers. Now that is the type of cut-backs that we don't need.

If there is a shortage of funds, you would think that cut-backs would come in other areas rather than with teaching staff. And I just say that there has to be a cut-back, because I'm sure that the members of that Northern Lights School Division would not see fit to cut staff.

I agree that northern Saskatchewan is unique, and I'm glad that you accept that fact that we have unique problems in northern Saskatchewan. And I wonder if you could indicate just where the situation stands right now with the provincial government and Indian Affairs, with the shortfall in funds and the troubles that they got into with funding last year for Indian Affairs.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Just a clarification, Mr. Chairman, for the member. He talks about a cut-back, when I had just indicated that there is almost a 6 per cent increase in funding to the Northern Lights board for this year.

I also indicated to him that the department, government, nor the minister, nor the MLA, make the decisions of the staffing component, and that it isn't necessarily a shortfall in funds, but perhaps a shift in the population or a decline in a particular school area that a board of education will decide to either cut back on staff in that area, or perhaps transfer that staff to where the shift in population has gone upwards instead of downwards. So many factors take place in that.

I'm assuming, when you ask about the federal funding, that we're talking about the tuition fee issue a year ago. That was picked up by the feds and they paid it till the end of June, 1984, and then the provincial Department of Education picked up on the same per student allotment that the others get, and we've been paying since then.

MR. THOMPSON: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The 6 per cent increase that you're talking about: are we talking about the 6 per cent in operating or 6 per cent in the capital projects?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I am talking about 5.8 per cent on operating grants only. The announcements the other day of the capital projects are over and above that, including any debt retirement that the board had. It is not within that operating grant.

MR. THOMPSON: — Mr. Chairman, I think it is quite easy to see how the Northern Lights school board has got themselves into a problem where they're going to have to cut staff. When you take an increase in operating capital of 5.8 per cent, and you take a look at increased enrolment, increased staff that they're going to have, and the increased cost of operating them schools in northern Saskatchewan, there's just no way that they can operate with a 5.8 per cent increase.

And I think it's quite plain to see that the priorities right now are not with education in northern Saskatchewan, because it is unique. And we cannot operate with a 5.8 per cent increase when you take a look at the increase in enrolment in the schools. In La Loche alone, you take a look at

the increase there and the increasing staff that they need — it's just unreal.

Mr. Chairman, I want to turn to the new school in La Loche, and I want to ask the minister if that school is going to be finished when the contractor had indicated. And is it going to come in at cost, or will it come in at above cost?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, the information we have on the project in question is that the board expects it to be completed on time.

Just a follow-up comment on the situation that the member says the Northern Lights board is in this year. We've had extensive consultations with the Northern Lights School Division. And as a result of that communications, we made several adjustments, and I would suggest that you would be wise to sit down and talk with the chairman of the board or the board as a whole.

(1915)

With some of the measures that we came to an agreement on, we anticipate that this is going to allow the board, number one, to reduce significantly its deficit; and number two, to provide an improved education to the pupils.

And here are about three items, perhaps four, adjustments that took place in consultation with the board and its administration. The per pupil rates have been increased to the same level as the southern rural rates. An adjustment was made in the calculation for the recognition of the director. They never had that before, and it's now the same as the rest of the province. The computational mill rate has also been set at the southern rate, 95.5. A portion of the costs for operating and maintaining the teacherages will be recognized in the grant calculation. That's new for this year.

Plus, as I said earlier, there's going to be an increase in the operating grant on account of the operations of the teacherages, and that's going to amount to about \$424,000, and that's over and above the 5.8 per cent. Plus, as I mentioned earlier, the \$1.7 million that the board will be able to access out of the Educational Development Fund, and I would suggest that that is more than fair and will be able to meet some of the needs and perhaps pick up some of the gaps that have been there for many, many years.

MR. THOMPSON: — Madam Minister, you're indicating that I should go and talk to the northern board members. I can tell you quite clearly that I have talked to the northern board members, and I have talked to them here as recently as two weeks ago.

You're suggesting, and I can only assume from what you have said, that in your consultations with the Northern Lights School Division, that they have indicated to you that 5.8 per cent is sufficient for them to operate the school system in northern Saskatchewan, and to bring down the debt load that they have. I suggest that that's not fair.

You're suggesting that I have to go and consult with them when I have done that. They have indicated to me what their problems are, and you're saying that there is no problem, that they're telling you, you give us 5.8 per cent and we'll run the schools properly. Could you indicate what the pupil-teacher ratio is in northern Saskatchewan, as you have indicated it's the same as southern Saskatchewan?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well as you say, you met with them a couple of weeks ago. I will remind you that the budget only recently came down, and it was last Thursday that the final adjustments were put into play. Keep in mind I'm not talking just on the operating, but I gave you an indication of where other adjustments were made. I do not have the set pupil-teacher ratio of the Northern Lights School Division. However, I can get that information from the board if you wish it.

MR. THOMPSON: — Mr. Chairman, when you talk about consulting, I'm sure you didn't just consult the day the budget was finalized. That's been done for many months, and with me it's done over years. But you indicated that in saving money and cutting back that debt, you have decided to make the pupil-teacher ratio exactly the same in northern Saskatchewan as in southern Saskatchewan, and I just ask you what that teacher-pupil ratio is.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well I didn't indicate that at all. I do not know what the PTR of each division is. I know what we are provincially. We were right around the 16.5 to 17 on the average, province wide. Now, obviously that differs from area to area and it differs from grade 3 sometimes to grade 11. There's lots of differentials in there. However, I can get the PTR for you from the Northern Lights board.

MR. THOMPSON: — Final question, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, could you indicate if there has been any request that has come in to the Department of Education from La Loche, from the local school board or staff, for extra funding for the addition to the old school that has been put up there in La Loche?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Could I have a clarification? Was it additional funding for staff or additional funding for the building?

MR. THOMPSON: — No, I'm talking about the new addition to the school that was destroyed by fire. Has there been any request for any extra funding for any projects — for extra rooms, or additions to rooms, or playgrounds, or anything like that, that has come into the Department of Education?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I will have to take notice of that particular question. I don't have any information on it tonight, but that doesn't mean that it didn't come into the department.

MRS. CASWELL: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Madam Minister, I would like to address some questions to you concerning the private school issue. I know you and I have had a great deal of communication on that issue. But speaking to some of my constituents over the weekend, we thought possibly this would be a good time for some clarification. Concretely how this affects my constituency, we have a school, Faith Alive Christian Academy, that is in an older part of facilities used for nothing else. And it's interesting — people talk about private schools as something perhaps that well-to-do parents use. And this school largely has parents who might be categorized as low-income; many of them are native families, some of them are single-parent families, and because of their Christian convictions, they are very concerned about Christian education or alternative education. So I think it's very important to realize that those people using private schools are not a group of well-to-do people who can't afford to pay a great deal of tuition, etc.

On Friday when you were talking, you were answering questions of the minister from Regina Centre. You mentioned that, quite correctly and I respect you for that, that it is ultimately the parents' right to decide the education of their children. And I appreciate the two or three places you made that point, but there is the one sentence I would like clarified. And I'm quoting from *Hansard* in your words.

And we will continue discussions, hopefully to come to a resolve in recognizing the rights of those parents, and at the same time ensuring that there is a standard of education there society has accepted.

First of all, I would like you to clarify what kinds of standards do you think these schools should be enforced on these schools?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, it's an interesting debate, and I guess standards, from my perspective, when I refer to them, particularly in regards to the A schools, is basically on the basic core component; that we have a tendency to think that all children should have access to these subjects, and come out with the ability to be able to read and write, and do their arithmetic, and have certain information in regards to other things.

So I guess when I talk standards, I'm basically talking that core subject as we normally know the school.

MRS. CASWELL: — I'm quoting now from a Professor Chris Gerrard, of 2457 Eastview. Yes, MLA for Saskatoon Eastview, he is your constituent. But I'm quoting from his letter:

Therefore we've asked that your department undertake to test our children of all school ages on a continuing basis, in order to determine the quality of education that our children are receiving. If our students are found to be deficient, then we will gladly acknowledge this and attempt to make up any deficiencies.

Professor Chris Gerrard has become a spokesman for the association of independent church schools. And he was saying very clearly that he would be very willing to have children using what is commonly known as the ACE (Association for Christian Education) program, to be tested on an ongoing basis.

So I think that I would like to read for the record that many parents, including, I must admit, myself, who have children in the Faith Alive Christian Academy, would be very willing to have overall standard tests on clearly academic skills. And do you envision that your department will be working towards this in the near future?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — That is certainly one possibility and it's one that is often talked about. The department right now and in this coming year would not be equipped to go into it. But it is certainly something that has been discussed and that will have to be pursued.

You know, the whole issue, and the issue of the rights of parents, particularly when it comes to private schools, raises some very difficult but very important policy issues that government and the Department of Education are going to have to deal with.

And it hasn't been dealt with in the past, and we are quite prepared to sit down and talk with the various people, as we have been. But I also noted when you refer to *Hansard*, that some of the discussions have been met, you know, frustrations. Things don't move fast.

But in all honesty, we are at this point in time not equipped to go into testing. But it is certainly something that will have to be given consideration for.

MRS. CASWELL: — I understand you do have funding, partial funding for Christian schools if they follow the curriculum set by the Department of Education, such as the school that resides in John Lake School, John Lake public school, and it's run by the Saskatoon Christian School association.

Do you envision that there would be no difficulty getting funding for that school? Although they hire their own teachers and put things in a Christian content, they use the Department of Education curriculum.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I don't believe we fund that school that you mentioned, but I could certainly check. The funding that has gone into nine private schools that have historical background to them, part of the criterion, and I believe it went in in the early 1970s, (I might be a little bit out on that) the policy on the funding of such private high schools was that they have five years of successful operation, and obviously if the funding question is going to be looked at particularly for more, and if you move out of the high school and into the elementary,

then I guess there's a much broader question that's involved that would have to be dealt with, including, you know, the necessary funds associated with it.

(1930)

But at this point in time I don't think we fund that school that you made reference to, and we do fund nine private high schools.

MRS. CASWELL: — I have a memo, and I assure you I don't have any secret papers or anything you have to worry about. This one, I'm sure, is quite an open one, it's re Saskatchewan Association of Independent Church Schools, and it came from your office, and I'm quoting from it: "during these discussions with the . . ." This is discussions with the Saskatchewan Association of Independent Church Schools.

During these discussions it soon became evident the ACE program was an entirely different program based upon different assumptions of what should be taught and how it should be taught when compared to the provincial program. Thus the request for provincial standing for graduates of this program had to be denied.

I'm pleased with your answer, that we're talking about core standards of basic academics etc., etc., but in this memo which I believe . . . I'm not quite sure of the date but it was some time in September or possibly August — I think it was August 15th — you talk about the ACE program. Graduates were denied a grade 12 status because of entirely different assumptions. And can you explain what you meant by that?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I would prefer to have the letter in front of me. However, for now, to the member from Westmount, I do believe we were talking about curriculum and that the assumptions being the curriculum that is in place.

MRS. CASWELL: — There is some confusion in the media and other places that they say that, well, the difficulty that a graduate from the ACE program have to get into secondary education is because the secondary school, such as the university, Kelsey, etc., does not want to accept them. And then some people from universities say the reason why we will not accept ACE graduates is because, is from instructions from the Department of Education. Can you clear up this classic Catch 22?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I guess it comes back again to what is given, what a credit is given for in terms of the curriculum. And if the department does not give that credit and if the testing hasn't been done, either through an accredited teacher or through departmental exams, then the universities will not accept anything other than that grade 12 certificate. Does that clear up the confusion somewhat?

MRS. CASWELL: — Back to your statement, there's a standard of — at the same time ensuring that there is a standard of education that society has accepted and I'd like to read from another letter written by professor Chris Gerrard, which I think gives some light into the difficulty of this issue:

Parents who enrol their children in such schools are not opposed to the public system. Rather we feel that a public system in a pluralistic society can no longer meet the educational objectives that we have set for our children. We derive inspiration from the Holy Scriptures, both Old and the New Testaments that instruct Christians to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord". The public system no longer qualifies because one cannot separate the philosophy of education from the content of education, the sacred from the secular, and the dominant philosophy of the public school curriculum is now humanistic. Our society no longer accepts as a collectivity that we are creatures of one Creator, the God of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob.

And I think it's clear from this quote that we have a situation that one group in society — namely, the parents using these independent church schools — are saying that, we have rejected society's standards, or another group of society's standards. And I question, when we talk about a standard of education that society has accepted — obviously these people are saying, we do not accept the standards in the public school system, rightly or wrongly.

And I'm sure that you and I would agree that the purpose of the Department of Education is not to make theological decisions about what is right, humanism or Christianity. At least, I trust that would be the case, at least between you and I, but I'm concerned that when we talk about the parents are the first people to decide what is the best type of education, that we are not having the Christian schools be judged by a school system that they have rejected according to their standards.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, to come back to the phrase of what society has accepted, you know, it takes us a long way back, particularly in a democratic society, where people came together and the rules were laid down as to how certain things were going to happen; certain things were mandatory; the law says this, and the law says that — education being one of those. It was decided a long time ago in a democratic state that everyone not only has the right to an education, but they shall exercise that right to an education.

From that point, in a democratic society, we get to who is going to govern the system. Now provinces, in this country called Canada, have received the responsibility of looking after education. It's a provincial jurisdiction, and in turn, in order to ensure that those decisions are made, in order to ensure that those decisions are made closest to the local level, then your factor of local autonomy and your local government — which schools boards are a part of — come into play.

Now, one can make a lot of assumptions when it comes to the democracy. First of all everybody that is present in this Assembly has the hereallwith to be here. Some days you wonder, but nevertheless you accept that, because that's the way people voted and sent the member from Quill Lakes into this Assembly.

Based on that, the local government in the democratic, going back in history as to who has jurisdiction over education, brings another topic into play, and that is what is going to be taught in the schools, and who's going to teach it. And that too was mandated through legislation in the provinces to the local level, and that being your locally elected trustees.

Now, the debate has carried on over the years, and in fact my guess is that it has probably heated up as to who actually has the control on what's going to be taught. Is it, in fact, one of the few things that the provincial government should be deciding, what's going to be taught, or should that also be done in conjunction with the local school board?

Well obviously, through the legislation that we now deal with, what's going to be taught has been stated in legislation, and consequently we have some core subjects in there. However, there's a lot of flexibility for the local level to be offering more.

The issue of what is going to be taught, particularly when it comes to the Christian schools, or private schools, becomes a much broader question, and I think there are other issues involved with it.

The whole question of religion in the schools, while it used to be part of it, becomes the question in dealing with the Christian private schools. And that's the religious aspect or component of the core curriculum. The member from Quill Lakes wants to know if I forgot the question.

In response to your question, and given that background, we have tried in part to deal with the issue based on the mechanisms that are in place, and that is your locally elected school board. And for instance, as I told the member from Quill Lakes yesterday, in the Saskatchewan Valley School Division, the church group there has worked out an agreement with the board of education where they are being funded on the per pupil rate through there. They are probably throwing in some money of their own. They do have a say in terms of the program, because it's a parents' board that is running it, but the overall umbrella jurisdiction is still with that elected board of education.

But it's one of the few areas that has worked out an agreement and in fact what you have in that school division is an alternative school that is governed by the church people involved, and they also have a say not only in the programming but the hiring of the teachers.

MRS. CASWELL: — Minister, whatever I think of your answers, I certainly respect the difficulty in which you had to give them, and if nothing else I suppose the display in the corner shows the necessity of discipline in the school, no matter what philosophy you have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MRS. CASWELL: — One thing that concerns me was about the issue of the local school board, of the public school board having control over the private schools in terms of accreditation etc., etc.

In terms of the funding that for every child who goes to a private school, it's a real plus for the provincial government because we're paying taxes and yet we're also paying tuition, so we're paying for a school system that we don't use. And so that we're clearly saving the taxpayer money. But the local school board loses money from his grant system because they're all funded for every child in a seat in their schools. So that the public school board would be the one who'd have the most to lose by having children in a private school system.

Also, that many of the parents do not feel in any way that they should be answerable to the public school board. They do not think that they have decided that the public school board is no longer their standard by which they want to educate their children.

And so then I tend to think that although obviously you've given examples where some parents are pleased to have a school within a school just as the native survival school operates within the Catholic school board, I tend to think that many parents or church groups will not accept the public school board or the local school board being the controlling fact in a private school. Have you possibly looked at the other routes of accreditation?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, I guess to come back to what this democratic system is, one could always take the view that if one is totally unhappy with the board of education, the door is open to run for one of those seats, just like it is if everybody in Regina Centre is unhappy, then they can choose to run for MLA Of that constituency. That's, you know, the extreme. That does not address the particular problem that we're talking about tonight.

(1945)

In terms of other routes of accreditation, we have not looked at any specific to this date, because discussions have still been going on. I suppose, if we were, there are several things that would have to come into question. Certainly open to discussion — there are certain criteria — if it was met could they be funded like the private high schools are at the present time? If you were to go that route, then you were into a question of somebody doing the inspecting or monitoring that takes place with the present system on high schools. So you would have that kind of a discussion, where some parents might still feel then that that is an infringement on not only their rights, but perhaps somebody isn't trusting them, or whatever. But it's a possibility to look at.

MRS. CASWELL: — . . . (inaudible) . . . I believe his name is Mr. Ray Ellison, have in accrediting these schools? You have a department for private schools. Wouldn't that be the natural jurisdiction for these private schools, rather than the public school board?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Ellison does provide instruction for some of those private schools. To respond to your question, of would that be the way for the others to go, that would have to be a policy decision made by government. As I indicated earlier, there's a financial question in there, plus there's other aspects that the government would have to address before coming down with a final decision. I had also indicated that those are hard decisions and they deserve ample discussion on.

MRS. CASWELL: — I think that one thing that bothers us, in this whole discussion of democracy, we generally concede if your taxes support something, then you have a right to have your two cents worth of opinion about how it should be run. So that although all these parents who take their children to private schools are also paying education taxes, therefore they certainly have a right to vote in whichever school system they so desire, etc., etc.

But these are schools are present which are funded by no one but the people using them. And I think, as long as they are funded by no one but the people using them, that these parents will naturally want a great deal of freedom in terms of the philosophy and in what one might call assumptions — how the school should be taught and what philosophy they should be in that school.

When we talk about pluralism, I think it's not enough to have a monolithic school system that teaches the idea that one idea maybe as good as another, but that we clearly have a right to a school system that goes on different assumptions from what we now term often the humanistic school system, or the neutral school system, or the public school system.

And it is no longer what it used to be — the Protestant school system — but it no longer carries within it a Biblical base; and so that there's a Catholic school system, and the public school system that many people claim to be more and more humanistic.

And these parents who are paying taxes feel that they are disenfranchised, that they do not have their taxes going to a school with the religion of their choice. Also many of them have a commitment that how a school should be run should be between the parents and the church, and the school is a function of the church, and that is part of their religious belief.

So I guess the actual question to that is that I tend to think we're slipping into very dangerous grounds when we impose standards on these schools that are funded by no one but the users, and especially if you give that power to the public school board. Would you like to make a comment?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, as I have indicated, it raises some very difficult and important policy issues, and I certainly don't have any firm answers in terms of changes in policy or lack of policies, whichever the case may be.

I suppose, particularly with the charter of rights coming down, we may very well find that some of the discussions on such policy issues as it relates to religion in the school will become more heated over the next five to 10 years, in terms of people searching for what they feel is a fundamental right, as classified under the charter of rights.

However, I also recognize that in terms of the rights that we may have in Canada that we probably have twofold responsibilities that go with those rights. And I guess that even makes the discussion more difficult.

MRS. CASWELL: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I would like to read a little bit from Howard McConnell, College of Law, U. of S., and support found in the charter which I'm glad you brought it up. I must admit that we had . . . On April 17th, I received the dubious right to be sued for alimony. Fortunately my husband is committed to the Christian principle of non-divorce so I don't have to worry. Neither does he.

But I tend to think that often we talk about rights in such a way that they may not be particularly helpful or useful, including some of the rights that we may get under the charter. But in saying with that, we do change some laws. We do change some laws whether or not they have been challenged in court or whether or not people have been quite happy with the old ones. We changed them without a great deal of discussion before April 17th.

And I would like to read, maybe for the record, what Professor McConnell, who's a constitutional expert, says about this:

Professor Christopher D. Gerrard's recent three-part series on alternative Christian schools provides a fascinating glimpse of a model of education with which the general public is not sufficiently familiar. Gerrard cites a Canadian heritage of educational diversity, according to which various denominations have in the past received financial support for sectarian education.

On a recent visit to Newfoundland, I was told that all of the province pre-university schooling was denominational in character. In Canada, we have never had the wall of separation between church and state or an establishment clause such as precludes state support for education in the American constitution. Assuming that the education provided by the Christian Centre Academy at Lawson heights, (and he was talking about a particular school) meets a necessary standard and religious education is such a character as a central tenet of the denomination's religious faiths, I think the city or province would be violating . . .

I'm pleased to see that the member from Regina Centre was interested in bringing up the issue of religious freedom on Friday, but he obviously is not interested in bringing it up enough to keep quiet so I can read a very important sentence, and we can get on with this issue . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I think I will.

I think the city or province would be violating the charter of rights if they did not extend the same tax relief to the academy as that accorded to the Seventh Day Adventists.

In mid-April, section 15 of the charter, which mandates equal protection and equal benefit of the law, and non-discrimination on religious grounds, will come into operation. It is essential to such a provision that legal advantages, benefits, or immunities conceded by governments to one denomination should not be denied to another. All must be treated equally.

It would take great ingenuity to demonstrate how, in the light of section 15, tax benefits accorded to one denomination can be denied to another consistently with the charter.

And in saying that, I'd like to say that the public school system, using the curriculum based on John Dewey, Kirkendall, Guttmacher . . . Many humanists have been taken to court in the United States.

Humanism has been declared a religion in several court decisions, and therefore in some ways we are funding one religious system or one philosophical system, while making another religious or philosophical system very, very difficult — giving them a very difficult time because they are

often double or triple-taxed, and I would like to see, possibly, that your department would look into the religious freedoms of parents who may have diverse views, whether or not those are parents who agree with me or don't agree with me, so that their rights can be protected without lengthy court decisions. Because, indeed, the Minister of Justice, on April 17th, changed some laws or was in starting the process of changing laws without being contested in courts, and I certainly think this is one that we would look well to concede religious freedom without a fight.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Just perhaps a short comment, to please the member from Quill Lakes.

I think most school boards, and I say "most" because I don't know for sure, but my guess would be, the ones I'm very familiar with, make a very distinct effort to recognize, first of all, the values of the home and all that contains, which includes one's religion. They make room for that in terms of school policy and school board policy that may exempt children from certain exercises or a day in recognition of a religious holiday within a particular church. So I think to a degree the recognition of the diverse views are often there.

One of the most difficult things for the school to do — some are perhaps successful and some aren't — and that is to recognize and enhance the values of the home. The church, the school, the home, and the community are very much tied together. And the school should not have a set of values on its own, but should rather recognize the values of the particular community that it's in, and for sure recognize the values that that child brings from its home — not only recognizes, but should be able to, in an idealistic world, enhance the kinds of values that a parent sends forth with their child when that child is sent to school.

I don't know if the member is aware that when the curriculum review was on there was very much a concern stated around the various publics to do with spiritual development or lack thereof in the public school system. And I think recognition at that time was given to the fact that you're not dealing with just the mind of the child, but you're also dealing with the spirit and the soul, and to ignore any one part of the whole child was to do a disservice to them.

Consequently, you saw forth the spiritual development goal which simply says: seek an understanding of the purpose and worth of human existence and develop a knowledge of God. Respect family, religion, and culture in a pluralistic society.

Well, with that goal it is now going to become incumbent upon school boards to make sure that they place within their school board policies and their own schools, along with the teachers, to look at how they can best address that goal and ensure that, in fact, is happening in their school.

In a closing remark, I am aware of the issue of the tax exemption for the Christian Academy in Saskatoon. And I'm also aware of the various points that have been raised: the fact that it's not a sub-unit or a school division, and city council has no authority to designate it as such, and that type of thing. I can only restate to the member from Westmount once again that the whole subject raises some very difficult, but more importantly, important policy issues to be debated and decided upon.

MRS. CASWELL: — Thank you, Madam Minister, I appreciate any effort to make the public schools more amenable to parents. And I am not at all — nor is Professor Chris Gerrard or anyone I know within the Christian schools — out to attack the public schools or the teachers in them, and the difficult job they have. However, if I may quote Professor Gerrard again, he quotes the member from Fairview, in which the member from Fairview says: "There's nothing that'll improve the public school system like a little competition."

(2000)

And I tend to think, when we talk about pluralism, that we will find — just like there are very few stores that please everybody when you go shopping for clothes or groceries — and the parents

out there are the consumers. And I think that more and more we'll find that we must allow for stores selling a different brand of education. And perhaps our job should be to make sure that all of those schools teach some sound academics and the philosophy in which they are taught should be left to the discretion of the customer, the parent.

So I thank you for answering my questions, despite the difficulty in the corner, and I appreciate your concern on this issue.

MR. KOSKIE: — Yes, Madam Minister, I was talking in respect to the Education Development Fund. And I just want . . . If you could give me what you have in mind in respect to one of the objectives, or what the fund is expected to focus on, where it says:

The promotion of efficiency measures through the use of incentive mechanisms in areas such as consolidation or sharing of services, program cost reductions, and energy conservation.

Is it your view that you are going to be providing to divisions extra money for, indeed, efficiency mechanisms; and the greater efficiency mechanisms that they bring about, the increase in their fund? Is it, in fact, what you are thinking of there when you talk about consolidation, the elimination of some of the smaller schools? I'd just like to know what you have in mind in respect to that particular focus?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I would be more than pleased to talk for a while, if you wish, on the efficiency grants. I believe that's where the member from Quill Lakes left off at 5 o'clock this afternoon.

Anything that has been suggested is in terms of examples. And when I talk about consolidation, I don't necessarily mean the consolidation of schools. I may be talking about the consolidation of services, such as the sharing of more services. We do have a shared services in dealing with special ed now.

It might very well be the pooling of, for necessity of purchasing. I'm aware of at least one region in this province that, for some time, several boards have gone together in order to tender on school buses, and a substantial savings has been gained from that.

I would like to make it ultimately clear for the member from Quill Lakes that efficiency incentives are by no way an indication that boards do not do their job. In fact, I would suggest that most governments around the world could take a lesson from some of the operations of school boards when it comes to efficiency.

But what we are recognizing is that some efficiencies do take some up-front money. And let me use the example of the Nipawin School division, who is looking at project on converting their buses to natural gas. The savings is substantial. However, there is an outlay cost of approximately \$4,000 per bus, and that's a lot of money if one has a substantial number of buses within their fleet. So what we've suggested is there can be some incentives there for boards to move into that area.

You might very well look at the maintenance of a building: some special windows, energy conservation, the saving of water in the showers in the high schools. But that costs money up front in order to get the savings on the long term down the road.

MR. KOSKIE: — You also indicated, Madam Minister, that the boards in respect to the development fund were being asked to submit a plan for expenditures in line with the focus points that you have set out.

I just wonder, are you thinking of any timetable as to when you expect these boards to be in a

position of submitting their plans so that they might qualify for some of the developmental fund? Have you any general timetable set forth whereby they have to submit their plans?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, first of all, this planning document is not only to be submitted to the department in order to access their payment, but it is for their general public. And we have suggested to boards that they must start their planning on a collaborative basis, not only with their community, but perhaps with their teaching staffs also.

There's no particular timetable on it. My guess is you will see the larger boards are probably ready to submit. They have perhaps been into long-term planning for some time, and will not have any great difficulty in terms of time in putting together a package. The smaller division might take a little while longer.

One of the reasons we didn't put a timetable on was that we wanted, first of all, them to really take a hard, serious look -term planning.

They were also informed that this is one fund where if they don't spent it this year, they won't lose it. It will be carried over for the next year, and all the moneys that could be allocated to that board will still be open to them. And that once again was to ensure that, in fact, that long-term planning takes place, and that we don't have the short-term, quick fix-its that the member from Regina Centre would like to see.

MR. KOSKIE: — Well you indicated that in respect to the plan that you want, it appears that you want this plan published, or at least made public to the general taxpayers and to the teachers and so on. Is it your assumption that there was not consultation at the local board level previously that was satisfactory, and are you imposing a new conditions of impositions of the nature of the planning by the local boards?

Is that what you're saying? Because that's implied by your answer, that they're going to have to publish these plans as you indicated.

I'm under the impression that in fact there was consultation at the local level, local autonomy, and I want you to explain a little better what you are precisely getting at. Were you not satisfied in fact with the nature of the planning that was being done by the boards at the local level?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Some boards, Mr. Chairman, have been in a position to do long-term planning, and they've also had the consultative staff to do the collaboration to the closest level to the school. And that is really in essence where the best decision making comes from, and that's that school with its parents, students, teaching staff, the board, and its administration. That takes time, and sometimes it takes an effort of a communication process that not all school boards have been into. Some have been, but not all. Those that haven't been into readily admit to it that they have to look at some mechanisms in doing it.

Now I would suggest to the member from Quill Lakes that most boards have a pretty good relationship with their local level. However, that does not mean that they put into place a formal consultation process in terms of spreading out the decision making, and this is nothing more and nothing less than that. It's not imposing. We are simply encouraging them to perhaps base their decisions on more of a collaborative process than what they have been accustomed to in the past.

MR. KOSKIE: — Once the local board has made their plan, could you clarify again just so everyone's clear? Do they submit that to your department? And is it necessary for the department to, in fact, okay the so-called long-term budget submitted by a school division before they become eligible for the grants?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I can only emphasize once again for the member's

benefit that we want this to be done in co-operation with, and we do not want it so that there is absolutely no flexibility for the local level.

The boards are being asked to table with their public or their constituents a long-term planning process that outlines the objectives, the cost implications, the program content, and the evaluation component.

In other words, they are going to be able to show what efforts have been made for improvement in the quality of education, and sometimes it's not so much the actual improvement, but the process it has gone through.

They are going to be asked to indicate to their public in that long-term planning where the moneys are being spent on the Educational Development Fund. The accountability mechanism is already in place in terms of that board being required with its annual ratepayers' meeting. The mechanism is there. We don't want to set up a new mechanism. We just want them to use this portion of it in the mechanism that is already in place.

MR. KOSKIE: — I want to ask you specifically, if they prepare their plan, does the plan have to be submitted in part of the consultation process to the department? And I ask you specifically, does it need the approval of the Department of Education before they qualify for the funds?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — All the plan needs is to show the three areas that have been identified, the three areas that have been identified.

Now, I can go back through the consultation that took place and what we had agreement on from the chairmen of the board, and the directors of education, SSTA, and STF. Within those three broad categories, there is a lot of flexibility for boards to identify projects that we haven't even thought of, in terms of the ideas that we threw out to those school boards.

Most school boards, when we met with them in the four regional meetings around the province, were excited about the possibilities that could be done with such a development fund, and with such projects. And in fact, my guess is you will find over half of them come up with some ideas on their own that we haven't suggested.

As long as they are contained within those three broad categories, the learning resources, the efficiency grants, and the program initiatives, then the moneys will go out.

MR. KOSKIE: — The question is that you've set out the three categories, then you say as long as they are within those three categories. What I ask you: is it the Department of Education who is going to be determining whether they are within the broad definitions of those three categories? It's a simple question.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Nothing about the member from Quill Lakes is simple, Mr. Chairman. That will be done in co-operation — the decision made with the department and the board together.

MR. KOSKIE: — Exactly what I was going to say, Madam Minister, and it's rather hard to draw it out of you. What you have done here is set up a system of a development fund, and it is your intention to determine and approve the plans which you feel you want to approve.

(2015)

There's no guarantee because, as you indicate, you first of all set the areas that they're going to be dealing with: financing of approved plans for improving learning resources; the promotion of efficiency, as you indicated; and program improvement initiatives such as increasing school effectiveness, etc.

And it's very obvious, as I indicated before, that what was indeed the local board's purview in order to direct the needs of education at the local level, has now indeed been usurped. And it will be the Department of Education that will be deciding who is going to qualify for the development funds.

I want to ask the minister: in respect to operating grants, one will know that last year we were in the House here requesting to know the operating grants for all of the school divisions in Saskatchewan. And I might mention, Madam Minister, it wasn't until some time in mid-June, after further requests, that you provided that information. I wonder whether you can provide a list of the school divisions, their last year grants, and the grants for the current year, and indicate the percentage of change in respect to each of those. Is that information sent out to the boards, and can you provide it to the opposition?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Before dealing with the issue of the operating grants and the grants going to the school boards, I would like to assure this Assembly, but most specifically the member from Quill Lakes, that the funds on the Educational Development Fund are going to be very assessable, much more so than a program that I recall several years ago called shared services, where first of all there had to be a joint committee and these rules were all laid down and a pupil program plan had to be submitted before you could even begin to access these funds. Not only that, Mr. Chairman, but those kinds of plans were put in those days without any consultation with the school boards before being done.

Now let's come to the issue of the operational grants. I don't know if the member from Quill Lakes is complaining because the grants aren't zero, or if he's complaining because they're too high. The same process for this year as last year — I do not have them compiled with me. Each board has received a preliminary estimate of their grant. That changes on a daily basis until the assessment is finalized and the mill rate is set at the end of the month. The member from Quill Lakes knows that.

When that is completed, I would be glad to send him the same information that he received last year. Last year he received the information of the percentage of grants. He wants them again. We can do that, but I would wonder why I would have to duplicate last year's process this year.

MR. KOSKIE: — Simply because of the fact what you have done last year is delay giving the opposition the information in respect to the operating grants, held them off until the House was closed, and then provided the information so the heat couldn't be placed upon you for deception that you outlined in the House in a general way.

If we took a look at the operating grants last year, as I indicated, there was a large number of them — 34 school divisions — that actually received fewer dollars than the year before. Thirty-six was below the rate of inflation. In other words, 70 of the Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible) . . . school divisions got less in operating grants than they would the year previously. And it has been the custom in the past, when we were in government, Madam Minister, when there was some management to the government at least, that by the end of March when the school boards required the information, that information went to the school boards, and it was also supplied to the opposition.

What has changed that has made it impossible for you to, in fact, calculate from the various divisions, and why wouldn't you be in a position at this time to provide the information?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, that's not true. Nothing has changed. The opposition receives the information no differently now than what the opposition received when they were the government of the day.

They did not receive it from — well, you couldn't have — you know, go back and refresh your

memory and be up front about it. It simply isn't true. The same allegation came forward last year. He wanted the information right now. That was before the final grant had come down, and there were changes, sometimes daily changes being made, because of assessment changes and other factors, and I made the same statement then. And he insisted with the same allegation and went back to the same thing this year. That simply isn't true.

MR. KOSKIE: — Madam Minister, last year you indicated that you would not provide a list of the school divisions and the operating grants that were going to be provided in your budget. But as we went through them one by one, you were able to do it. All that you refused to do is to put it on a sheet of paper and provide it to us during the time of the estimates. What you did was a deliberate attempt not to provide the information that could be used during the estimates.

I want to assure you that the opposition previously, under the previous administration, did in fact have that information. You weren't around, but you should check.

AN HON. MEMBER: — They were not.

MR. KOSKIE: — They certainly were. And all you're doing is neglecting to provide the information which we have a right to have. I'd like to ask the minister, even agreeing to her assumptions that she can't provide it: when will she likely be able to provide it to the opposition? Prior to the end of the session, within 10 days, or in June, or July, or when? Or is it when it's convenient to you? Because last year you indicated that you would provide it as soon as possible. And in fact I had to write to you and request it from you.

Well, why are you not prepared to provide that information? Are you afraid of the embarrassment? And when in fact are you likely to be in a position to provide it?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the same response as last year. You know, right now we are dealing with preliminary figures. I made that point last year, and they insisted that we go through several documents. I don't have those documents with me that we could put three sheets of paper together and struggle through five hours of one divisional board by another, and for a very good reason. The figures are preliminary.

If the member from Quill Lakes would like to contain himself and gather some patience around him, the mill rate are set at the end of the month, and hopefully most of the assessment figures and other factors will be finalized by that time.

Now it seems to me that it ultimately makes much more common sense to deal with final figures than to deal with preliminary; stand up; shoot your mouth off, and then finally get some final figures that indicate you were wrong to begin with.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Madam Minister, this was an outrage last year, and it is an outrage this year . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I don't care how much you yawn when I'm asking the question. We are not prepared to accept this, Madam Minister. The preliminary operating grants, as you put it, until you became a minister were always available. And if they are preliminary, you could say so; and you could provide at a later date any adjustments that might have been made in those figures, if you wanted to.

Madam Minister, the reason why you're not providing it is because you're going to find it embarrassing. And it is the style of this government to obstruct the legislature of Saskatchewan whenever it suits their purpose. And that's all you are doing. You are obstructing the due process of democracy in this legislature. And that's all you are accomplishing by refusing to give the information. You could give us the preliminary information, but you refuse to do so. There's only one reason you're refusing to do so, because it's embarrassing.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — There's nothing embarrassing about the information. Let's refresh our

memories on last year's budget, if that's what we're going to get into. In fact, maybe we should go back for about six years and refresh our total memory.

Last year this province had a 5 per cent increase in funding — the highest in Canada. One other province matched it. One other province in the whole of the country, and that was the province of Ontario. Along with that, we had approximately a 5 per cent increase in mills. Now if I compare that 5 per cent increase in mills, compared to the last three years of that administration, which was 17.5, 13, and 10.9 respectively, that 5 per cent increase in mills tells me that we did relatively well with the education budget last year.

All of that, Mr. Chairman, considering the fact that we still have that little innocent title in the formula called capital debt retirement that was slowly eating up the operating grants, there's nothing embarrassing about this year's budget. It's just a simple fact, the figures are very preliminary. And as soon as I have them, they will be sent to the opposition, all of them.

Last year, Mr. Chairman, we had 70-some school boards that received an increase. Yes, we had 30-some that had a decrease. This year you will still see some school boards with a decrease. The two main factors being, Mr. Chairman, if they are through reassessment or if they've had a large decline in their student enrolment. For instance, the Regina Catholic board has lost 140 pupils. That translates into hard dollars for the Regina Catholic board of \$350,000. Now obviously if it's a school division that has increased by 140 pupils, it's to the good. But if it's a decline of students, then it's tough for the school board to be able to budget and set that mill rate in any one year.

As soon as those figures are put together, I will even ensure that the opposition has the information on the development fund, if that's what they would like to see. Plus they will see the increase in grants to the school divisions — what the divisions receive. If they would like to have the facts on why a board receives a decrease in their funding, I would be more than willing to provide that for you, providing you use it in an honest manner, which I don't hear coming forth from the member from Quill Lakes very often to tell you the truth.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Madam Minister, are you going to answer my question? Why can't you give us the preliminary figures? Or are you going to obfuscate all night until 10 o'clock? Because we're quite prepared to stay here, if that's the name of the game. If you want to obfuscate, and delay, and obstruct, we're quite prepared to hang in here with you.

Or you could try answering the question. Why not give us the preliminary figures as was done every year up until the time when you became a minister?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, it wasn't done every year up until the time that I became minister. In fact, the pat answer was — and I used to sit up in the gallery as a school trustee in here: in due course, Mr. Chairman, in due course. That was the apt answer of the day. I don't have the preliminary figures with me. When the figures are put together and the mill rates are compiled, I will send the information to the members opposite. If they would like the entire book to find the figures, they're welcome. They won't find them. They're not there. I don't have them.

(2030)

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Madam Minister, that's right as rain with me if you want to send me your book. I can get the information, and I'll bet I can put it together in less than an hour. And I'll bet you could, too. You could put together those preliminary figures in a relatively short period of time.

Madam Minister, last year you had the unmitigated gall to sit there and give the member from Quill Lakes the operating grants for the first four or five school districts listed in the *Public Accounts*. And then you had the nerve to stand up and say: but we can't give it all to you.

Madam Minister, Madam Minister, you gave us the information after the session was over, when it was of little use to us. And that's what you're going to do again this year. And, Madam Minister, that is just simply not an acceptable way for a minister of the Crown to behave. And I ask you to give us that information now.

If you want to give me your book, and if I can't get that information out of that book in less than an hour, I won't use it. Now, how's that? How's that for a fair deal?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, that is not what happened last year. Perhaps we should get last year's *Hansard*. As I recall, we started alphabetically — alphabetically.

AN HON. MEMBER: — No.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Yes, alphabetically. And we went through them. And then the member from Quill Lakes stood up — and I don't know what letter of the alphabet we were at — and said, well, it's obvious, for whatever reason, and went on to the next question. But I volunteered to stand here until we got to the end of the school boards in this province.

AN HON. MEMBER: — Why can't you do that now?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I cannot do that now, Mr. Chairman, because I don't have these figures with me tonight. I stated they were very preliminary, and we have had changes coming in day by day. When they are ready, the opposition will have them.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Chairman, I am going to move that this committee adjourn till tomorrow to give the minister a chance to come back with the figures which she patently has available to her. I need a white sheet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order. The House cannot adjourn from committee.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — No, I'm just adjourning the committee. I move that the committee adjourn. I move the committee rise and report progress. I do so, Mr. Chairman, to give the minister an opportunity to get the information which is patently available to her through the department.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

YEAS — 6

Blakeney
Thompson

Engel
Lingenfelter

Koskie
Shillington

NAYS — 30

Lane
Duncan
Pickering
Hardy
McLaren
Smith (Swift Current)
Baker
Hepworth
Currie
Sandberg

Klein
Martens
Domotor
Folk
Bacon
Parker
Smith (Moose Jaw South)
Myers
Rybchuk
Caswell

Hampton
Boutin
Schmidt
Tusa
Meagher
Glauser
Sauder
Zazelenchuk
Weiman
Swenson

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Item 1, Executive Administration, agreed?

MR. SHILLINGTON: — It certainly is not, Madam Minister, I want to ask the question that I asked some time ago. Why won't you provide us with the preliminary figures, as was done in every year until you became Minister of Education?

AN HON. MEMBER: — Mistress.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — The distress of education.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I can only state once again the process has not changed. And when they are compiled, the mill rates are set, it will be sent to the opposition.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Why don't you provide us with the information?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Once again, Mr. Chairman, the figures are preliminary that have been given to the boards. There are changes being made daily. The mill rates will not be set until the end of the month. To give just simply preliminary figures is probably not the best information that could be given. Surely to goodness, the opposition would want to have a look at the impact of the increase for this year.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Surely to goodness, the minister is attempting to prevent us from doing that by not giving us the information. That's the very thing that Madam Minister seeks to prevent, is us discussing the impact of your grants on the school divisions. Madam Minister, I wonder if you could give me, in particular, the grant for Battle River, No. 60 School Division?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I have to take notice of that because I don't have the information with me tonight. I stated that once; I can only state it again.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Madam Minister, why didn't you come with the information? I would have thought you would have anticipated from last year that we might be asking this. Why didn't you bring the information with you? Your failure to bring it, Madam Minister, is just a little too convenient. Why didn't you bring it with you?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I can only state once again, the figures are very preliminary. Last year, when we were into estimates in this House, it was closer to the time that the mill rates had been set. And the figures are very preliminary, and I simply do not have them with me tonight.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Madam Minister, your excuses are as transparent as a window pane. There are a number of your officials in the Legislative Assembly — I assume some of them, indeed probably all of whom, have drivers licenses. If it, indeed, is back in the office or in the department, I assume they could be back here within half an hour. You can drive anywhere in Regina and back in half an hour. Why don't you send them for it? Because I can assure you at 23 minutes after 9 we're very likely to be dealing with your education estimates.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, even if one were to go to the department, pull the computer print-out out of the computer, put them all in one sheet for the opposition, it doesn't change the two factors that I said: very preliminary, and no mill rates have been set yet.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — We have no quarrel with the fact that you may adjust it later, Madam Minister. What we're asking you for is the preliminary figures, and you haven't given us any reason why we can't have them.

I tell you, Madam Minister it's patently apparent you don't want to be embarrassed with your own figures. That is not an adequate reason to refuse to give the opposition information and estimates.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, there's nothing embarrassing about \$35 million this year, with 10 million of it going into the Educational Development Fund, 17 million going into the operating grant, and 8 million going into debt retirement that will no longer eat up operating costs for school boards.

I would have thought that perhaps the member from Regina Centre, and Quill Lakes had maybe done some of their homework again through the media. For instance, I recall reading the other day in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* that Saskatoon boards, with their grants this year, were looking at absolutely no increase on their mill rate. That is the closest thing I have in terms of information in this House tonight, is what I read in the *Star-Phoenix*.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Well, why don't you get the computer print-out and share the information with us? Why keep it a secret, Madam Minister? As I say, your excuses are transparent. We always got the preliminary figures. Indeed, it was the habit of ministers who were courteous to distribute it ahead of time before the . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: — Who'd you get it from?

MR. SHILLINGTON: — We got it from the minister of education, whoever that might be. It was the practice of past ministers to distribute that ahead of time to the opposition critics. And I ask you again, Madam Minister, why won't you give us the information?

This is outrageous. Last year you gave us the information after the session was over, when we were not able to make effective use of it. And that is a very sorry performance on your part — cheap and shoddy as well.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — We could talk about patronizing also. I indicated last year, and I indicate again this year, the process is no different from when the member from Regina Centre was minister of education. And the grants were compiled after estimates were done and sent to the opposition. And the then opposition of the day inform me that sometimes they waited months for the information.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Madam Minister, are you suggesting that in many sessions which ended prior to April 22, today's date, sessions went by with that information being distributed? Is that what you're saying?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, in most other years the budget, first of all, has been in March and the mill rates were set at the end of March. The Leader of the Opposition knows that. This year we have some different circumstances. Boards were given an extended time to set that mill rate because budget came down on April the 10th.

The figures to date are preliminary. I do not have them in the House with me tonight. I have given my assurances that I will give them to the opposition as soon as they are put together in one sheet so that they can read them and not have to go through 108 or however many school divisions there are, and that perhaps they would like to wait until the end of April when they get the mill rates with it also.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, what we're asking is what your grants are. If you wish at some later time to provide us with the mill rate, fine. What we're asking is the grants that you are providing for in your budget. We are asking how they are going to be distributed. We're asking how \$317.2 million is being distributed, and you are saying we're not entitled to know how \$317.2 million is being distributed.

After all, it is perfectly clear, Madam Minister, that you don't need to know what the mill rates are before you tell us what the grants are. Indeed, the school boards have to know what the grant is before they set the mill rate, as you well know, and therefore I suggest to you that you ought to tell us how you're distributing this \$317.2 million.

It is not immediately obvious what the committee is doing at all if you will refuse to tell us how you're going to distribute \$317.2 million, to which school divisions. That, we ask you, I ask you to tell us. If you are going to make adjustments later, we understand. Are you still refusing to tell us how you are going to spend \$317 million of public money?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I did not refuse to share that information with the opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is twisting words and putting words where there are no words. I can't . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order, order. Allow the minister to answer.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I said I do not have the figures in the House with me tonight. The figures are preliminary. If they would prefer, they can wait until the end of April and they can get the figures, along with the corresponding mill rates and where they are at. If they want preliminary figures and all that that entails, then we will prepare that sheet of paper for them and deliver it to them. But I don't have them tonight, and at no time did I state to the Leader of the Opposition that I refuse to share that information.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, we're talking about 10 per cent of the money that your government is going to spend, approximately — \$317 million. We wish to debate it. This is the forum for debate — right here, right now, in this committee.

This is an obvious question, Madam Minister. I cannot believe that you would not assume that the opposition would ask what you were doing with this trifling sum of \$317 million. You don't have the information because you don't wish to give it to us. If you did wish to give it to us, you would now make it available to us, so that we could debate it now, here, at this forum, provided by this legislature.

And I ask you again, if you do not have it now, will you adjourn your estimates, at least leave subvote 1 outstanding, so that we can debate it after we receive your information.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — No, I will not adjourn my estimates. If we can't deal with this particular question, then fine, let's go on, and let's debate some other issues.

I am following no different course than what has happened in the past. I do not have the preliminary figures with me tonight.

(2100)

The Leader of the Opposition, he wants to know how it was distributed. Eight million of it was put into debt retirement. That left 17 million for pure operating. The funding formula has not been changed, except for debt retirement has been pulled out. That is no longer a component of the operating grant.

The funding formula based on the per pupil tuition fee, transportation, and some other factors that come into play, are still the component of the funding formula. Nothing has changed on that.

So, Mr. Chairman, that's, in part, the distribution. Now if we want to talk about the specific figures and the information, I have said I will prepare them and get them to the opposition as soon as possible.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairperson, and Madam Minister. I'm sorry I failed to make myself clear. I was not suggesting that we defer the debate of your estimates. I was asking that subvote 1 stand. We can go on to other subvotes. We can consider all the other programs in your department. We would leave subvote 1. You would provide us with the information. We would have an opportunity to discuss it.

Do you see any problem with that proposed procedure?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I guess I have a question, and I won't get an answer, because in this I am not allowed to ask questions. But I question why we want to change the process tonight on this particular issue, when the process has been no different than what has happened in past years to do with estimates and when information is sent over. Pure and simple.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairperson, and Madam Minister, clearly your recollection of the process and mine is a good deal different . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, that isn't true. And if any one of the members is prepared to put up any cash with respect to whether or not previous ministers of education distributed the grant pay-out list during estimates, and if anyone will put up cash to say no, I will put up cash to say yes, because . . . Look, it is very, very clear that those facts are the circumstances which prevailed in previous years. There is no question of that.

Madam Minister, it is not relevant how many days after the budget came down. That's not relevant. In case you think it is, there is no relevance there. May I point out that the information has been available to the minister obviously and to her staff for a goodly period of time. There is no reason why that couldn't have been prepared, it was thoroughly — and I mean thoroughly — to be anticipated. No one can imagine that an opposition would come in here and not ask her how she was going to spend 317 million.

And when she says she didn't anticipate that question and therefore doesn't have the information . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well, Madam Minister, if you anticipated the question, expected us to ask it, why do you . . . And you're not refusing to give the information, you have made clear: one, you anticipated the question; two, you are not refusing to give the information; three, it's \$317 million; four, you didn't bother to bring it. You didn't bother to bring it. And you are now saying that you will not, you will not agree to defer this subvote 1 so that we can ask you questions after you do bring it. That makes it pretty clear, Madam Minister, that you do not wish us to ask questions after we have that information.

There is no other explanation for the facts you have already given us, one by one, that you anticipated the question; that it's a large sum of money; that you have the preliminary figures; that you do not refuse to give them to us, but you will not give them to us at any time when we may ask you questions about them. Is not that the case, Madam Minister?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, nothing has changed in terms of the tradition and information when it goes forth, and the Leader of the Opposition is trying to mislead this House into believing something, something that just isn't so. It just isn't so. I have indicated to you, we will prepare a document, not 108 of them, but one document that lists them all, and we will send it to you as you have requested.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, are you again saying that previously this committee of finance has not been provided with the grant pay-out during estimates? Is that what you're saying, Madam Minister? Because if it is, then this is not in accordance with many people's recollections, including my own, and certainly not in accordance with the — I am very sure — records of the legislature if we pursued them.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Speaker, the grant pay-out and operating is \$317 million. As for the details to be compiled into one specific piece of paper or information for the opposition, that has

always come at a later date — always.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, you are then persisting in the view that it has always come at a later date, always come later than April 22nd, which obviously is a later date because today is April 22nd. You are then denying, Madam Minister, that eight and one-half by 14 sheets sideways used to be regularly distributed showing just what the grant pay-out was to each school division in Saskatchewan. You are denying that, Madam Minister?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, once again the Leader of the Opposition twists, and turns, and puts words that aren't even there. I can only simply say I am more than willing to share the information with the member. He knows what . . . You know, the member from Regina Centre says after the session. If the information is compiled within the next week, they have every opportunity to ask questions in question period. That has never been the end of it. They say no, they don't. Well, my guess is they asked lots of them last year, particularly as it pertained to Regina and Saskatoon, who were going through their reassessment.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, we now have the minister stating very flatly what her position is — that while she may be prepared to answer the odd question in question period, when most of the questions we would like to pursue would be out of order, she will not give us the information while her estimates are before this House, because she does not wish to answer detailed questions about them.

And, Madam Minister, for \$317 million, it is appropriate that an opposition ask to each . . . Questions on to which school divisions that is to be paid? If members opposite think that's not the case, then they have a very strange view of the responsibilities of the opposition and the responsibilities of the minister.

And I ask you again, Madam Minister, will you agree to let stand either this vote or the school grant's vote until you have provided us with this information and given us an opportunity to ask you questions about them before that vote is passed? Will you do that?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Speaker, I will prepare the information that the opposition has asked for; it will be in detailed form. If they don't want to wait until the end of the month when the mill rate comes, then we will try and put together a computer print-out for them that is based on preliminary figures that will not have the mill rate included in it, if they don't want to wait till the end of April. And we will do that as quickly as we can.

I am doing nothing different tonight, regardless of what the Leader of the Opposition would have everybody believe. Absolutely nothing different than what has happened in many, many past years.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, will you accept our view that we are not insisting that you put the mill rates on them? We are asking you to put the grant, compare it with the previous year's grant if you would, and that is enough.

You can give us if you like, six or eight weeks from now, the statement including the mill rates when they've all been set at the end of the month. What we are now asking for, very simply, is a statement showing what grants you propose to pay under the vote of \$317.2 million to each of the school divisions in Saskatchewan; we're asking that you tell us that. If you will, tell us what grant you paid that same school division last year; and we're, thirdly, asking that you do that in a timely way, before your estimates are all disposed of by this committee, so that we can ask you questions about how you propose to spend \$317 million

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, if the Leader of the Opposition wants two components in there — first of all, what the grant is this year, and then to compare it to last year's — if he wants that compiled also, he's going to be waiting for a couple of days longer than just simply

the straight pay-out to any particular board. He knows that.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, I will tell you, if I had a department of education that couldn't make a comparable list of the two pay-outs, this year's pay-out and last year's pay-out, and would take two days longer in order to match them up, I would make some changes in the senior staff of the Department of Education. And I think the minister is grossly unfair to her staff, grossly unfair to suggest that it's going to take two days longer to put a column which compares last year's grants with this year's grants.

However, Madam Minister, if you are insisting that your staff could not do that except in two days longer, you can give us the grant, and I will get some one in our office to compare the two in, perhaps, an hour or so.

As I say, I think you're doing your department a gross disservice to suggest it, but I will come back to the very question I asked then: will you provide us with that information and allow us to ask questions about it in committee of finance? Thus, will you allow either subvote 1 or the school grant subvote, to stand, so that we may ask you questions after you have provided us with that information? I remind you Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, that we're talking about \$317 million.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, last year we were talking about \$350 million that was a blue-book figure that included all the construction and the debt retirement figure in there. The year before it was \$333 million, and two hundred and ninety-nine, two sixty, two thirty-six, two twenty-two-0-four.

Well, the same process is being followed this year. Nothing new, nothing different. The information will be forthcoming to the opposition as soon as it is compiled into one sheet, and if they want last year's comparisons with it, we will do that for them.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, I will ask a very short question: do you have any objection to allowing one of your votes to stand until after you have provided us with that information so that we may ask you questions on the information you have provided? Do you object? Would you mind telling us?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, if I am expected to compile this information for tomorrow when my officials are in this House for estimates, that is somewhat unfair in terms of the time. I will not give preliminary figures that do not denote what certain things mean to the opposition. And if it is simply to be a preliminary figure, with nothing else, I will not do that. I will take the necessary time required to ensure that they have the proper, full information.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, I'm obviously not making myself clear. I asked you whether you would allow one of your subvotes to stand? It can stand till the day we're going to introduce The Appropriation Act. And, if you think we're going to be through with all of the estimates — Finance, and Health, and Agriculture — by tomorrow, I think you're being a little presumptuous.

We are obviously . . . this committee of finance is going to be sitting for some weeks now. That's right. Therefore, there is no reason why we couldn't come back to this issue some weeks hence. That's all I'm asking.

Will you allow one of your votes to stand — subvote 1 would be the most convenient one but, if you somehow object to that, we could take the school grant vote — so that, after you have provided us with this information which you readily acknowledge that you have, we might ask you some questions about it before it is finally disposed of and we say that \$317 million has been voted?

(2115)

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, there is absolutely no good reason why that vote should stand on this particular year when it has never happened before. The proper, full information will be given to the Leader of the Opposition and his band of seven when it is available. I will give my assurances that I will try and keep that time short as to when that information is forthcoming to the opposition.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, I ask again: you will make it short? Then will you be good enough to allow one of your subvotes to stand for that short time, so that we may ask you some questions on the information you provide after you have provided us with it? After all, the delay, in your own words, is just for a short time.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, they can ask questions of my department and my portfolio during question period at any time — at any time. So I do not see the need to stand this subvote when nothing is happening that's any different than in years past.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, do I take that convoluted answer to mean no? Do I take it that you are refusing to let any subvote stand, so that we can ask you any questions about this information which you say you can have to us shortly? Is that what you're saying: that you decline to answer, in committee of finance, any questions about the distribution of \$317 million? Do I understand you to say that?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — If you want to talk about the distribution of grants, we can talk about funding formulas; we can talk about the ability to pay; we can talk about assessment, reassessment, and several other factors pertaining to that.

I will give my assurances that the necessary information — including, on the preliminary figures, that first of all they are preliminary, what factors could possibly change them between now and then. It could be such things as the change in the assessment or the reassessment factor. There could have been an error either by the department or by the board of education. As I said earlier, Mr. Chairman, those figures are changing daily until that final mill rate is set.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, I have absolutely no faith in the Leader of the Opposition or the other seven members, that they will take preliminary figures and use it to their best honest knowledge. I have no faith in that. Therefore, when the information is sent over, it will be the full, complete information.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, I was elected to this legislature to represent Regina Elphinstone. The money you pay out under of \$317 million affects my constituents and affects them very vitally.

I would like to know whether or not my constituencies are being dealt with in the same fair and equitable way as I am sure you're dealing with other constituents. I would like to know that, and I think that I am elected to ask that. That's what I think I'm elected to do.

If we are spending \$317 million, I think my constituents would expect me to ask how much is the Regina public board getting; how much is the Regina separate board getting; and are those fair figures compared with what other boards are getting? I think those are reasonable questions, questions which ought to be asked in the committee of finance, and questions which ought to be answered in the committee of finance. And you have just told me flatly, you won't give me that information in a manner which allows me to ask those questions on behalf of my constituents. And I think, Madam Minister, that's a poor performance on your part.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — The Leader of the Opposition has always been entitled to his opinion, and, quite frankly, that's precisely where it should stay, instead of coming out of both sides of his

mouth as it so often does.

The Leader of the Opposition knows full well there is a funding formula in place that ultimately is based on equity, and that is the ability to pay versus the need.

We are talking about a fundamental thing like fairness and equity for the school system. For instance, the Member from Assiniboia perhaps comes from a richer area than what Meadow Lake does. Now do you really think that Meadow Lake school grant, if they were to compare it to the city of Regina, they think they have their fair share. But if it's based on a funding formula, Mr. Chairman, then it does, and that is based on the ability to pay. Two factors: the taxpayers at the local level, and the provincial grant at the provincial level. Now I will only state again, this process is no different than it has been in years past.

I have given my assurances of what changed in the funding formula, and for the better, I might add, that debt retirement coming out, for the better. We now have pure operating grants, not operating grants going into debt retirement so that boards no longer have that kind of money to be able to deliver their programs instead of paying off the debt retirement. That debt retirement, Mr. Chairman, also means that this government is picking up 100 per cent of the cost of debt retirement. That is the only thing that has changed in that funding formula, and yet the Leader of the Opposition would have us believe that maybe Regina Elphinstone isn't going to get their fair share. Well it is, because the funding formula basically hasn't changed. It will be proven when they receive the information that they want, and that information will be complete and full, so that the member can fully understand it.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, the minister must believe that we and the public are naïve if people think that the formula, as she says, does not change. Obviously it does. And I am not for one moment suggesting that Regina Elphinstone is, or is not being dealt with fairly. I know nothing about how Regina is being dealt with, and the minister is making very sure that I know nothing, because she is giving me no figures. May I ask her, by what amount has the conveyance grant been increased this year?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, these figures have to do with the components in the funding formula. The formula has not changed assessment changes, but the formula didn't except for debt retirement.

The basic rates per pupil. There has been an increase on the kindergarten. The kindergarten group of 3.34 per cent for rural areas, for urban areas that has increased 4.13 per cent. The reason that the urbans have increased is because we closed the differential on the per pupil rate by 20 per cent for the four large urban boards. The reason we closed it is on the same principle that we put the four large urbans on the same computational mill rate as last year. If, in effect, reassessment was to really bring everybody equal, then perhaps the computational mill rate should be changed, and we agreed to look at the differential on the per pupil, which we did, and, we closed it by 20 per cent.

Division 1 and 2: it's 3.64 per cent for rural, 4.55 for urban. Division 3: the rural is 3.33 per cent and for the urban is 4.17 per cent. Division 4: for the rural is 2.93 per cent, for the urban 3.65 per cent. As I stated, that differential on the urban and rural rates reduces it by about 20 per cent.

Now we have the incremental rates for comprehensive high school: low cost, high cost 1, high cost 2, and high cost 3; — those have increased from 2.5 per cent to 2.6 per cent. The rural transportation has, per pupil, 2.8 per cent. The per kilometre daily has increased by 2.5 per cent, and the allowance to parents in lieu of that is increased 2.6 per cent.

Urban transportation per pupil per year is 2.6, and per day is 2.5 per cent increase. Special education transportation has increase by 2.7 per cent. The room and board for high cost per pupil per month is approximately 2.6 per cent increase.

The bilingual program is 2.8, varying from 2.5 per cent increase, and language implementation is, respectively, from approximately 1.8 per cent to 3.6 per cent. The sparsity factor, which is a component of the funding formula, is 6.5 per cent.

The small schools factor is \$193 for division 1 and 2, 387 for division 3, and \$774 for division 4. And I'm sorry, I don't have a percentage on that. The director . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I just said, I'm sorry, I don't have a percentage that denotes anything on that. The director is staying the same, salary allocated, which is \$54,325.

We have rental recognition, class-room per month, is 2.8 per cent, and you have your gym halls, based on per pupil and per year, is a range of 2.2 per cent to 2.6 per cent. And that is basically most of the components in the operating grants which would be rate increases. The computational mill rate is unchanged this year. It remains at 95.5.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, I think your answer obviously raises a good number of questions, and you will understand when we hear that answer why we would like to see the figures.

You have the material before you, and the big price items were 3.34 per cent, 4.13 per cent, 3.64 per cent, 4.55 per cent; and then a good number of others, some of them fairly substantial: 2.93; 3.65; 2.5; 2.6; 2.8; 2.5; 2.6; 2.6; 2.5; 2.17; 2.6; 2.8; 1.8; and 3.6. And all that, you say, adds up to an average of 5.7. All that adds up to an average of 5.7, and there wasn't a single one up at 5.7 until you get down to sparsity factor.

Now obviously, there is either a substantial increase in enrolment, which could account for some of these things, or some other thing which could account for them. And they were going to have very, very differential applications to different school divisions.

And it is fair and reasonable to ask: how does a school division fare with increases that range around two and a half or 3 per cent on every component, when you're giving out 5.7 per cent more, as you say? And obviously, a fair number of the divisions are not going to get 5.7 per cent or anything like it. And those who have the good fortune to have a special application — a sparsity factor, or something like that — will pick up some money — possibly some of the small school factor.

I am not complaining about that application, I am just saying that it is by no means self-evident from a reading of those figures how, let us say, well the Regina East School Division will fare — nor, indeed, how the Regina Public would fare. I'll pick an urban and a rural.

And yet you will not give us your actual calculations. You give us these figures from which nobody — nobody in this House — could predict what the Regina East School Division will get. And I think it's a fair question to ask you. Will you tell us what you're going to pay the Regina East School Division, and how you calculate it — even if only on a preliminary basis?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I would tell you if I had the figures here tonight. I don't have them. I stated that once. You seem to think that that isn't quite the truth. Well, I hate to disappoint you. It is. We will compile it into a comprehensive package for you and give it to you, no different than any other year.

(2130)

Let me explain what happens with the computational mill rate. And you may remember we haven't raised it this year. If we had have, you would have seen what would appear to be a substantially larger increase on the per pupil rate — as you will recall from your days around government — which isn't entirely a real increase, as you well know.

The other factor that comes into play: we have basically picked up, not only the provincial share this year, but the local share. Consequently, you see that computational mill rate staying the same this year, which is the signal that board will not need to raise their mill rate unless they have some specific things happening to them: reassessment, assessment growth, and declining enrolment.

So, consequently, the 5.7 is very real. But because the computational mill rate has not changed, then you see the 3 and the 4 per cent increases on the per pupil. And that is strictly the provincial share, with no need to have the local level picking up a portion of that.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister, I think you will agree that the impact on particular divisions of that series of decisions — to leave the computational mill rate as it was; to select a very varied range of increases for different functions and different cost centres — will have very varying effects on different school divisions.

So we are obviously not in any way able to predict what the effect will be on school divisions, and not able to ask you any intelligent question as to why one school division seems to have done well and some school division seems to have done not well, since we don't know that and cannot predict it from the information you have given us. I say to you again: do you have any objection to us asking questions on this at a later date? We will . . . I'm sure my colleagues would agree we could move to something else. There are many, many issues that we can consider and we can come back to school grants at a later time. So perhaps, if you don't see any problem with that, we will just move on to another item, and then we can come back to school grants because we are going to get some additional information very soon, as you indicated.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I haven't changed my mind on the process of what we are going through here tonight, and there's nothing to indicate that I should. The computational mill rate and various other factors have always had an impact on school divisions. That simply isn't happening this year, whether it's assessment growth, reassessment; the impact has always been there. We will see some divisions that get substantial increases. Perhaps when they went through reassessment that was moved down, and then they get a very large grant in place of it. We could see another school division where the assessment growth is up; the grant is down. If you couple that with a division that has a declining enrolment, then obviously the impact is greater, as the member well knows. Nothing has changed.

We will put together the preliminary figures. But if they are preliminary, they will denote where the changes are, and why they're preliminary, and to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I never said I wouldn't give that to you. I said we will have to . . . We will have to prepare it for you. But I am not prepared to delay . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Chairman, I am not prepared to delay estimates on education for something that has never happened before. The information, if it's forthcoming to the opposition, they are free to ask questions during question period or any other time with a simple phone call to my office or to the department. That has taken place before, too.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order, order! I've been noticing that this evening we seem to be on the same topic without making any progress.

And I'm not laying any blame on either side of the House. I'm simply pointing out that . . . would it not be possible to proceed from Item 1 to 17? I notice that Item 18 (Grants to Schools) is quite far down the list, and possibly we could proceed from 1 to 18 and deal with Item 18 when we get to it (Grants to Schools). Is that possible?

MR. KOSKIE: — I want to continue our line of questioning in respect to this. And I want to ask the minister: have you, in fact, sent out notification to each of the boards? A preliminary, at least as to the amounts that you are in fact going to provide to each of the divisions?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Not at all. Mr. Chairman, yes, boards have been notified. They were notified by a phone call. And, pardon . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . pardon. Let me finish.

MR. CHAIRMAN: — Order! Will the members allow the minister to answer the question?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — They were notified by phone call, plus they have been notified in writing. They were also told the preliminary — you double check your figures. As a consequence, there have been many changes and many phone calls and discussions between various boards and the department for clarification of the information.

That happens every year, Mr. Chairman; 1985 is no different. In terms of the calculations, particularly if the school board is into reassessment or if they've had a hard time getting some final figures out of the assessment authority.

MR. KOSKIE: — The Minister has indicated that she has advised the boards by phone and then confirmed it, or I suppose confirmed it in writing.

I'd like to ask the minister if she could advise us when she first notified them by phone and in writing?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, they were notified at regional meetings by the regional directors and given a print out the day after budget. The day after budget with the figures being preliminary. I can only state once again, in many, many cases several figures have changed, and on a daily basis.

MR. KOSKIE: — When, Madam Minister, do you expect to have finalized the changes in respect to the boards? Have you any possible time limit that you're looking at in respect to when you will come up with a finalization? Because you say its preliminary that you've sent out and they're changing daily. Is there any potential deadline, or is there any estimation of time that it will take? Will this carry on until June like it obviously did last year? Because obviously you didn't have the information because you sent it to us in June, and only after we wrote to you. And you said the same thing as you said tonight. I'll go back and I'll prepare it and give it to you forthwith.

So I'm going to ask you, when do you expect to have a finalization?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I indicated boards would be setting their mill rates at the end of this month. The end of April.

However, there are still changes that take place after that, whether it's on tuition fee, tuition fee overpayments, underpayments, assessment. There could have been a mistake in there. So those changes often take place. And I don't recall the precise date that the opposition received their information last year, but I would suspect that there were even some boards that had changes after that.

MR. KOSKIE: — What, Madam Minister, problems do you see with providing the opposition with the preliminary print-out in respect to the information that you have sent to the respective boards?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — If that were to be the very same information that boards received on April the 11th, much of it would be out of date.

I just indicated to him that many changes have taken place since April the 11th, or whenever budget came down. And some of them take place on a daily basis until the assessment is finalized and the mill rate is set.

MR. KOSKIE: — Madam Minister, do you think it's relevant for the opposition in estimates to

have the opportunity to discuss in estimates the particular amounts of operating grants that you send to the various school divisions? Do you think that's a fair proposition that we be given that opportunity? And if you don't believe that, can you explain your rationale?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, we're back to the funding formula again.

I would suggest that is the first thing that should be debated is the funding formula.

Secondly, there is nothing to prevent this opposition from asking questions during question period after they have the information. What I find most interesting is, estimates is the first time that I have had any kind of question on education since the spring of 1984. That's how interested they are in education.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Madam Minister, in the same vein of questioning, I wonder whether or not you can give us a date or a day when you would have this list ready for us?

If tomorrow, if we're still on estimates tomorrow night, would your staff have time to go to the computer and get the list compiled by, let's say, 9 o'clock tomorrow night?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I will have that information prepared as quickly as possible, Mr. Chairman.

I have already indicated that I will not give them only half information; that it will be full information for them to use. To give them half information is not to give the full picture, and I will not do that.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Madam Minister, I notice that when you're answering these questions about how long it will take your staff, you never ask them.

What I would like you to do right now is to ask your deputy minister right now. Lean over and whisper in his ear, or ask him how long it would take him and the staff, the ten or fifteen people you have paid here tonight to be here with you, how long it will take him to get it put together.

And I would ask you to do that: to ask your Deputy Minister how long it would take him to have one of his staff put it together.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I will have the information as soon as possible for the opposition.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Tomorrow, Madam Minister? Of course we're not going to get this done tonight. Tomorrow is private members' day, so we will not be on your estimates tomorrow. You will have, then, 36 hours from now until we next deal with your estimates. Do you think 36 hours would be long enough for two or three of your staff to get this report that we desire together?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, we will bring our information up-to-date as quickly as possible. We may have to phone the boards of education. The member from Assiniboia wants to know as possible, as what as possible, as soon as possible as we can. I'm not too sure what the hang-up is, but obviously we're into a game plan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . If the hon. member from Assiniboia would like to rise to his feet and tell this Assembly that I'm lying, I'm sure that we would entertain hearing that. And I would suggest that even from the seat of his pants, he withdraw such remarks.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — One of two conclusions, Madam Minister. You are incompetent, or you are dishonest. Now take your choice. Those are the only two conclusions the facts will admit.

Anybody could get those figures together in a matter of a few hours. There are what? A hundred school boards here? You can't pull 100 figures together and put them on a sheet of paper in a few minutes? Either, Madam Minister, you are stonewalling, you are dishonest, or you are lying. I prefer to believe that you are incompetent . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I believe she's incompetent. I believe she's incompetent. It's parliamentary to say she's incompetent. It's not parliamentary to say she's lying. So I'll believe she's incompetent.

But, Madam Minister, any competent person could pull these things together in a few minutes. Now you are either stonewalling, or you're not being honest with us, or you are totally incompetent as a minister. Now which is it?

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HON. MRS. SMITH: — The question is, Mr. Chairman, what kind of figures do the opposition want? They really don't care. They really don't care if they have all of the figures and the final picture. They don't really care about that. And that's the question that's at debate.

What kind of figures do you want? I have told you I will give you some preliminary figures as quickly as we can draw them together. They will not be the preliminary figures that went out on April the 11th, because those have changed on a daily basis. So we will bring those figures up-to-date. That will still not give you the complete picture, because there's still changes taking place, and that finalization of assessment and mill rates does not take place until the end of the month.

The member from Regina Centre knows that. If I want to be incompetent, I could give him any kind of figures, and he really wouldn't care. And if I were incompetent, I wouldn't care either. You will only get the figures that are up to date. I am not stonewalling. I will give you the full figures as quickly as we can put them together. And it will probably — listen — it'll probably be much faster than what the Conservatives received from the NDP when they were in power.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Madam Minister, I would like to put to you the question as to why we are dealing with the education estimates as the first department to deal with since the budget was brought down? Now I and my colleagues believe that the reason we're dealing with education now is to get you off the hook on the education funding.

I agree with the leader of our party when he lists to you a number of grants — with a number of grants that you say are increasing by 1 per cent, 2 per cent, and 3 per cent. And the list goes on and on. And you are trying to tell the world that the grants to the school boards is something quite a bit bigger than that.

And I believe that you are embarrassed about the grants that are going to the school divisions. And that's why you're not telling us; that's why your estimates are here today; and that's why you're not willing to postpone them until later.

And I would say to you that, if you are not willing to give us the commitment that in 36 hours you can have the list ready, then very obviously you are trying to avoid the question, because you, Madam Minister, are embarrassed by the amount that you're going to be giving the school divisions.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, one of the reasons that you're dealing with Education as first up on estimates is because this government laid that down as a priority in the budget. And it was a good priority, and it was long overdue. We only had . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: — . . . (inaudible) . . . I don't believe you. Who will believe you?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — I suggest if the member has difficulty in terms of credibility, he better

start talking to a few trustees and teachers, instead of that kind of garbage that is nothing but fantasy.

You suggested there's dishonesty. Yeah, okay, let's deal with that. I don't want to give you half figures, because it isn't the whole . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . But I told you time and time again: the figures are not here. We will compile them in the best manner as quickly as possible like any other year, and give you the total picture to it.

Now, that was good enough last year, the year before, and the 10 years preceding that. Nothing's changed in terms of process, except the fact of intimidation and a patronizing attitude., a member suggesting from his seat — and he doesn't have the nerve to stand on his feet and say liar; and somebody else says dishonesty. Well, that's just pure garbage, gentleman — pure garbage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. ENGEL: — Thank you, -Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, last year we got the same kind of a commitment. When did we get the numbers last year? When did we get them? After the session adjourned! Not for question period, not for estimates — after we went home from here. And that's exactly what you're trying to do this year.

The innuendoes we're throwing your way, Madam Minister, are because you're refusing to give us your working documents. You're refusing to reveal the numbers, because you're embarrassed with them. There's no other reason.

You hinted earlier tonight that in Assiniboia, maybe we're going to get less than in northern Saskatchewan. Why can't we have those working documents to see if your formula's working? Why can't we discuss the various school units, and how much they're getting, and what kind of cuts they're going to get — not 5.7 per cent increase? Why can't you share them with us?

And the only reason you don't want to share them is you don't want to bring them up. Last year . . . You said now, tonight. You said you're going to let us have them in question period. Can you ever remember a question period where we can get out some questions without having to cut it nice and short; let you do your thing; and a half an hour later it's all over. That's what you want.

And you don't even want that. You want to wait till after the session is over like you did last year when we had to write for them. A long time after we were out, we finally go the numbers. And I'm saying you're stonewalling, you're intentionally not giving them to us, and it would take some time. The time is until this session is up. That's the time you're waiting for.

MR. KOSKIE: — I'm going to ask a specific question. Madam Minister, last year you indicated that you couldn't give the information to us. You didn't have it compiled. And we proceeded in alphabetical order as you indicated, one school division after the other. And obviously, that process you were able to have complied with.

We asked you, as an alternative, would you provide the detailed information to us, and you indicated that you would provide it forthwith. Now are those the correct recollections of the discussion last year in respect to wanting the information?

We wanted it last year during the estimates. We could have extracted it from you on a long and laborious one by one by one by one. And you were complying with that.

Now, obvious — and you indicated, you said well, let's not proceed on this basis because we have 114 school divisions to write down. And we asked you if you'd provide it forthwith. And you indicated you would, just like you're saying today. Now I want to ask you: can you provide to the House then, having made that commitment to us, when did you provide the information

to us last year?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I would have to go back and check my files to find out when it was provided to the member last year.

MR. KOSKIE: — I'd like to ask the minister whether she could recall in the framework whether or not it was during the time that the session was on.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Mr. Chairman, I just stated I would have to go back to my files and check. I have no idea of what the date was when the information was checked. If they have an idea of when it was, why ask the question?

MR. KOSKIE: — What I want to indicate to you, Madam Minister, that your word of providing it as soon as possible, as soon as you can compile it, has no meaning, because last year you gave that same commitment, and the House was adjourned before we got the information.

Do you feel that in fact that is what has happened? Do you feel that that is a fair way of dealing with the opposition in providing the information? What other reason then, what other reason could you have had? I'd like to ask the Minister, Mr. Chairman, what other reason did she have for not providing the information until after the session adjourned last year?

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I guess — let's deal with 1985 estimates. We're back into 1984 estimates right now . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . sign of old age I guess Al, nothing more.

I will go back and check the file. I don't recall the date that the information was sent, but we will find out and inform the opposition of what the date was, and I'm sure that, regardless, even if the dates are to be the same, there's going to be some disagreement on that, so it would seem.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Madam Minister, you suggest that this is the sort of information which could be asked in the question period. I'm surprised that you don't know better than that.

Let me read to you one rule — I'm reading from *Beauchesne's*, page 132 — one rule which such a question would offend. It would offend several rules with respect to question period. But let me just read one which ought to be obvious, even to mm:

The matter ought to be of some urgency. There must be some present value in seeking the information during the Question Period rather than through the *Order Paper* or through correspondence with the Minister or the department.

Madam Minister, we couldn't ask that question in question period. Among other things, it requires information that is too detailed to expect a minister to have.

I would suggest, Madam Minister, that we are not going to make it tonight. Will you undertake to provide this information for us when we pick it up on Wednesday, if indeed we do resume your estimates on Wednesday? Strikes me that it is not unreasonable to ask you to photocopy — what is there 100 school division here?

AN HON. MEMBER: — A hundred and seventeen.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — A hundred and seventeen? You've sent them all letters? Strikes me that your staff might be able to photocopy 117 letters in 36 hours. And if they are, why don't you give us the information? Just give us the letters you sent to the school boards. I assume there is no other confidential information in them.

The fact is, Madam Minister, you are stonewalling, you don't want us to have the information

because you don't want us to do our job.

Madam Minister, the rules of these estimates are that unless the information is for some reason confidential, as might be the case if it's a cabinet document, or might be the case if it involves a deputy advising a minister, unless for some such reason information is confidential, it is provided in *Estimates*. And if Madam Minister spent some time in the House she would know that is the way your colleagues operate, and that is the way other cabinet ministers operate in other governments.

Information, unless it is confidential, is provided in *Estimates* so that we may do our job in voting these estimates. Your excuse, Madam Minister, is that you think you might get beat over the head and shoulders — you might get beaten up with the information. You're like the Minister of Revenue and Financial Services who complained when he gave us the *Public Accounts*, that we used the information therein to criticize the government.

Your approach, Madam Minister, is the same thing. If we are going to use the information to be critical of you, you are not going to give it to us. That, Madam Minister, is not acceptable conduct.

It's not acceptable from any of your colleagues, and I don't know any of them that would try it. And it's not acceptable from you.

Madam Minister, I ask you if you will discharge your responsibility as a member of the Crown and as a spokesman for Education in this Legislative Assembly.

HON. MRS. SMITH: — Well, first of all, coming from a lawyer on what the rules are, I would suggest to the member from Regina Centre that he's got everything backwards if he thinks that that kind of information is not of value. I believe that's one of the rules that the member stated.

I will give you, as quickly as possible, Mr. Chairman, the preliminary information, but it will not be the preliminary information of April 11th. I have indicated to you, in all honesty, that those figures were very preliminary; there has been changes on a daily basis. Why would I throw out, information from April 11th that has been changed since then? That just doesn't make common sense to me at all, and I don't think it does to you, if you were to be truthful and admit it.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:02 p.m.