

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Social Services
Ordinary Expenditure - Vote 36

Item 1 (continued)

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, has there been a change recently in the providing of the telephone deposit for people who are on Saskatchewan assistance plan? That used to be covered. Is it no longer covered, and if not, can you tell me when that was changed?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — There hasn't been a change, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — So in other words, you're still providing funding, specifically for telephone deposits, when necessary?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — I am informed that we have never done that, unless it's an item relating to some kind of medical consideration. So there has been no change in policy.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I assume that would mean that people who are beneficiaries would then have to find out of their food allowance or their rental allowance or something.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — It comes out of the overall dollar allotments which they receive, and of course part of that is the \$60 household allotment.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Well, Mr. Minister, I raise that matter for a very specific reasons, because I'm sure we will both agree that every avenue of assistance that's available to assist people in finding employment should be provided. And it seems to me that when someone goes out and applies for a job or several jobs, one of the ways which the employer will use in which to get back to the prospective employee would be to telephone the employee. And if there is no telephone — and there are indeed many homes in which there are no longer telephones — that therefore creates a great difficulty for them to be able to be notified if they are going to get a job. The employer will make one phone call, maybe two phone calls, and because he's got a list of 200 or 300 people who have applied, will not take any more time and therefore will go to somebody else. Wouldn't you consider it reasonable to provide in cases where necessary, funding for a telephone deposit so that people who are out there trying to get some work would not lose job possibilities because they don't have a telephone?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well with regards to the deposit issue, I think it's fair to say that it would not be appropriate for us to be providing deposits in the case of people who, for one reason or another, have provided to be a bad risk in the past, and that has been the policy. There is no change, as I indicated.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Surely, Mr. Minister, everybody isn't a bad risk. I mean the way you're stating the answer to the question is as if everybody is a bad risk. A moment ago you told me you provide no funding for telephone deposit. I'm not sure exactly what the amount is, but I know with some confidence that the amount of assistance that's available . . . And no one would suggest it should be a great deal of money, but with the amount of assistance that's available for, say, a family of four people, they would be hard-pressed to find money for a telephone deposit — a very important necessity when one goes job seeking.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well the issue of the telephone hook-up might very well be considered as a special needs situation in the instance of individuals who may be employable, looking for work, and for one reason or another aren't able to do the kind of telephone communication, so if you're aware . . . I'm not aware of any particular instances where that kind of problem has been directed to the attention of my office. You may be, and I would certainly be interested in knowing of those particular cases and whether or not we couldn't handle them under some kind of a special needs arrangement for those particular individuals, if you're aware of a specific case.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, it shouldn't be you or I who should solve that problem. It should be a policy in your branch of the department that handles SAP (Saskatchewan assistance plan). Is there a policy in Saskatchewan assistance plan to provide that kind of a special need and has there been that policy in the last two or three years, or are we writing the policy here in this committee?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well as I indicated, there has been no change in policy. The policy is the same as it has always been. If you are aware of a particular individual who could benefit from having a telephone, and that individual doesn't have one at present and it would assist in their particular circumstances to locate work, then we certainly would be willing to consider that under our special needs arrangements. And I think that that's what the special needs arrangement is there for.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Are your social workers authorized to make that decision? And they should be. I mean, people shouldn't have to run to the minister or a member of the legislature every time there's a problem. In some cases, yes, we are kind of like ombudsmen. Are your social workers authorized by your policy to make that decision on the basis, as you call it, special need?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well a worker is authorized to recommend it; a supervisor is authorized to approve it — if we're talking about a special needs situation. Now I'm not aware of any of those that have come up in the past. The policy, as a policy, is today as it has been, and will continue to be so.

We don't provide across-the-board allowances for people to subscribe to the newspaper so that they can read the job offering in the employment column. So there are certain things that just as normal course are not

done. However, if you are aware of a specific case where a person needs to have that particular service, then we would be willing to consider it under special needs allowance.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I will take you at your word that indeed the policy is such that an individual or a family, who is forced to go on their Saskatchewan assistance plan and needs to have a telephone installed, will be able to get a telephone deposit when necessary. I have your assurance of that; I will be contacting with individuals; I will be contacting your social workers and making that recommendation when those cases are brought to my attention. I hope that you're accurate in your description of the policy, Mr. Minister, because we certainly will hold you to your word.

That is not the way I have understood the policy to be. That is certainly not the way the experience has been from people who have been found in those kind of circumstances. But, if that's what you say it is, I am prepared . . . I have no other choice but be prepared to accept your word for it, and then we will monitor it to see how it develops.

Mr. Minister, I did not have a question, and unless you want to make a comment, I'll go to something else.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well, as always with regards to special needs matters, we consider each individual case on its merits, case by case by case. And so if you are aware of a specific case, then we will deal with it as a specific case, and we will be happy to do so.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, let me turn to some other matters related to what we talked this afternoon but more specific to concerns that others have been raising with you and the government. And as you know, there is a lot of concern that has been growing about the growing rate of poverty. There is more and more individuals and organizations who are speaking out on this issue. You've heard from several of them, I know; so have I. And these people who speak out, Mr. Minister, are ones who care. They don't speak out because they just simply want to be heard, or they have no other better things to do with their time. They see what's happening in the communities in which they live, and they want those people who they elect to speak out on those kinds of issues and take action when necessary. So their motivation is not political in most cases, or maybe in all cases, and it's certainly not one of self serving. It's a real concern about certain trends, that are happening in our society which show the spread between the very rich and the very poor widening ever so dramatically every year.

And one such group, Mr. Minister, is the Saskatoon health services society which not too long ago spent a lot of time preparing a brief with statistical support to what they had to say. Another group that comes to mind is the Regina Centre Interfaith Association. And these are only two of many who have worked long and hard to get the attention of the government and politicians in general so that more priority can be given to the growing number of people on social assistance; the growing number of people who are working for low wages and the growing unemployment situation that faces them; and in turn how all of this affects

the well-being of people in the province.

The brief that was prepared by the Saskatoon Health Services Association, I thought was particularly well prepared and should cause anyone in public life and government to take notice. And I want to underline again, I don't think this is just, as some people would say, just another noisy group. I don't think there are many such groups, but you certainly could not describe this group of people as being that.

And I just refer you, Mr. Minister, to the kind of people who have endorsed and the kind of organizations who endorsed the concerns expressed in that brief: the Saskatoon Community Health Unit; the Saskatchewan Health Coalition; the Inter City Support Committee; Saskatoon Presbytery, United Church; The Church in Society Committee; Saskatoon Presbytery, United Church; an organization called Crocus Co-Op; Project Ploughshares in Saskatoon; Oxfam; Working for Women; Equal Justice for All; and the list goes on.

And I think, Mr. Minister, that this brief has been presented to the government long enough ago so that you would have been able to respond to it. And I'm interested in knowing — have you been able to respond to this brief, and if so, what was the nature of your response?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — But, Mr. Chairman, I don't recall formally having received this particular brief. Evidently this report was made public through a press conference or a press release of some kind. I do not recall a specific report coming to my office requesting a specific response. Certainly I would be willing to do so. And if you're aware of some particular miscommunication that has taken place somewhere along the line, I would be happy to respond.

I certainly am willing to respond to the various aspects of the brief. It has been reviewed by department officials, and I would be happy to do so tonight, if you want to be in discussion on this particular matter. But in terms of a formal written response under my signature, going back to this group, I'm not aware that they requested any such formal response from me. I don't recall a particular letter coming to my office or to the Department of Social Services.

(1915)

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I received a letter dated April 21st, and at the same time a letter was sent to the Premier, the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Western Canada Concept Party, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Social Services. You have indicated that your department is considering the brief and has analysed it. If your department has access to the brief I do not understand how it was that you did not seem to have it, Mr. Minister. Have your department therefore acknowledged the brief at least, that they have received it, and have they given any indication to this group with regard to the information which they have provided?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Mr. Chairman, my apologies to the member opposite. We have, in fact, responded formally to that particular brief under my signature. I couldn't

remember that. It likely will have happened some time during the month of May because we did receive the brief in the latter part of April, I believe, either in the department or directly through my office.

So we have responded and if you would like to take some time this evening we certainly can go through the . . . I don't have a copy of it here but we can go through the points on the brief if you would like to do that.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, thank you. I knew you had received the brief, unless it got lost in the mail. And I'm glad that you were able to double-check that.

Some of the things that have been raised . . . One of the members over there wants to get into the debate. Do you think we should let him, or would you prefer to have him ask you in caucus? I'm sure that the member from Saskatoon will better be able to get answers from you in caucus when it's not under public scrutiny.

Mr. Minister, I noted with some interest some of the points that were raised in the brief. And one of the things that was said, and supported by documents . . . Mr. Chairman, I can't hardly hear myself speak because of the noise coming from the government side of the House. Can you bring the members to order?

Mr. Chairman: — Order. Order, please. Could we have some order please.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. Mr. Minister, some of the things that the brief noted was that one in four people in Saskatchewan live in poverty and that the number of poor families in this province have increased by 17.3 per cent from 1981 to 1984, and that those numbers have increased since 1984.

And I think it is of some interest and should be of some concern that among that group of new people who are poor are actually people who in the past have had an advantage over some other people. And that's the educated — people who've got a reasonable education.

Now we have among those who are in the category of living in poverty, people who have an education but are unable to find employment; who thought they were secure in their jobs and got their mortgages and were looking forward to raising their families and retiring under a pension which they thought they had figured out and all of a sudden it all came to an end.

Now, Mr. Minister, were you able to respond to some of those statistics and information provided? And without going through the whole letter — if you will send it to me at some time that would be quite adequate. But were you able to respond to some of these statistics in any way, or was that not part of your response?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Mr. Chairman, the issue of poverty in our society is one that I think we would all naturally be concerned about. I don't think that one would wish difficult circumstances upon any of our fellow citizens. And we would all want to do what we could, within the limits of reasonableness, to deal with the particular issue of poverty as it faces us.

There are some things that government can do and we have attempted to do some of those things. For example, increasing the supplements to low-income working families under the family income plan, or increasing benefits to seniors under the Saskatchewan income plan.

We do know that the single most common characteristic of people on social assistance is in fact low education and lack of job skills and job readiness and so on. So even though there will be those people that do have some level of education, and who for one reason or another find themselves in difficult financial circumstances, I do not believe that that is a good reason to say that we should not be focusing on providing education and training for people on social assistance. Because I think all of the research throughout North America has indicated that when governments do focus on that particular area to ameliorate the individual circumstances of people, that in fact it does have success. It may not have success in every case, but certainly that is an area in which efforts need to be directed.

In terms of whether or not social assistance rates should be increased . . .

An Hon. Member: — I didn't ask that.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — No, but you did deal with the general issue of poverty. And there are those who argue that one way, of course, to alleviate the problems is in fact simply for the government to increase the size of the welfare cheque. Of course here in Saskatchewan, as I indicated earlier, we do have among the highest benefit levels for families. And we can spend more time on that if you would like to.

There are a number of other things that the federal government is looking at in terms of our income security programs in Canada, and our unemployment insurance programs. They are, of course, under review, and appropriately so. It has been some time since those foundational social security type programs have been put under the microscope and have been appropriately reviewed. I think that's something which governments certainly do need to do from time to time, and I think what the federal government has attempted to do is appropriate.

It's one of the things that we undertook to do with the welfare system when we took over government a few years back. And while it's unfortunate that there are those individuals who do find themselves in difficult financial circumstances from time to time, I think that we are attempting at least to move in the right direction as government. Certainly there will be problems. And I would be the first one to publicly say that certainly no government has all of the right solutions or would be able to consider all of the alternatives.

I certainly am interested in hearing from other individuals — and I don't particularly care where they come from or what their political stripe is — as to how we can provide a better society here in Saskatchewan and what government can do to help make that happen. I realize government can't do anything, and I suppose I'm

somewhat less of the persuasion that the member opposite is, that government can in fact do a lot of things. There are some things government can do; there simply are some things that government cannot do; and we need to find the reasonable balance. And that certainly is what we're striving for.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, when I refer to the poor, I don't only speak of people who are on SAP, and neither do the people who prepared this brief. There are many, many people and many, many families who are living below the poverty level who are not on Saskatchewan assistance or Canada assistance or whatever. They are poor because they have inadequate incomes.

And you made some reference to the federal government reviewing some of its programs and policies. I'm glad to hear that. I hope that in the review the federal government will reconsider some of the things that they have brought about in the last two budgets, which had really a disincentive to people.

In 1985 and 1986, what the federal government has done through its budget is taken a family with two children and a single income of \$10,850 annually and that family will lose \$905 in increased taxation. A family, same family with income of \$21,7000, which is the poverty line, they will lose \$2,334 in increased taxation. And a family at \$40,000 is going to pay \$4,644 in increased taxation over five years. But listen to this, Mr. Minister. The family of the same size, with an income of \$50,000 will only lose \$2,933; and if it has an income of 80,000, it will only lose \$1,002; and lo and behold, if you have an income of \$100,000, that kind of family of two children with an income of that amount will actually gain \$516.

And when I stand here and talk about the unfairness of the system . . . and I know you don't write federal budget legislation, but hopefully you will have some influence because they are your brethren of the same political stripe over there. Hopefully, you might have some influence in persuading Mr. Wilson and Mr. Mulroney and others that they are misdirected in their policies as they apply to the way they treat people on low incomes, as opposed to the way they treat people on very high incomes.

Now when it comes to training and education, we should provide all the incentives and all the assistance that's possible and reasonable. I don't disagree with that. And that's why I wonder why Social Services requires that anyone taking a post-secondary education has to first of all be on SAP for a whole year before they can qualify for assistance.

(1930)

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well the member raises a fair question, and it is a difficult issue to determine at what point in time the taxpayer, through the social assistance plan, should be paying for university education for individuals. And I think you would agree with me that there would be, I think, a considerable debate in society as to whether or not social assistance, whether or not welfare, in essence, should be used to provide a university education for people.

We do of course have a student loan program available in Saskatchewan and in Canada. And we of course recently reduced the interest rate for students so that they are now eligible, for 6 per cent student loan money to finance university education.

The welfare program was not designed, not put in place, and is not maintained, to necessarily provide university training or university degrees for people. However, we do realize that there may be those instances where, for example, handicapped people may not be able to access any normal kind of employment for themselves, and that they may require some kind of specialized training at the post-secondary level at a university; and in that particular instance we do provide them, of course, with funding.

The average single employable is on social assistance for four to six months and then they are off. And to simply say that if you're going to be on social assistance for one or two months that we're going to say that you're eligible to receive taxpayers' money to go to university, I'm not sure that the public would accept that as being a sound social policy. I would have some problems with it myself.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, you went to university and I went to university and others go. We all indirectly receive taxpayers' money to go to university. You did not pay the full cost of your university education, and neither did I. We happen to be among those who are fortunate enough . . . I had to do it on my own with student loans, and I think that's fair. But we were among those fortunate who are able to take advantage of a university education. There are others who pay taxes, but whose children never do.

I don't quite understand your logic. You will provide up to two years training in vocational training through SAP but you won't provide assistance to university. Now how can you justify putting people into two classes of some kind. If you happen to be unfortunate enough for a period of time to be on SAP, and I know that there are many of them that are short-term, then somehow you're not worthy of a university education, so therefore you have to go in vocational. And I'm not discrediting vocational training; that should be equally as important as a university education. But why do you differentiate between the two?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well as I indicated previously, it is a matter that has some complexities. It's not just a black and white issue. And I don't think that you were suggesting that, you know, a person comes on social assistance today and if they want to go to university tomorrow — and I know you weren't suggesting that. And that's to put it in fairly stark black and white terms.

So somewhere there has to be a point in time where you say, no, the social assistance system is not designed to fund your education at the university level. On the other hand, there may be a point in time when it is appropriate on certain case-by-case basis to in fact fund a university education for an individual who is unemployable at present and will benefit from that.

Where that particular line has been is a difficult issue. The policy has not changed for some time. It is being reviewed. It's one of the issues that we are reviewing in

its entire context of where do we go with the education and training thrust in welfare reform. We have been operating now for about 18 months under this new emphasis in welfare reform, and I think that it's appropriate that this whole issue of what is the eligibility criteria for social assistance clients be looked at. It is something that is being reviewed.

I don't know exactly where it's going to go. I'm giving you what the rationale is at present. And it may be fair to say that in fact, you know, the one-year cut-off is not appropriate. On the other hand, I don't think it would be appropriate to say that if you're on social assistance today that you're into university tomorrow at the taxpayers' expense entirely. So somewhere in there is a reasonable balance and I would be interested in hearing what the member opposite would suggest in terms of what could be an appropriate policy in that regard if he thinks the changes need to be made.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — I'd like to suggest: have a change in government. But we won't get into that, Mr. Minister.

Let me give you one example, and if there is a legitimate review taking place, I'm glad, because I really think that the present system is skewed against encouraging someone who happens to be on SAP to get an education, particularly a university education, but otherwise, too.

Let me give you this example. There are situations where students who may be single and may have families, find themselves in the last two years of their term needing to go on SAP. They have not been provided the benefit. Some of them have actually not been able to finish writing their examinations because they were not able to financially get by in order to do it. They either have had to leave where they were going to university and go back home to live with their parents and therefore lose a whole year of study because they weren't able to complete it.

I would recommend, Mr. Minister, that you begin by at least looking into those kinds of circumstances in order that you may bring what I would call some reason into the whole system, Mr. Minister. So I'll leave you with that suggestion. We talked a little earlier, if I may . . . I'll wait. You may want to respond.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well normally the kinds of circumstances that you're talking about are such that the individual, through one means or another, would be able to carry on. There may have been those particular instances. I'm not aware of any particular case where someone did in fact end up having to drop out of university after two years or three years and go on social assistance; and social assistance wouldn't pay for their university costs, therefore they had to terminate their university program. And nevertheless, if that has happened, that in itself may be a sufficient reason to take into account the kind of review that we are doing at present.

Once again, it's not a black and white issue, and there of course are other means of funding that individuals have and families do have — student loans, for example . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . If you're saying that they've already used up the total amount of money that they have

available to them under the student loan system, there is a fair argument then, as to whether or not the taxpayer should in fact continue to give them any further assistance if they've already used that up. And those are the difficult questions that we deal with on this issue.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Are you suggesting, Mr. Minister, that someone who took a student loan and may have a family of one or two children, can get by a whole year of university on a student loan alone? that's what you said.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — No. I'm saying that there are student loan funds available to people, and one would expect that that particular course of available funding would naturally be investigated. And if you are aware of a particular case, I would certainly like for you to provide me with the details. You don't have to do that now, but as I indicated, the whole matter of where we are going with the education and training thrust is being reviewed, and rightly so. This was a major new thrust under this government; it's appropriate that we take a look from time to time as to whether or not the policies are in fact working in the best interests of as many people as they should be working in. And we will continue to take a good, hard look at those particular kinds of policies to ensure that they're doing what they're designed to do without, I would add, abusing the taxpayers' dollar because we don't want to do that, naturally.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Well no one wants to abuse the taxpayer's dollar, Mr. Minister. But I just want to correct you on your argument which you made it appear that anyone who got a student loan somehow is abusing the taxpayer's dollar. Because that's the conclusion one would have to draw from what you said — because you keep falling into that trap which you have built for yourself, that you have got to keep attacking people who happen to be in the unfortunate situation of having to get assistance, of whatever form it is.

But, Mr. Minister, on May 1st I wrote you a letter and I asked you some questions about the Saskatchewan employment development program. And you did respond, and I appreciate that — on May 28th. And you provided me with the following information, that in '84 - 85 and 1985 - 86, 3,861 jobs were funded. Can you break that down for each of those years? That's the total for the two fiscal years. Can your officials tell me how much was in each of those years?

(1945)

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Just before I do that, I would like to clarify for the member opposite — and I will assume that what he said he said in all sincerity — but I have benefited from student loan programs, and you have benefited from student loan programs, and I suspect a good number of people in the Assembly today have benefited from student loan programs. And to suggest that somehow I was saying that that was abuse of the taxpayers' dollar — I

wouldn't have thought that an educated individual like you would have reached that conclusion based on the remarks that I said, and I will assume that you didn't. I hope that was the case. I'm a very strong proponent of student loan funding. Indeed the moneys available to single parents and to married individuals today, in fact, has doubled through the bursary scheme this past year. So we believe very, very strongly that that is a very appropriate means to provide people with funds to secure much needed education.

Now I will get the statistics for the member opposite to respond to his specific question on SEDP (Saskatchewan employment development program). In '84 - '85, SEDP was 2,707 people; and in '85 - '86, 2,130 individuals — 2,130. And if you just wait a moment, I want to clarify another figure here.

I'm sorry. I should be giving you the job figure instead of the people, because some leave that particular position and it's filled by another individual for a period of time. So I was giving you the people as opposed to the jobs positions: 2,160 in '84 - '85; 1,701 in '85 - '86. But that 1,701 figure does not include the targeted positions under winter works which went to social assistance clients in '85 - '86. And then in '86 - '87, we expect around 2,400 jobs in '86 - '87 under that particular program.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — That's why I wanted the breakdown, Mr. Minister. it appears that in 1984 - '85 you started with 2,160 and in 1985 - '86 you went down to 1,701; and you talk about some targeted winter works jobs, but I don't really know what that's got to do with this program. So, even when you add them I suspect your emphasis on the program, in spite of your boasting about it, has seemed to have reduced itself.

In line with the same argument, Mr. Minister, I asked you in question period several weeks ago, with regard to the negotiations between Ottawa and the provincial governments, to target 30 per cent of the training in and employment spaces under the federal government's major job creation program for social assistance recipients — and negotiations had broken off. They were supposed to have concluded by April the 1st. Already we could have some of that in place. Can you give us a further report? Have the differences between you and the federal government now been resolved so that people can start getting benefit from this federal-provincial program, or are you still finding yourself in the situation of locked horns with the minister in Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — No, we're not in a locked horns position with anybody. We're in the final stages of dealing with details. I understand that officials have reached, in negotiations, targeted figures where we will be able to put social assistance clients into the CJS (Canadian jobs strategy) job strategy here in Saskatchewan, and I might add that I'm very encouraged by that because it was this provincial government, the first provincial government in Canada to push the issue of welfare reform at the national level, in terms of getting people off of social assistance and into training and education and jobs, and to encourage the federal government to make it possible for clients right throughout Canada, and certainly here in Saskatchewan

from our perspective, to take advantage in a much larger scale of the federal job creation dollars than previously they had been able to. And, I'm very pleased that we have been able to accomplish that and I think a good deal of a commendation needs to go to the officials in Social Services who work very hard to bring the negotiations to the stage that they are presently at, almost finalized.

I would add, as it relates to the SEDP program, that as I indicated just moments ago, we're looking at 2,400 jobs this year. There was 2,001 in the first year of the program, and in the middle year we had 1,701 plus targeted jobs under the winter works program. So we're maintaining a fairly steady, even keel with a slight increase this year in anticipated SEDP jobs.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I asked you this question on this program some two months ago, and at that time I read from a document which is an Ottawa document, in which it was stated that, and the reason why the negotiations had broken off. The document said, with reference to your government, and I quote from the document. The provincial government:

has a major disincentive in place which requires social assistance benefits to be decreased by the amount of any additional income received, including adult training allowances.

This too is listed as one of the stumbling blocks in the federal-provincial negotiations.

Mr. Minister, have you been able to resolve that disagreement that you've had with the federal government on this particular issue? You say your officials are close to concluding an agreement, albeit two months late. Have you been able to resolve this concern of the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — It never really was an issue of substance at all. When we indicated to the federal government exactly what we were interested in doing here in Saskatchewan, the issue disappeared. And it really never was an issue which in any way thwarted negotiations at all.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, can I . . . Just to confirm something which we talked a few moments ago — did you indicate you would send me a copy of the letter you sent to the Saskatoon group in response to the brief that I spoke about? I don't need it right now but will you give that to me so that I can know what your responses were rather than getting into it all here tonight.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Sure. I'd be happy to give you a copy of the letter.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, can you tell me the number of social workers you have employed who work under the Saskatchewan assistance plan in 1986, and whether there is more there now than there were, say, four years ago?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well back in 1980 - '81 or '81 - '82, whichever year you want, there was an average of 141 workers, permanent and temporary, and we estimate

'86 - 87 to be 170, permanent and temporary, average number of workers. So there has been an increase. I don't have the percentage figure here but there has been an increase in the number of people working in that particular area of the department.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — How many permanent?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — We don't have that figure here but we can give it to you. I have no problem doing that. We don't have that particular figure here directly.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — I guess I shall have to wait for it. I find that rather unusual. That is a very important question that would be asked and the reason I would ask it, obviously, is because the number of people who are dependent on welfare has increased dramatically. And in order for social workers to be able to do an adequate job it's important to know how many social workers are on staff. Surely your officials must know how many social workers they have hired.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well the reason why it's difficult to give you that particular figure, and to do so with any accuracy right tonight, is that we would have to find out from the regional offices exactly what their situation is because they have a certain pool of funds that they can use to access, to hire staff, depending upon whether the case-load goes up or down. So we will provide you with that information if you want it. You haven't told me you want it. If you nod your head or say yes — whatever — we'll get you that information as soon as we can.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Now, Mr. Minister, let's get serious about this. I want it, and I have a right to expect that I'd have been able to get it today. Your argument that somehow you have to consult your regions is a bunch of nonsense, and you know it. And your department officials, your senior officials, know how many staff are employed. The reason you don't want to give that figure, Mr. Minister, is because you know the number of social workers as a proportion to the number of people who are recipients is a disgrace.

The case-loads of those social workers have increased to the point where they no longer can provide the counselling services which are so important to meet all those objectives which you talk about. Those case-loads have increased so dramatically that they no longer have time to sit down with a client, talk about their problems, and try to help them out of the situation which they're in.

Since you don't want to answer the question about how many social workers you've got employed, because you know that it's less than what it was four years ago, Mr. Minister, I'll ask you this question: can your officials instruct you, and therefore can you tell me what the average case-load of a social worker is in your department?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well, I don't want the member to get distraught over there as the night wears on, so I will try and maintain it on a low level here, even keel.

The average number of workers, permanent and temporary, as I indicated, was 140 and has increased to

170. The average cases per worker in 1981 - 82, I believe was 152, and then it rose to a high of 185 a few years back, and is now down to 176 per worker — average cases per worker. And there will be variance there as well. We understand that.

And that compares favourably, for example, with Alberta, where their average number of cases per worker is 175. Ours is at 176. In British Columbia, theirs is 315 per worker. Now of course we don't want to compare ourselves all that much to British Columbia. But you can see there the extreme 315 per worker. We're 176, comparable to Alberta at 175. The average number of cases per worker has come down from a high of 185 to 176 today.

(2000)

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Won't you agree, Mr. Minister, and I'm sure that your officials can help you, that there are some social workers who have a case-load of 250 or more?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Yes, there are some case-loads that may be that high and even higher because they're called administrative type cases, and they would be appropriate in those particular circumstances.

There are some duties that have been in fact removed from the day-to-day responsibilities of the Saskatchewan assistance plan worker and have been given over to the verification unit, which in fact we have staffed up somewhat more so than previously. So whereas the case-load may have increased somewhat, there are certain duties that are not now being asked to be performed by those particular individuals, which previously they were asked to do.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, will you undertake to have your officials provide me either directly or through you, as of today — we'll take a specific date, so that we can have a specific time to work with — as of today, the number of social workers that work under the Saskatchewan assistance plan that you have in your department today, both permanent and temporary. Since you do not have that, will you undertake to provide it for me? As well as the total number of SAP recipients — and I don't mean case-load; I mean those who are children, spouses, and so on — as of today. so that when I receive the information, I can make a comparison as to the kind of case-loads you have. Can you provide that for me by letter or whatever, in the next day or so?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Yes, we will provide you with that information. But we will do so in the context of a fair comparison to what it may have been previously — for example, those people that are in the verification unit today, that are doing certain things that presently social workers don't have to do, that previously they may have done.

As well, we have the assessment and placement unit which has, I believe, something in the order of 20-plus full-time people working there that are working directly with social assistance clients. And previously that kind of assessment and placement unit was not there that is

providing direct, specialized, individualized counselling to clients.

So we will provide all of the information that pertains to the number of individuals who in one way or another are working with social assistance clients.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — I would appreciate that. But you will also give me the number of social workers? Okay.

Mr. Minister, I will turn to another time. Can you report to the committee the number of food banks that now exist in Saskatchewan; and do you in any way provide financial assistance to them?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — I believe there is one in Saskatoon and one in Regina and one in prince Albert. There may be another one that was, I understand, talked about; whether or not it's come into being, I'm not sure.

We don't provide direct assistance to food banks in terms of government funding directly.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Yes, I have information that there is one in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina. And I thought there was also one in Moose Jaw. So if there is, and I think there is, there would now be four food bank operations in the province, and that in itself tells us something about what's been happening.

There were no food banks prior to 1983. When the food bank in Regina opened in May of 1983, in its first eight months of operation, there were 10,666 people who were served; for the first eight months of 1984, there were 24,770 people who were served. In January of '84, 2,617 people were served by the Saskatoon food bank; in January of 1986, 3,867 people were served, and that number keeps growing, Mr. Minister.

I think food banks are a reflection of some of the difficulties that we see faced in Saskatchewan in recent years. That's the first time we've had food banks since before I was born. And I think that you would not deny that there is a problem here, and it's unfortunate. And yet, in spite of that, Mr. Minister, when people ask the department and ask your government to provide some assistance to these people, they are denied.

For example, the Regina Centre Interfaith Association wrote you some time ago to request some assistance in providing counselling services to people who they refer to the food bank. Were you able to respond to this group in a positive way to this request, which may have assisted these people through counselling and help direct them into some other kinds of aids or some other occupations or what no? Were you able to respond to the Regina Centre Interfaith Association in a positive way?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the provincial government funds a variety of counselling services in one form or another in this city and in other cities of the province. And of course there are counselling services available through the Department of Social Services as well, and then there are of course private counselling services that may be available, for example, through churches in the city. So there's a fairly broad spectrum of

counselling services available.

And if the member is suggesting that we need to see more counselling services, and that tax dollars should be spent that way, then I would be interested in hearing his particular recommendation.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Well, Mr. Minister, the problem with your response — and I guess you responded in like fashion to the Regina interfaith association — is that all of the agencies which you refer to are already overburdened to the point where they can't handle the clients that they've got, and I'll give you an example. The Family Service Bureau has had its case-load increased by 30 per cent in the last year alone. It has not had additional funding to increase staff to handle this, but a case-load which has increased 30 per cent in the last year. We've already established, because of the heavy case-loads of social workers, that they don't have the time to counsel their clients.

And so my recommendation to you, Mr. Minister, is that when a group like the Regina Centre Interfaith Association makes a request to your department, that that is a request that's worth and has some merit. And I would hope that you would reconsider your denial of assistance. It would not be a great deal of money, but I submit to you, probably a better spent dollar than many other things that governments spend money on.

Here is a group that has a lot of contact with people who are in need. They're there on the street working with them or in their homes working with them. What better group might be able to provide this kind of counselling — because they refer people to food bank every day — than this kind of an organization?

I simply would hope that you might reconsider their request and provide them with that small amount of money that would assist them in at least a part-time counselling service, so that they could be of assistance to these people who they speak about.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I suppose one could for ever be positively responding to requests for funding from a variety of organizations. In fact, I suspect that the most common activity that I find myself involved in as Minister of Social Services is to consider requests for funding that come from a variety of organizations around the province.

And the time comes when one simply has to say: here's what the priorities are going to be in the Department of Social Services; here is where the money is going to be spent; this year we will fund this new organization, which means we can't fund this organization this year; and next year we may fund this new organization. And the reality is that one simply doesn't have enough money in government to respond to all of the organizations who would like to have money from government. I'm sure that was the case when your government was in power, and it will be the case for ever, I suspect.

I do think the member should be aware that the Family Service Bureau of Regina has received . . . or this year will received a 13.1 per cent increase in overall dollars from the

taxpayer; and the Catholic Family Service Society of Regina will receive a 12.7 increase. Now that's not 3 per cent, 4 per cent inflation-related; that's a significant increase. Ten point five per cent, Saskatoon Family Service Bureau; 11.1 per cent, Catholic Family Services; 11.8, Minto; for a total family service bureau increase around the province of 11.8 per cent, which is a fairly reasonable or significant increase, I would think.

It may very well be that the particular organization that you made reference to was turned down for funding this year. And certainly I encourage any organization, if for one reason or another they have not been successful in receiving funds, to naturally reapply in the next budget year. And we will take a look at any organization, any request, seriously, and naturally they will have to be prioritized as you get into the budget process. But if this particular organization wants to submit another budget request this particular year, then we would look at it as seriously as we would look at any new organization which is requesting government funding.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, I wanted to ask a couple of questions with respect to day care. First of all, some factual questions, and then I have a couple of comments.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you would give us the number of additional day-care places approved and the number of places which were either not used or lost or closed.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Since when?

Mr. Shillington: — Since March 31, 1985.

(2015)

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — As I understand it, last year the centre in La Loche closed but was replaced by a family day home operation, and the Smiles & Chuckles centre closed. It was simply not a viable operation as I understand it. So those would be the ones that closed.

An Hon. Member: — How many spaces?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — How many centres?

An Hon. Member: — Spaces.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Spaces. The centre in La Loche was licensed for 20 children but there were only five that were in attendance there. And as a consequence the centre closed and a family day home commenced operation in its place. And in Saskatoon . . . pardon me, in P.A., Smiles & Chuckles, I understand was licensed for 28, but the number of children had been progressively going down over a period of time, and as a consequence the centre closed.

Mr. Shillington: — Well, I must say, Mr. Minister, you very effectively cured me of asking anything in the nature of a detailed question. I asked what I thought was a fairly short question. The answer took nine minutes. At this rate of going, neither you or I may live long enough to see the end of these Social Services estimates.

Mr. Minister, let me then try a general comment on you,

and perhaps you can respond to that without a nine-minute delay. My impression, Mr. Minister, has been that the state of day care in this province is not very healthy. Visiting day-care centres, as I do . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well there's the member from Moosomin, no doubt the acknowledged expert on day care, no doubt knows about all there is to know.

Mr. Minister, the overall impression one gets visiting day cares is that the system is starved for money. The equipment is woefully inadequate. Many of the day cares I was in did not have good equipment for the kids to play with. Some cases it consisted of a few stuffed toys and a television. I don't regard that as an adequate stimulus for the intellectual development of children, and that's what toys should do — good toys should stimulate the child. I don't regard television or stuffed toys very good.

Mr. Minister, the pay to the workers ought to make us embarrassed. As one member making a comment to the national committee on day care stated, the average paid to day-care workers is half that paid to zoo keepers. So we pay those who are paid to look after animals twice as much as we pay those who are paid to look after children. That strikes me as something of a misplace of our priorities.

Mr. Minister, the equipment is inadequate. The system is not available for many children, particularly infant day care. It's a serious problem. Single parent families which have infants have great difficulty in finding day care. They usually can't. They are usually left with some private individual which may or may not be adequate, but there's no way of the mother knowing. And they are very hard to find.

So, Mr. Minister, it strikes me that what the day-care system needs is not a lot of briefs to a national committee. What the day-care needs is more money. The minister might say, how are we going to accomplish that? Well, I would invite the minister to check the report on day care which was given to the department in late 1981. It recommended a system of maintenance grants, a system of increased subsidies to the parents. In the day-care boards that I met with, I took a copy of that report with me and inevitably the members of the board, whom I talked with, indicated that was precisely what the system needs.

I wonder, Mr. Minister, if this government ever has any intention of doing anything with day care. You came into office with the report in place, commissioned by the department which, as I said, I have found attains universal acclaim when you discuss it with the directors and the staff at a day-care unit. You commissioned your own report by the member from Saskatoon Riversdale. All of this has resulted, I think, in virtually no action being taken. We still have day cares which are inadequate in terms of quality, inadequate in terms of funds, and inadequate in terms of spaces. Some of them, Mr. Minister, I think are just not what they might be.

I wonder, Mr. Minister, is this government ever going to get around to doing anything with day care, or are you going to continue to let the existing system — which everyone including yourself, I gather, agrees to be

inadequate — continue indefinitely.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to respond to the concerns pertaining to day care. The member opposite casts some aspersions on the member from Moosomin concerning his knowledge of day care. I do suspect, having heard what the member just said, that the member from Moosomin knows as much about day care as the member from Regina Centre does.

As it relates to some of the initiatives that this particular government has taken, I certainly can talk about those momentarily. But I do want to say that I think it is important that organizations do, in fact, present briefs to the federal government concerning the whole issue of child care and day care. And you seem to dismiss that whole process and say all they need is more money; forget about making recommendations to the federal government. You don't seem to recognize that in fact the federal government and all three political parties at the federal level, including your particular party, are very concerned about what the federal government at the federal level could be doing with regards to day care. And if you were on top of the day-care issue then you yourself might have made a brief to that commission when it came through.

Our particular provincial government did present a brief and it was most interesting that the commissioners on that particular task force indicated that the provincial Progressive Conservative Government of Saskatchewan was the only provincial government that to date had presented a brief to the federal government, which is indicative of our serious concern about child care in our country and in our province. And we did have some very significant specific recommendations that the federal government could in fact act on, which would in fact inject new money into the system. So contrary to your position, which is simply to go running around the countryside crying, more funds, more funds, our position is to say, here's where we think money could go; here's where it could come from; here is how it could be spent.

Now I'm sure that if you think about it, you might be able to come up with some specific recommendations in that regard. Unfortunately you have not done so yet. And I was disappointed that the NDP party at those particular task force hearings did not have any specific, direct, exact recommendations about where the money should go to, where it could come from, what kind of changes could be made. Yes, there were important comments made about accessibility and affordability and those kinds of motherhood things. But nothing specific coming from the NDP party. And I was most disappointed in that regard.

Now as it relates to the funds that day-care centres need, I can only state that under the former administration no operating grants whatsoever were provided to day-care centres. None. Zero.

Now, I'm not so sure why that was. It may have been that you were more enamoured with potash mines than you were with the day-care needs of single mothers. That may have been the case. It may have been the case that you were more enamoured with taking my tax dollar and your tax dollar and spending it buying land for a socialist land

bank scheme than you were enamoured with providing day-care facilities and assistance to families here in Regina. That may have been the case.

Now you have suddenly woke up the day-care issue, and you have said there should be more money put into day care. Well in fact this time, for the first time ever, that direct operating grants will be provided to day-care centres in the province of Saskatchewan, and it's happening under a Progressive Conservative government — not under a New Democratic Party government — a Progressive Conservative government. And that particular operating grant . . . I'm sure that we can argue about what the size of it should be. And naturally there will be those people who will always say it should have been more than it was. But the fact that day-care centres are going to be receiving anywhere in the order of 4,000, 5,000, 6,000, perhaps in some instances even as much as 7 or \$8,000 direct operating grant money which they previously did not have, which they can use for any purpose that they want to — to enhance salaries, for example, of people who work in the day care centres — I think that's a very forward-looking step that has been taken.

And I would read into the record some information, this letter coming from the Saskatchewan Advisory Council on the Status of Women:

On behalf of the Saskatchewan Advisory council on the Status of Women, I wish to congratulate you and the government on the proposed increase in day care spending. We are pleased the government recognizes that parents may need outside help and support in childrearing. Providing funding directly to the child (care) centres and homes will give a necessary cash infusion without encouraging fee increases.

And then we have:

The Board of Directors (from) the Idylwyld Child Care Co-operative (that) would like to express our thanks for the consideration given to daycares in the recent budget. We believe that the direct monthly operating grant is a positive step in the evolution of quality daycare in the Province.

And here is a letter from the Kids' Place Child Care Co-operative in Saskatoon:

Kids' Place Child Care Co-operative is very grateful for the operating grant of \$20.00 monthly per licensed space. Our centre will benefit greatly from these funds which will be paid directly to us. This will enrich our program to provide higher quality programming and will improve the quality of care in our centre. We are very appreciative that you recognize child care to be an important issue in Saskatchewan. Thank you for your ongoing support. (Signed by the president of Kid's Place Child Care Co-operative.)

So I think that we have taken some significant initiatives, not only in terms of providing direct operating grants to day-care centres, but also to provide child-care help for

people that are involved in our SSDP (Saskatchewan skills development program) training programs.

(2030)

There's the MacKenzie Infant Care Centre which we have been involved in funding here. And we have the innovative Market Square approach to day care, where the business community in down-town Regina has decided to get involved in the provision of day-care services.

We believe that those are the kinds of things that should be done. Some of them should have been done some time ago under your administration, but I understand that was four or five years ago and you had different priorities at that time.

Our priorities are not to nationalize potash mines and uranium mines and buy land for a government-owned land bank scheme. One of our priorities is to work in the day-care field, and we have chosen to substantially infuse new dollars through a direct operating grant to day-care centres here in the province of Saskatchewan. And I think that will be very well received, as indicated by the letters that I have just read to you.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, the amount of money has been restructured. I will wait to see if any more is spent. I know the minister in the past has budgeted more money for day care than you've actually spent.

Mr. Minister, I would not claim that day care was the single most significant achievement of the former government. I think there were problems then: I will readily admit that. But, Mr. Minister, you have done nothing to solve those problems, and they are worse now than they were then.

I know the minister reams off these statistics. But I'll tell you that I have gone through this with you before. You always claim to be spending a lot more money, and each year when I go back and talk to the day-care people in my riding — and there's quite a few of the centres in my riding — the problems got worse. So I don't trust the figures in this book, and I don't think any of the people involved in day care, care what you put in the estimates. The fact is the situation has got worse each year that you have been in office.

Mr. Minister, I did not go to the national committee on day care for good reason. The last thing this problem needs in one more study. It has been studied to death by a series of Conservative governments which wish to avoid taking any responsibility, either for doing anything or for their own inaction. The last thing this problem needs is another study by a federal committee. We need some action. We're not getting it, Mr. Minister. But if you'll call an election, I think you'll find that there will be a new administration to come into office, which will do something significant for day care. I have really very little hope that this government is going to do anything but talk about it.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the member suggests that nothing significant has been done in day

care.

Well since 1982, we have increased the number of subsidized day-care spaces in the order of 1,710. That's a 44 per cent increase in the number of subsidized day-care spaces. Now I'm sure that some would say that's not enough. But surely the member opposite can, in all fairness, stand to his feet and say, yes, I acknowledge that there was a 44 per cent increase in subsidized day-care spaces since 1982. Now that's fairly significant.

Now I've just indicated that there's going to be a direct operating grant going to day-care spaces this year in the order of \$20 per child per month, which is going to inject in the order of anywhere from 4, 5, \$6,000 of new money, unconditional, into day-care centres. Now that's significant. Surely you can stand in your place and say, yes, that's a new initiative and it recognizes the need in day care. And it has come under a Progressive Conservative government. And we applaud that. But you would choose to rather say, nothing has happened. Well the facts suggest otherwise.

And thirdly, you just admitted that the reason why you wouldn't go before a federal task force on day care is because you've got nothing to say — nothing to say except we need more money. Well one of the things that we suggested to the federal government was, in fact, that they cost-share the kinds of things that they presently are not cost-sharing in order that the provincial governments would have some additional freed-up money that they could put back into additional child-care services.

Now that's a very significant recommendation. And I think the task force was very encouraged by that. And I certainly was encouraged by their particular response. I think that there will be some very significant recommendations that come out of the task force that the federal government will look at very carefully. And I think that we are going to see some initiatives coming out of the federal government concerning child care, when that process is concluded. In the meantime, we have decided that we can't wait around; that there are steps that have to be taken. And one of them was in fact to provide the direct operating grant to child-care centres which will be coming this year, and which I believe will be very well received.

And if the member wants me to read to him again the letters that have come from people who happen to run the child-care centres, I would be happy to do that, but I don't think we need to do that. We've already covered that ground.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, just to remind you that in 1981 the recommendation for an operating grant was about \$120 a space; you're providing exactly \$20 a space. Can I ask you, Mr. Minister: how much equipment grant do you provide to the average day care in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — The old equipment grant was \$100 per space per year. And what we have done is we have rolled that into the operating grant which now is a separate unconditional grant of \$20 per space . . . pardon me, per month per space. So if you take the old grant, and

I believe it works out to something like \$8.50 or whatever, and then you add on to that the dollars that we are in fact putting in — new dollars into the particular system — as unconditional grant, we're talking about an overall \$20 unconditional grant. If you're talking about new money per space, it's around the \$12 figure per space. So in fact it comes out to somewhere in the order of ... well as I indicated before, it's going to vary depending upon the number of licensed spaces that particular centre has.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Well I'm glad we re-established that because a moment ago you were talking about a lot less — 4,000, 6,000, \$7,000 of new money going to day cares as an operating grant when in fact it was not new money.

Mr. Minister, what you have done again is played with the figures. You cancelled the equipment which could have amounted to 1 or \$2,000. Now you're saying you're going to give in the form of operating grants, \$4,000. You've got a net gain of \$2,000 for day care which is not, I don't think, a very significant change. So let us be clear on that, Mr. Minister, that all of the funding you're providing under the operating grant is not new money. You've actually cancelled the program that existed, and you've rolled it into what you now call the maintenance grants.

Mr. Minister, let me ask you just a quick follow-up on something which my colleagues were asking. Back in 1984 - 85 you announced in estimates that you were going to provide 217 additional spaces. Your annual report states that you provided only 185 additional spaces — not near the target that you announced, Mr. Minister. That's why we are concerned when we ask these questions because it seems to me what you announced is not coming to fruition.

I do not have the statistics for 1985 - 86. Can you tell me what the net increase in day-care spaces was in the year 1985 - 86? That's when you take into consideration those that were closed and those that may have been opened — was there a net increase in day-care spaces in 1985 - 86?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — There were 50 additional spaces added in '85 - 86. On the issue of the direct operating grant, for a centre that had 60 licensed spaces, we're talking about 8,400 additional, new dollars, over and above anything previous — new money. For a 50-space centre, we're talking about 7,200 new dollars. That's a significant infusion of money. For a 40-space centre, we're talking about 6,000 additional, new dollars — brand-new, new money, going in to that particular centre. So that's very significant.

Now you could say, well, it should be 10 times higher than that, or who knows what. And you're right; back in 1981, someone did recommend \$120 a space. And I suppose you could have put that money there, but over the next two or three or four years, we wouldn't have been able to add any additional new day-care spaces, if that's where the money had gone. Our particular priority over that period of time as to increase spaces by 44 per cent — 1,710 new spaces.

An Hon. Member: — Fifty last year.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — This particular year — 1,710 since

1982. This particular year we are deciding to direct the new money into the operating grant side of the centres, plus there's going to be 100 new spaces this particular year. Now we could say, well you need to have more spaces. Okay. Well that's fine. And you could take the operating grant away from the centres and you could have put it into new spaces. And there's a trade-off there, that you have to decide, you know.

Now you didn't provide any direct operating grant. And you can stand to your feet today and say, well you should do both; you should provide an operating grant of massive proportion and you should massively increase the number of spaces. But I don't know that that's a responsible position to take.

We chose during the first number of years of our administration to increase spaces by 1,710 new spaces over that period of time. Now we have decided to take new dollars — rather than this particular year putting them significantly into new spaces, to take that particular money and to put it directly into operating grants for centres. Now you can disagree with that particular expenditure pattern. That's naturally your right, if you choose to do that. But I think the fact that we have significantly addressed spaces over a four- to five-year period of time, and now significantly adding new dollars to day-care centres, is well received.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, the responsible thing to do would be to give some priority to the need for family support services to families who need day care, and the need to put a priority on the care of our children. You are not doing that in your government, Mr. Minister.

You did not give me the full answer for 1985 - 1986, and I think I know why, but I'll give you another chance to come clean. You said that the number of spaces that were added in '85 - 86 were 50, but you didn't say how many spaces were lost or closed in that year. Will you give us that information.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — I'm informed that the net increase was 71 spaces — total, overall, subsidized spaces, net increase in that particular year.

Now if you want to take a look at the four-year period of time, we're talking about a substantial increase, and I'm sure the member opposite doesn't want to take a look at the particular four-year period of time. But when you take a look at, for example, the number of family home spaces: in 1980 - 81 under your government, 613; under this particular government, 1,892. So a substantial increase — 613 compared to 1,892. Day-care centre spaces, 2,929 in '80 - 81 compared to 3,732. So overall a significant increase on the magnitude, as I indicated before, of 1,710 new spaces. And this year a direct operating grant to day-care centres. I think you could argue that, you're not responding enough, as I'm sure oppositions always do, but you certainly cannot argue that we have not responded. In fact we have responded and we have responded in very substantial fashion.

(2045)

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I was ready to proceed

to the next item but once again you give us contradictory figures. Your first answer was that you increased spaces by 50. Now we discuss it further, you say you increased spaces by 71. In 1984 - 85 you said you were going to increase spaces by 217; you actually increased them by 185.

Now, Mr. Minister, in order to be credible in this committee and in the view of the public, will you tell us which figures are the correct ones — the 50 increases or the 71 increases? Will you make up your mind or will you give us the correct . . . Will you listen to your officials, hear what they say, and then tell us what they say, rather than picking up your own figures are you hear your officials. Is it 50 or is it 71?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well if the member has any familiarity with the day-care system, he knows that there are centres that may in fact close down from time to time, although that is infrequent. What is more frequent is that you have more day-care homes that are closing and others are reopening, and when you take the overall net figure, 71 is the net figure — the best of the two that I gave you.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Well I have had occasions where I have taken you at your word, Mr. Minister. I'm not prepared to take you at your word because I don't believe you. I really don't and I don't think anybody else does either. I mean, you have displayed time and time again where you choose to use figures and you throw them out and then you try to change the figures. And in this case I don't believe that there was a net increase in day-care spaces in Saskatchewan in 1985 - 1986. And you have not helped in any way to change my view of that, and neither have you helped to change the view of anyone else. But since we can't establish that, let me ask you one specific question, and surely you will not take 10 minutes to get the answer; you'll be able to tell us.

You have had a request from the Child Care Centre Co-operative, which is located on College Avenue, for what I think is a very innovative and needed and good infant-care program. It was submitted to you in time for consideration for the present budget. Are you able to respond to that request in a positive way in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — In that particular centre that you're referring to, already there are 120 spaces — 60 and there's a dividing wall, and another 60. So in fact what we have is a very large centre, if you want to talk about day-care centres. Now you're talking about adding an additional number of spaces in that immediate area — in that immediate neighbourhood. Okay . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well that's very significant. For a large number of infants. Now we have indicated that we will not be proceeding with that and the proprietor of that particular centre understands that.

I think the member needs to know that there are very significant medical and health concerns about infant day-care centres, and there are serious reservations about whether or not the best way to provide infant care is in large or what we would consider to be a normal day-care centre environment. And in fact the federal task force, when they came through, indicated that they had received submissions from the medical community

which suggested that in fact that may not be the way to go to provide infant care.

At present we do provide infant care in our family day homes. And I read off the statistics to the member opposite to indicate that we have seen an increase from 600 licensed spaces in '80 - 81 under your administration in family day homes to about 1,800 — almost two times an increase — in family day homes which of course provides care for infants. Now that may be the best way to go, to continue to increase day homes to provide infant care as opposed to doing it in a centre. I'm sure you would agree with me we do not want to jeopardize the health, the medical condition, of any particular youngster because of the problems that may be associated with providing day care to a lot of infants in one particular day-care centre.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, just to correct you because you provided some misinformation. I must say, and probably through no fault of your own. But indeed, Mr. Minister, this is not a proposal in which this would be in the same facility that's there now, which is what you said. This day-care is a very successful operation; they do have money set aside for a capital program; they do have additional property that's located there on which they could provide this service. And quite frankly, although I agree with you that there have to be alternatives for day care, I don't think we want to put it all into one kind of form, and the in-home day-care operation, I think, have got to be one of the options. This proposal has a lot of merit. At least you could try it. You've got people who are qualified, you've got people who have a record of terrific success, and some effort could have been made to provide a beginning. Now, I don't have a question in that. I simply want to make that point. I would like you to think about it again. Okay? If you want to respond I'll let you.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Rather than trying it, which you suggest at that particular centre, we in fact are trying infant care in terms of the pilot project at the Balfour tutorial program, and in fact there will be a registered nurse who will be on site to ensure that we have the appropriate kind of medical and health facilities for the particular youngsters that are going to be cared for there. So in fact we are in a sense trying a pilot project infant-care approach through Balfour tutorial.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I will discuss with this group at a time when it's convenient to them about whether they've agreed with your refusal to provide the funding, as you indicated they have.

But let me go on to another subject. In order to expedite time, Mr. Minister, can you provide me with a list of the non-government organizations which your department is funding this year — and your staff can do that later — the amount of funding you are providing to each, and how much that is an increase for each one over the previous year. Will you undertake to provide that for me through your staff so that I can have access to it?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Yes.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Thank you. I only want to specifically refer to one because I think there is a

particular problem. This is the Prince Albert Group Homes Society, which according to the funding you give them now, have staff which is being paid, compared to the hours that they work, at about \$2.79 an hour. Can you tell me, Mr. Minister, what kind of an increase of funding you have provided to the Prince Albert Group Homes Society this year over last year?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Four per cent.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Four per cent? I thought you finished just telling us . . . You must have used selective figures again. You talked about 13 per cent increases, 12 per cent increases. Here's an organization which is in the process of negotiating a contract with its employees, where if you apply the hours worked to the amount that they're getting paid, about \$1,070 a month, works out to \$2.79 an hour, and you provide a 4 per cent increase. Now, Mr. Minister, how do you propose to solve this problem which this society faces with a 4 per cent increase?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well we're talking about an organization that has a house parent model that it uses to deliver its services, which means that people live in for a period of time. It means that they sleep there for a period of time. Now if you want to include the time that they're sleeping when they are there and roll that into the amount of money that they receive per hour and say that they are receiving \$2.79 an hour, you can do that. I don't think I will do that. We, of course, have an autonomous organization there. It has its own board. It negotiates with its own employees. We have provided a 4 per cent increase in funding to that particular organization. You want to compare that to the 11 per cent. In fact, the 11 per cent that we talked about earlier with regards to family service bureaus was for various kinds of services that were being provided, counselling services. So it's an altogether different kind of an approach.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, I don't accept the view that you're doing an adequate job because I think a 4 per cent increase, you will know, is not adequate.

Let me ask you another question on another subject. Are you in the process of centralizing some of your operations in the city of Regina? You have two offices — one on Albert Street North and I think one further south. Is your department centralizing some of those operations that provides family services and so on?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well we're looking at the possibility of providing family services out of one office and the income security services out of another office for better service and efficiency of operation. It's something that is being looked at. It's being considered. But whether or not it actually takes place is another matter altogether. It may not provide to be the most feasible thing to do.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — So you're telling me you have not made that decision. The budget bureau has not directed you to make that decision, and there is no specific time on which it's supposed to happen?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — No. The budget bureau did not direct us to do anything with regards to this particular matter. Nothing.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Finish the rest of the answer. You have not decided to centralize. I really raise this because the locations now serve predominantly the clients where they live, and if you centralize some of the services, you're going to move away even a further distance, these services, from the people who really don't have access through transportation means in many cases. You're going to move it away and make it much more difficult for them to get the service.

So all I want to know is: have you made that decision? And if so, what is the time frame in which it's to happen?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well in fact most of the income security clients are dealt with out of the north office. And that is in fact likely where an income security office would be if you were going to have one income security office. You may have a family services office in some other part of the city. But the reality is most of the family service workers, or a good number of them, in fact perform their activities out there in the city. It's not all done in this particular central office.

So we're looking for the most effective way of meeting the needs of our clients and doing so in as efficient a way as we can.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Now, Mr. Minister, I know that some people in difficulty actually go to the office and talk to people who are there. If you move it out of the north office, you're really reducing the access. And I think that's wrong. And I hope that you would reconsider that move. I don't think it's more efficient. You can't just measure things by the efficiency of the dollar; you have to sometimes measure about the service they provide.

And in this case you're taking away access to very, very important services which one could define as prevention — family service which you have in the north office, which if you move to the south will be removed away from people who predominantly have . . . who take advantage of it. And so I think it's important that you take a second look at it.

Mr. Minister, a couple of quick items before we move on to the subvote by subvote. Can you describe what kind of process is used when a child is charged under the Young Offenders Act? What are the steps and the procedures, as briefly as you can?

(2100)

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — The police investigate and the police lay charges. And we don't get involved, from the Social Services point of view, until we may be asked for a pre-disposition report by the courts.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — These young offenders obviously will need legal assistance or legal advice. Do you have a list of lawyers that you have available, who you refer cases to, Mr. Minister? And if you have such a list, can you send it to me — probably not today because you won't have it. But will you undertake to send it to me, if you have such a list.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — For the member opposite, legal aid provides universal services to all young offenders.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Does legal aid have all of the lawyers how are employed by legal aid, who provide the services, or is there also another list of lawyers, of the private sector, that legal aid utilizes?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well we make the service available. Legal aid makes the service available. The family can of course engage their own lawyer if they wanted to. So they have an option. If that option is there for them in terms of their fiscal conditions, then they could do that. Otherwise legal aid is there, available for people.

Mr. Shillington: — — Just one question and it has to do with the rights of parents with respect to situations where they are accused of abusing children. I've had some experience in this in a professional sense as a lawyer, and of course it's attained some profile recently.

Suffice it to say, Mr. Minister, there's been an outstanding problem for quite a while. I don't think that's denied by either side of the House. If the problem has attained an unusual profile recently, that may be in part due to the fact that your government has not acted on a problem which has been outstanding. The legislation is inadequate, and so, I believe, is the rights of parents to appeal decisions of the department. There's simply no real mechanism there to do that. They are in many ways at the mercy of the department.

And I wonder, Mr. Minister, if your department has any plans to resolve a problem which has been outstanding for many years and which I assume your government admits is still outstanding.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Yes, the member has raised an issue which is of considerable concern to me. It's one of the reasons why we have been undertaking the review of The Family Services Act. And it's not true what the member has said, in fact. We have instituted a process of consultation with various professional groups and have reached agreement on some new protocols. We have reached agreement on some new protocols concerning the whole issue of child abuse.

I would simply inform the member that if we are aware of a particular case that may have some criminal matters attached to it — possible — then we automatically refer that to the police and they take it from there. And if they are of the opinion that sufficient evidence exists to lay charges, they lay charges.

And it goes through the normal court process, and Social Services has nothing to do with that; that's the court process instituted by the police, and it carries on. As it relates to a family services matter, of course, we have the family court judges here, and they will make a particular determination once evidence comes before them.

Now I do believe that the Act is deficient in a number of respects and needs to be changed. We do need to provide, I believe, for example, for the provision for a show-cause hearing. We do need to, in the Act, make it possible for parents to have greater access to information

that pertains to them. And those are some of the things that we want to do.

There are delicate issues involved here and we want to make sure that we are both providing for the rights of the parent and at the same time ensuring that children are appropriately protected if in fact that is what needs to take place. To find that reasonable balance and to write it in legal terms in an Act is not an easy thing to do. And I recognize that there is some urgency to that. We want to accomplish that as expeditiously as possible. And I indicated earlier on today that we hope to be bringing amendments forward into the House in due course, as soon as we can.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, through your own admission, there's a lot of things you haven't done yet. But there's one thing you've done a great deal of, and that's polling. Polling. Polling with your favour polling research outfit called Tanka Research. In 1984 - 1985, Public Accounts show you spent \$12,000 to do a poll. Your department, believe it or not, paid for a poll by Tanka Research. My question is: did you spend any money in 1985 - 1986 for polling, and who did it?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — We don't have that information here. I can get it for you . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well we don't. I mean, I don't have all of the information in the Department of Social Services here. And I will get it for you and provide it for you. We can do that in public accounts. I can send the information to you by way of letter, and I'll be happy to do that.

I suspect that it may have to do with issues pertaining to productivity and attitudes of the public concerning productivity in the public sector, because I was involved of course as cabinet minister responsible for the cabinet council on productivity. And so I would want to check and make sure that that is exactly the information, and that I'm providing you with the correct information. I have no problem giving it to you; I just want to make sure I'm providing the accurate information.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, that's an atrocious answer. You do have a problem giving it to us. You don't want to give it under public scrutiny; you want to give it through letter, which is fine with me. But I want to have it.

But what you're doing . . . Don't tell me your officials don't have that information. Your officials do have that information. That's their job. And when you come to the estimates of this fiscal year, it is your responsibility and it is the responsibility of your officials to tell this committee the expenditures you made in the previous year, Mr. Minister. For you to say to this committee you don't have the information on how much you spent on polling in 1985 - 1986 only tells us that you spent a considerable amount of money and you're not prepared to let the public know what you spent.

Now, Mr. Minister, will you ask your officials again to give you the information on how much you spent on polling in 1985 - 1986. We know you spent \$12,000 in 1984 - 1985. You obviously are now telling us you spent a considerable amount more. How much more did you spend?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — I want to say to the member opposite, the Department of Social Services is a large department with a budget of hundreds of millions of dollars. Now I don't know off the top of my head, and I don't suspect my officials have the information here either, how much money we spent on pencils in the Department of Social Services. But I could get that and I could provide it for you.

I don't happen to know how much money I spend on postage sending letters regularly to the member from Regina Centre who is constantly requesting information from me. I don't happen to have that particular information here.

There are hundreds of items on which thousands of dollars are spent that I don't happen to have at my fingertips, nor do my officials have at my fingertips here tonight. We can provide the specific detailed information for you.

I indicated I suspect that that figure that you talked about, the \$12,000 figure, has to do with polling information relating to the attitudes of the public concerning productivity in the public sector, whether it's municipal or provincial or federal, because I was involved with productivity issues as chairman responsible for the cabinet council on productivity.

I want to make exactly sure that that is in fact the information that is correct and accurate when I give it to you. And I think that's fair and that's reasonable. Now if you want to chastise me for not having that information tonight, then you go right ahead and chastise me. I won't lose one wink of sleep over it; I want you to know that.

There are literally thousands of things that take place in the Department of Social Services for which we can provide you with information, but it will take some time. And that's the reasonable approach to take. I've been very forthcoming in providing you with information. I will continue to be forthcoming. If you want to make some cheap political points by chastising me tonight because I don't happen to know how much a particular item costs, then you feel free to do that.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Minister, this has in many ways been an exercise in futility in that you have not consistently provided information. You've consistently refused to provide information.

And here we are dealing with what is well-known to the House Leader and the members opposite, a sensitive issue. And a minister doing his job would have alerted his officials that he wants to be prepared to respond to that sensitive issue. You obviously didn't do that, or you did and now you don't want to provide the information so that we can question you further.

I didn't ask you to provide further information, '84 - '85. All I asked, Mr. Minister, is how much you spent in '85 - '86. Since you refuse to answer that, I will ask you if you will undertake to do the following: will you provide me the total amount of money you spent in 1985 - '86 for polling in your department who did the polling, and what the

polling was for? And if you will undertake to do that, we'll move on to the other subvotes and proceed with your estimates.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — I'm not sure which years you're now talking about.

An Hon. Member: — '85 - '86.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — In '85 - '86, to the best of my knowledge, Social Services has not done any polling.

An Hon. Member: — I didn't think so.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — You were asking me about '84 - '85, and that's exactly what I was responding to. You know, if you'd be a little clearer, then perhaps we could get along better with one another.

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no polling done in '85 - '86. But I will find out and I will also provide you with that information by way of letter in the same way that I have undertaken to provide you with information regarding any polling done by Social Services in the calendar year or the fiscal year '84 - '85. And I'm sure that will satisfy the member opposite.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Now to the extent that progress is possible, we've made some progress. I was for three times asking you about 1985 - 1986. If you would listen to the questions instead of . . . well whatever, you would have been able to answer that. Okay.

You know what I've asked for, 1985 - 1986. Will you check with your officials, provide me the information, and will you provide me the similar information for 1984 - '85? It will be in *Hansard*.

You have undertaken to do that, I assume. And if that is so we will move on to the next subvote, Mr. Chairman.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 and 3 agreed to.

Item 4

Mr. Tchorzewski: — One question, because I didn't ask it earlier, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, on day care, are you increasing the amount of subsidy levels and the income cut-off point in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — No, we have chosen to direct any new dollars this year to the operating grant, direct operating grant side of day care, as I indicated before.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Have you informed the day care groups what your subsidy level is going to be for this year; have you given to all of them the financial indications of what your funding is going to be?

(2115)

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well we're continuing on with the regular subsidy levels. We have informed them of the operating grant . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well it's a

brand-new program so we have written them a letter telling them about the brand-new program. We didn't inform them in '84 - 85 what the subsidy level was. That's just an ongoing thing. So I don't know what the member is getting at.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Day care operations are confused. They don't know whether there's going to be an increase in the subsidy or whether it's not going to be because you have not let them know. Indeed, you've informed them about the operating grant but the day care operations don't know whether there's an increase in the subsidy; they don't know whether there's a change in the cut-off income level for which people can qualify for subsidy. Why has your department not undertaken to let the day care operations know that there is not going to be an increase in those things?

Since you haven't, will you be soon doing that so you can clear things up?

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Well you only let them know if there is going to be a change. You don't let them know if there is not going to be a change. So we have provided them with the change information relating to the new operating grant that is coming.

Item 4 agreed to.

Items 5 to 17 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 36 agreed to.

**Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Employment Development Agency — Social Services
Employment Development Fund — vote 65**

Items 15 and 16 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1986
Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Social Services
Ordinary Expenditure - Vote 36**

Items 1 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 36 agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Dirks: — Mr. Chairman, I do want to take a moment to thank all of the officials who have assisted me, particularly Mr. Ian Wilson who has travelled down from Saskatoon with the Legal Aid Commission, the members of the Department of Social Services that are seated in the gallery who have from time to time provided assistance in these estimates, and also those senior officials who have accompanied me today in the Assembly. I've had the opportunity of working with these people in the Department of Social Services for three years now, and I certainly have been impressed with their professionalism and their dedication to the task that the people of Saskatchewan have given to them.

Mr. Tchorzewski: — Mr. Chairman, I too want to extend our appreciation to the officials for providing the answers to the minister. I'm not going to comment about his answers to the opposition; we've made that point. But

certainly I know the amount of work that goes into preparing it for estimates by departmental people, and on behalf of the opposition, we extend our appreciation, and we look forward to the answers being provided to those questions which we have asked and for which the minister was not able to provide the answers but has undertaken to send them to us at some future time, as soon as possible.

**Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Labour
Ordinary Expenditure - Vote 20**

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman, yes. I have my deputy, Mr. Phil Richards and behind me I have my assistant deputy, Henry Kutarna, and next to him from administration, Mr. Pat More; and from labour standards, Marg Rappolt and some other assistants from various departments who are here in the Chamber to assist us. And they've been getting ready for a large part of the evening, and they're ready to proceed.

Item 1

Mr. Shillington: — — Mr. Minister, will you give me the names, salaries and the positions of your personal staff?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — — We have a ministerial assistant D, which is actually my chief secretary, Brenda Syhlonyk who has been with the department for quite a while. I inherited her from the former minister. I inherited her from Gordon Snyder, so she's quite experienced . . . (inaudible) . . . she's quite experienced, and she makes 2,179 a month. Margaret Peterson, doesn't have quite as much seniority, she makes 1,828 per month. Donald Spice, ministerial assistant 4 — 3,293; and James Goliath, ministerial assistant 2, at 2,353. Their increases don't seem to be very large. We can send it over for you to look at.

Mr. Shillington: — — It sounds, Mr. Minister, like a fairly modest staff. How I wish other members of the cabinet were as frugal as you are with the public purse . . . (inaudible) . . . Oh yes, indeed, you are. This government came into office paying the highest salary for personal staff in Canada by any provincial government and you continue that.

It appears, Mr. Minister, that you have set some sort of a different standard for yourself, and that is . . . you are to be congratulated. I hope that some of the comments that I hear are not accurate. I hope it's not merely inexperience. I hope this remains a facet of your term as minister although it's apt to be a bit brief, I say.

Mr. Minister, I would appreciate it if you can get me these answers in writing; they don't necessarily need to be read out. I would appreciate the salary and the increases in pay of your senior officers of your department.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — — We'll get you a copy and send it over; we've got it ready for you.

Mr. Shillington: — — Mr. Minister, does it include any increases?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — There are increases of 3 per cent. In addition, if anyone was promoted, of course, they were paid according to the salary scale that they were promoted to. So the increases are 3 per cent across the board.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, are these pay increases in addition to incremental steps in the grid? I'm looking now at the first document you gave me with respect to your personal staff. Are these pay increases in addition to incremental steps on the grid, or are these all that this staff gets in terms of pay increases over the last 12 months?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — You're speaking with respect to my personal staff?

Mr. Shillington: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — The increases include any increments if they were moved up in a particular division. Of course this works similar to the system in Education, that if you have more seniority or if you move into a different increment, you get your increment plus the regular increase which was about 3 per cent, which I felt was quite generous. However, all the other workers in the government got the 3 per cent, so I felt it was fair that my staff get the same sort of increase.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, can you tell me the date when these increases were given and whether or not they were retroactive to any other date?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — The question you've asked, the answer is being presented to you on the copy . . . The increases are effective January 1, 1986. So to that extent they might be retroactive as of today. But those are the pay increases on January 1, '86.

(2130)

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, would you give me the details of your out-of-province travel? This is something you may be able to give me off the top of your head. It may not amount to very much, or it may be something that you want to provide in writing. We're not going to finish these estimates tonight, so you may . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, we're not. So you may want to provide this in writing tomorrow, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well, my out-of-province trips is, I went to Edmonton with respect to legislative review, and I don't know how much it cost. It wasn't very much — the price of a ticket and a hotel for two nights. I went to Winnipeg to meet the vice-president of CN Rail with respect to a labour situation. I don't know how much it cost because I forgot to put in my expenses, so as soon as I tally it up and put those expenses in — I drove my CVA vehicle to Winnipeg, and I stayed in a hotel two nights, so you can figure out the rates. It wasn't very much.

Mr. Shillington: — Well, I must say there's a sharp contrast between the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, the government House Leader.

Mr. Minister, I want to ask you a question with respect to

the bankruptcy legislation. I'm looking at a clipping of the globe and Mail; virtually the same story was carried in the Leader-Post. There was some concern expressed by the labour movement about changes with respect to a report which recommended changes in The Bankruptcy Act. The Hon. Minister Côté stated that he was (a) surprised at the concern, but (b) wanted to discuss the matter with provincial people who he . . . this is dated June 3, 1986, and he stated that he had those discussions and that there was concern expressed. I would appreciate a comment from yourself, Mr. Minister, what your expressed view was?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well in this fairly recent development, on June 2nd there was a meeting in Ottawa — the Consumer and Commercial Affairs ministers. And as you know, I haven't travelled outside of the prairies, so I wasn't there, but they're working on this to see if they can find a solution to the problem. In bankruptcy, as you know, you and I being lawyers, it's rather difficult to find someone to collect the money from, even if it's owed on wages, but the federal people are working on the problem. We're not taking a final position until the federal people have come out with their position and what their solution might be.

Mr. Shillington: — I don't think that's quite the problem. The problem has not to do with whether or not a bankrupt firm can pay wages; the problem has to do with reorganizations under chapter 11 of the U.S. bankruptcy code.

Under that chapter, firms can be reorganized and the courts have the jurisdiction to abrogate labour contracts and indeed, they have the right to decertify unions. If a company can persuade a court that that's what it's going to take to get them operating again, the court has that power, and the power is used quite frequently to reorganize companies. It was that section and the power of a court to set the terms of reorganization, which includes the abrogation of a collective agreement, that the labour movement in this country found offensive. And indeed it's been quite controversial in the U.S. It has been used in the majority of cases to set lower wage rates. And I wonder, Mr. Minister, if we could have a comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — I think you're exactly right. You've been watching a lot of American television, and that's predominantly an American problem and an eastern Canadian problem where they welcome industry into Ontario, and therefore they have companies that can go bankrupt.

But in Saskatchewan, where so far we've only got 15 public companies, it hasn't been a big problem. And we will follow this because under our government we are now getting some development going in Saskatchewan, and 10 years from now it may become a problem. But it certainly isn't a problem right now. We're concerned now with getting the jobs here, and we don't anticipate a lot of bankruptcies in Saskatchewan under our government in the next 10 or 12 years.

Mr. Shillington: — I don't believe chapter 11 is restricted to public companies. It is public companies one hears

about, Penn Central and so on, but I don't think it's restricted to that. It's available to any company and, I think, is used for private companies.

Mr. Minister, I would appreciate, rather than the rhetoric about how grand and glorious things are on the prairies, I would appreciate a statement about this government's position with respect to what I think is an important issue, one which your opinion has been sought by the federal government. And I would hope that you'd provide a position, Mr. Minister, and I would hope that your position as Minister of Labour would be to defend the interests of labour.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well first of all, I want you to get something quite clear. My duty is to defend the interests of workers. If you're referring to labour being the labour leaders who support your party, I really have no desire to support them. But the workers will be protected. And you're dealing with something that is hypothetical to the nth degree because you're referring to a law that now exists in the United State. The federal government is considering whether that type of a bankruptcy loss should be implemented in Canada. And our position would be that the workers be protected. It's not a tradition in Canada that you can use a bankruptcy law to get around a collective agreement. And we are stricter with our continuation of a company. So I would think Section 36, I believe, or is it 37 — Section 37 in our Act would most likely cover it.

But since we are several years away from the problem, we will keep an eye on it, and we will make sure that the workers are protected. So don't start bringing the American situation to Canada. People don't care what's going on in the United States. They're worried about what's happening in Saskatchewan. It's not a problem here and it's not going to be.

Mr. Shillington: — This is a difficult time to educate the minister in his portfolio. But if the minister took any interest in the area of labour relations, you would know that an accounting firm in Toronto has for the last year or so been acting as an advisory committee to the minister. They have brought forth a report to the minister in some levels of government, unlike this, that report was made public federally. The report by the firm — and I'll give you the name if it would be of any assistance to you — Gary Colter has recommended that Chapter 11 be incorporated into our Bankruptcy Act.

This is why what is now happening in Tennessee and Arkansas and New York State has become an issue in Canada, because of an advisory firm set up by the minister to study the Bankruptcy Act has recommended be adopted. The minister has asked for the views of the provincial governments.

so I'd appreciate if the minister would come down off his high horse, answer these questions; they are legitimate questions. I am not terribly interested in what's happening in the U.S., but I am interested in what's happening in Canada and Saskatchewan, and these questions pertain to that.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well, I just answered. I told you it's

purely hypothetical. There's a proposal in eastern Canada and it's being considered. It's being considered, and it is not an immediate problem now. And I've told you, our position simply is that the Bankruptcy Act should not be used to circumvent the Trades Union Act and a collective agreement that exists.

Now is that . . . Do I have to make it any clearer for you? Is that quite clear? And it's all we have here is the traditional NDP doom and gloom scenario here — that's there is doom and gloom on the horizon. You're trying to scare people, and there's nothing to worry about.

Mr. Shillington: — Well, Mr. Minister, you didn't say that before. That's the first time you have said that your government is opposed to any changes to the Bankruptcy Act which would enable labour collective agreement to be abrogated, and I thank you for that. I regret that it took six full minutes to either get the minister to understand the question, or to get him to answer it.

Mr. Minister, I would like to turn to the problem which has arisen with respect to section 11(1)(m). The problem is obvious, Mr. Minister, you brought forth a Bill which now sits, I believe, in first reading. I believe it was given first reading but has not been given second reading — indeed hasn't, I don't believe, been moved by the minister. I don't believe you've moved second reading of it.

I'd be interested, Mr. Minister, and so would a goodly number of other businesses and labour people in Saskatchewan — I'd be interested in knowing what this government's plans are with respect to the problems which have arisen with respect to 11(1)(m).

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well, the hon. member knows — you've been in this Assembly a lot longer than I have — that that Bill is before the Assembly and should not be the subject of a debate in estimates. But I will try to give you some direction on that, and that is, it is here, and we will get into this on second reading shortly, and you will have a chance to speak your piece.

But it's quite clear that the labour leaders were trying to stir up unrest and concern, needless concern, among the public, and it hasn't been working. There were one or two employers who were showing signs of possibly abusing the labour situation. We've brought the Bill here and, as for all intents and purposes, cured that because it's clarified to them what the law really is. And we will pass the Bill in due course, and you won't have any doom and gloom to talk about. So it's going to be a disappointing summer for you.

Mr. Shillington: — Well, it's going to be a disappointing summer, but only because this government didn't have the nerve to call an election. However, I doubt that the fall will be that disappointing.

Mr. Minister, are you saying, unequivocally, it is your intention to pass this legislation before this session prorogues?

Let us take a wild flight of optimism here and suppose the legislature adjourned in two weeks. Is the minister saying

unequivocally, no matter when the legislature adjourns, that Bill is going to pass? Because if it is, then I'm going to go on to a different subject.

I may say that it doesn't meet, I think, the hopes of the trade union movement. I don't think it meets the expectations of the business community. I frankly don't know who you're pleasing with the amendment. But perhaps you think it's history; perhaps you think history will be kinder to you than your contemporaries.

Mr. Minister, I just would like an unequivocal statement that the Bill is going to pass; it's slated by the government as part of the government program to pass in this session.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well if you're in favour of the Bill, why don't you move it to the Non-Controversial Bills Committee?

Mr. Shillington: — No one ever said it was uncontroversial. I just finished saying it meets the expectations of no one. I have been in receipt of correspondence from the chamber of commerce in Regina and, I think, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce condemning the legislation. I have been in receipt of correspondence from the trade union movement condemning the legislation. So I would doubt that it would be an appropriate candidate for Non-Controversial Bills Committee.

I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you want to deal with the question instead of these silly answers. Do you intend to move it before the end of this session?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well I intend to proceed with the Bill. But you've indicated now that you're opposed to the Bill, and I expect that you may delay the Bill, so I don't know how fast we can proceed on the Bill. But we intend to follow its course and continue with the Bill.

I find it very unusual. The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour has denounced the Bill and is not in favour of the Bill, and so I really don't understand your position as to what you wish to have. It was our opinion that the Bill was a compromise that was reasonable. It seems to me that neither side wants a reasonable compromise, and I'd like to know from you and the NDP which side you're on.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, if you move it, you'll find out. I want to know, Mr. Minister. I cannot tell you the matter has not been decided on in our caucus. Whether we have not decided whether this piece of legislation is better than nothing at all, I guess that's the question.

There's no question, I think, but what, if we were in office, we could find if you people would have called the election when you should have, there would be a new administration. And I think we would have found the solution which would not have offended everyone on the horizon.

So I take it, Mr. Minister, that you intend to pass the legislation before the end of session. Would you just say yes to that, just so I could get an unequivocal answer to this.

(2145)

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well, the member opposite and I used to be in the same party, in the same government. And I haven't forgotten that in 1972 the trade union leaders came to that government and said: here, pass this Act — and they did. They didn't say there's anything wrong with it; it's not fair. They didn't say anything like that. They said, how fast do you want it passed?

So we know who owns the NDP. And we know exactly what they would do. But we don't know what they would do in this case because they have a hidden agenda again, and they won't give us their hidden agenda. I challenge you to give us your hidden agenda. You have put Bills here — private members' Bills, into the House — but you haven't on this subject. Bring us your proposal for a reasonable solution to this problem.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Minister, I wish you would talk to the House Leader. We have three tax Bills which we would dearly like to proceed with, but which you have never let us get to, because every Tuesday, when we've said we want to deal with them, we wound up dealing with some silly resolutions instead of these tax Bills.

Mr. Minister, I take it from your refusal to answer the question and from the fact that the Bill has sat in the first stage of second reading for some 57 sitting days of . . . that Bills was introduced very close to the opening of this session. I take it, Mr. Minister, that you don't intend to move with the Bill at this current session. I take your equivocation, Mr. Minister, to mean that you don't intend to deal with the Bill.

I say that's regrettable, Mr. Minister, because it is a problem which needs resolving.

The decision of the Labour Relations Board, whether or not it was correct in law, is most unfortunate. It puts a trade union in the position of often having to call an early strike, a premature strike, if they want to avoid getting caught in the jaws of this particular legislation.

Mr. Minister, you stated that the Act had not been used; in fact, it has. It was used by an employer who heretofore had been thought of as one of the more responsible employers — Canada Safeway — with a good record. If Canada Safeway will use it in a pinch, with their labour relations record, then I suppose the trade union movement might be forgiven for saying that anyone would.

I think it's regrettable, Mr. Minister, that you weren't able to find a solution to this problem. It's regrettable, Mr. Minister, that you have come to this Assembly with an amendment which has offended everyone. I take it from your equivocation you're not going to be dealing with it, and that's unfortunate. This problem really needs to be resolved. The decision of the Labour Relations Board was, I think, patently unwise.

Mr. Minister, I want to deal with a report which you received and which you were good enough to give me with respect to video-display terminals. It is, Mr. Minister, an area which the member may or may not be aware I've

had some interest in. I've moved, I think, three or four private Bills on video-display terminals. I've read your report, Mr. Minister. I think it's short of what is necessary, but it would be an improvement. And I wonder, Mr. Minister, what is your intention with respect to the recommendations contained in that report?

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — Well I say to the NDP member for Regina Centre — is it? — that I'm disappointed you've gone off the topic of that Bill, because I'd like to see your hidden agenda on labour. I'd like to see you talk about tax Bills. I'd like to see your hidden agenda on taxation. You people live in the past and in the history of this province, and you go back to the 30's and you say, oh, I remember the Conservatives in the 30's. Well I wasn't even born then, so don't start that.

But my father remembers, and he remembers Tommy Douglas' hidden agenda when he raised the sales tax — when he said, that is an evil tax, quote; it's unfair, it will be gone — and after he was elected he raised it. And so that's your hidden tax agenda, and I think you should lay it out on the table. I think you should lay your labour agenda out on the table. I've put my Bill on the table. You say it's wholly inadequate, but you won't come and tell us what you think should be done because you have a hidden agenda, and that is the history of your party to operate on hidden agendas.

The only open agenda you ever had was the *Regina Manifesto*. That's the only one you ever laid out. And this is nothing new. I remember 1975, when I helped you, and you, and you get re-elected. And you never ever, every said one word about buying potash mines. Not one. I remember going to my last NDP convention in 1976 and saying, don't buy those holes in the ground. So I'm really waiting for your hidden agenda. If you want to go out and scare people with the unknown — what you people say and what you're planning, you know, it's causing people to fuel up their tanks just in case, because they're going to have to seek political asylum if you're ever the government.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Chairman, this is a new approach to estimates. It's a brand-new approach to estimates, for the minister to insist that the opposition deal with problems which they were elected to solve. It really is a new approach to estimates. I haven't heard that used before. I suppose, Mr. Minister, it's one way of avoiding an issue.

Let me say with respect to section 11(1)(m), I'm not sure what we would do with it, we don't have the resources you do in your department. I'm going to get to it tomorrow. I think you're short of resources in that department. But nevertheless, you have the department, you have the resources, and the people — we simply don't. It is not the role of the opposition to lay before the Assembly solutions to problems. It is the role of the opposition to act as critics and to offer alternative to the government at a time of an election.

I say, Mr. Minister, I'm not sure what I'd do with section 11(1)(m); I don't have the resources you do. You have the resources, and you have the job, and you have the portfolio, and I would suggest, Mr. Minister, that you

either answer the question as to whether or not you're going to move it or deal with the next issue I raised, but I suggest it's not a very fruitful approach for you to be insisting that we solve the problems you were elected to deal with.

Let me say in passing, with respect to section 11(1)(m), it was introduced in the legislation during the 1960s, before either the Blakeney government or yours . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh no, it wasn't. It was introduced in the '60s; it has been there for a long period of time, Mr. Minister. However, where it came from is irrelevant. The point is labour and management alike thought they knew the meaning of that section. It was interpreted in a given manner for many, many years — I'm not sure how many — I'm not sure how many years, but it was interpreted for many, many years, and then it was changed. The issue is not when did the problem arise. I guess in a very real sense the problem arose in 1985 with that decision.

Mr. Minister, I'd ask you to either deal with the question as to whether or not you're going to move section 11(1)(m) or go on and answer my question with respect to video display terminals. But if you're going to insist, Mr. Minister, that we answer and deal with all of the issues which you were elected to solve, these estimates are going to take a mighty long time.

Hon. Mr. Schmidt: — I was going to tell you about video display terminals, but the misrepresentations that you've made here cause me to make a correction for the public here that this section, The Trade Union Act that you introduced, that has never been replaced, was brought in in 1972. And a similar section appeared in 1966. When the union leaders said to you, enact this Trade Union Act, you enacted this — and I've got to solve your problems — and not only do I have to solve your problems, but you don't even know how I should solve your problems. You caused this mess, and you don't even know how to solve it.

In any event, video display terminals, first of all . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You have to be corrected again. It's not my report. It was the committee's report that had a broad cross-section of people, some of them very left-leaning people, and they had a close look at it. We had right-wingers, left-wingers, and good old, down-the-centre type people. And they had a look at it, and they came out with a report that was not nearly as serious as the doom and gloom you had been predicting for five or six years. All of the research around the world — and we don't have a monopoly on the video display terminal in this country — I would think Japan and the United States and western Europe have a few thousand or million more than we have in Saskatchewan, and all of this research indicates that there is no danger to the user. There is discomfort, and there are some nuisances attached to the use of this machine, and we've made some of those corrections, and the report has recommended corrections. But there is no danger.

And you are predicting danger for years and years — that these are dangerous machines. That's because you would like to get back to the old quill pen with thousands of people scribing away. You don't like technology; you don't like change. I don't know why your party is

considered revolutionary because you're the most reactionary group of people I've ever seen. They don't want any technological change; you don't want any innovations to cause efficiency. Just do it the way it's always been done. We want double the pay and half the hours and new quill pens, that's your attitude.

Your attitude is that hardly anybody works but everybody shares, and society doesn't operate that way. So video display terminals . . . Again I have to correct you. First of all, it's not my report, it's the committee's report. Secondly, they are not dangerous, but there are some problems, and the report has dealt with the problems.

Mr. Shillington: — Well, Mr. Minister, you have really set a new high bench water mark in terms of silliness. Mr. Minister, all I can say is I sincerely regret that the member from Yorkton has left the Chamber because I think that we owe him an apology.

An Hon. Member: — He's there.

Mr. Shillington: — Ah yes, indeed he is. He was described by me and a number of other people as the worst Labour minister in the history of the province. Mr. Minister, he wasn't; he wasn't. The silliness with which you have proceeded with your estimates tonight suggest that the harsh condemnations of your ministry, which are already coming forth from those for whom you are supposed to be serving, are well-founded.

First of all, Mr. Minister, you accuse us of adopting legislation written by Nadine Hunt. She was not president of the Federation of Labour then, nor was that the process, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, you insist upon turning these estimates into some sort of circus . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member from Prince Albert, who has been here for three years, still apparently doesn't know the rules. One of the problems, Mr. Minister, is that the Conservatives . . .

Until it is 10 o'clock I have the floor and the House Leader is out of order. At 10 o'clock you may rise and I have to sit down. But for two more minutes I am going to tell the Minister of Labour what a jackass he's making out of himself here this evening.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — And if he continues to act like a jackass, then these estimates are going to take a long time.

Mr. Minister, the questions which we put to you were questions of a serious nature. We asked, Mr. Minister, for your position on some relevant issues to the trade union movement. I make no apologies for asking questions on behalf of the trade union movement.

I don't think, Mr. Minister, you or your predecessor in office have any idea of what a trade union is. A trade union is a voluntary association of workers who voluntarily agree to form a trade union; and at any time a majority of them don't want it, there's a relatively effective mechanism, Mr. Minister, for setting it aside.

Mr. Minister, you and your predecessor seem to believe that trade unions are instruments of oppression for those who belong to them. You act as if . . . members opposite use the word trade union bosses in a very pejorative sense . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member from Prince Albert-Duck Lake has used it as much as any one does. The member from Prince Albert-Duck Lake, the member from Regina Rosemont, and other members are continually referring to the leaders of the trade union movement as trade union bosses. And they spit it out as if it were a dirty word.

I say, Mr. Minister, that the trade union movement have been ill-served by this government, in large part because you do not understand what the trade union movement is. It is a voluntary association of workers who have banded together to promote their interests. You seem to believe, Mr. Minister, it's some sort of an evil dictatorship imposed from abroad.

I said the House Leader had to wait till 10 o'clock. It's now 10 o'clock. If you wish, you may rise and adjourn the House.

Hon. Mr. McLeod: — Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure if I should say thank you. Mr. Chairman, when I tried to rise a minute or two earlier, it was only to save the member from Regina Centre from making a fool himself in front of all of those thousands out there. Mr. Chairman, I move the committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:04 p.m.