

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Martin: — Mr. Speaker, you'll recall a few days ago I had the pleasure to introduce to you, and to the members of the House, a number of students from the province of Quebec who are at the University of Regina. Well today we have another group of students, adult students, from the province of Quebec who are at the University of Regina, doing the bilingual studies program. And, Mr. Speaker, with them are Robin Ross, the teacher; Estelle Wilcott, Sandra Butel, and the bus driver, Preston Parker.

I want to say to you that we are indeed welcome for you to be here. Bienvenue à Saskatchewan. Amusez-vous bien. And I'd like to ask the Minister of Culture to speak to you in your first tongue.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Maxwell: — Merci, Monsieur le président. À nos visiteurs, en effet nos amis de la belle province, bienvenue à la législature et à Régina. C'est un plaisir pour moi, au nom du premier ministre et du gouvernement, de vous accueillir ici aujourd'hui. Et, Monsieur le président, puis-je dire que j'aime beaucoup l'accord Meech Lake. Bienvenue et bonne chance.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I join with the members on the government side of the House in welcoming our guests from Quebec. I feel very much attached to the folk who come from Quebec and study at the University of Regina. My daughter graduated *mention bilingue* from the *centre bilingue* at the University of Regina. My wife has studied there.

One of the students lived at our house . . . stayed on and lived at our house for some time, a student from *Disraeli*, down by Thetford Mines, and we have had many happy relationships with the students from Quebec who were studying at the University of Regina. And I join in welcoming them here to Regina and to Saskatchewan. Bienvenue a Regina; bienvenue a Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Saskatchewan Prescription Drugs Plan

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I direct my question to the Premier, in absence of the Minister of Health, and it has to do with the dismantling of the Saskatchewan prescription drug plan, and the kind of hurt that this decision has inflicted on thousands of Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Premier, I have here a letter from a Regina family with

a three-and-a-half-year-old daughter who has to take drugs four times a day to overcome a serious allergic reaction to a number of different foods. Without medication the child is very vulnerable to serious infection and has been hospitalized a number of times.

Under the drug plan as announced, this family will have to pay out about \$1,700 a year up front for their daughter's medication. And I ask the premier: are you able to say to that family that the changes in the drug plan which you have made are fair, just, and compassionate?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that under the drug plan in Saskatchewan, if there are unique situations, that they will be covered, as they are in the province of Manitoba, which I understand is the best drug program anywhere in Canada, next to ours, which will be the best.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, if there is a unique drug situation where children, or anybody else for that matter, has a situation that means it's going to be long-term or chronic care, has been dealt with in another jurisdiction quite fairly. And the hon. member probably knows better than to just frighten people in saying it's going to be a \$1,700 bill because you have a child, for example, that is going to have a drug problem, and now they're going to have to pay it all. He knows better than that. I mean he can go ahead and frighten people if he likes, but the program is sensitive to specific needs, and I would be very happy if he could give that specific example to the Minister of Health, as they have in the province of Manitoba. And they address specific needs if in fact they are long-run or chronic or unique, and it's worked very well.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I did nothing to frighten this person. This person wrote to me, and I have never heard of this person before she wrote. Mr. Minister, she outlines . . . Mr. Premier, she outlines that she'll have to put up \$1,700 up front. One hundred and twenty five dollars of that is gone; that's her deductible. Beyond that she will get back at some point in the future, presumably, 80 per cent. But 20 per cent of \$1,700 is \$315. So she's got \$440 a year that this woman is going to have to pay out for her child.

Now those are the hard facts which come from the figures you have announced. How can you call that an improved drug plan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the hon. Member to give me the name of the pharmacist; give me the name of the individual. I mean, if he was sincere about it, Mr. Speaker, he could have provided me with the information before question period. All he's doing is grandstanding. If he wants to give me the information — I have asked for letters — I'll call him on it today. I've asked for letters from the opposition. . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order. Order. I'd like to ask the members to please not interrupt the Premier

when he's answering the question. He was on the topic and trying to answer the question, but I'm sure . . . Order. I'm sure nobody could hear him. So just please restrain yourselves.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — I just say to the hon. members, I asked him to forward names to the Minister of Health or names to me, and Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member now to give me the child's name, give me the pharmacist's name, and we will deal with it. But I haven't received them. All I get from time to time is people standing up trying to frighten people.

Now, if you're really concerned, provide the information. Provide the information so we can deal with it. Rather than just frighten somebody, bring the information here and we can examine it, and then we can both deal with it.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I don't propose to traipse names of citizens who were in trouble in this legislature.

But, Mr. Premier, with respect to the information which I have already provided to the Minister of Health — not on the issue because this is a new one, but on other similar ones — will you see that the Minister of Health or his deputy replies, giving us what your proposal is to deal with these exceptional circumstances? Because I haven't had any answer yet and I ask you. . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — My question to you, sir, is: have you seen a single answer, in writing, sent by the Minister of Health to anybody who has brought forward a so-called unique situation respecting the drug program? Just one — just one.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, the hon. member brings a case before the public today, and then he says that he won't give the information to me because it's in the legislature. He said you wouldn't put it in the legislature . . . (inaudible interjections). . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order. Order, please, order. Once more we are getting vociferous interruptions and nobody can hear what the answer is.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, maybe we can calm the opposition down a little bit, okay? We'll calm them down a little bit.

All I want from you, and all you want from me, is the following . . . (inaudible interjections). . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Just order, please. Order please. I'm sorry to have to interrupt again, but once more the Premier in this case is being interrupted, And we're trying to hear the answer, but were having difficulty.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Let me reinterpret the question. If the hon. member wants assistance and response to these individual cases, which I assume that he does, if the members opposite or anybody else in the public will give us the names of the individuals, we will examine

cases and we will deal with them, as they have in Manitoba, as quickly as we can determine all the circumstances around their health care problems.

And if the minister has not responded to occasions that the opposition has brought forward, I would encourage him to respond as quickly as he can. Obviously they have to talk with the medical staff and with the pharmacists, and with the individuals. They'll do that as quickly as possible. Our intent is to deal, in all sincerity, as quickly as we can with unique circumstances, and we will do that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Premier would outline the policy which you have with respect to so-called unique cases. There are a goodly number, and I've had a significant number. What principals will be applied? What tests is the Minister of Health using so that we can advise the constituents and others who asks us whether they likely qualify as unique?

Obviously you can't be totally definitive. That's the essence of unique. But you certainly can outline the general principals. I am asking — and I am asking my constituents — is their income relevant? Is the amount that they spend for month relevant? What are the relevant criteria? What information do we need to send in order to get an answer? — none of which we've received to date.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, a couple of observations. The hon. member knows now that people on social services and low income are covered. I mean he knows that. So he shouldn't raise the fact that there is no income consideration. It's already been in and designed.

People in nursing homes, Mr. Speaker, are the same. People in nursing homes have the same. But if you are on welfare, if you are on welfare in this province, you are covered. If you're a senior citizen in a nursing home you are covered. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. member knows. . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order, please. The Premier is attempting to answer the question. He's on the topic. He's being continuously interrupted, again, and I'm just asking the members to please refrain and allow the answer to come forth to the people.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, the opposition behaves as it usually does, particularly when children are here in the Assembly. They can't seem to sit and listen to a response. I will say it again.

People that are on welfare are already protected, and he knows that. People that are . . . senior citizens in nursing homes are protected. Under the Manitoba program where we're getting advice — and you can certainly monitor if you like and maybe even a phone call would get you the information.

You look at alternatives, lower cost alternatives. There

may be generic alternatives that would be provided to people. In the Manitoba situation, they've examined a whole range of things that they could do under unique circumstances. Now, Mr. Speaker, the opposition . . . (inaudible interjections) . . . Listen to them, Mr. Speaker, they talk and they talk and they talk, because they can't stand to listen to an answer.

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Obviously there's a great uneasiness about the answer to the question and some question of whether it's on the topic or not. But, I believe, in essence, the Premier is on the topic, and I believe the records will show that the supplementary covered a fairly wide range of areas to answer, and possibly that combination is causing the problem. So I would just like to ask the Premier to quickly now finish his question, to answer his question, if he wishes, or else we'll move on to the next question. I recognize the member for Saskatoon Westmount.

Ms. Atkinson: — Saskatoon, Nutana, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, for your information, Mr. Premier, this family has called the Minister of Health's office. And what did the Minister of Health's staff say to this family? Let's listen. They said if things are a little tight at the end of the month, shop around and maybe some pharmacy will give you some credit. Is that your response? Is that your response, to turn corner drug stores into loan companies and sick people into beggars. Is that the response . . . (inaudible) . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I will not take at face value the information that the hon. member provides. I will review it. If the hon. member will give me the names of the family, the child, the pharmacist, and the doctors, then we'll review it. But if she stands up in here and makes it up — if she stands in here, Mr. Speaker, and will not provide it to the public, will not provide it to me, but just grandstand and stand there so that she can put herself on television, as opposed to really dealing with the issue, then that's unfair to the people, Mr. Speaker. That's unfair.

If she wants to provide us with the information, then we will respond, Mr. Speaker. And if they're afraid to provide it because they'd rather just make an issue in the House, that's their problem, and they're going to have to deal with it in the public.

Reimbursement Through Drug Plan

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Premier, I'm not grandstanding. There are hundreds of people in the same situation.

New question. Mr. Premier, about two weeks ago, or about three weeks ago, a number of pharmacists received a document from your officials, and that document said the drug plan would try to reimburse families their prescription drug costs within 25 to 30 days. However, there have been some suggestions that reimbursement won't occur for maybe three or four months.

Do you expect people to go to their druggist and beg for credit while they wait anxiously for repayment of their drug bills under the plan? And why can't you advise people who can't afford the money up front what they should do? Why don't you come clean with the population of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I really believe that the hon. member should come clean with the public of Saskatchewan. And if she's concerned about the various kind of things that she has raised, then she could provide the government with information, and we would respond. And it's not true that it's going to be months and months before the response will come back. It's not the case, Mr. Speaker, and she has raised it.

We will make every effort to make it as quick a reply and responsive repayment as possible, as they have, Mr. Speaker, in other jurisdictions like Manitoba. Now if it works in Manitoba under a NDP administration, what's wrong with the NDP over there saying, well, my gosh, it's been quite a healthy program in the neighbouring province?

Why are they standing here trying to frighten people when they're not over there frightening people in Manitoba? Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because they don't care, Mr. Speaker. All they are is being partisan. They don't really care about the people — just like high interest rates; just like farmers, they don't care at all.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Minister, this is not the imagination of the opposition. This is not a minor problem; it's a major problem. Your own material admits that over 72,000 senior citizens and senior citizen families will be affected; that over 128,000 other families will be affected; that they will purchase more than the deductible in terms of prescription drugs. That's tens of millions of dollars out of people's pockets. And yet, what does your government do? You spend \$20 million a . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. I believe that the preamble to your supplementary is getting too long, and I would like to ask you to shorten your preamble. I think you've gone on long enough, frankly, and put your question.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Premier, you're prepared to spend \$ 20 million on political advertising, \$10 million on political hacks for your cabinet. Why don't you cut your expenditures and reintroduce the real drug plan of this province?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would just have to respond and look at the record of the previous government here to know that she is completely unfair when she's making her allegations.

This month, Mr. Speaker, to senior citizens, 106,000 senior citizens are receiving up to \$40 million in cheques

that they never received under the NDP — \$500 to every senior citizen, \$700-and-some to couples. Now the NDP never provided that.

Mr. Speaker, let me point out as well: under the NDP low-income people paid a gas tax. They paid tax on utilities. They paid tax on clothes. They even paid, Mr. Speaker, in terms of fees for extra billing. The members opposite didn't remove the fees for extra billing. They didn't have a heritage program. They taxed the seniors in retail sales. Mr. Speaker, again I say, they don't care at all; it's all rhetoric. The real people that care are on this side of the House, and that's why were elected and they're over there.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Youth Unemployment in Saskatchewan

Mr. Martin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order, order, please. Order, please. Order, please. The members know full well that any member in the House has the right to ask a question. I recognize . . . Order, please; order, order. I recognize the member for Regina Wascana.

Mr. Martin: — Mr. Speaker. . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please; order. Order. All members, even though they're objecting, know the rules of the House. And all members know that every member in this House has the right to ask a question. I recognize . . . Order, please; order, order. I recognize the member for Regina Wascana.

Mr. Martin: — I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, and besides, I'm one of the new guys in the House. Mr. Speaker, accuracy and fairness are words that are unknown to the members of the opposition.

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order, Order, please. Order! Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Now we're having a little difficulty here this morning, but I'm sure we can get through it if we all try to co-operate. I would like to ask the member from Regina Wascana to get on to his question.

Mr. Martin: — I will get to the question. Like everyone else in this country, I'm concerned about unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. I have a question for the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Is it true that the actual unemployed youth in the province of Saskatchewan is 13,000 people, and if so, what are you doing about it?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm . . . I am . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order! Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. I'd like to caution the member from Regina North that I hardly sat down — or, Moose Jaw, yes, I'm sorry — Moose Jaw North. Order, please. Order, please.

I'd like to caution the member from Moose Jaw North that I hardly sat down and already he was hollering. Now I'm just asking for the co-operation of the members. Just be quiet a little bit. That's all I'm asking, and let the Premier answer his question.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, today the unemployment statistics come out for not only the province of Saskatchewan but indeed the whole country. I'm happy to respond to the hon. members question, with respect to unemployment locally and for the youth.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan now has the second lowest unemployment in all of Canada, and we're very proud of that. As a result of difficult economic conditions our unemployment now is 6.4 per cent actual and adjusted to 7.3.

With respect to youth, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that there have been 6,000 new jobs created in the province of Saskatchewan for young people — 6,000 more people working today than there was a month ago. And I'm very proud of that.

And, Mr. Speaker, what I'm particularly proud about is the following: is that unemployment rate among women is 7. . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Please finish your answer. Order. Order, please. Order, please.

I would like to ask the members to stop interfering once more. Unfortunately, I've had to do that a number of times this morning, which I don't particularly like to do because it's using up question period.

I would like to ask the Premier to finish his answer, please.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the opposition would bear with us as we review these important information statistics. Mr. Speaker, I just want to reiterate that unemployed youth . . . new jobs for youth are up to 6,000; 6,000 more young people are working in Saskatchewan among young people than a month ago, which is very positive.

Mr. Speaker, let me make the point where I'm very proud, is that the lowest rate for unemployment for women any place in Canada is in the province of Saskatchewan at 7.1 per cent, ahead of Ontario and Manitoba. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Policy Regarding Prince Albert Regional Community College

Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister of advanced education and manpower, and my question is, that in view of your reputation of slashing education, are you willing to give this House a commitment in respect to the staff at the Prince Albert Regional Community College?

The administrator, the director of administration says that

the staff and the board have been treated with scorn, disdain, and with untruth, and that they've been told over and over again that they would be consulted with and they would have a part to play in this, they were not listened to, and that you have no intention of listening.

Will you give this House today a commitment that the jobs of the staff at Prince Albert Regional Community College will be protected, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Mr. Speaker, we have given the same commitment to the staff, the management, and the board at the Prince Albert Community College as we have given to the boards and staff of community colleges in the other three urban centres — Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Regina.

As I said in the House earlier this week, for the most part the process there in terms of the amalgamation has gone relatively smoothly. It's unfortunate that such was not the case in Prince Albert. But certainly, when it comes to the staff, that's one of the reasons why we must continue to move on with this, Mr. Speaker, is because we do not to see them placed.

And secondly, and perhaps equally important, if not more importantly, we want to proceed, Mr. Speaker, to get the new institute up and running because it's the students as well that we have great concern over in terms of having that programming ready for this fall, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lautermilch: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, if your commitment to the staff at Prince Albert Regional Community College is the same commitment that you gave to the people who were fired from the technical institutes, it's just simply not good enough. My supplementary is this: are you aware that because of your power grab, you've created one big deal of uncertainty in that area, and that caught in the middle are the students?

And are you also aware, Mr. Minister, that right now due to your power grab, over 50 per cent ... there's only 50 per cent enrollment in terms of the university classes that were available to the students in that area? What kind of an answer can you give to those students who've been calling and asking for answers in the past few days as to what programs you're going to be delivering from that college? What answer have you got for those students, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — We are absolutely committed, Mr. Speaker, to having the institute up and running for this fall. Programming will be on schedule as much as it can possibly be on schedule. And secondly, Mr. Speaker, I object to the use of "power grab" because certainly it is not a power grab by the department. In fact, we want to give ... we want to set up a separate board of governors for this new institute and get it out of the department, Mr. Speaker. Now that doesn't sound like a power grab to me. And secondly, Mr. Speaker, I did not ask for their

resignation. They resigned. I did not ask for their resignations.

Mr. Lautermilch: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. With your typical arrogance, you haven't been consulting with these people. And the former chairman indicates that you've been stepping on the college and on the community and on the principals that they've been fighting for over the last 20 years, and that your government is financially, morally, and it's ethically bankrupt.

And, Mr. Minister, I want to know what it's going to take to make you understand that this take-over of the community college in Prince Albert and in other cities doesn't have the support of the students, of the cities, or of the staff. What's it going to take you to understand that what you're doing is wrong, morally, ethically?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — In terms of designing the blueprint for the future, Mr. Speaker, relative to post-secondary education, over the past winter we have consulted with some 550 associations, individuals, and groups.

And I would say to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, that time and time again we have heard about these kinds of things: (a) there should be a different form of governance for our institutes; that it should no longer be an arm of the department, and that we should have a separate autonomous body to allow for better interaction with the needs of the business community; to identify and to act on where the jobs in the future are; to eliminate duplication; to eliminate out-of-date courses; in fact, Mr. Speaker to make sure that we have the tools in place to respond to the needs and the opportunities of the adult learning population as we move towards the 21st century, Mr. Speaker.

My resolve continues and will not be abated in that regard, because I will not let the people of this province down, and the adult learners in this province down, for the next two decades, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I would just like to refer all members to resolution no. 12. And in light of the resignation of the former member from Saskatoon Eastview, I would now like to declare that resolution no. 12 is dropped.

POINT OF PRIVILEGE

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before orders of the day, I rise on a question of privilege in accordance with rule 6 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*. This morning, within the prescribed time, I served you written notice of my intention to do so, as well as providing you with the matter and conclusive information pertaining to it.

My question of privilege deals with the remarks made by the member from Athabasca, July 7 in this Assembly. And

I refer to page 1013 of *Hansard*, where the member stated, as he referred to myself:

I have a letter that I wrote to him four months ago, and he still has not answered the letter. That's the type of minister that we have in Sask Housing.

Later that same day, he had the page deliver a copy of this letter to me while I was speaking in debate. Mr. Speaker, as you are aware I provided you with a copy of that letter. I also provided you with a copy of my response to the minister's letter, dated April 2, some two weeks following receipt. This, at least in my mind, becomes more than simply a dispute between two members — and I believe is a question of privilege. Based on the evidence, I will ask you to find a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege at the conclusion of my remarks.

The member from Athabasca did not provide the courtesy of saying he did not receive my response. Or he could have spoken with me privately. But he didn't. Rather, he chose to use this Assembly to strongly indicate — much to the delight of the opposition benches at the time, Mr. Speaker — that, in fact, I did not respond at all, and for the added comments, designed to disgrace and embarrass me concerning my role as minister.

Mr. Speaker, I believe most people, including some Hon. Members of this Assembly, know I take my obligation as minister very seriously. I discharge my responsibilities to the best of my abilities, regardless of the number of hours that that may take me to do. The remarks made have cast aspersions at my credibility to all members in this legislature. And it is also clearly recorded historically.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, shamefully, many times bordering in similar circumstances, members opposite seem to have stated inaccuracies, make claims that they don't . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. I'm sorry, I must intervene at that point. You must stick strictly to your grievance.

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member may have used poor verbiage. However, as for me, when a definite misleading remark is made to this Assembly about my integrity, I feel morally obligated, Mr. Speaker, to challenge that statement. And I will not be intimidated by anybody.

Mr. Speaker, I raised this question of privilege for your decision, and will send a copy of my response to the member in the event he replaced the original.

Mr. Speaker: — I would like to thank the member for Regina South for the notice which was received in my office this morning in accordance with rule 6.

Privilege, as all members know, is a very serious and very important issue. The essence of privilege or breach of privilege, has to do with the ability of a member to fulfill his responsibilities as a member. Members will also be aware that according to *Beauchesne's*, citation 19:

A dispute rising between two members, as to

allegations of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege.

I find this matter appears to be a dispute over fact. That can be settled . . . Order, please. Order! I find that this matter appears to be a dispute over fact which can be settled in the ordinary course of debate, and that it does not interfere with the member's ability to do his duty. And therefore I find that it does not constitute a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. Order, order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure Environment and Public Safety Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 9

Item 1 (continued)

Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Chairman, a question to the minister. Yesterday, Mr. Minister, you made no long-term commitment whether or not . . . you made no long-term commitment to the creation of jobs in the area of the transmission line versus the possibility of the use of sprays on the transmission line.

A lot of people, as you know, and you implied that yesterday in your reply, that people in northern Saskatchewan, with a high unemployment rate, are very, very much interested in getting those jobs in the long run, not only the short run, in regards to the transmission lines.

And a lot of them are very worried about the impact that the use of chemical spraying would have in regards to the transmission lines project, because many of them have had experience with the effects on the transmission line on the Island Falls-Flin Flon line. The utilization of chemicals there has created a lot of damages and have killed a lot of animals and also have knocked off berry picking, you know, that was done along side those roads, and so on.

When people received that information, they were very concerned then about whether or not you would make a long term commitment. Yesterday you did not make a long-term commitment. What I want to know is whether or not you will make a long term commitment to go for jobs rather than chemical spraying on those transmission lines.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I believe I answered your question yesterday. I advised you that we did not authorize anyone to spray along the transmission line, nor did we have a request to do so. Instead, the government and Sask Power have opted rather to provide jobs for northern people to clear the right of way for that particular transmission line.

As it relates to the roads, I think you would be better to ask

your question when the Department of Highways is up. We haven't authorized anyone to do spraying from our department.

Mr. Goulet: — You neglected to answer my question. My question was: is there a long-term commitment to the policy that you've started where you will hire people to clear off the lines? Will you do it in the long-term? Is this a long-term commitment?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — This department doesn't hire anyone to do that work. That's strictly under the power corporation. They have made no request to our department for the right to spray. Rather they have opted to go the other way. And I can't give you long term commitments because we are not the people doing the employment.

Mr. Goulet: — But you are the people who give the determining regulations as to whether or not they would be using sprays on those transmission lines. Is there any long-term aspects in regards to utilizing the sprays?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — In our department we don't have that kind of authority to write long-term agreements. What we do as a department is respond to written applications and requests for permission to do certain things. we have had no request for that kind of permission. And so therefore we have given no permission.

Mr. Goulet: — Another question in regards to the transportation of hazardous chemicals, especially on the northern route on highway 105 and up to 905 that goes up to Southend and Wollaston. I would like to know what type of hazardous chemicals are being transported on that particular stretch of highway?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — That would fall under the Dangerous Goods Act, operated by the federal government, and we would have no access to information that would tell us what goods were transported on those particular highways.

Mr. Goulet: — So you have absolutely no information of what is transported on Saskatchewan highways — on 102 and 905 going to the North?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — No, our department would not have that kind of information.

Mr. Goulet: — I suggest maybe that you should get your research staff to make sure that you know what's going on that highway, basically because a lot of people are complaining that, especially Highway 102 north of La Ronge, which is in terrible shape, will now be transporting a lot of these other chemicals, and that the department, Minister of Environment, should at least know exactly what is being transported and make recommendations, possibly to the fellow minister, about improving the road conditions on that highway.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The only time that our department would have any involvement is if there are spills reported. We've had no other way, really, of accessing that information that the member is talking about. That information is controlled under the federal Dangerous

Goods Act, and we really have no way of controlling it, and no way of gaining that knowledge.

If a spill occurs, then we're responsible to see that the spill is cleaned up properly, and we take responsibility.

(1045)

Mr. Goulet: — Then the question is: when you take the responsibility of clean-up on those highways, how many clean-ups have you done in the past year or two?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — We don't have that kind of information here. We could achieve the retrieval of that through our computer. It's not a simple process. It would take a considerable amount of time. If the hon. member is really anxious for it we could attempt to do that, but it would require a considerable amount of research by my staff.

Mr. Goulet: — Because of the tremendous concern that people have, you know, from my area, I would appreciate if that research information was forthcoming. Could you provide that?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Yes, we will, but it won't be in the next day or two. It will take some time to get.

Mr. Goulet: — Could you give me a more precise time on it, then.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I would estimate within two to three weeks. It's pretty hard to put an exact day. It depends on the work-load in the department.

Mr. Goulet: — Okay. Another question, and this has to do with more of an interprovincial arrangement with Manitoba on a mine which, underground, falls into Saskatchewan territory. And that mine is in Namew Lake — or Sturgeon Landing, you know, is the closest community. It is just 25 miles north of Cumberland House, and that a shaft has been sunk there in the past while.

A lot of the people raised this issue with the Minister of Highways over this winter. They raised the issue of jobs, but they specifically also raised the issue of environment. Basically, because the people of Cumberland were very concerned because the dams upstream had created a lot of environmental damage for people at Cumberland, and the basis of their livelihood, which was fishing, had been stopped, you know, at periods of time in history.

And they were very concerned now that the only clean water that they would get into Cumberland House came in from the North, and that river system is the Sturgeon-weir River system into the Tearing River at Cumberland. A lot of people were very concerned that the last clean river that — water that reaches Cumberland may now be jeopardized by the fact that this mine shaft that is just on the other side of the Manitoba border digs right in and goes into the Saskatchewan side of the lake.

And what people are worried about is this: many of the lakes have underground currents, and more especially when these lakes are deep in the . . . because it's at the

edge of the shield. Some of the lake — the lake in there is over 200 feet deep, and the people are very worried that some of the wastes and some of the hazardous chemicals or anything like that may be seeping into the lake system and would then be hazardous for the people, not only downstream in Cumberland House, but also to the people in Sturgeon Landing. I might add that Namew Lake or Sturgeon Lake is one of the more beautiful and rich lakes that we've seen in the past.

So a lot of people are really concerned about that, and nothing really has been stated, you know, from this Department of Environment to work in close harmony with the Manitoba government to make sure that effects of any type of pollution from that mine, you know ... to make sure that there are assurances that there is no hazard, you know, to the people downstream in regards to their drinking water. I was wondering whether or not the minister had any information in relation to any environmental research that may be taking place in regard to the Namew Lake project that is going on right now.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I believe the mine that the member is referring to is Manitoba. The stage that it's at in their environmental process I'm not sure of whether it has received permission to go ahead or whether it hasn't. But when it does go ahead, with it being right on the border we will expect it to operate under the same environmental conditions as we would expect a Saskatchewan mine.

If it affects the area in any way on the Saskatchewan side, then of course we'll step in. We will, on an ongoing basis, be monitoring the water in that area to be sure that no pollutants are being allowed to come into the water. But at this time there are no pollutants, and the mining hasn't proceeded to the point where we really would have any information.

Mr. Goulet: — My advice then to the minister is, because you're unsure of whether or not there are pollutants there, that maybe you may want to direct your research staff to make a more careful analysis of the situation, basically because you seem to imply that existing research and that type of thing may be inadequate. I was wondering whether or not you will be following up on that?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — All that's happening at this time is a beginning test operation. It's in Manitoba. The control of that mine will be under Manitoba, not under Saskatchewan. We have really no opportunity to control what happens in Manitoba unless it's causing an effect on Saskatchewan. It hasn't gone far enough yet that there is any way that they could have an effect on Saskatchewan.

In the future, it will be monitored very closely and the lakes will be monitored. If there 's any problem, even a glimmer of a problem shows, we'll deal with it at that point.

Mr. Goulet: — I might add that people in Cumberland are used to hearing that there would be no problem. They were told there would be no problem in regards to the dams that were being built upstream. They were told there would be no problems in regards to the sewage that

was being dumped upstream, you know, from Cumberland. Yet the fishing was stopped in regards to the mercury, you know, pollution that took place there.

And people as such also recognize that the trout, you know, has disappeared from the lake. And they're very concerned that increased pollution may harm the other fish, that have already harmed the trout, and are therefore looking more and saying look, it's going to be happening on the Saskatchewan side; the effect is going to be on the Saskatchewan side. We are looking at solutions and maybe an EIS (environmental impact study) may be in order, you know, at this stage. Will you do an EIS if something directly is forthcoming from Cumberland House and residents?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — No, our province will not be doing an environmental impact study, and it will be under the Manitoba government and their department, not ours. So it's out of our jurisdiction. We cannot do the environmental impact study here.

Mr. Goulet: — But you mentioned that you could do interprovincial type of studies if the effect is on the Saskatchewan side. And I was wondering if you will be proceeding to work in co-ordination with the Manitoba governments to make sure that the concerns of the residents of Cumberland House are addressed.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — During the environmental assessment period when it's open for public review, we would have the opportunity to make our concerns known to the Manitoba government. And if any areas show to us that we have issues that we should be raising, we will raise those.

If the hon. member knows of things that are of grave concern to his area, I would ask simply to send it in letter form to the department, and we will see that your concerns are looked at and registered with the Manitoba government during that environmental impact assessment period.

Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I'm going to be discussing public safety for a time. My first question is whether the item "public safety" in your department is the one that we have known for many years as the technical safety services branch or the safety services branch in the Department of Labour.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Yes, that branch was transferred to the Department of Environment in November.

Mr. Mitchell: — In November of 1986? You've indicated, yes, Mr. Minister. And I can confirm with you that it came intact and that all of the programs that were included in the technical safety services branch in the Department of Labour came over, and those include the electrical inspection service, the elevator inspection service, boiler and pressure vessels, fire safety and gas inspection?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Yes. It came intact with all of those. I might tell you that we still feel that the Minister of Labour kept most of the money, but other than that it came intact.

Mr. Mitchell: — And can I also ask you to confirm that each of these units — and I'm going to be using the term "units" to describe the subdivisions of the branch that I've just mentioned to you — can you confirm that each of these units have the same program responsibility and the same functions as they had when the branch was in the Department of Labour.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Yes, they have the same function and the same responsibilities as they had under the Department of Labour.

(1100)

Mr. Mitchell: — Now, Mr. Minister, will you be able to answer questions today about the activities of these units, during the year 1986-87, in terms of numbers of inspections and numbers of orders issued?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I believe we can, yes.

Mr. Mitchell: — Well, I'd like to begin then with the electrical and elevator safety unit. Now the first question that I have, Mr. Minister, is to confirm the shape of the program of this unit as it now exists, and I want to frame my question on the following way. Does the functions and responsibilities of this unit remain the same as they have for, say, the last three years.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — They're essentially the same. We have added the inspection of amusement rides to the elevator safety division. That was a new piece of legislation that came in, and so that responsibility would be in addition to what has been normal over the past three years. But other than that, functionally the same.

Mr. Mitchell: — Just one follow-up question on that. I asked the question in terms of a three-year period and you answered it. You were responsive to my question. Can I cast it a little wider and ask whether apart from the amusement rides addition, there have been any substantial changes to this program, and I would like to know specifically what changes have occurred since the days when I had some responsibility for that program.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I'm afraid I can't go back 10 years because we were not government that far back. It's essentially the same, but there may be some minute difference that I wouldn't even be aware of. My director tells me essentially it is the same.

Mr. Mitchell: — Fair enough, Mr. Minister. May I ask you the number of inspectors that were employed in this unit, the electrical and elevator safety unit, during 1986-87, permanent and temporary?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — There would be 25.5, and that includes the chief inspector in the branch, who also does some inspection, but not as much as to the others.

Mr. Mitchell: — During that year, 1986-87, I'd like to ask you some questions about the volume of work being done in the unit. And I would like to know how many permits

were issued for new electrical installations or additions and alterations during that year. How many permits?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — 31,308.

Mr. Mitchell: — And are you able to tell me, Mr. Minister, how that compared with the previous year, which would be 1985-86?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — We don't have that figure for '85-86 here. My director indicates that it likely would be within a couple of thousand of that number, but he said he doesn't really have the number here.

Mr. Mitchell: — Is there any reason, minister, why you would expect that number to be either smaller or larger in the year under review — '87-88?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — It's, for the most part, the same as the year before. There was a little bit of a surge with renovations because of the government's home program. But because the economy is down, there are other offsetting factors. So it's essentially the same from one year to the next there.

Mr. Mitchell: — I want to cast this question in a little broader and more general terms, Mr. Minister. I want to ask you, what is your philosophy with respect to electrical inspections? And I'll take some time to ask the question, and I think you may want to consult with your officials before answering.

You've told us, and I think it's perfectly accurate, that there were in excess of 31,000 permits issued during 1986-87. And that figure is about the same as it was the year before. And within a thousand or two, it's likely to be the same for the year under review. And I know, and I put it to you, that there is no possible way in which 25.5 person years of inspection service in your department can possibly follow through on those permits. And I put this to you, not in any contentious way, because I'm familiar with the problem; it was a problem that existed during my years to the department.

But I would like to hear from you, I said philosophy — not philosophy so much as your priorities or your plans with respect to discharging your responsibilities under the legislation, so far as the inspection of these installations are concerned.

Now you will know from your legislation that the unit has a number of responsibilities with respect to new installations, alterations to . . . I should say, installation of electrical equipment; installation of electrical wiring and distribution systems within buildings; alterations and additions to existing installations; and the examination and inspection of all electrical equipment intended for distribution in the province, which is an even larger sweep than the 31,000 permits we're talking about. And there is no way in which you can discharge all of responsibilities that seem to be placed upon you by the legislation.

So I'm aware that you must, of necessity, have an approach to this problem. You must have prioritized it and you must have a policy with respect to inspections.

Now that was a very long question, Minister, and if it's not clear enough, I'm prepared to keep talking. But I'd like you to respond to it.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The hon. member has raised a considerable area of concern to all of us. It's been an ongoing problem, I think, in this branch for some period of time. I know when I was in opposition we raised questions on the same subject area, so it hasn't just surfaced.

I would tell the hon. member that when we have owner permits we try to do 100 per cent of the inspection. If we have a fully qualified electrical contractor putting in a couple of plugs in a bank, or something of that nature, we don't place that on a high priority list because the contractor and the electrician will be well qualified people in the trade. So we prioritize the inspections to quite a degree where contractors have a proven track record and we've inspected time after time and have had no need for change.

Now you asked me about philosophy. I think that what needs to be done is to have a method of sampling put in place that will be impartial and will go through the permits and call out a certain number out of a given area and we'll do those inspections. Because I don't think it's possible to do every one of the 31,000.

Another area that we're thinking about, and when I say thinking about, that's all that's happened to it at this point. But we have discussed it at some length with the construction industry; that is the idea of generating a master certificate to license contractors, which would enable them to do the actual inspection of their own work that their men are doing. I mean the master contractor himself could go on site and do the inspection and sign the release.

(1115)

I believe it's an area that has been overlooked for some times. We don't have someone following around on the heels of every medical doctor to see that he did his job right. I think, in some, in some ways, fully qualified and people licensed by examination through the department could be given the license to do much of that type of inspection. Now we do very serious inspections of most of the hospital type of construction or remodelling, because there is affects individuals — many people involved.

I don't know just how far to go. The member is familiar with much of this, but our philosophy is to inspect the serious ones, inspect those done by private individuals who have very limited electrical knowledge, but for those with good qualifications, with a good track record, to inspect at a lesser rate.

Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Minister, one can't help but notice in looking at your estimates, the huge reduction in person years in this particular branch, in the public safety branch. It's a reduction of 32.8 person years of employment which is a reduction of fully 25, 30 per cent of the work-force in this public safety area. My question is: how many of these 32.8 person years that have been

cut are being cut from the electrical and elevator safety unit?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The budget shows a big change, and I might indicate to the hon. member that there is a big change coming. We are proposing the transfer of the electrical and gas inspection to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. The budget that you see here is basically a one-half year budget.

So there is a big change coming. But the inspection procedure that I outlined to you would likely be similar. It's still in the negotiation stage. There are many unanswered questions, so I couldn't give you the exact figures of what will end up in Power, how many people they'll put in place to do the job.

But that is the anticipation, that this area, the electrical and gas inspection, will be transferring to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. And that is the method that's used in many provinces in Canada, that the utility companies have taken on much of that inspection role.

Mr. Mitchell: — Now I want to be clear, Minister, on what you told me. I think I should approach it with respect to the unit that we're discussing, electrical and elevator safety. Do I understand from your answer that there will be no staff reductions in that area while they remain in your department?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The electrical division, three inspectors took the retirement offer, and because of the proposed transfer of that unit across to Saskatchewan Power Corporation, we do not intend to refill those positions. We'll leave that hiring process to Sask Power once they have the branch in place. The elevator side is not expected to transfer. It's expected to stay within the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: — The idea of transferring the inspectorate services in electrical and gas to the power corporations is, of course, not a new idea, and I think you're aware of that. It's been around the system for . . . been around the provincial system in Saskatchewan as an idea for oh, 12, 14 years that I know of. And it has in the past been rejected, and at least one of your officials will know this very well, on the basis that there are many situations in which the power corporations, the Saskatchewan Power Corporation and the inspection service are at odds about particular points.

In a sense, Minister, you encounter a conflict of interest situation on the gas side, most definitely, because of the way in which natural gas is distributed in Saskatchewan, as well as on the electrical side, depending again on circumstances.

Now I won't take the time of the House to go into that level of technical difficulty, but I would like to hear from you as to how it is now that in 1987 we are able to brush aside these substantial problems that will be encountered if the electrical and gas utility is at once supplying the product, supplying the distribution system, as it does to a very large extent, and also inspecting the equipment and installations that are involved in bringing that power and

gas into your business, into your apartment block, into your hospital, or into your home.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — In the negotiations with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation — and there have been negotiations for some time; the negotiations are proceeding into the final stages — we haven't had a great deal of difficulty in dealing with this concern. As the member will know, because he was involved a number of years close to this particular branch, the Saskatchewan Power Corporation electrical work at the power pole and the line level has never been inspected by the branch. So the line service basically was left to the power corporation to do its own monitoring up to now.

When we come to the connection at the home, its immediately then the electrician and contractor that are involved, so I think we sort of have an arm's length. The electrical contractor takes the power from the industry or the home and connects it to the main power transformer provided by the power corporation. So you do have, to some extent, an arm's-length arrangement.

There will be an ongoing monitoring availability within our department. I think that's a requirement. And just the number of people that will require, I'm not quite prepared at this time to put a figure on it. We're doing a lot of looking and a lot of considering. We will have need to have some supervision. We will still license the electrical contractors and a number of areas like that. So there will still be monitoring and administration of the legislation within the department.

Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Minister, my recollection of the way in which these inspectorate services work is that when a permit is obtained it is paid for by the person who takes out the permit. There is a fee involved. And I remember, when I was deputy minister in the department of Labour, making that argument — and I thought, and I still believe it to be a very sound argument — that an inspector more than pays for himself or herself in the work that is done in performing his or her duties in the department.

That was particularly true as I recall it, and I must admit to being a bit hazy about the details. I think that was particularly true in the case of gas inspectors, where we could actually prove that an additional gas inspector would generate enough revenue to pay for all of the salaries and benefits that were involved in hiring that extra person.

Now two questions, Minister, based on the advice that you're getting, particularly from the gentlemen behind you: is my memory correct that that is the case? And if my memory is correct, is it still the case?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Of course, that can be the case. The fee structure and the wage structure and the number of inspections that an individual is able to do, all of those questions, of course, come in to whether or not it is self-sufficient. We do have the authority, through regulation, to set the fee structure. Sometimes it has been out of line to some extent with current costs and didn't cover completely, but for the most part it has been set so that it did cover the cost.

Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Minister. That was certainly my recollection and a great deal of frustration involved in not being able to push that idea through the various levels of approval that exist within any government, and this one as well.

But I come now to the question that I want to ask in relation to this plan, to hand these services, or to contract these services, over to the power corporation, Minister, why is that a good idea? Minister, why is the idea of the power corporation taking over electrical and gas inspections a good idea? Why is it a better idea than continuing to perform this service as we have for so many years, from a department of government and at arms length from the electrical and gas utility.

I would think this — if I may speak to it before you answer, Minister — that there is a reality of conflict of interest, which I think you partially acknowledged in your answer. And there is certainly a perception that must be taken into account, as well, of the independence of the inspector at service, formerly provided by the Department of Labour, now provided by your department.

I mean, people respected the inspector when he came on site. The inspector had a great deal of power. The inspector could issue, and did issue, hundreds — thousands of correction orders every year requiring installations to be brought up to standard, and performed what I thought was a very, very valuable service. And performed it clearly at arms length from everybody involved in the electrical, generating, and distribution system, as well as the gas distribution system.

(1130)

And as you've agreed, I believe, Minister, it is an expenditure which is covered by the people involved, the consumer or the . . . I think the consumer is the best way to describe it. Whether the consumer is residential, an individual, or whether the consumer is industrial or commercial, they're paying the freight. And they will pay the freight whether you're doing it out of your department or whether the power corporation is doing it out of the power corporation.

And I wonder, in these circumstances, why it makes sense to move those services from a department of government, where it has functioned so well for so long, to the very utility that is the main actor in the electrical and gas distribution system in the province?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — You've asked a number of questions, basically. It's not one question.

To begin with, it's a decision that is made to try and improve the effectiveness of our inspection service. You, yourself, and I have both experienced the frustrations of the great backlogs that have been in place for a number of years.

We also . . . And as much as I appreciate the nice handwriting of the lady who kept the book that had something like 300,000 cards that detailed all of the inspections over the years — and it's all handwritten, hand-filed, a very, very labour-intensive system — and I

appreciated the work she did, but in this day and age I think we have to move beyond that.

The power corporation, because of its present state of computerization for billing of power bills, can move that type of system into their operation and, with the expertise of the people in place, handle it very effectively and much more efficiently than we can within the department without spending a considerable amount of capital dollars to put computerization in place in our department. I think the estimates that have been in place would exceed \$1.5 million, to just look at that side.

I don't see the real concern of conflict of interest. Every time that there has been a gas connection to a home or to an industry, the person from the Saskatchewan Power Corporation that turned the gas on always did the initial inspection. So I don't see that letting him go on to inspect the balance of it . . . That initial inspection inspected the furnace hook-up mostly. So in many homes, all you have is the furnace and the water heater.

So we're not changing much. And if we, as a department, maintain the right to do the monitoring that we feel is necessary, then we can go and take a look at what each one of those inspectors is doing and whether or not he's doing that job effectively. You wouldn't have to make many stops in a year to see that 25 or 30 or whatever number of inspectors they have are really doing an effective job.

as far as the idea that the inspector can now order somebody to make a correction, the inspectors under the power corporation will be given the same authority to make that kind of an order. It's an absolute must that they have that authority, otherwise our system would fall apart. So the order will still be available to that inspector, and it must be obeyed. So I think, in that respect, there should be no problem.

I would say there's what I would call almost an arm's-length conflict of interest. The power corporation has an interest in one way. The inspector will be an employee of that corporation, but will not be the same person who puts the line in place. So it's an arm's-length kind of a conflict that could appear, but not a very serious one really.

Mr. Mitchell: — Now of the 25.5, now 22.5, person-years in the electrical unit, how many of those will vanish from you department and reappear on the Saskatchewan Power Corporation payroll?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — As I indicated to the member earlier, we are anticipating maintaining some monitoring capability. Those numbers are not firm at this time. The elevator safety division will not transfer. So that drops us down to 23 and one-half inspectors. I'm not just sure how many of those . . . The majority of them will go, but I couldn't tell you the exact number. There might be 20; there might be 18. You know, there will need to be some maintained, and we haven't really reached the point of finalization where I could give that figure.

Mr. Mitchell: — Now I need clarification with respect to one statement that you made, Mr. Minister, and that is

that those figures in your estimates under vote 5 are for approximately half a year? And you indicate yes, and I would ask you to expand on that because you show 87 person-years for the year under review, and that compared to 119.8 in the previous year which, as I pointed out, is a reduction of 32.8 person-years in this branch.

But I'd like you to reconcile the figure of 87 person-years with your explanation that part of this reduction acknowledges the fact that there will be a transfer to the power corporation.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I would draw to the member's attention that the only part that's being proposed to be transferred is electrical and gas, so it's not a half a year for the whole of the public safety; it's just for those people concerned, that part of it.

Mr. Mitchell: — Yes, I know my question didn't make it clear that I understood that, but I did. And what I want to get at, and I'll get at it directly now, is how you calculated it. Just how did you arrive at the conclusion that you were going to require 87 person-years of employment in this branch during the fiscal year under review?

You have talked . . . you have just told me that you plan to transfer 18 to 20 person-years to the power corporation, about six months into this fiscal year, or six months down the road or sometime in the future, and that would be part of the answer. But I am now looking for the answer with more precision as to how you arrive at 87 person-years in this branch?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — If I understand your question correctly . . . we are kind of disputing what you're asking. But if we're wrong, you'll ask again I'm sure.

What we basically have here is the total number of the people that were here last year, then we had 11 people take early retirement in that department, and the number that are anticipated may transfer. If you add them together then that . . . if you take the 87 that we still show and you add on the people that were proposing to transfer out, you'll come back to the figure that we had last year. That's the route that we used to make the calculation of 87.

Mr. Mitchell: — With respect to the owner permits, and I'm nearing the end of the electrical part of the questions I have for you today. Mr. Minister, with respect to the owner permits, you're talking here about a situation where I want to wire my rumpus room, and I go to the department and I obtain a permit, and that's called an owner permit. And I think it has some other, some more technical designation — a form of some kind or another, or a permit of some kind.

You told me that one of your policies or one of your objectives is to inspect 100 per cent of these permits. I've got some questions with respect to that. The first one is: have you been achieving that objective? Have you been satisfying that policy; have you been inspecting 100 per cent of the owner permits?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The form that you're looking for is form J. And yes, they have been achieving 100 per cent of

those, as the member would be aware

When you issue an owner permit, you have a very amateur electrician. I've done some myself, so I speak from experience. But many times when our people go out and do the inspection, they almost have to give instructions on how to redo, and to correct the errors, because there are many times that dangerous circumstances would occur if you did not inspect.

So we take it extremely serious and try to do them and do them fairly quickly, because of the lack of experience of the people doing the work.

Mr. Mitchell: — Now the reason why I'm focusing on owner permits is of course that the work is naturally done with less professionally qualified people, as a general rule, as compared to work that a contractor undertakes.

I'm also concerned about it because it is widely known, and indeed I'm referring to the Saskatchewan Labour annual report for 1985-86 — which your officials had some hand in drawing — which indicates that of the 2,797 fires recorded in 1985, electricity was the largest single cause of fire, accounting for 30.4 per cent of the total number of fires, or 850 fires, in 1985 can be traced to electricity as its single cause.

(1145)

Now my understanding is that most of those electrical fires take place in private dwellings, and in some unknown number of those, minister, it will be with respect to wiring that was done by the owner or pursuant to a form J permit. Now I don't think . . . you may have some explanation with respect to that, and you can give it when you answer the question that I'm about to put to you, and it is this: my experience, and the experience of people that I have spoken to about this, is that the inspection that's done of a form J permit is normally done when the work has been completed. And the inspector, on doing the inspection, is limited because the inspector can't see what's there, except what's obvious.

In other words, if the permit was to install new wall plugs, all the inspector sees is the exterior of the wall plug. Now granted he can go down in the basement or somewhere and maybe see some other parts of it, but generally he can see the exterior of the wall plug; he can't see behind the wall plug or along the way. And the kind of inspection that can be carried out at that stage is so very limited that in many cases it amounts, I submit, to no inspection at all.

If these owner permits must be inspected — and I agree fully with anyone who says they must be — then my point is that they must be inspected at a time when the inspector can actually see something, and not be inspected when all the inspector can see is what a nice rumpus room I have and how fine the plastic fittings on my wall plugs actually line up with the horizon, if you know what I mean.

So I want to summarize that long question, Minister, and ask you first of all if you agree that it's desirable for those particular permits to be inspected at a stage when the inspector can actually see something; and what you think

or what you plan should be done about clearing that situation up, in light of the fact that electricity is such a major cause for fires in this province.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Let me respond to the hon. member in a number of different areas. There are a number of electrical fires, and it's become fairly serious over the last number of years as homes and businesses have increased the number of electrical appliances and variety of equipment that is used within the home.

At the time that many of our homes were wired 30 years ago, a 60-amp entrance was probably adequate to meet the demand. Today you may find the same homes with close to 200-amp entrance. But the wire in the wall is the same wire. So in many cases it's an overloading of the system that was put in place. Sometimes it's extension cords that are strung all over the houses because there weren't enough outlets provided, and several appliances plugged into the same extension cord, causing overheating and hence fire.

So there are a number of causes. It's not just home-owner permits. We take the home-owner permit as a very serious issue, and so follow it with more detail than we would with a contractor permit.

In the cities we inspect on a home-owner permit at the completion of the rough-in stage, and then once the job is completed, an inspection of the finished job. So it overcomes the concern you raise with all the work being hidden. It's all exposed at the time of the inspection, and I think that that is a very important part of the whole process of home-owner inspection.

In the rural part of the province we still try to do that, but because of distances it's more difficult to achieve. So we do it as much as possible, but at times we cannot do the double inspection in their circumstances.

Mr. Mitchell: — That leads me to the question of just where you have inspectors and where you don't at the present time, particularly in light of the fact that three inspectors have been laid off. It used to be, Minister, that the province was divided into 15 inspection districts — Regina, Saskatoon, Estevan, Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Prince Albert, Swift Current, Tisdale, and Yorkton, with some of those having more than one area.

Now I don't want to get you involved in a long detailed answer, Minister, but my concern is that with the number of inspectors that you have now, compared to what had in previous years, and particularly after the lay-off of these three people, which parts of our province do not now have electrical inspectors working?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Let me correct the member in one area. There were no lay-offs. The three people who left us were due to retirement. The retirement occurred in Saskatoon and Regina, in locations where we had a number of inspectors in each point. So all points are covered, and the list that you read, it's the major cities, plus Tisdale, that have inspectors in place. And you read the list right down. It is the same list today.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Minister, I'd like to direct a few

brief questions to you about the area which you've just been discussing with the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

An Hon. Member: — That's brief?

Mr. Brockelbank: — I'll try and be brief. You said, I believe, Mr. Minister, that you have added a function to the public safety sector, namely the safety and amusement rides inspection. If so, how many person-years do you anticipate that function will require?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — As the member will realize, most of those inspections occur just in the summer months during the season when amusement rides are operating. We anticipate the addition to be approximately one person-year. But during the summer period three people will do that work as required, and will continue to do the elevator safety as well.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Minister, you stated that the number of electrical permits that were issued last year were 31,308, within that neighbourhood. Can you give me an indication of how many permits were not inspected, and if you have a rural-urban breakdown? And I'm particularly interested in residential rural-urban breakdown.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — In the last year we cleared 22,600 and some odd permits, but I don't have a break out of the rural/urban split. That would take a tremendous amount of work to pull that out. You know, as the permits come in, they come in and they're put in place by number. It would take a lot of detailed work, and as I indicated to the former member, at this time all of that work is hand catalogued and hand filed. It's not like going to a computer and calling for it. It would be strictly a very manual process, and it would be hard to come by.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Minister, could I get you to clarify...give me the figure again, 22 thousand and something? Was that the number of residential permits, and if so, how many were actually inspected?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The total was 22,686 that were completed last year.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Okay. You've stated that the department will maintain a monitoring function in the area of gas and electrical inspection. How many person-years do you expect to use in monitoring that area?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — As I indicated to the former member, that figure is not finalized yet. We're working on it. Because it's a new area, it's a little bit difficult to arrive at the number that we may need. So I would hesitate to give you a firm figure at this time. We're still working through that process.

Mr. Brockelbank: — You said that...I want to get the number, Mr. Minister, of gas inspectors and electrical inspectors in '85 and '86, the two previous, the one just closed and the one before it.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — There would have been 20 gas inspectors in both years, in 1985-86 and '86-87, and the

23.5 in electrical in both of those years.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Minister, I'm going to ask you once more to try and give me a figure on the number of inspectors, gas, and the number of inspectors, electrical, that you will require to monitor in this estimate that's before us. And I realize what you said, and I appreciate what you said, that there's some difficulty in finalizing a figure there. But can you give me an unofficial guestimate of how many you expect in each of those areas?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — If the member will take it strictly as a guestimate, because I certainly don't have a firm figure and I've told you that, but approximately two people in each area — two gas, two electrical would likely be sufficient to do that.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I just want to get a figure so I can see how correct you were next year, how accurate you were next year. With regard to the number of permits issued — if I can just go back to that — there were a total of 31,308 of which you said 22,686 residential were inspected. How many of those were inspected? Were they all inspected?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — There were 22,686 permits completed. They were inspected and completed. But they were not all residential, like that's...of the total 31,308, 22,686 were inspected and completed.

(1200)

Mr. Brockelbank: — All right then. Let me clarify. Of the 31,308 permits, they're all permits; they're not just residential? I see. Okay. And of those — all of them — 22,68 were completed and inspected? Yes. Did you have a J permit when you were doing your wiring?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — That was a long time ago, long before I was in this business. Yes, I did have. Yes, it was inspected, and it even passed.

Mr. Brockelbank: — I had one of those too, and it passed — which is really not necessary for you to answer the question, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, how many correction orders were issued in the residential area, or do you have it just as a general figure?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The correction orders would be for the overall inspection. There were 2,244 correction orders issued.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Consequently this would require a further inspection, and I gather there's an additional charge for a further inspection. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — We issue the correction order and then we go back and inspect that, and on that first call-back there would be no additional charge. But if we have to go back a second time, like a correction order, then a reinspection, and if a second reinspection is required, then there would be change.

Mr. Brockelbank: — You said, Mr. Minister, I believe, that there were three inspectors took retirement in the year closed, just closed, and they were not replaced. Is

that correct?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — No, they were not replaced because we are intending to transfer to Saskatchewan Power Corporation. We thought it would be better to leave it open and let them do the hiring.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, after having listened to the questions raised by the member for Fairview and some questions raised by myself; and in view of the fact that there were thousands of electrical permits that were issued, that were not inspected; and in view of the fact that three inspectors have retired, which will not be replaced for upwards of 6 months; and in view of the fact that the number of correction orders will probably continue at the level which they're at, if not exceed that; and for the reasons which the member for Fairview brought to the attention of the Assembly about transferring of inspection staff to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation — and the question that is automatically raised about conflict of interest — I feel that estimates are not sufficient.

There has been a drastic reduction in the number of person-years under the area of public safety. The member from Fairview has demonstrated adequately that there is a serious problem with regards to electrical fires, which has not been satisfied at this point; therefore I don't feel that the provisions within the estimates here are satisfactory. And I know the minister will disagree with me; I can rest assured that he will rise and disagree with me.

So, in assuming that, I will move on to the next brief subject which I wanted to deal with, and that is the question that I raised earlier, Mr. Minister, with regard to further elaboration on the figures related to the property management corporation and a more detailed examination. You said that at the time you would attempt to provide me with more detailed figures, and I wonder if you have those figures.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — We went back through to the property management corporation and they couldn't give us a detailed breakdown because they said they basically don't have it yet. This is an estimate, as I told you, and at the end of the year we hope to have it that much more firm.

The property management corporation is also new. They take a look at the space that we occupy and they make an estimate of what that space is now . . . what they are now paying. They make an estimate of what our postage costs have been in the past year, what our furniture costs have been in the past year, and those are the figures that are included in that overall figure of 987,000, I believe is the figure; I just don't have the book open to it.

But they were not able, when my staff contacted them, to give us that breakdown yet. It'll be available some time this year, but it isn't available at this point.

Mr. Brockelbank: — Mr. Minister, what kind of an agreement do you have with the property management corporation to protect yourself from them gouging you? I want to know because I'm sure that the minister who's in charge of that is going to be charging as much as he possibly can to the different departments, knowing that

minister.

An Hon. Member: — Why?

Mr. Brockelbank: — Well that minister will have his reasons, and the philosophy of this government provides the reasons why that will occur. It's related with the philosophy of this government which has previously been discussed in this House and which I won't get into at this time.

I want to know how the minister is going to protect himself. How does he know he's not being charged too much? You must have some way of assessing it.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I suppose that I could tell you that I'll watch the hon. member that's in charge of the property management corporation very carefully to see that he doesn't overcharge me for anything. As we mail letters we keep track of what the cost is. Whenever we need furniture — and we haven't needed very much — we'll keep track of what the cost is. During the course of negotiations, we'll put a figure on what the rental cost is per square foot is. And when we add it all up at the end of the year, if it hasn't come to as much as this 987,000, then we just won't agree to pay it. So that will be the balance.

Mr. Brockelbank: — In dealing with that minister which is going to provide his government with new efficiency and effectiveness in the administration of public buildings, I wonder if you could, at the first opportunity you get, crank him up a bit, because quite frankly, for an effective, efficient operation I'm not impressed at this point. And I'm sure that it's causing you some problem, and I can understand if you don't want to discuss it here, because you don't want to put that minister on the spot. But I've asked the minister for information months ago and haven't received it yet. I'm sure your having the same problem with him that I'm having.

I'm not prepared to accept the fact that you're telling me that you cannot provide more detailed information. I'm going to continue to seek that information. I'm not prepared to accept that at this time, for whatever lengths of time it takes to acquire that information.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I think I gave you the only answer I could to that question, and I think I'll just leave it there.

Mr. Mitchell: — I want to come back Minister, to tour apparent plan to transfer services to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. And I'm glad that the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Power Corporation shares some of my concerns, I think.

And I'm not surprised, because this is an idea that's been gone over and over and over again in these past years and has always been rejected for what were considered, by officials and ministers at the time, to be very valid reasons. I want to ask you, Mr. Minister, when this latest consideration of the subject began?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I think the decision was taken in late '86 to proceed to investigate and follow it through. And because the system has been in place a in a number of other governments across Canada and seems to have worked

reasonably well, we feel that we can put it in place and that it will work reasonably well. We'll watch it carefully and make adjustments, where necessary, to see that it works right.

Mr. Mitchell: — Minister, can you tell me in what jurisdictions the electrical inspections are carried out by the utility with the monopoly over that system, as well as in what jurisdictions the gas distribution system is inspected by the utility?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Different provinces have varying degrees of this. But two provinces that have gone that route fairly standardly are Manitoba and Ontario.

Mr. Mitchell: — Are you telling me that in Ontario the natural gas distributor is responsible for the inspection of gas installation?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — In Ontario the electrical is with Ontario Hydro. Their gas inspection is with Consumers Gas. So it's a very similar idea, not both with the power corporation as it would be in our case, but both with deliverers of the product.

An Hon. Member: — Are you arguing that we should sell off the gas facilities?

Mr. Mitchell: — No, I'm not arguing. I'm going to respond to the Minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Power Corporation. I'm not arguing we should sell off the gas facility.

What I'm going to ask you, Mr. Minister, is simply this: because this is an idea that you agree has been considered in the past — and I'll tell you it's been considered a number of times in the past and has been rejected on more than one occasion for what were considered good and valid reasons — and because I submit we haven't uncovered any new reason for doing it this morning, but nothing's changed out there that would now make what was a bad idea into a good idea, I come to the conclusion that what were doing here is, in part, cooking the books.

We're making it appear that the size of the Saskatchewan Public Service has been reduced, which we all heard or read the statement, the really incredible statement from the Minister of Finance on March 5 of this year in which he boasted that, or in which he said that there was a plan to cut the size of the public service of Saskatchewan by 2,000 people. I think that this is your contribution to that. And I want to put that to you. You looked around your department and you saw, well, the easiest thing that you could do was to dust off this old discredited plan of transferring these units over to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation and that would be your contribution to the 2,000 person target of the Minister of Finance.

And while your answering that question, answer it in the light of this comment. It lacks reality. The service now isn't costing the taxpayers of Saskatchewan any money, in the sense that you obtain enough revenue from these inspections to more or less cover the cost of the service.

If you increased gas and electrical inspectors into your department, the increased revenue that would be generated would more or less cover the increased cost of those people. By taking them away from your department, removing them as employees in the public service, and by giving them off to the Crown corporation, the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, you're not reducing the cost to the people of Saskatchewan, you're not affecting the costs of the people of Saskatchewan. All you're doing is cosmetic. Just on the surface you make it look like you're doing your share to contribute to the objectives, the objectionable objectives of the Minister of Finance. I'd like your comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Well, I guess the hon. member is entitled to his opinion. I don't happen to agree with the opinion. To begin with, last year in electrical inspections we covered approximately 73 per cent of the costs that our department experienced. So there are some very real costs. Approximately 27 per cent of the cost was borne by the tax payers. The reason for the change, I think, is so that we can avoid a lot of duplication.

When you come to the gas inspection, I think it's fairly straightforward. Every time that there is a connection at a business or at a home, the gas side of Sask Power has to send a person to that sight to make that final connection, to turn the gas on. The same person can be qualified to do the inspection. So you wouldn't have Sask Power running somebody to the site and then our branch sending an inspector to the site. The same person can be trained and qualified to turn the gas on and to do the actual inspection.

So we'll save duplication of service in that respect. It should cut considerable cost for the government and still do every bit as an effective and safe job as we had in the past.

On the electrical side, I don't know whether we can have quite the same savings. But Sask Power has fairly qualified people in many areas and they may choose to use them. The method they use to put the inspectors in place will be entirely their method.

But where I did indicate to you that there could be significant savings in Sask Power was in the processing, the administrative side where you handle all of those bills. They have the billing process in place. So they can handle it in their computers without spending quite a few dollars to achieve it.

I believe that the decision is a good decision. The reason that it likely wasn't made before is that you didn't have the courage to step out and make a change. I think that we have the courage to step out and make change. We're doing that and time will tell. And I believe when we're back in the House a year from now, it will likely show that the change was a good change.

The former member asked a question and, if I may, I'd like to answer it. He indicated that the retirements were going to be for six months before we put any inspectors in place. The retirements basically took effect on June 1, and likely the figure, time wise, will be about a three-month period when we will be short those three people. After that the

power corporation can hire three, or they can hire six, or whatever they feel they need to do the job.

Mr. Mitchell: — I want one last question in respect of this debate that we seem to be having about whether this makes any sense or not, and it has to do with the way in which you intend to implement that decision, if that is, in fact, what you decide to do.

How will it happen? Is this something that will be brought to this House for discussion and debate, or is this something that will just be slipped through under the expanded powers that the cabinet has to make these kinds of changes, under the legislation that was passed in December?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I'm advised that it will require legislative change, and that would come back before this House for debate.

Mr. Mitchell: — Well, I'm glad to hear that, Minister, because if I may say, with respect to you and your officials, it is a wrong-headed idea. I mean, it is not enough to just pass it off by saying you hope to avoid some duplications with respect to the people who look at gas installations in residences. It's a much, much, much more complex area than that, as your own officials will advise you.

And the fact that the Minister of Finance wants to reduce on paper the size of the public service is not a reason for doing this thing. There has to be a more rational reason for making the change. And I'm glad that you're bringing this legislation before the House so it can be debated. And again, with respect, I would just implore that you review very carefully the implications of this decision before you decide to bring that legislation here.

I would also urge you to consult widely in the community with respect to these changes in the electrical community, if I can use that — the contractors and the groups involved — and similarly in the question of gas. Because it's my impression, based on my experience, that the community is not with you on this idea.

And I realize as I sit down that I have not left you with anything to respond to because I just made a representation to you.

I have one more question and that concerns your inspection of amusement rides. How many person-years are you devoting to that inspection service, and will you describe to the House how that service works?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Well I did answer that question for the member from Saskatoon Westmount. You may have been out of the Chamber for a minute.

There will be one extra person added to the elevator and safety division. The three people involved in that division then will do the inspections during the period in the summer when those amusement rides are involved. We estimate the cost will be approximately one person-year, but it will be divided among three people who will do the work. And we have sent people away for special training so that they are qualified to do the inspection of

amusement rides.

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I would like to ask you a few questions with respect to environmental matters relating to uranium mining and uranium transport.

One of the concerns that I have and that our party has is the problem of handling radioactive tailings in northern Saskatchewan, a problem which I think all politicians a decade ago underestimated in terms of it's seriousness, over 30 million tons of radioactive mill tailings in northern Saskatchewan that have not been properly disposed of, and frankly, today in many cases are still not being properly disposed of.

My first question is a very non-partisan question, in the sense that all political parties during their term in office didn't resolve the problem, but it's clear today that it needs to be resolved. And that is that we have two abandoned uranium mines in this province that were abandoned at a time when the problems associated with mill tailings were not sufficiently recognized that the difficulties were dealt with seriously.

At both the old Gunnar uranium mine and the Lorado uranium mine, there are large quantities of radioactive tailings on the surface, and in some cases, in lake waters that have never been covered over or properly disposed of in any way. These pose a long-term hazard to the environment.

As you will know, Mr. Minister, the result of mining uranium brings to the surface radioactive materials like radium and thorium, with very, very long half-lives — radium with a half-life of 80,000 years. In other words, in 80,000 years, half the amount of radium will still be on the surface and will still be radioactive. Radium, for example, is a carcinogen. It can cause genetic damage to people who are exposed to it.

My question to you is: what action is your government now prepared to take to clean up the Gunnar uranium mine site, the tailing site there, the tailing site at Lorado, to make sure that those tailings are properly disposed of and properly covered over? What action are you contemplating to resolve that problem now that the long-term hazards and the health risks associated with radium and thorium spreading into the environment are now well known?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I'm advised that the national mine tailings commission has done a fairly major study identifying many of the problems on the sites that the hon. member is raising. As well, our own department has done some studies on the same general area of mine tailings. The branch in the department is now working putting together the ideas from those different studies. The actual solution that we will use is not being projected as yet. They're still working with it. It's a very complex matter, as the member knows, and I'm advised that they are working on it now with the view of coming forward with the process that will be used to help to eliminate the problem that now exists.

Mr. Prebble: — I wonder if the minister could give the House a commitment that during this coming term of office of your government, you will take some concrete steps towards resolving the problem, particularly in three areas. One, there is an obvious need to cover over the radioactive tailings that are now laying on the surface.

Second, you've got to do something about fencing off the area so that people don't have easy access to the tailings and take unnecessary health risks by wandering over them.

And third — and I want the minister to very specifically comment on this matter — I'm very concerned about the fact that for far too long radioactive tailings have been left in Langley Bay, a bay of Lake Athabasca that for a long time during the '70s and early '80s was fairly heavily fished. You've got to either remove the radioactive tailings from the bay, Mr. Minister, or alternatively, you've got to dam that bay off from the rest of Lake Athabasca so that the tailings don't continue to allow radioactivity to leach into the lake.

Will you give the legislature a commitment that you'll deal with the problem of Langley Bay during this upcoming term of office, during the next three years in other words. And will you also give a commitment that you will take action over the next three years to stop the spread of radioactive tailings at the abandoned Gunnar and Lorado sites and cover them over?

(1230)

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I'm advised that Langley Bay is also in the studies that have been completed and will be part of the area that will be looked at. The member realizes that these mines and the tailings have been there and deserted for a long time. This didn't happen in the last short while; it's been there for probably 20 to 25 years.

We are looking at it. I suppose we've all learned a considerable more about the dangers to the environment from tailings over the past number of years, more than they knew in 1950 and so on. But the solutions are not available yet and I can't give the kind of guarantees that the member is asking for. We're certainly working towards that, but I can't give guarantees.

Mr. Prebble: — Well the solutions, Mr. Minister, are not as vague as you suggest. And I'm not raising this in a partisan manner, as I said, because as you've pointed out, every government, every government, every political party has been in office at some point since those mines were abandoned. But what I'm saying to you now is that it's becoming clear, a lot more is known about the health risks of radiation than was known 25 years ago. It's clear that this problem has got to be resolved.

And what I'm saying to you is there are two or three fairly simple things you can do. One, you can dam off Langley Bay so that the radioactive materials will no longer work their way from Langley Bay into the rest of Lake Athabasca. That's something concrete you can do. Secondly, you can make arrangements to have the tailing piles that are left behind at Gunnar and Lorado

covered over in the way you're now requiring that to be done at other uranium mines. And thirdly, you can fence the area off.

Now will you give the legislature a commitment that you'll take action along those lines in the next three years?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I'm advised that my staff are looking at the issue very seriously and I've given the member that information. For us to begin to resolve the issue without looking at all the facets of it would not be wise. We've done many, many studies. The studies were done by people with expertise in the area and I think we should draw on all of the information we have so that when you do make the necessary corrections, we do it to the best of the ability that we have as a government and as a department.

It's certainly an issue that we want to resolve. But we want to resolve it in the best possible manner, and that's what we're approaching and I hope that we will achieve it in the next short while.

Mr. Mitchell: — Further on this question of these abandoned tailing sites. I wonder if the minister would consider this. We are approaching this, as my colleague from Saskatoon University says, in a non-partisan way, and you didn't create the problem, Minister. You just happen to be the minister now at a time when it's clear to everyone that something has to be done about it.

You fly over these tailings areas, one of them in particular in a plane, and you see the erosion lines directly from the tailings area right into Lake Athabasca and you can . . . it's coloured, and a very dramatic sight, and it's obvious that water is going from the tailings area directly into the lake and something has to be done.

My colleague says that it should be covered, and it should, because it's water that leaches radio-nuclides from the tailings area into the environment, into the water system. It's water running through there. It's either surface water running along the top or it's surface water that becomes ground water that carries the radio-nuclides out into the water system, or it's underground water passing through. And of course there's underground water everywhere, but in northern Saskatchewan there is a lot of it running quite near the surface.

And what I want to ask you, Minister, is whether in light of the things that my colleague and I have said, you or your department are prepared to share with us these studies that have been done and the reports that have been made to you.

We come to this, Minister, we come to this subject with some level of experience and expertise, and we would like to think that we could make a contribution to your consideration of this problem, particularly considering that our approach to it is non-partisan. And we are as anxious as you, and we assume that you are as anxious as we are, that there be a solution to it. Can I ask you whether you would be good enough to do that?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I'm advised that these studies are public studies and we could provide you with a list of the

names of the studies and possible sources where you could access them.

Mr. Mitchell: — That would be very good, Minister. And can I also ask you that if there are internal studies or studies done for the department that are not publicly available, whether we could get copies of these studies, if that's feasible, or at least very detailed précis of these studies?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I would think that there would be no problem in giving the reports that have been done within the department. Now they've done a number of studies. I hope that they don't miss one in picking them up because it's over a long period. But we'll do the best we can to give them to you.

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask the minister a question with respect to the present actions that are being taken by Amok to handle leach tailings at Cluff Lake. The minister will be aware of the fact that there has been some controversy surrounding whether or not an environmental impact assessment ought to have been done before Amok embarked on their latest plan to remove highly radioactive uranium mine tailings from several hundred — in fact, 3,000 — concrete vaults, process them, and release the radioactive materials into the regular tailings pond that's operated by Amok.

The question that I want to ask the minister is: every plan that Amok implemented up to this time, with respect to this problem of these very highly radioactive leach tailings, has been unsuccessful. I can remember in 1977, when the Cluff Lake board of inquiry hearings were on, and Amok assured us at that time at those hearings that the radioactive vaults that it was designing, that the waste, the radioactive waste, would be placed in these concrete vaults, would be secure for hundreds of years. That's what they promised. And every plan that they've undertaken to handle those radioactive vaults since putting the radioactive materials in them has been a dismal failure, Mr. Minister.

And now what Amok is essentially doing is they're undertaking a disposal plan that they originally promised the public, the Saskatchewan public, they'd never undertake. They're putting the radioactive tailings into the regular tailings pond where they said they'd never go.

And my question to you is: what assurance do you have from Amok and what assurance has your department arrived at that this tailings disposal plan that Amok is now embarked on is going to work any better than all the other plans they've tried in the past that have all failed?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — The member has followed this issue for many more years than I have, and so I would say, for the most part, your facts are correct. However, the decision to put the leach tailings into the concrete barrels was a temporary storage position. That was not the original decision that was made in 1977, but that was the temporary. And it was part of the responsibility of Amok to look for a solution for the disposal of those leach tails. They have looked for that method until now, and have finally come to a position where they've added a fair

addition to their plant, through their processing system, and are able to take these leach tail barrels, dump them in, mix them with other ore to reduce the concentrations, and they are reprocessing.

I think really what Amok has done is to find a solution to a very, very difficult problem that has been facing them and the province for a number of years. Personally, I'm glad that that's the route they are taking, and that gradually we're going to get rid of those barrels, because they've been sitting out in the environment. They've been very difficult to control the run-off from that site. Some of the barrels were starting to crack from frost in the winter-time, and the problem was getting worse, so that it was time that we did deal with it.

Amok has found a method, and it seems to be working as well as that kind of a problem can be handled. At the time they've processed something over 900 of those barrels. They're working towards it by the end of this year. Likely the majority of them will be gone — hopefully all of them. It will likely be much better environmentally for the people in that area and for the whole province.

Mr. Prebble: — Well, the minister simply hasn't answered my question, which is: what assurance does your department have that this proposal will be any more successful than all the other proposals Amok came up with in the past, that have all been dismal failures?

The point I want to make to the minister is that this whole Cluff Lake uranium mine operation, from the point of view of waste disposal, is one giant experiment. And you, sir, consciously made a decision, and your predecessor made a decision, not to require an environmental impact assessment to be done before this new waste disposal plan was put into place.

And you made no provision for public hearings into this waste disposal problem, even though the wastes involved are going to be radioactive for the next 150,000 years. And future generations, if the problem hasn't been handled properly, are going to have to sit down and try to figure out how to dispose of it.

Now, Mr. Minister, my question to you is: first, will you answer my original question? And secondly, will you explain, in light of your inadequacy to answer the first question, why you didn't require an environmental impact assessment, and why you didn't make provisions for public hearings before this waste disposal plan went ahead?

(1245)

Hon. Mr. Swan: — I think I've answered that question many times, and the hon. member just asks it again. Let me tell you that, under The Environmental Assessment Act, that processing was not deemed to be a development and therefore did not require an environmental impact assessment.

I can tell the hon. member that I took my mine pollution staff; we went to the site and reviewed the whole processing equipment and plant that was put in place. My staff did the necessary research to be sure that what they

were telling us was right. I'm advised that the levels of emissions going into the leach-tail area now is exactly what was predicted. And my staff have monitored, and they advise me that they were predicted and that's what's happening. So I think maybe you've had some concerns with what Amok has promised in the past, and it wasn't to your liking. But I believe that what Amok has done in this circumstance has been exactly as predicted, and it seems to be working reasonably well.

One of the staff member, the union local president, Gord Bedient, said that as long as there's plenty of fresh air and ventilation at the mine that there should be no problem with the handling of the leach tails, and they're reasonably satisfied that radiation to them as a staff will not be a problem.

I don't know what answer other than that that I can give to the member. I believe that we reviewed it very carefully. We followed the legislation that is written down. We gave the necessary permission and permits to amok to proceed with the processing of the leach tails. The project is going ahead, and I really believe that at the end of this year the environment in that area is going to be better, not worse. So those are the answers I would give you.

Mr. Prebble: — Well, Mr. Minister, I guess my only comment would be that I believe all you're doing is shifting the problem from a problem on the surface where, albeit it's an eyesore but at least it's readily accessible and can be easily studied, to a problem that's going to end up being in the tailings ponds, which leads to my next comment.

That is, the policy of your department so far has been, with respect to the handling of tailings ponds and radioactive tailings, to require only a covering of six-tenths of 1 meter of gravel, coarse rock, and other materials, over something that is essentially going to be radioactive for the next 150,000 years. That's all you required at Uranium City — six-tenths of a meter. I've read dozens of studies that recommend as much as 20 to 30 feet minimum of covering over radioactive tailings. And my question to you is: when are you going to start following the kind of recommendations that are coming out of a lot of U.S. reports, as an example, that require covering over tailings ponds of 20 to 30 meters to reduce radiation emissions, instead of just six-tenths of a meter? Why didn't you require that at Uranium City, and why aren't you going to require that at a uranium mine like Cluff Lake?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — You can quote from American figures, but every tailings area has different circumstances. At Beaver Lodge, where you say that they are using six-tenths of a meter, that is an area where the tailings are wet. And the emissions of radon gas from wet tailings will not be as serious as they would be in dry tailings.

If it were dry tailings, there may be need for heavier cover — that I'm not sure of. But because the tailings are wet, it is deemed that the cover that is now provided is adequate in that area.

Mr. Prebble: — Well, Mr. Minister, I want to say that in my view I think you're making a very serious mistake. A

future generation of Saskatchewan residents is going to have to go back and handle this whole problem of tailings disposal again, because of the failure of your government to handle it properly. Six-tenths of a meter of coverage over millions of tons of radioactive materials at different mines in this province is never going to stand up to changes in weather conditions and to all the changes that are going to take place over the next 150,000 years. Not a chance, Mr. Minister, and you know that, and your department knows that. This is just a . . . You're just undertaking a very, very temporary disposal solution to what is a very long-term disposal problem, and another generation is going to have to come back and do the work all over again after the uranium mining companies are no longer around to cover any of the costs involved. And I think you're making a very serious mistake.

I want to ask you another question, because time is short, and shift over to the Collins Bay B-Zone Uranium Mine and ask you two specific questions. One is: how in the name of God, did you ever come to justify, Mr. Minister, allowing a uranium mine to open and mine millions of tons of radioactive ore within 100 meters of one of the richest and most valuable water resources that we have in this province, Wollaston Lake. How could you ever justify opening a uranium mine within 100 meters of a lake, closer to a lake than most cottages in this province are to a lake?

And in addition to that, while you answer that question, could you explain to me why, at the same time as you allowed that uranium mine to go ahead, you watered down the lease agreement, dramatically, between your government and the uranium mining company involved, so that most of the major provisions that were in the lease agreement between the Key Lake Mining Corporation and this government were taken out of the lease agreement between your government and Eldorado? Can you explain why you watered down the lease agreements, that had been signed by the previous NDP government, so badly, when you signed the lease agreement with Eldorado?

Hon. Mr. Swan: — Well the hon. member has made quite a speech and covered a lot of areas.

To begin with, when you got up, you told me you were going to be non-political, and I think I just detected a note of politics in that last speech. Let me also have a little note of politics.

The Beaver Lodge situation, to begin with, was left in a very, very poor condition when your government was in office, and we've moved in and we've improved the situation considerable. I'm not saying it's perfect, but it is certainly much better than it ever was at the time that you were on the government side of the House.

As it relates to Wollaston Lake, our department doesn't directly put in the lease arrangements — that's done with a different department. The pit at Collins Bay is much lower than the lake level, and water naturally runs downhill, so you're not going to have seepage going from the mine into the lake. Rather, the seepage will go the opposite way, will go from the lake into the mine. And any waters that go into that mine are handled through the

normal process, and it runs through the mill.

So you don't have a very serious problem there at this point. Even though it was situated close to the lake, it is at a lower level than the lake. The water is running away from the lake, and all tests of lake water show that there has been no contamination of Wollaston Lake.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:59 p.m.