

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ORAL QUESTIONS

Changes to Health Care

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to direct my attention . . . would like to direct my question to the Minister of Health. In her absence I will direct it to the acting minister, then. I suspect the Minister of Health will be here shortly, Mr. Speaker. So in the interim I'll ask this question to the Acting Minister of Health.

We must, Madam Minister, continue on in our discussion that we were on yesterday about the so-called health model, the new health model. And I want to begin, Madam Minister, by correcting one falsehood which is that people have been led to believe that the districts that you are proposing are actually smaller than the districts proposed by the Murray Commission. And I ask you, Madam Minister, will you admit today that Murray proposed 35 districts where you are proposing as few as 20 larger districts? Would you admit that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you. Thank you very much for that question. I think what we're saying about the districts is that the size of the districts is going to be determined by the people in the communities out there.

We're going to work with local communities and say: what size of district makes most sense to the communities out there? Because a big part of wellness is community control.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, I appreciate your answer, and I can understand the difficulty that you are working with in this perspective. And so perhaps now that the Minister of Health is here, I could rephrase that question and ask the Minister of Health that very same question.

Madam Minister, the falsehood that you are propagating is that you are leading people to believe that the districts that you propose are smaller than those districts proposed by the Murray Commission, and I was just asking: will you admit that the districts that Murray proposed are actually up to 35 districts, while those that you are proposing would have a maximum of approximately 20 districts? Just so that we get that clear on record, Madam Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The Murray report, Mr. Speaker, recommended 10 districts in rural Saskatchewan and I think it was one in Regina, one in Saskatoon, and three in the North. Those were the districts that were designed by Murray.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing here is asking people to get organized on a district basis that may be 12,000 — it may be less, it may be more — depending on what meets their needs and depending on what the communities think is appropriate.

The reason we want that to occur is because we have been informed by communities in Saskatchewan, we have been informed by communities in Saskatchewan that in order to provide the kind of services they want to their remote communities, that they feel a critical mass of approximately 12,000 population would be appropriate.

Our objective, Mr. Speaker, is to deliver higher-quality health care services to our remote communities in Saskatchewan and to urban and rural communities, and that's what we will be doing throughout the health care reform.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Before the member asks his next question, I just want to remind him that his two questions were longer than the answers that were given.

Mr. Neudorf: — Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to get into a debate with you. But turning back to the Minister of Health, Madam Minister, you just did exactly what I have been accusing you of. You are leaving the impression that Murray said there will be 10 districts.

Madam Minister, those are the planning districts — 10 planning districts — and within those 10 planning districts there were to be from five to seven health board districts. Which means that actually he was proposing totally different than you are trying to lead this Assembly to believe. There's a difference between a planning district and the health board district, Madam Minister. So please be conscious of that and tell the people the whole truth.

Now, Madam Minister, the acting minister just said that the people out there are going to be determining the boundaries of the health board districts. Are you saying now that the people are going to be sitting down from one area to another, and that they will be designing the boundaries, that you have no maps prepared, that you have nothing ready to guide them? The people themselves, Madam Minister, are actually going to draw the boundaries themselves. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is Mr. Bernard Kirwan and other rural leaders have indicated very clearly that this version of the report, this new document that has been tabled, is very acceptable to our rural communities. And Mr. Kirwan has indicated, as the member opposite will know, that we're glad it's not being forced onto us. It will cause people to co-operate and use their imagination.

Now when we ask communities to get together and organize on a district basis, we are saying: come together with those communities that you feel you can work with and that are appropriate. You tell us what communities you can work with and what sort of area you want to work

with. People have asked us not to impose a blueprint on the province and a map of the boundaries. They asked us not to do that. They want the flexibility to make those determinations on their own.

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your words about telling people that they will be allowed to be making their own decisions ring hollow, Madam Minister.

As about 20 minutes ago my office . . . I had my office phone your office to find out when these public meetings are being planned, when they were being held. We were told by your office, Madam Minister, that there are no public meetings planned, that the only meetings that were being held right now are private meetings with the minister. Those were the words: private meetings with the minister.

Because our MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) want to be out at those meetings that are going to be out there, Madam Minister, are there public meetings that are going to be held?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, I will be meeting with stakeholders throughout the province in the weeks and months to come. They are phoning my office. They're asking me to go out. I've said, bring together the boards in your area, home care and ambulance. We'll sit around a table and we'll talk.

And I will be doing that in the weeks to come. The members opposite want consultation but they're constantly criticizing us when we engage in consultation.

With respect to public forums, if areas want to hold a public forum on the matter, they can. The government is not organizing public forums throughout the province, but if the region or the district wants to do that, that's up to them. It's appropriate. And we have absolutely no problems with that.

The fact of the matter however, is, as Minister of Health, I will be meeting with people throughout the province. And I hope . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, what we're trying to get at on this side of the House is that we want public meetings. We want all-party public hearings to be held throughout this province, so that, Madam Minister, it is not you or your hand-picked bureaucrats that go about leading the people along to draw the conclusions that you want them to have. Madam Minister, that is the concern that we're hearing right now from people.

Madam Minister, my question to you is simply this: will you commit to an all-party public hearings throughout the province so that people can truly get a balanced

approach to this situation?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — We're not going to foist anything on communities. If communities want to hold public meetings, they can. The government is not going to foist anything on them.

What the member opposite wants is to play politics with this issue. He wants to try and destroy the health care reform that the people across this province are asking for and have been asking for for a number of years now. What the member opposite wants to do is what he did in the legislature yesterday and was pointed out by Mona Kines from the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association. His behaviour frustrated her, is her statement. She has said that many people involved in health are willing to bury professional jealousies in order to make health care reform work, and I applaud the professional organizations for what they've done. And she is calling on politicians to do the same thing to make this work for the people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, not for one moment have we questioned the professionalism of any of those people out there. That is not the problem. Their decisions, Madam Minister, are being based on half-truths and falsehoods that you are perpetrating. That is our concern and the reason why we are asking you to do what we're asking you to do.

Now your plan here is a political action plan and you are doing a super sales job on the political aspect of it. Now I want you, Madam Minister, to tell the people that it is their decision and then force the decisions on them by denying funding for anything that you as a NDP Party don't want them to do. That is our concern, Madam Minister.

Now, Madam Minister, I ask you a very simple, straightforward question and I would like that type of an answer. If a local hospital does not want to give up its doctor in return for a visiting nurse, let's say, will you guarantee that funding will be maintained at that doctor level? Will you guarantee that to that community, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The member opposite pays lip service to the need for community input and community involvement and community control. And yet he wants the plans of a health care district to be determined on the floor of this Assembly — totally inconsistent with respect to his positions.

What we will do is we'll ask communities to come together — we'll ask communities to come together. We have witnessed this coming together of communities in the last few months; it's been going on longer than that. People are looking at the health care services that are available in their districts and they're making decisions for themselves based on options that are presented to them and available. They are making decisions for themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fair enough, Madam Minister, fair enough. They make decisions for themselves. But what I'm saying to you now is that the decision in that community is that they're not going to give up their doctor. That's their decision, Madam Minister. You just said that they could make that decision.

Now are you committing yourself to maintain the funding for that doctor that that community has made a decision for itself that they want to maintain? Will you then allow them to maintain that doctor by providing the necessary funding to keep the doctor there?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The member opposite, in his political partisan way, is trying to use scare tactics. Oh yes, what you are using is scare tactics and you should be ashamed of yourself.

What we will be doing throughout this reform is creating a critical mass upon which more doctors can get to our rural communities. And in addition to that what we will be doing is implementing programs to get primary health care nurses doing hands-on work in our communities.

Now this isn't going to happen over night because this is a reform that will take time, Mr. Speaker. The objective and the goal is to look at group medical practices, for example. It doesn't have to occur, but if districts want it to occur they will be able to make it happen. Whereby communities who lose their doctors or if the doctor in a community wants to go on holidays, that they can make sure, through the interim board, that there is a medical professional in that community when needed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister . . . (inaudible) . . . such an answer. Will you maintain the funding for that doctor?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, is that in the health care reform what we want to do is develop a quality health care system that brings more workers to rural communities and more health care services to rural Saskatchewan and urban centres.

In order to do this it is absolutely crucial for us to co-ordinate and integrate services in the health care system. Absolutely crucial. And the people of Saskatchewan recognize this. They recognize this. You hear it on the open lines, you read it in the newspaper. They recognize the need for reform and they are pleased their government is showing some leadership.

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, you're obviously refusing to answer that question, so my next one will be a lengthy question.

Mr. Speaker, to the Madam Minister I say, there's a political agenda here, and it's a shameful political agenda. It's obvious by your answers. This plan that you're talking about is going to be imposed on

communities, and that's the truth. The minister has already got maps prepared for the boundaries, and that's the truth. The minister's boundaries are larger than those in Murray's, and that's the truth. And this minister is already threatening communities like Eastend with a loss of funding if they do not bow to her will, and that's the truth, Mr. Speaker.

And I simply ask you, Madam Minister, do you deny that your officials told the people of Eastend that if they did not give in to your demands, that \$140,000 would be taken away from their hospital. Do you deny that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, I have not been present at the meetings that the officials in the department have had with Eastend, but I do know that the member opposite was present at the Eastend meeting, attempting to foment dissension amongst the communities. Because those members opposite, their political agenda has been, since time immemorial, to pit urban communities against rural communities; to pit farmers against workers; and to pit professional people against people who aren't professional.

The members opposite have been bent on that agenda for over ten and a half years. And now they are attempting to do the same thing again. They want to go into our rural communities, and they want to do what they can to destroy any possibility of health care reform.

But I have faith in the . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, one thing that you are accomplishing is pitting community against community. I just talked to the mayor of Leader, and you'll be interested in hearing from the mayor of Leader on this issue and many, many other communities in this province whom you are now pitting one against the other because, Madam Minister, it's not reasonable to expect Eastend to say, sure we'll give up our hospital. We'll give up our \$140,000. It's not reasonable, Madam Minister, to expect that.

Now I want a clear answer from you, and I want the media to listen to this, and I want the people of Saskatchewan to listen to this: what is your explanation for refusing to allow a committee of this legislature to hold public hearings? What is your answer to that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, I once again ask the members opposite to join us in the health care reform and to try and facilitate it. They don't want to be positive about this. They want to be destructive. They want to do what they can to undermine health care reform in this province and to try to foment dissension because that's their game plan.

The fact of the matter is, is health care reform is absolutely essential. We will be meeting with people throughout Saskatchewan. The whole process is one of consultation

and dialogue. And that will be occurring. We will be consulting with communities. We'll be asking them to come together. We'll be asking them to consider their health care needs.

And we will do in this process what we can to improve the quality of health care services in our rural communities for example, and in our urban communities, and to bring people together to look at a district of approximately 12,000 . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — If at all possible, we would like to join in you in this exercise. And if you want to take politics out of this situation, the way to do it is to appoint an all-party committee as we have done on the constitution for example. And I think you will find that the Premier and the Minister of Justice are very satisfied in the non-partisan manner in which that committee is working.

But the reason, Madam Minister, is that you are involved in politics while you're attempting this process. And you obviously know better than the Premier; you obviously know better than the Minister of Justice. It's got to be your way or no way, Madam Minister. I'm not getting any answers from you.

Now I ask you this, Madam Minister. Quite bluntly I ask you this: are there any circumstances, are there any circumstances under which you would consider agreeing to an all-party committee of this Assembly to study the matter? Are there any circumstances at all?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, this government is showing some leadership. The members opposite spent \$1.8 million on a health care study and then shelved it. And they did nothing with it. And they didn't have the courage to do anything. And now they want the matter studied some more and reviewed some more.

The fact of the matter is, is stakeholders throughout this province have been asking for over 10 years that we need health reform. They have presented briefs to the Murray Commission and other bodies over the last 10 or 20 years. There has been a lot of input on this.

Finally it's time for somebody to take a stand, to put a document forward, and to go out and make it work in our communities, to consult and to develop a health care system that is going to bring quality health care services to our communities at a time when we are facing a huge deficit created by the members . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, the degree of hypocrisy dripping from your lips is just appalling. Totally appalling. That is the most hypocritical stand that I have seen.

When the Murray Commission report came out you were

roundly condemning it at every twist and turn — roundly condemning it. Now what are you doing? You're are holding it up as the be-all and the end-all that you're going to be following.

Madam Minister, the hypocrisy of your government and your stand where you said you would be spending more on health — you condemned us for a 4 per cent increase; now you're having a 4 per cent decrease — Madam Minister, that hypocrisy and betrayal on the people of Saskatchewan is not going unnoticed by the people.

Madam Minister, a simple question to you now. You have stated that there are 67 town hospitals that are going to be closed — 67. Now there is a lot of doubt on there to which of those hospitals are the ones that are going to be closed or stand the jeopardy of being changed, in your words. Would you table the list of those 67 that you're talking about in this legislature and write a letter to them indicating that you are the ones that I'm talking about. Would you do that, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Simard: — If we want to talk about hypocrisy, let's talk about the member opposite and his statement that we said 67 hospitals would be closed. He knows full well we haven't said that. What we are talking about with respect to hospitals is we're asking communities to come together and to look at the possibility of options, for example, that may provide higher-quality services to these communities. We'll be asking small hospitals to do that and communities to do that — to take a look at options that will provide higher quality health care services.

I want to say once again, the members opposite were on the wrong side of the issue in 1962, and they're on the wrong side of the issue again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Madam Minister, you have said all throughout question period that the local individuals will be the ones that make decisions versus health care spending in the future.

Would you tell the legislature today whether it will be the citizens in Regina or the citizens of southern Saskatchewan who will make the determination on the Plains Health Centre?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — With respect to the Plains Health Centre, the Regina Health Board has been asked to consult and engage in whatever consultations are necessary in order to come up with recommendations. I would assume that that involves consultation with all people who are users of the Plains Health Centre.

There is no decision by this government to close the Plains Health Centre. There was a report commissioned by the PC (Progressive Conservative) government, the Atkinson report, that has recommended the closure of the Plains Health Centre. Instead of adopting that recommendation, we have asked the Regina Health

Board to consult further.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Question to the same minister. Madam Minister, as usual you continue to mislead. The Atkinson report came out with five options on the disposition at the Regina Plains Health Centre — five.

Now, Madam Minister, if the Regina Health Board, as you say, in consultation with other health entities in southern Saskatchewan make a determination on that particular institution that is other than closure, will they have the freedom to run that particular institution? Will you fund it? Or will you tell the tax base of either Regina or southern Saskatchewan that they then should come in with extra money? Which will be the determination?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, I don't believe these questions. The fact of the matter is, is the Regina Health Board will be doing the consultation with respect to this and will be advising us of what they have heard. At that time we will be, in conjunction with the Regina Health Board . . .

An Hon. Member: — Oh, then you will be making the decision.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Well the funding. There is a funding issue here that has to be considered. If the members opposite are suggestion that the Plains Hospital should be closed, then they have to be aware that there are millions of dollars that will have to be put into the Regina General Hospital in order to do that. If the Plains Health Centre is going to be closed, it will cost millions of dollars to renovate the General Hospital.

I would ask the members opposite if that is what they're suggesting we do, because I trust it is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Russian Grain Sales Suspended

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to speak today on a matter of major concern to Saskatchewan farmers. The suspension of sales to Russia is a significant disruption in the grain sales and will have a significant impact on farmers in Saskatchewan in coming months.

The Russian market has been a major one for Canadian grains, as members opposite know, Mr. Speaker, buying on average nearly 27 per cent of our wheat exports, 32 per cent of our durum, and 24 per cent of the barley exports from the Canadian market.

The cash-flow difficulties faced by Russia, its inability to remain current on its credit, and the need to suspend shipment are a concern to all farmers and all parts of the agricultural industry. Farmers have already faced poverty-level incomes in the last two years. In 1992 incomes were projected to be increased somewhat, but are still below the average level of the 1980s.

Farmers are in no position to withstand any disruption that further erodes their livelihood. The federal government's interest-free cash advance can help provide cash flow to farmers if sales are disrupted for any length of time.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is sending a letter to the federal Minister of Agriculture, asking Ottawa to take the following steps. And, Mr. Speaker, we would ask the members opposite to join in this proposal.

First, the federal government must give farmers a clear indication it will stand behind them, both by securing access to difficult markets and by protecting them from any further disruption in cash flow. And secondly, Mr. Speaker, it must continue to offer interest-free cash advances for 1992-93 crop year. Mr. Speaker, that item is still outstanding, even though farmers are beginning to harvest this year's crop.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank members of the Assembly and ask the members of the opposition to join with us in this proposal to the federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, first of all, that we will support the government if they are planning on sending a letter to the Minister of Agriculture, asking to have the greatest amount of insight into the development and maintaining the markets that we have, particularly the Soviet Union. And I think this comes on the heels of the report in the paper that the grain sales are going to curtailed because the limit has been reached in what the Canadian Wheat Board can provide as a backstop for loans to the Russian community. And that is significant. And I think that we need to be very careful what we do there.

However there's one point that I want to make on the interest-free cash advance. You are being again a little hypocritical in saying the cash advance should be continued in grain, and what we had initiated as a livestock cash advance, you cut off on August 1.

Now what you need to do, Mr. Minister, is to seriously consider the livestock industry as an asset in the Saskatchewan rural community, and say to the hog producers and the cattle producers in the province of Saskatchewan that they will have equal opportunity with the grain producers in order to market the grain through the livestock that they have in the province of Saskatchewan. And that, Mr. Minister, is what you should be doing and initiating with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture.

So putting the interest-free cash advance, making it available for 1992-93 in the crop year, is an excellent idea. The second excellent idea is also that you make it available to the livestock producers so that they can maintain and continue the development of the livestock industry in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Expenditure Seniors' Secretariat Vote 42

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to please introduce her officials to the House.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce Brenda Righette, who is the executive director of the Seniors' Secretariat, and Del Fuchs, who is the director of seniors' programs.

Item 1

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the fact . . . First of all I'll acknowledge the fact that the minister has been very forthright in responding to the global questions, and acknowledge the fact that we've reviewed the global questions and there weren't any further questions that we felt were not appropriately addressed that we'd like to bring up today.

But we would like to just make a couple of comments and we trust that as we enter into the debate today and even as we get into the areas of Social Services, that the minister will be as forthright as she was in responding to the question posed by my colleague on health. And we know the Minister of Social Services has indicated more than a willingness to be as forthright as she can be.

When we talk about seniors, Madam Minister, certainly one of the major concerns, I guess, across this province and the fact that since we have a population that is getting older, or we have such a large seniors population in this province, there are major concerns that senior citizens do have regarding funding.

And as I look through the budgetary statement presented by the Minister of Finance, I notice that there's a substantial decrease for the estimated expenditures in Seniors' Secretariat this year compared to the forecast for '91-92.

I think, Madam Speaker and Mr. Chairman, in light of the fact that seniors over the years — and I will acknowledge the fact that seniors are like many other groups — themselves they have a hard time working together and having one cohesive force.

We have, as I found out when I met with the senior's "Action Now" committee, many of those seniors did not agree with the individuals who are working on the plus 55 games and I think there's something like a half a dozen or so organizations, and I think that they were all pulling from different directions. So it must be difficult for the staff and for the minister to understand exactly what seniors are looking for.

But I do know some of the major concerns they do have

are areas like the heritage grant which has been discontinued. Certainly they are concerned about the fact that the Minister of Health through the Minister of Finance are talking about eliminating subsidies or care through the level 1 and 2 care home projects, Madam Speaker.

And another area, Madam Speaker, is the fact that they just are wondering exactly what role the Seniors' Secretariat is going to play in the future. So I guess my first question, Madam Speaker — I posed two or three — but I would like to ask what, Madam Minister, what your observations are of Seniors' Secretariat and the role that you as a minister will be playing in the future and what role Seniors' Secretariat will have in the overall scheme of this province?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thanks for that question. I think what something like the Senior's Secretariat can do very effectively in government, is to work across departments to ensure that programs that affect seniors are better co-ordinated and are better targeted to seniors most in need.

So I certainly see a continuing role for the secretariat. And I think one of the great advantages with the secretariat is we have the seniors' provincial council which represents people from 15 different seniors' organizations and they are very helpful in co-ordinating our role as government with the opinions and the views of seniors' organizations.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, I guess one of the areas that has drawn a fair bit of criticism is the fact that the department has . . . or Department of Finance certainly has decided to discontinue the seniors' heritage grant.

A couple of questions I'd like to ask the minister is, how many seniors are affected by this program, the discontinuance of this program? And what kind of economic or dollar spin-off or saving is going to be . . . the Minister of Finance is going to see through the discontinuance of this program?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Okay. Thank you for that question — 28,750 seniors lost benefits. The savings to the treasury were \$10.9 million.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I noticed one article back in June 11, '92 in the *Leader-Post* where the headline was: "Seniors watch NDP gov't" And no doubt I think many people across this province right now are watching the government regarding the changes that are taking place. And certainly a lot of change is taking place contrary to the observations people made prior to the election back in October.

And as I indicated, and I've had many people in my constituency, seniors themselves who have acknowledged the fact that the deficit we faced back prior to October, 1991, the deficit we face today, sooner or later must be addressed. And many seniors acknowledge that they may have to have a part and take a part in addressing the deficit.

And I think we talk about deficits, we don't just talk about the deficit provincially, but we must look at the overall

impact of the deficit we face on the national scene as well.

And seniors in this article indicated that they are in support of eliminating the deficit. The major concern they have is that the deficit reduction isn't done at the expense of the poor. One comment was made in this article — and I'd like the minister to comment on it — regarding the elimination of the heritage grant.

The individual that was quoted said he liked some of the alternatives that have been tossed out, and one of the alternatives he mentioned was "like the Home Adaption for Seniors Independence Program that provides \$2,500 in grants." I wonder if the minister could comment on what this gentleman was talking about at that time. Is this a new program for seniors, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thank you very much for that question. That is a new program. It's a joint program with the federal government. It helps seniors remain in their own homes by providing grants to allow them to renovate their homes to accommodate a disability; that is, if they're disabled they can get a grant to renovate their home so that they're not forced to leave their homes.

The other program that we are introducing in conjunction with New Careers is assistance, not just to seniors but to other low income groups, in repairing homes, whereby we would provide assistance in terms of evaluating the project and also basically we would subsidize the labour component.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. That last response regarding New Careers, I take it from that — and of course we'll be dealing with New Careers shortly — you're going to be using some of the New Careers program and kind of co-ordinating I take it some of the seniors' housing needs through New Careers to provide the necessary services available to . . . Would that also be involved . . . would you use New Careers in this program that's helping the disabled; but by providing ramps and services through the disabled, are you going to kind of co-ordinate all of this into one service versus overlapping, or having two different agencies dealing with services like that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much for that question. The program for disabled seniors covers the whole cost, that is, labour and materials. New Careers, all we would do is we would provide the labour component.

What I find with seniors in my constituency, often say, especially single women seniors, is they have difficulty making renovations on their homes or doing basic repairs. So what we would do is we would be there, we would be a reliable contractor, and we would also be subsidizing the cost.

(1445)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, when you're talking about . . . If I caught you correctly, you were talking about the fact that you would give assistance in seeking a reliable contract. Is that what . . . I think one of the problems . . . I'll pose this question,

Madam Minister.

One of the problems I think many people face, and seniors in particular, is the fact that even when we look back at the home program that was introduced by the former government back in 1986 — the \$1,500 matching grant program — many seniors, I think more than other people, got caught in a merry-go-round, if you will, of — and I'm going to use the term — unscrupulous individuals who took advantage of people, went to them and said, well there's a grant here and if you put a few dollars here and we see your home needs some work done on it, some renovations, and we can do it for such-and-such an amount.

Many people, specifically the single senior women who were still in their own homes, may have been taken in. And I don't think that they intended to be, but they put their trust, like a lot of people across Saskatchewan put trust in individuals yet. And we just have a recent incident in the local news about an individual putting his trust and going out as a good Samaritan to help somebody, only to lose his life.

And I think, Madam Minister, when we come to programs that are helping people, it may be appropriate for the department or for someone to at least have, or the seniors having, an avenue in which they can do some consulting or consult someone to at least get some information and feel that at the end of the day when work is done, that they have received the value for their dollar.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. I acknowledge the concern about elder abuse, that for seniors this is a major concern for seniors. And it's one that the secretariat is taking very seriously.

Now with respect to New Careers, New Careers will actually be doing the work. So this is one of the advantages. We have, you know, the trained foremen who have the expertise. And then the actual work is done by people on social assistance. So it's taking people on social assistance, getting them to work on a very worthwhile project which is providing . . . doing repairs for low income people. And I would imagine a lot of the people who will sign up for this will be seniors.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, and Mr. Chairman, I guess another area of major concern to seniors is the fact that drug costs have gone up substantially. And as we see from the recent budget, the seniors are now . . . not only have families gone from \$125 a year premium to 380, but senior families where there are two people are doubling from 75 to \$150 in their deductible, and likewise singles from 50 to \$100.

Now I guess one of the major concerns that comes across my desk daily is the fact that for individuals . . . and no doubt seniors fall into a bracket of individuals who tend to be forced or in some ways end up on more medication than many of us. And for those of us who are quite healthy, I guess we should be thankful for that, because when you look at medication costs today, it certainly can take a big bite out of your budget.

And that's the thing that I face, and I know it's a difficult

scenario. Because many of these individuals happen to be senior single women. They happen to be on the lowest fixed income that's available as far as . . . In most cases they're on the Saskatchewan Income Plan and on the federal income plan. And to see the increases in the utility rates and increases in health taxes and the increases in everyday taxes, Madam Minister, it has created a major problem for many of these people.

And as minister responsible for seniors, what have you or your department done to address some of these concerns specifically with cabinet and with the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. I think there were a lot of difficult decisions that had to be made in the budgeting process. Some of them certainly related to the drug program. But I would still say two things. We still have one of the best drug plans in Canada today. And another thing about the plan as it exists now is it has something that wasn't there before. It has a threshold. And if you spend \$390 on drugs and you're a heavy user, after that your co-payment is reduced. So before, there was no protection for people who did have to take a lot of medication.

One feature of the plan as it exists now is that there is that protection. The other protection that we worked with Health to put in place was to protect seniors who really could not afford to pay. That is, never mind the 390, they can't even pay that.

And what is in place, and perhaps we should do a better job of advertising this, is there is an emergency service in place. So if a senior goes to a pharmacist, anybody goes to a pharmacist, cannot pay the cost of the drug, there's a 24-hour WATS (wide area telephone service) line where the prescription can be filled. And then there's a process whereby an application can be made and the senior or other person can have the co-payment reduced or whatever's appropriate to suit the circumstances.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I believe that certainly having access to a phone number — and I believe you said a 1-800 number — is something that is positive. Because it's not always that easy for someone who's not feeling well to go to the druggist and not have the money available, then have to go home and go through the process of talking to a worker or calling someone and maybe a week or so later finding out that they finally can get the funding that's needed.

I'm also wondering if the department or recommendation to Finance wouldn't be . . . or we couldn't form a . . . make a provision that allows people to lay out what their income projections may be for a year. A lot of times, especially when it comes to the income plan, the Saskatchewan Income Plan kind of kicks in behind the guaranteed income supplement of the federal government.

And that is based on a person's filing for their income tax notice. And many times, especially today with the fact that interest rates are fluctuating so much, many people if they do have a few dollars in the bank are caught in a position where their income can change dramatically

before the year is out. And maybe at the start of the year, when they file their income tax, they may be in a position where they don't qualify, or for a very minimal income supplement; by the end of the year they could be on substantial income supplement.

I'm wondering if there could be a process adopted that speeds up getting these numbers, or making these numbers available, or allowing people to make these numbers available so that we can kind of keep in touch rather than having people always continually calling departments or calling offices trying to make arrangements to get them through their difficult times.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thanks for that question. SIP (Saskatchewan Income Plan), one of the reasons SIP is so easy to administer is it is piggybacked right off the GIS (guaranteed income supplement). So basically the federal government is the one that decides the criteria, and then we just automatically trigger our program on to the GIS.

Now the GIS, which is the federal supplement, does work on a prospective basis. That is, if you're . . . say you are a new senior. You don't have to go on the basis of your last year's income if you actually believe that your income may decline in the coming year. You can file a form saying this is the income that I anticipate; this is my prospective income, and they will base your payments on that.

We also have a 1-800 number for seniors to facilitate, you know, the process. So if they have a problem, they can call us quickly and get an answer.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, what is the provincial commitment to the Saskatchewan Income Plan? What's their guaranteed maximum that a person could receive at the present time?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — For a single person, the maximum per month now is 80; it's going up to 90 in October. For a couple it's now 135, and it's going up to 145 in October.

Mr. Toth: — This is a monthly amount?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, I guess one area that I feel would address some of the problems we are facing today is a program that was initiated by the former government. And it's a program that helps people build for the future, and that's Saskatchewan Pension Plan. And in light of the fact that some 40,000-plus of the 56,000 participants in the plan were women, it would appear to me, Madam Minister, it would be more appropriate to help people build for the future, rather than governments of the day always being forced to — as we have here — looking at an income guarantee to try and at least maintain a minimum income available for our seniors or for individuals who are caught in circumstances beyond their control.

I'm just wondering, Madam Minister, if as the Minister responsible for Seniors' Secretariat and certainly Women's Secretariat would almost come under the same

... I believe comes under your mantle as well, Madam Minister. If indeed you've taken the time to really consult with your cabinet colleagues about the Saskatchewan Pension Plan and not just ... we see that you've allowed it to continue and suggest that it will continue.

But I think at the present basis where it's sitting in limbo, many people are just concerned that it will not be much of a program at all. It won't be of any benefit. And I think it would be appropriate for us to take a serious look at that program to indeed give it some credibility so that it would help people, especially housewives, or people working in small businesses on low incomes, Madam Minister ... could plan for their future because I believe in the long run it can be a very beneficial support program, mechanism in place that will take a lot of people off of the guaranteed income support plan.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you. I'm not responsible for the pension plan but I have no problem answering the question.

There was a flaw in the program from the point of view of the commitment of the province. Because what the program really did was it took low income seniors and it increased our commitment to them and lessened the federal government's commitment to them. That is, a low income senior who in other circumstances, without the plan, would qualify for the GIS, the federal supplement. We in fact were wedging provincial dollars in there and lessening the commitment to the federal government. Now that was a flaw, as far as I was concerned.

But the reason for the changes to the plan were financial, because of the cost to the plan. But the plan has not been abolished. People will be allowed to continue to make contributions. We are also negotiating with the federal government to allow people, if they want to withdraw their money, to have the money withdrawn and put into another shelter plan like an RRSP (registered retirement savings plan) and not be taxed on the money that they withdraw. Because we feel that's fair. Because we've changed the rules, we think that we have to give them the option to withdraw if they choose that.

I think in the long term, when you talk about women — and I agree, women on pensions is a serious problem — with so many women now in the work force, I think one way to start dealing with the problem at a very early stage is to ensure there are better pension benefits for groups like part-time workers, 70 per cent of whom tend to be women. So I think you have to start earlier to ensure that pensions are in place. And one way to do it is through changes to labour standards.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I appreciate that. But one of the problems you do face is the fact that ... Just take the farming situation, and I think that's one of the major areas where women run into a major problem, because of the fact that you really ... How do you pay your spouse? And yet that is the only appropriate way for an individual to at least acknowledge. And yet it's taken a long time for Revenue Canada to recognize the fact that a spouse in a farming operation, even though they may be involved in the house and may not be specifically out running a piece of

equipment, play a very major role in the ongoing workings of that farm, or the economic viability of that farm.

And I think that's why a lot of women over the years have ended up in a situation where they really haven't had anything at the end of the day, and maybe that's an area that we need to address. And as Minister responsible for Seniors and women, that's probably an area that I would ask the minister to certainly raise with the federal government as well.

Allowing small businesses, working with small businesses, and maybe this is ... I'm not sure, there's a pension plan Act before this Assembly, whether it allows for some changes or allows for some room to negotiate and manoeuvre to build pensions for women. But I think that's where my personal view of the Saskatchewan Pension Plan was. Even though the government may have felt it was too large and maybe it was too costly, it was probably costly on the fact that there was an automatic \$15-a-month pay-out. But I would suggest, as the younger generation were involved and as more women got involved and the program was allowed to build over a number of years, it would have built itself into a place where it should carry itself.

And probably what the government could have looked at, rather than matching up the \$300, even matching, let's say, a hundred dollars. And that's what many women have suggested to me. They weren't necessarily saying, maintain that \$300 match; maybe give us a hundred dollars or whatever. But encourage ... the idea was to encourage people to plan for the future.

(1500)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you. A lot of those issues would have to be raised, as you pointed out, with the federal government. What I would encourage the member opposite to do though with some of these ideas, is to plug into the income security review where we're reviewing all programs. But we have a special unit looking particularly at seniors' programs. Some of the consultations will be done by the seniors' provincial council and others will be done by department officials.

But it's things like this that we want to look at. What dollars are in the system across the piece, not just in the Seniors' Secretariat, not just in one department, but in several departments. What dollars are in the system for seniors and are we using the dollars as effectively as possible? Are we doing the very best job with the dollars we have?

So that's the purpose of that review. And we really are trying to get as much input as possible. So I would encourage the member opposite to give us his ideas.

Mr. Toth: — Well I thank you, Madam Minister. And certainly I would be more than willing to offer and, as I've mentioned even just previously, throwing out some ideas that I've had.

I did catch up on the Minister of Finance's comment about wasting money. And certainly there's ... it doesn't

matter where government's involved, it's difficult just to really track and police all the spending. But I think what we need to do is learn how to work with groups, and in many cases working together versus always pulling apart.

Just a couple more questions, Madam Minister. What I'm wondering is, what cuts were made in Seniors' Secretariat to date financially and were any programs besides the heritage grant cut from Seniors' Secretariat?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — There was a reduction in grants to seniors' activity centres. They were cut in half.

Mr. Toth: — What effect will the cuts made to the department — and I'm specifically looking at the fact that funding is down from 48 to 37, something like \$11 million — what effect does this have on the department?

And one other question before I take my place. Is this the beginning of the end for Seniors' Secretariat, Madam Minister, or do you see the Seniors' Secretariat continuing to have a role in government?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. The majority of the reduction is the heritage grant. And then the other one I mentioned was the activity centres.

I think that the Seniors' Secretariat will continue to have a role because I think one of the problems is the one I mentioned a minute ago. We have to do a better job of co-ordinating across departments. If one department does this, another department does that, a third one this, what is the cumulative effect on seniors? How is this affecting seniors across the piece? And so therefore the secretariat will continue to have a very vital role in doing that.

And I think the other thing is, when you're dealing with seniors, there's such a resource out there that we have to continue to tap and that is that they have so many different organizations, they have lots of time, they work very hard as volunteers in their different organizations. And the secretariat plays a key role in having a liaison relationship so that we can get their input very easily. So for those two reasons I would see it continuing to be very active.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 42 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Seniors' Secretariat
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 42**

Items 1 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 42 agreed to.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, just before the officials just get away, I just want to say thank you for their help and joining with the minister and I in debating the Seniors' Secretariat this afternoon.

The Chair: — The Chair would also like to . . . we'd ask that the minister communicate appreciation to her officials as well.

**Consolidated Fund Expenditure
New Careers Corporation
Vote 59**

Item 1

The Chair: — And before I recognize the hon. member from Arm River, I'll ask that the minister introduce her official who is here with us for this estimate.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you. I'd like to introduce Alvin Gallinger who is the chief executive officer of the New Careers Corporation.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This isn't going to take very long to do this. I just have a few questions.

Madam Minister, the first thing that comes to my mind, I see going back to the years 1991 and then '91-92, there's been an increase. And this year I see a decrease in the total expenditures for New Careers Corporation. Now I just wondered what cut-backs the roughly \$2 million or 2 million-plus means here. What does it entail?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Okay. Thank you very much. There's about a \$2 million decrease. About a million of that comes from Sask Works. The employment program last year had a budget of about 6 million. It's about 5 million this year. And one of the reasons for the change is the federal government changed its rules last September, October. They used to cost share those programs, so that if we spent . . . and actually in a way we're spending more, because if we spent \$6 million on employment programs last year, we would get back from the federal government three, because it was cost shared.

In September, October, they ended cost sharing so that now when we spend 5 million on employment training programs, it costs the province 5 million. We don't get that back from the federal government. So there's a million less in these numbers, although in effect, in the long-term effect, it is not that great. And the other million is administrative, a series of small changes in tightening up the operation.

Mr. Muirhead: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, you're saying that in 1992-93 there will be no federal monies and in 1991-92 there was? Was there in '91-92 and what percentage? What percentage of what?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — We can get the exact number for you, but the principle basically is cost sharing. So that if you put in, as the corporation did last year, 6 million into training, at the end of that cycle, you get back from the federal government 3 million because it was a cost-shared program.

So it would be approximately 3 million, but we'll get the exact number for you. And that has changed. Now it is not cost shared so the province pays the whole shot. So in a

sense we're spending more because our part of the cost last year was 3 million for the training programs; this year it's 5 million.

Now what the federal government has said is that they will cost match it. That is they will put the equivalent of \$6 million in training programs into the province. We're still working out that agreement with the federal government.

So in sense we should, if what they're saying proves to be true, get \$12 million worth of training programs in the province . . . or \$10 million worth of training programs in the province. Our 5 and then they should cost match it and they should put another 5 million into their own kind of training programs.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Madam Minister. So, just so I have it clear, let's go to last year's . . . just a question on last year so I understand this. The \$11,341,800 last year, was that . . . was there a percentage come back from the federal government of that or was the percentage over and above that?

This should have been . . . whatever's in here should be the actual spending, of government spending. It should be because if there's . . . they'd have to show an income if there's money coming from the federal government. If there's money come from the federal government last year, then where did it go?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — It's in a sense, it's a complicated process. The department, New Careers Corporation, the Department of Social Services, same principle. We spend all the dollars up front. So we spend the total amount. Then the province is reimbursed from the federal government for the cost-shared programs, but that money goes into Consolidated Fund rather than into our individual budgets. It goes into the Consolidated Fund when it comes from the federal government.

Mr. Muirhead: — Okay, I understand that, Madam Minister. That's fine. Thank you very much.

I want to move along here quickly. Just for saving time here, because I do want to get on to Social Services, Madam Minister, could you send me documents or send us over documents that will show us where New Careers will be spending this money? Would you be able to supply that?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No problem. We can easily supply that. A more detailed breakdown than what you have now? No problem. Yes, we will.

Mr. Muirhead: — And of the total vote, Madam Minister, how much is for administration?

(1515)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Can we provide that to you? It's more complicated this year because, as you know, a part of the Department of Social Services was basically carved out of Social Services and moved across to New Careers. So we have to put together the consolidated picture. But I have no problem in providing that to you.

Mr. Muirhead: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, that's fine.

I just have two questions that I . . . two more questions and I'll put them together. I'd like to have . . . Well maybe you can answer this one individually. I'm just not understanding and I should I guess: what do you mean by when they put in the vote here “. . . Local Authorities and Other Third Parties”? I don't know what you mean there or what it means.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — What that term means is that it's grants to individuals. Could be, say, a grant to a trainee working on a program, and it also is grants to groups like, for example, a non-governmental organization that had successfully applied for a grant. It would be a grant to, say, a food bank to hire the trainee as well.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you. My last question is, is what new plans have you in the department for promoting new programs for 1992-93?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I think our major priority is that there's an imbalance right now. The group of people who tend to be on long-term social assistance tend to be female — a lot of, say, single-parent women. Our programs tend to be programs, the training programs, male. So we have to readjust that balance. We have to look at ways to gear our programs to the long-term people on social assistance who tend to be single-parent women. And that's our goal.

It's a difficult one to achieve because it's often easier to provide construction-type work which tends to be male. But that is our major priority for the next year.

Mr. Muirhead: — Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, you say that's going to be the major priorities. But what other . . . and you don't have to . . . you're going to get me some information anyway. Maybe you could just give me an outline of what all the new programs that you're talking about initiating . . . And if that's agreeable, we can move on.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank the minister and her officials for coming in to answer these short questions. I don't mean to just shove over New Careers because I think it's quite important. But it's not a big department, not a lot of spending. And I think it's very important. And if there's anything else comes up in my mind, Madam Minister, I can always talk to you and get answers I'm quite sure. So I'm quite willing to let it go.

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 59 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
New Careers Corporation
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 59**

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 59 agreed to.

The Chair: — The Chair would also like to thank the minister's officials for assisting in this estimate.

**Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Social Services
Vote 36**

The Chair: — I will ask the minister, first of all, to introduce her officials who have joined her in the Assembly.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Con Hnatiuk, who's the deputy minister; I'd like to introduce Bob Blackwell, who's the assistant deputy minister; and Elizabeth Smith, who's the executive director of support services.

Item 1

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Firstly I'd like to thank the minister for the pre-questions that we asked of her department and her office. We've been through them very carefully and are very satisfied with the answers that came back.

There were three or four minor ones that weren't answered. And you made such a good job of the important ones that we're not going to . . . There was a few about your office that were missed, but it's not important so we're not going to spend any time asking questions on any of those questions at all, Madam Minister.

I have one question that I want to ask before I get into my main questioning here. There was a name that has been brought to my attention, the name Kim . . . I'm not sure I'm pronouncing it right. I'll spell it so I make sure I've got the name right — D-y-m-y-t-r-y-s-h-y-n. I think that's close. Do you know who I'm talking about, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Kim Dymytryshyn.

Mr. Muirhead: — Okay. Sorry I didn't know how to pronounce it. Is she paid for any services, any contract, any way in public by public monies?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — She's on the Social Services appeal board for the Saskatoon region. She's actually the chair for the Saskatoon area.

Mr. Muirhead: — So you're saying she's on a board. Is that just on a board or full-time board or full-time worker?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — What it is, is it's if you have a complaint about the way the department's handled your case, you can appeal it. And there's a local board, and this would be the board for Saskatoon. Then if you're still not satisfied or if the department isn't satisfied with the judgement at that level, you can take it to a provincial appeal board.

So it's a board that only sits when there are appeals to be heard, and they're paid on a per diem basis.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Madam Minister. That's fine. And the other name is Peter Prebble. Is he working for government or getting any funds out of government,

that you know of?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — He's not getting any . . . he's not working for the Department of Social Services, that's for sure.

Mr. Muirhead: — Would the Department of Social Services, would they be paying any grants to any departments or into any other individuals or organizations that he could be working for?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — As far as I know, Mr. Prebble is not employed right now. I'm not sure of that, but that's my understanding. Certainly as far as we're aware, he's not getting any . . . no organization gets a grant who also employs Mr. Prebble.

Mr. Muirhead: — That's fine, Madam Minister.

Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, the only reason I ask that question, that I was talking to him a few months ago and I asked him if he was working. He said that he was working but not being paid by government, and I wasn't just sure what he meant. He was working for government, not being paid for government. But that's fine.

I just thought I'd ask you in case he was involved in Social Services because his heart and soul was always in Social Services, and he's the one that made the billion-dollar promises — if we're to win another election. I think he was sitting right about here, Madam Minister, when you weren't here, and I think his promises were the billion-dollar man. He was nicknamed in here as the billion-dollar man.

And I don't mean to slight him because the things he was asking for he believed in his heart was right, and maybe for the people of Saskatchewan it was right. We might be talk a little bit more about some of the things that he asked.

I want to start off, Madam Minister . . . I understand . . . I guess if you turn over to the *Estimates*, page 86, I would think that the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan, that's where all persons will be paid social assistance. Is that the funding that covers all people in the province for social assistance?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — That's correct.

Mr. Muirhead: — I'd just like to ask a few questions pertaining to that item. Could you give me a . . . Just taking it for example that there's an individual, an employable individual, what would their total assistance come to? An employable individual, whether they're living in a city or in rural Saskatchewan, or if there's any difference. If there's no difference, I'd like to know please, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — They would be entitled to \$480 a month.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you. Was that \$480 a month, is that the total basic monies they would receive, or does that include other benefits paid on their behalf? Is that the total or is there other benefits on their behalf paid out?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — That's the total benefits, and it would include — I'll just read what it is — basic allowance for food, clothing, personal, household items, of \$195; utilities and laundry, maximum of 75; shelter, maximum of 210; for a total of 480. So that's the whole package.

Mr. Muirhead: — Is there any other benefits under certain circumstances that they could receive through Social Services?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The only other thing would be a special-needs benefit, like if they were a disabled person, for example; or a health care benefit, if they became ill, they would have that paid. And of course if they were in training, they would have their training paid as well.

Mr. Muirhead: — Now could you give me what a couple, two people living together, what their same benefits would be . . . the same answer for only two people living together.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The total amount would be \$870. The breakdown would be, the basic allowance would be 390, utilities and laundry maximum would be 365, and shelter, 115, for a total of 870.

(1530)

Mr. Muirhead: — Now how about a single employable, keeping in mind all these questions I'm asking you are employable people. Single employable with one child, what would he or she receive?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The total there would be \$855. Basic allowance, you know, food, clothing, personal, household items, \$380; utilities and laundry, maximum \$125; shelter, maximum \$385.

Mr. Muirhead: — So that one comes out to approximately, Madam Minister, 375 for that child. I just figured that in my head. Is that approximately right, 375?

So if that's one child, now will it be exactly the same if you have two, three, four, five children as single employable? How much per . . . what I want to know is how much per child after one?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, this is covered in the regulations and I'll certainly send a copy over. But the basic idea is that utilities and shelter cap off after you have two children, but the increase per child is about \$155 a month.

But you know what part of this exercise shows is why we're doing an income security review? Our regulations are too complicated. They are very difficult for an average person to sit there and figure out what they're entitled to, so we want to try to simplify this.

Mr. Muirhead: — Well you said it there, Madam Minister. It is complicated, because I've been dealing as an MLA going on to my 15th year, and it's . . . you talk to one individual and they've been to see about social assistance and it seems to be different under different

circumstances and where they live.

Now, I'd like to go back on that breakdown on a single employable, what is the housing allowance on a single employable? I didn't get that on your breakdown.

I'd like to, Madam Minister, any of that information you have there that's available to the public, I'd like to have it sent over so I'd have it. I haven't got a copy of it in my office. I guess I should have, but I haven't.

But I'd like to know what the housing would be for a single employable?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — \$210 a month.

Mr. Muirhead: — Now I ask you there, Madam Minister, for \$210 a month, where does a person . . . what do you get for that — for \$210 a month? I mean what are you going to get for that? Are you just going to get a little one-room shack some place with furniture in it or otherwise? Or what? I mean what do you get for \$210 a month?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the member opposite makes an excellent point. These rates are very low, very low. So that you end up in very poor-quality housing. You end up perhaps being able to rent a room. So the rates are inadequate, and I can see that. And I think it's a tragedy.

Mr. Muirhead: — All right, you read . . . here's a single employable with one, two, three children or otherwise. But those children are going to be brought up in that home for . . . the \$210 home. So if they have a family, is there more allotment for that? Say a single employable living in a \$210 suite, room — it wouldn't be much of a suite — but a whatever. And then a little child comes along or maybe after a while they've got two or whatever. Does that housing increase at that point?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes it does. A single employable, the maximum is 210. But, for example, if you have a family with two children, the maximum is 365; at three children . . . a family of two, the maximum is 365; a family of three, the maximum is 385. And it goes up in gradations until you get to a family of six, and the maximum for housing is \$500.

Mr. Muirhead: — I guess that's what would tell me if I was a single person, I wouldn't want to live in a \$210 suite. I think I'd be wanting to get hold of some children to live with me and live in a \$500 suite. That's what that really tells us.

And I'm not making fun of the department at all, Madam Minister, because I know there hasn't been changes there for a good many years in some of those things. But I think there should be. I think it needs to be looked at. There needs to be some changes here.

But there's something that does bother me — back, and this is going to take me back when the NDP were in government prior to 1982, when I was told that they actually would go out, Social Services . . . and maybe they did afterwards. I don't know that. I never was involved in

my nine and a half years in government with Social Services unless I asked a question or heard it in here. So being critic for Social Services, there's just some things that I won't know. You'll know more perhaps than I will for sure, Madam Minister. Do Social Services buy homes to put families into? Do they buy homes?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No, we don't. What we do is we pay a shelter allowance to the individual and then the individual decides where they will live. So it's their choice. We just pay the allowance.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, could you ask your officials if it's been the practice of the department in the past to buy homes to put social assistance families into?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chair, my officials said they're getting pretty old but this question pre-dates them. As long as they've been here the department has never bought homes for people on assistance, but they go back into the 1980s only. So as far as they are aware, this was never a practice of the department.

Mr. Muirhead: — Well if they go back to 1980, then they will know that out in my constituency of Simpson there was . . . And I hope this practice has come to an end. I am sure that it . . . I stood up in our caucus and said, I never want to see this happen when we're in government. And I hope it didn't, but I'm not saying it didn't. I was hoping your officials would know.

But in the town of Simpson there was two single individuals — sisters. And these people were on social assistance and it is as sure as I'm sitting . . . standing here that Social Services built them — didn't buy them two houses — they built them two new houses in the town of Simpson and lived on social assistance. And I wonder if any of your officials recall anything about that incident. Because that incident, it came up in this legislature before.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, my officials have no knowledge of that incident. But if you would like to provide us with the details, we can check for you and find out what records we have. Because if in fact the department was involved, we would still have a record of that. But certainly the individuals that are now in the department have no knowledge of that incident.

Mr. Muirhead: — No, I wouldn't ask the officials to go back that far because I went through that back in 1980 and it did happen as a fact. I just wanted to get your commitment that it wasn't happening today. And I'm not saying it didn't happen under our government in the first years too. I don't know that. I was told it didn't. But I know this case because it was confirmed under Social Services.

I want to ask another question before I move off homes. Do they buy homes . . . do they own homes in Saskatchewan? Do Social Services own homes, period?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No, we do not own any homes.

Mr. Muirhead: — Now just another question before I leave. What people obtain on social assistance . . . the questions I asked you and you said you'd send me over a

document. Will that include like a couple, then? I asked before, if you remember, I asked about the single employable, and then the single with a child and so on, and then a couple, and I don't think I made it clear that couples with children, and what the rates would be. Just if that's going to be on the document you're going to send, we don't need to further that any more. Just assure me that that's going to be on there.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — That information will be in the document. What I'll send you is — I would send it right now but it's the only copy we have here — the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan regulations. And I think . . . I've looked through it. I think probably your impression would be the same as mine — it's far too complicated.

My deputy minister came recently from Alberta and he says in Alberta they have a one-page document which can be understood by somebody with about a grade 5 education which says, here's what you're entitled to. So we certainly want to make this more in that form.

Mr. Muirhead: — Well, Madam Minister, could I then ask you then for . . . if this complicated book that I won't be able to understand and perhaps you don't understand and for sure some five-year-old picking up the book won't understand, could your officials or your department supply me with a one- or two-page . . . what is very simple. That should be very easy for someone to take that book and just put her into a one- or two-page, because I think that's a good suggestion that the individual that came from another province. If that's what they're doing there, let's do it here.

So maybe I could have something come from that book that outlines it all so when we have people ask about social assistance that an individual like myself who's an MLA, maybe a rural councillor, or a city alderman, or whatever, or just an individual, or people in churches, whatever, that work with young people, they can reach in the drawer and they've got this page and here it is, plain and simple. And so could I ask if that could be done or if you're going to do something like that?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. Yes. We were waiting for the income security review because we're hoping to simplify the rules. But we have no problem in providing you with a couple-page summary of what's here and what the key points are. And actually that's an excellent suggestion because until the income security review is done, it might be worthwhile to have that couple-page summary for other people as well, because there must be other groups out there who have the same difficulty with these complex rules.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Madam Minister, I appreciate that. All right, I'd like to ask this question before we move off this line of questioning here. Where there's a time when an individual that's on social assistance and they're not employable, and they move on into their later years, what's the date . . . I mean what's the age that they have to move on to some other type of benefits?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Basically they move off our system, primarily when they become seniors. They're

eligible for full benefits at age 65, and they can apply for partial benefits at age 60. So the most common way to move off would be to become a senior citizen.

Mr. Muirhead: — All right, Madam Minister, we have many people out there that I know that are receiving social assistance and they're employable, but there's not jobs available. And I know that what the criteria is if they're not able to get a job and they've tried then they get social assistance.

What is Social Services doing? Have they got any special program because I know they sure used to condemn us when we were in government. Here you're not coming up with enough plans and enough to . . . some new programs to get people off of social assistance. I thought we were trying to do our best, but maybe we didn't do well enough.

But I know at election time that was the promise that you were going to do. You were going to get people off social assistance. What programs are you coming up with or have come up with that are going to get the employable to work and off of social assistance?

(1545)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The main plan that we have is the community employment program which is an umbrella program really. It involves . . . it's got different components. The target groups, the groups out there that we encourage to apply and we give priority to are, first of all non-governmental organizations. They're our first target group.

We include in that food banks, feeding programs, a child care centre would be an NGO (non-governmental organization). Another example of an NGO would be a small, private group that provides supports to families in crisis, organizations in the community that are non-profit, that are not government, and provide very valuable services to the community in terms of dealing with hunger or supporting families. We put them at the top of our list as a priority. They make application for assistance, and what we do is we provide someone on social assistance, goes and works at the food bank or goes and works . . . Some of our projects are planting gardens in the summer, and then the food from the gardens is used at the food banks or in the feeding programs. That's the first target group.

The other target group is more geared to rural Saskatchewan and its local communities. I think, for example, there are . . . one of your members opposite, his community got a pretty sizeable grant, and I forget exactly what the community project was. But they're community projects. I think it was in doing some renovations with respect to rail ties or something.

But those are basically projects that the local community decides what needs to be done in their community. They apply and we provide people on social assistance to do the work.

Mr. Muirhead: — So what you're saying, that you do agree that they should try to get people off of social assistance and get them doing something, if it's even

community work. You're saying that you agree that if there is community work to do, naturally they're getting their social assistance, but they would at least be doing community work where applicable. Do you agree with that?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I certainly agree that people on social assistance want to work. And on the community employment program, for example, we've created, it's about 600 different jobs, and we've had no problem. Certainly the people on assistance seem, from my point of view, to want to work as well, that they feel much better about themselves when they feel that they're making a contribution to the community. And that's something we support as well.

Mr. Muirhead: — Well, Madam Minister, that's quite a change, and I'm glad to see that you think that way. Because when we were in government back in the early '80s — about 1983-84, I forget the exact year — Gordon Dirks became the minister of Social Services. And he felt along the same lines as the rest of us, that if there's a day's work that you can do out there or a job, period, to get them off of social assistance . . . because I always believe in the philosophy, a day's work for a day's pay. And if you're able to work, for goodness sakes, find them work.

So what Mr. Dirks did was — and my story, it's 10 years old now, but this is how I recall it — it was to go in and prune trees up in the North in the winter. And you only could get into these swamps in the northern . . . in the winter, in the colder times of the year, in the fall and before break-up in the spring. So what Mr. Dirks did was — out of Prince Albert, I believe it was, Meadow Lake, North Battleford — was to have people, young people that are getting social aid, but strong and healthy and could go do this job.

And I don't know the numbers, Madam Minister, that signed up for this program. But I know that after we did it, that all we heard from this side of the House was discrimination, that you're making these people go into that cold, north, old country and do whatever they were to the trees.

Am I saying . . . am I hearing you say that you agree with what Mr. Dirks did now, that you try to get these people to do something — do something that's productive? If it's nothing else, it's doing something for the province and it's doing something for themselves, or learning how to work. They're learning how to get their muscles in shape and become . . . learn this day's work for a day's pay.

Are you agreeing now with what Mr. Dirks attempted to try to do, rather than say discrimination?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, I'm not exactly sure what Mr. Dirks was doing, but I do know what we're doing. I think our goal is simple. We want to encourage people to be independent and self-reliant. And I think that that's what people want as well. They don't want to be dependent. They want to be independent and self-reliant.

And with respect to the employment programs, I think what we did there is we listened to the communities and the communities said that they thought these projects

were worthwhile for their communities. A lot of the work programs are still in the North. I'm not sure that we have pruning of trees but I know the biggest-ticket item up there is fire suppression.

And the communities thought the programs worked and the people who were in the training programs wanted to be able to make a contribution. Their only hope is that they find long-term employment, which is our hope as well.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, I think you've been in this government now as a cabinet minister for about 9, 10 months and your philosophy's getting just the same as all the rest of them now, that everybody's just so co-operative and so nice.

Just like we heard in question period today — that we're just going to go out to the communities and we're just going to ask them about their hospitals and whatnot and their health care, and there's going to be no problems. We're not going to interfere. We're just going to let a local autonomy take care of it all, when you, Madam Minister, know quite well that all people — and I make no bones about it — that all individuals on social assistance aren't what you just said they are; that they aren't all wanting to get a job and want to make something of themselves.

You know that there's people out there that wouldn't work unless you . . . if you took them right off and let them starve, they wouldn't work first. They'd line up in the streets at the food banks. You know that those kind are there.

And we have to separate those kind because I think the majority of the people on social assistance are there because they can't help it. They are there because of tragedies and things that went wrong, and they can't help it, and they couldn't get a job.

But there's many people . . . and let's get off this nicey-nicey stuff, that we're always saying that the communities out there, oh, they all want to. That's what you're hearing from your ministers, and I don't like a nice lady, to you, to start get like the rest of them in the front row. If you start getting too much like that, you're going to move to the front row.

So what I'm saying to you: do you, Madam Minister, agree that if there is work to be done in this province and you've got a strong, able individual, male or female, that can do that work, should they be told they've got to or lose their social assistance?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, I guess I'd answer that question in two ways. I agree in every barrel there's a bad apple. We're all supposed to pay income tax and be honest. And there are some people who do not put the truth on their income tax form. And I don't think it matters what group of people you're talking about. Sure there are going to be problems. But I think we are looking at two ways to deal with problem cases. One, is we're . . . the individual social worker has a lot of discretion; that is, if a social worker really feels there is a resistance there, the social workers has a lot of tools at his or her disposal to force the issue.

I think the other thing — and I'd like to just recount to the member opposite, a conversation I had with somebody involved in one of the NGO grants. It was a friendship centre. The guy had a got a grant from the department to hire a number of people, and he was an aboriginal person, and he was talking to me about the grant and he was saying exactly your point. He was saying, I'm having trouble motivating some of these individuals to work. And I said, but you know, really aren't you a better person to do the motivating than me because you're dealing with your own people who you understand.

And I talked to him a couple of months later and he said that he was making progress; that he knew how to deal with the people because he was one of them and had been in a similar situation at one point in his life; and that he was having success.

So it's a difficult problem. There's no quick, easy answer here. But we show no signs in our system of people out there taking advantage of the system in any significant numbers. And we feel that the tack that we've taken is one that will have a long-term success rate.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Madam Minister. You know, I'm going to say this comment because I've listened to a lot of socialists in this building, in this legislative, since 1978, speak. And I've heard on the opposition side and when they were in government.

And somehow or other the answers that you're giving me and your thoughts, it pleases me because somehow or other, you don't talk like a socialist to me — you talk like you're on the wrong side of the House. You should be over here. That's where you should be because socialists usually don't talk that way.

But I just want to give you caution, Madam Minister, that if you keep on the type of thinking you've got, you're going to get in trouble with some of your back-benchers because they don't agree with your philosophy and some of the things you've been saying.

Okay, I want to move on, Madam Minister, to . . . Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, I just want to go . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Let's allow the Minister of Social Services to answer the questions and the member for Arm River to ask them.

Mr. Muirhead: — I see in the budget like we talked before, on page 86 of the . . . Saskatchewan Assistance Plan, the roughly \$240 million that's your budget. Last year it was \$205 million; this year, its 233,469 or approximately. That's your estimate.

Now what if there's a real run on? That's your . . . And we've had the Minister of Finance say, there is no way; we're going to stick to this budget no matter who suffers. We've been through it. You've been listening to it for two months, Madam Minister, about the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program. They know it's the '91 program is the best for the farmers, but the '92 is best for the Minister of Finance. We know that's the stand he's taken.

All right. What's going to happen if there's a real run on Social Services? Is it fixed that that budget . . . But if all of a sudden there's 2 or 3,000 more and it goes a way above that, how does that work, Madam Minister? How does that work in the department? You just pay the actual . . . You pretty near have to pay the actual . . . But I'd like your comments on that.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much for that question. It's basic entitlement program. It's basically a federal, cost-shared program as well with the federal government, so it's entitlement. You do not have the right to say, we've spent \$233 million so the next person who comes and applies for social assistance, we deny social assistance. We do not have that right.

So we arrived at the 233 million by projection. We did our best to estimate what we think the demand will be out there for social assistance. And so we have to hope that our estimate was accurate.

Mr. Muirhead: — That leads me to a question then. That 233 million, is that the same as when we're talking about in New Careers, is your federal cost-sharing there over and above that or included in that?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — These dollars would be cost-share dollars so that essentially we would pay out . . . Say we were right on target, we would pay out to people on social assistance \$233 million this year. Then at the end of the cycle the Consolidated Fund would get the half of it back from the federal government. But that would go into the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Muirhead: — So then what we're saying, that it's really a misleading figure, and it's no different than the past government. So that figure's always been there. It's carried right through. But I'm saying just as . . . Mr. Chairman, to the minister, it's actually a misleading figure because we don't spend that much if we're getting a certain percentage back and it goes into the Consolidated Fund.

So if you had to draw on more money, would you . . . Let me ask this question. You got your 233 million that you would get a cost share from. But all of a sudden it costs you 400 million. Where would you get . . . What percentage would you get from the federal government cost-sharing? Would it be just on this figure or the whole, entire figure?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The cost sharing would continue no matter what the amount. What they would basically do is they would look at the end of the year and they'd say, how much did you actually spend? So if we ended up having to spend 400 million, we would get cost sharing on 400 million.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, just so . . . did have that clear. Is that . . . I didn't hear you just quite well there. But to make it sure, my colleague and I were wondering, that 233 million, the cost-sharing comes off of that. So just say for example you got \$75 million back, it would cost 160 million for the department, and then the others would go into the Consolidated Fund. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — That's correct, and there's no capping. The only capping is for the three wealthiest provinces, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. They have a limit, but we don't so if we go over that we would have it cost-shared.

(1600)

Mr. Muirhead: — In your projections when you come up with a budget last April, in your projections you must have thought that that was going to carry through for a year or you would have projected for more money, of course, because last year they projected 205, this year 233 million. So you must have been projecting perhaps some more.

There's been a lot of changes in Saskatchewan since this budget was drawn up. This would be drawn up probably some time in February, March, or whatever, those figures would be put together, probably March 31. I'm not sure whenever your date was you put that figure together. There's been a lot of changes in this province because this government has come down with their heavy hand on people pretty hard.

I mean there's a lot of people with extra costs out there. The GRIP program, if this crop comes off the way it looks, it's going to be like three-quarters of a billion less dollars and cents in the hands of the farmers in the province, plus that goes on out to individuals throughout the whole province. There's been tax increases. There's been . . . well almost every promise that the government has made it's been broken with more increases in dollars and cents.

When SaskPower went up, SaskTel went up, SaskEnergy, SGI, income tax, E&H (education and health) — they took 7 per cent on, and put 8 on. I mean it was just . . . it has to be hard on individuals. And the point why I bring this to Social Services, the jobs that people . . . the unemployed are higher than it's been for a long time. So are you looking to . . . that there may be another large increase on that figure because of the people that may have to go on unemployment. If a farmer loses his land out there, he's going to be on unemployment to have something to eat.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I guess I have two different answers. First of all I guess my own view of a budget is what you have to do is you have to be totally realistic. That is you have to say here's our target; it's a realistic target; and then you stick with it. It's a pact. You say we're going to spend \$409 million in the Department of Social Services, and I'm sure my officials will tell you that I tell them all the time we're going to spend \$409, we're not going to spend any more.

The estimate as to the number of people who would be on assistance this year we made as realistic as possible. It was done as part of the whole budget process so that we knew what was happening in other parts of the budget when we came up with that particular figure. So all of the things that you're talking about were taken into account. When you're projecting, there's always a risk of being off. But because it was done in the whole context of all of the other changes occurring in the budget, we think it is realistic.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you. A question that I'm asked a lot out there lately. We'll talk about the people in rural Saskatchewan. If you're a farmer and you have no . . . there's lots of farmers out there with no assets left. They owe more on their land than what the land is worth. They owe on their machinery. And they're still hanging on because they're, through the boards and whatnot, some of them are getting leasebacks on their land and they're talking about a program in here for six-year leasebacks.

So that we're moving into an era now where a farmer can have no assets to borrow money on. So if they run out of cash and absolutely haven't, in some month . . . got a family and themselves to feed and there is, all of a sudden, no money left. Like for instance, I just had an individual just on the weekend that I . . . these sad stories I pick up all the time. They are sad stories.

But this individual thought he wasn't doing too bad for cash for the summer, but he deposited . . . he hauled the last of his grain out on July 31; he has no way of borrowing money, and he had this here wheat in his hands and the cheque, enough cheque to get him through and pay his bills and buy his groceries to get him into harvest.

He deposited the money into the bank and the bank took the whole cheque and left him with zero — not \$1 to buy food. And they are taking some out of their garden, of course this time of year, but that's all they got is their garden, with no cash and no family. These people, a lot of cases it's . . . you can go to mom or dad or grandpa or grandma or maybe you got a brother. But these people are fairly new in this country, and they have no family.

Now I'm not saying some friend won't come along. But the question asked of me — and this is a proud man — but if I'm desperate enough, is there any place in Social Services for this individual to go to?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I can certainly tell you, yes there is, and we have had from the opposite side of the House emergency cases come forward in which there's just basically a cash-flow problem. And sometimes the individual doesn't even have to be on social assistance in the long term. They just have a month-long problem in which they can't provide the basics. We certainly have the capacity to provide that sort of assistance.

We also have the ability in farming situations to base our assessment as to whether or not you need assistance not on your last year's income, which is the tradition, but on your current income if in fact you are having a crisis this year that would not have shown up in your taxable return last year.

But I will make another general point. The social assistance system was really designed for people who are on wages and lose their jobs. It wasn't designed for farm situations.

So it's one of the things when we review — we're talking about income security review — one of the things we have to look at is to make the system more sensitive to the agricultural problems that are out there. Because it is not a

system that is basically designed for farm situations. It's based on the idea that you have to liquidate all your assets essentially to be eligible, which of course doesn't work in a farm situation.

So within the next year, I certainly invite you and your colleagues to participate in the review if you have ideas in which we can change the rules to make them fairer to farm families.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, I appreciate that because that's . . . Now myself as an individual, and I suppose the majority of farmers out there in Saskatchewan, if they know what the future's kind of planning for them, what the future's going to give them . . . and I don't give much excuses to somebody going hungry on a farm. I can remember back to the dirty old thirties when people had to go to farmers to get something to eat when they didn't have any money at all. But at least they would . . . I can remember my mother carrying water from an old well to grow vegetables, and we always had a steer around to butcher and eat. But there were some people living in towns didn't have that luxury.

But I guess the point that I want to leave with you, that here's this emergency that can come now, like the case I'm talking about where this individual thought he had everything planned right and the bank takes all his cheque — those situations like that. And that's what I'm sure glad to hear from you, that I can tell an individual like him that at least he can apply. That's what I need to know.

And now the next question along that . . . because I asked you, I said this person had no assets to borrow on. His machinery was already a loan at the bank. There might have been assets in the machinery but not a lendable asset; they weren't a bankable asset. Now there isn't an individual . . . you couldn't go to John Deere or Case or any finance companies or the bank if you've got a loan on a combine and say, well here, I'd like to take another thousand against my equity on that combine just to buy some food. The banks just don't do that way.

So if a person finds himself then in an emergency monthly . . . just say for one month or two months where they do have maybe some assets and they just can't borrow five cents and they have no money in the house, they could go and apply. Is that right, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — They certainly can. And as I say, we've had emergency situations come to my attention. You would know this about rural people. Sometimes they're so proud that it's really a friend or a neighbour who's phoning our department and saying that somebody should go out and see this family because they can't provide the necessities.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, I want to move into child care now. We had a Bill go through the House here some time ago, and I can't remember . . . We had two Bills, Bill 13, 14 — one was The Adoption Act, one was child care. I forget which one it was. I believe Bill 14 was the child care Act. But if not, that number doesn't make any difference.

Could you just in your words today here, tell me how that

really affects the child today, the family of the child, and just people in general, how that Bill is really affecting people out there.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, we had put a piece of child care legislation before the House in first reading, but we pulled it after Martensville because what we found was there was a greater desire on the part of the public to do more changes in the child care system. So that instead of just tinkering with it, we want to look at more extensive changes and we have already begun a process of talking to people.

For example, the people affected in Martensville had given us some very useful suggestions. So we will not be proceeding with any child care changes this session. Next session we will come back with a more comprehensive piece of legislation.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, are you saying that that Bill 14, was that the one that you just didn't proclaim it — it's just going to be put on hold? Or was there another Bill that you were going to introduce?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No, there were two pieces of legislation that were passed — The Adoption Act amendments and The Child and Family Services Act amendments which were minor changes. But then there was a Child Care Act, some changes to The Child Care Act which we have put on hold. Because what we're hearing is that in light of what happened in Martensville, people want to look at more extensive changes to the system. So that will come back next session in a different form.

Mr. Muirhead: — Can you tell me now, under the present laws today, if someone suspects that a child . . . we're not talking about wife-beating here or spouse-beating. I guess it happens both ways. We're talking about child abuse. Now what is the actions that an individual must do, an individual, if they report to Social Services that they're suspecting child abuse, what is the first thing that Social Services do?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — We have very strict regulations about what a social worker has to do, and there's simply no discretion in this case. If there's any sign of injury, the child has to be taken immediately to a hospital to be examined so there can be an assessment as to whether or not, is this injury consistent with an accident or is it an injury that would lead one to suspect abuse; and the police have to be notified.

And as I say, these are two rules in which there's no bending. They're absolute. The child has to go to the hospital; the police have to be notified.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, I have several questions I want to ask pertaining to child care and child abuse, but the member from Thunder Creek wants to ask a few questions and I'll come back on to it later on. Thank you.

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I would like to discuss the area also of child abuse. The Friebus case, which I'm sure you're aware of,

occurred in my constituency. And that saga was one that was very ongoing with a lot of my constituents because of the numerous locations that the family lived in. The fact that child abuse had occurred was not a surprise to a great number of people in my riding.

There was a report done and there were some that felt it didn't go far enough. The former critic, Social Services, I know was asking questions. And today I would like to know from you sort of where that is going, and sort of the direction. Because I'm getting people that were very familiar with the Friebus situation asking me questions; that they're feeling a little bit up in the air. And I would like you to clarify that a little bit today.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The case, because of concerns like the ones you raise, the case was sent to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman did an investigation and his conclusion was that the Department of Social Services in that instance had done everything it could to prevent the death of the child involved.

The details are confidential because there's a lot of personal information there. But I do think I can say that what the Ombudsman concluded was, although there were signs of difficulties in the family, there was no reason to believe, in the terms of the past behaviour, that the mother would do something like take a shotgun and shoot the daughter. There was simply no pattern building up to that, so that it was quite an unpredictable event in that sense.

But his main conclusion was — he did a thorough investigation and he said everything that could have been done was done.

(1615)

Mr. Swenson: — Well I'm wondering, Madam Minister, if when we do a review such as this, if we aren't so worried about the overall system sort of remaining intact, that we don't miss a few things.

Because in conversations that I've had with a number of people — some of them testified at the trial by the way — that there were some things that were very evident. I mean one individual said to me: we didn't want our children playing at their house any more because of these violent tendencies that were exhibited. And the fact that Social Services had interacted with other of the children previously.

And I know the concern, Madam Minister, that you and your officials had because I even received a call from one of the lady's relatives requesting me as the MLA for that area to become involved on her behalf, that Social Services don't have the right to take her children away.

And I know that the to's and the fro's that occur there, but this one seemed to me to exhibit a lot of sort of a classical case history of where abuse will occur. And I understand your reluctance to tear the whole system down because of one or two instances, but I honestly believe, Madam Minister, that there's got to be some more public input or some way that we don't threaten your system at the same time we're allowed to get on with it.

Because I think what we see there leads directly so many times up the road to what we're seeing now with the Young Offenders Act and changes, because obviously patterns of abuse lead to abusive people later on in life. And I'd like you to comment a little bit more on that.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thanks for that question. You've got the balance right. I mean, what the member opposite said is true. It's a balance because you have to respect the family, and you can't ever appear to be taking children away from their family for a frivolous reason. Okay? So that's the one side.

Then the other side is, though, you can never leave a child in a dangerous situation. So that is always a very . . . not always. Often it's black and white — the child's safe; the child isn't safe.

But often it's a grey area. It's a judgement call. And it's a judgement call actually made very frequently, not just by social workers but by doctors in hospitals. Is this child abused, or has this child had an accident? By police — should we charge this person with abuse? Or should we say, well the person has said yes, I hit the child too hard, but I'm going to reform and I'm going to take counselling. So across the piece, professionals in this province daily make those judgement calls, and as I say, they're very difficult calls.

Now in terms of the future, though, what we're looking at is the creation of the children's advocate or ombudsman. We struck a task force to look at the form that such an office would take. And the role of that particular office would be to monitor the systems that affect children — the foster care system, the child care system, any of the systems that affect children, including the Department of Social Services. To ask those questions regularly — are we doing the most effective job possible?

And to take individual cases like the previous case and because these people are experts in dealing with children — the office would be — perhaps they could even do a better job than an ombudsman who is dealing with a whole variety of cases. And to go back and say, what went wrong? Could this have been prevented? Do we have to change something in the system so that this doesn't happen again?

So we're aware of the concern we share, and we have that as our first-stage response to the situation.

Mr. Swenson: — Well I think it's important, Madam Minister, that that be taken probably quicker than later, although once again you will have — and I suppose it's necessarily so — you will have a child's advocate who basically will deal with adults, not with children. You're still going to have to have the judgement calls in most cases made by an adult in some position of responsibility in order to have the advocate look into a particular situation. It still will be an adult judgement call that's made.

I guess another area that will reflect on this, and once again it may be clouded by what we saw happen in Martensville. As you know, in the last couple of years

there's been a lot of discussion on what the best form of day care is — whether it should be public, private, that type of thing. And I can tell you that there's a lot of concern because of Martensville, that people on the private side are going to feel some heat put on them by the sort of official bureaucracy, because of not wanting any repetition. In other words, we'll get into a situation of perhaps overkill.

And my own children have experienced both. And I can tell you that there are a lot of very excellent people on the private side out there. And I wonder, given what's happened in the province, Madam Minister, if you have some comments there that may allay the fears of people that are engaged in this debate.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thank you very much. That's a very good question, because again it's exactly the same thing. It's a balance. There are parents out there who want to have a licensed, regulated child care service. There is that group. Because of Martensville, the demand for that has increased.

There are other parents however, who say, I know my neighbour. I've known her for 20 years. She takes care of a few children in her home. And I don't want the state coming and interfering in that relationship because it works very well. So we want to respect that group as well. We don't want to become excessively regulatory. And that is actually, that particular dilemma is one of the reasons why we want to spend a little bit more time on the child care facility.

And I think the other message that we want to get out to parents is that the government can only do so much. That is, we can licence and we can regulate to a point, but it's still primarily their responsibility to do what they can to ensure that their children are safe. And we put in the SaskTel bills last month, information about how to choose a safe child care and how to monitor it. But they have an obligation as well to ensuring that their children are safe.

Mr. Swenson: — Well I agree with you, Madam Minister, because in rural Saskatchewan many times the institutional, government-run facility simply isn't an option. You will find very few towns in my constituency, the largest of which would probably be under 700, that can engage in that type of a function and do it in any way remotely successful, looking after the taxpayers' dollars at the same time.

So we're going to have to rely on private care institution or private care in most cases in coming up with some type of satisfactory regulations, and I know that review has gone on in the last couple years, and there have been changes to the fire code and this type of thing. And I guess what I'm asking you is, given that you do have now at least a year, year and a half, experience of some of those regulatory changes, if it's working fairly well and are you expecting more major changes when you do bring that piece of legislation forward from what you've seen so far?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thanks for that question. I think really as a result of Martensville we got some very good, practical suggestions that we want to look at. Let

me give you an example, and this one came out of a visit I had to Martensville.

The individual said there should be a distinction made between advertising yourself as providing child care and just being the neighbour next door. That is, he was making the point to me that if I put an ad in the paper and I say mom of two will look after three children, that's fine because really what I've said is I'm a mom of two children. Those are my qualifications.

But he said we should be very strict about me saying, you know, Janice's child care service, because that suggests a professional quality that should require that person . . . if I wanted to put that ad in, I should have to go through a licensing process.

Now I give that as one of many examples. Think what Martensville did is it put people into the mind set of thinking about child care. We're getting lots of different ideas, and we want to follow through and see how many of them will be workable.

But our aim is where I started — the balance. There are a group of people who want regulated licensed child care. We want to ensure that that's available. But for people who want to make their own private arrangements with individuals in their community who they know quite well, we don't want to intrude into that relationship either.

Mr. Swenson: — Personal curiosity, are you saying that we're going through some type of a hearing phase on this before we get into further discussion of this Bill? And the reason I ask it, I know lots of people. My wife was a program director in an institutional day care for about a year and a half, upwards of 60 children, a very difficult situation, quite frankly, to do anything with in a church basement, and has always felt that there was no place for an individual like herself to sort of make her views known with previous reviews of the system. And I would think those are the kind of people that you would want to draw on to sort of strike the balance, as you say, as to what's worthwhile and what is simply a holding pen for children.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thanks. That's a good question. We're not going to go through a formal hearing process. But certainly what we do want to hear . . . and probably a good idea would be to work through the MLAs, make MLAs aware of the fact that we are reviewing the legislation. Lots of people are coming forward, but if individuals like your wife have other suggestions, to let me or people in my department know what the suggestions are.

Because this is an opportunity . . . I guess you have to kind of be prepared to listen to people when they want to speak. Now a lot of people do want to speak on day care, so that's what we're doing. So I certainly invite the members opposite, if they have any personal experiences or any suggestions, or there are people in your constituencies who we should be contacting, we have no problem with that. We would welcome that.

Mr. Swenson: — I appreciate the offer, Madam Minister, but it's very difficult for an individual to approach

government. My experience has been that most people are very overwhelmed with the thought of senior bureaucrats sort of one on one with them. They're much more comfortable if they can relate their experience in some type of a forum of like-minded people. And I know how difficult that gets because you find the extremes tending to gravitate to those situations. But I'm not sure we're going to get where we need to go without some type of public expression over and above you or your officials or me sort of one-on-oneing with people.

It's too big an issue because what is at stake is our next generation basically. And I would like some thought given to a more formalized process. If that's unworkable, so be it, but I would like you to think about it anyway.

I want to go on to one other area — and you can respond to the critic — and that is the changes that were made to the . . . proposed changes to the Young Offenders Act because of the problems that have occurred with particularly violent individuals below the age of 16, I believe it is — or is it 18? Madam Minister can correct me — and the necessity to come up with a better system on particularly incarceration.

Has your department played any role in that review? And sort of where are your thoughts? Because you must, through Social Services, end up dealing with some of these people and their families on a fairly regular basis.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thank you very much. As you would know, the young offenders legislation is federal. I actually just recently instructed the officials in my department to begin discussions with groups who are concerned about the Young Offenders Act. Neighbourhood Watch, I just happened to see in the paper that they have concerns. Most of their concerns, from what I could tell from the paper, is about the federal legislation. But I want us to sit down with them and figure out what their concerns are vis-a-vis our system.

Our problem, I think, is we don't have choices. The courts decide who has to be incarcerated and who doesn't. That is, in adult corrections the judge has a lot of discretion as to whether somebody should be incarcerated or not. The young offenders legislation does not give a lot of discretion. So we're really left picking up what the federal system decides.

I think if I could make a general statement as to where I would come from on young offenders, anybody who's a danger to society obviously has to be removed. If there's no danger to society, the cost of incarceration is very high. These are very young people. You have to put as much emphasis as you can on rehabilitation and alternative measures. I have no problem with the idea of punishing people for what they've done wrong. But I think when you're dealing with young people, it's especially important to have that other side there, looking to ways all across the piece of rehabilitating the person, so that they don't spend the majority of their life in an institution of some kind.

(1630)

Mr. Swenson: — Well, Madam Minister, I agree with you.

And I think by incarceration what we do in many cases is take someone who obviously has a bent for violence or for being sort of obstructionist in society, shall we say . . . will further that bent because they'll have the best teachers available possible.

Now on the other hand we see the situation in the province here where we're closing down our work camps. They were associated with the Department of Justice, but a lot of Social Services former clientele . . . I mean we have people that basically through work and other interactions were rehabilitatable without putting them into that tougher situation.

And the questions that my colleague was asking earlier about, you know, allowing people the opportunity to do community work and service and that type of thing, appeals to me in a regulated environment far more than either incarceration or simply booting them back out on the street because our jails are full.

And I'm really, really saddened by the fact that we've decided to close those work camps down. I mean they provide a very valuable service to many of our provincial parks, to the communities associated with them. And many of those people quite frankly don't burden our system further. They don't come back and be a client of yours. They don't bother the Minister of Justice any more because they're not habitual.

And I really think that in conjunction with this we need to rethink that concept. And I know it's dollars and cents with the Minister of Finance. But, Madam Minister, as the Minister of Social Services who doesn't need any more clients and certainly doesn't need violent ones, I would think that you might want to rethink that system.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I think certainly community-based alternatives to incarceration are the way of the future, not just here but elsewhere. I also think though in Saskatchewan, something that will make a big difference in the long term is the greater involvement of aboriginal people in the system. And I don't just mean young offenders; I mean family support systems, the whole system.

Because I think that when you look at the fact that in our young offenders facilities, 70 per cent of the institutionalized young offenders in this province are aboriginal, we have a major problem in this province. It's one that there's no easy answer to, but we have to start dealing with it and we have to start dealing with it across the piece. I think the way we have to start dealing with it is by getting the aboriginal groups and individuals involved in designing and delivering their own programs.

I think they relate to each other the same as we would. We relate best to somebody white like us, and as long as there's a culture gap there, we're not going to be serving the best interests of these young kids. To me, it's a disgrace to our society when 70 per cent of the kids who are locked up in this province right now are aboriginal. We've got to change that.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, just when the member from Thunder Creek

asked you some questions there I asked you about, and I'd like you to repeat that answer if you would, please.

There's a child that someone suspects that they've been abused and they report it to Social Services, in what manner I don't know, but Social Services find out. What is the first step that's . . . and the first step and a series of steps that Social Services do in these cases?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — First thing we would do is we go into the home; we talk to the child; we talk to the other people in the home. So we do an investigation of the situation to determine what different individuals are saying happened. We start with home. We talk to the individuals in the home, the child and whoever else is there and living in that residence.

Then we take the child, if there are injuries of any kind, anything visible, to a doctor to be examined. Then we notify the police. So that's the procedure.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, what if a child . . . let's say they're of school age or whatever, they're in school and a teacher suspects that maybe there are marks on the child or whatever, could be from child abuse. Is there any special requirement the teacher is supposed to do if they suspect?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. That's a very good question. The person, whether a teacher or whatever, whatever their occupation, has a duty to report that situation to Social Services, to the police if they choose.

The Ombudsman in his report, his recent report, made a really good point — there is not enough public awareness of people's obligations relative to child abuse. This is not a choice. You have an obligation, a duty to report any suspicions of child abuse to the Department of Social Services or to the police.

Mr. Muirhead: — Let's just use, for example, that a teacher suspected a child was . . . He or she, the teacher, sees a mark on the child and you don't know for sure whether it was from playing or whether it was . . . It's hard to tell. I mean you can see children that you don't know where they come from and what their family background is. You can see a mark on this child or whatever. Well did that child get a whop from it's mother? Did it fall? Or did it . . . What happened? Did it fight with it's brother or sister or whatever? But if a teacher suspects that this child may be involved in child abuse, who would the teacher contact?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. That's actually a very good question; it's very pertinent because the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation recently made the Department of Social Services aware of the fact that they want to work more closely. They're concerned about those questions. Their teachers are concerned. Because they don't want to wrongly accuse somebody but on the other hand they don't want a dangerous situation to go unreported.

So what we want to do is to work more closely with the teachers' federation so that, for example, teachers

probably should have training to make those sorts of judgement calls.

But still, the same answer as I was making to the member, your colleague, it's still going to be a judgement call. There's some cases in which you can say nothing is happening, the child is totally safe. There's some cases in which you say something is terribly wrong, and this has to be reported. There's a grey area in the middle. And every individual professional, whether it's a teacher, a doctor, or a social worker, struggles with that daily.

All we can do is give them the training and the information. But still in some of those cases it's going to be a struggle. Is this something that should be reported, or is it just innocent.

Mr. Muirhead: — Yes, I appreciate your remarks, because these are serious situations, because you don't know whether a child is abused or whether they just got hurt. It's a hard situation. It's hard to make the accusation to a family or a mother or father or whatever, that you're abusing your child when perhaps they weren't. I mean there's a fine line that we don't see. And we know it's a very, very serious situation.

But my question was, if you remember, Madam Minister, was, and I asked you: what would the teacher do if she wanted to report it? Who would she report it to? To the Social Services? Or would she call the parents? Or RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)? What's her duty? Or any outside individual that have children . . . that are looking after children? Would a school teacher — we'll use a school teacher for example — would he or she contact the RCMP, or the parents first, or Social Services?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thank you. The teacher — he or she would have a judgement call. They could call the parents if they wanted to give the parents an opportunity to respond. That would be a judgement call as to whether to call the parents or not.

But if there is a suspicion of child abuse, phone Social Services, local office of Social Services, or the police — either one. But they have an obligation to call one of those two.

Mr. Muirhead: — All right, thank you. Okay let's carry this a little further now; we're just talking hypothetical so far here. Then I have a case I want to bring to your attention, or not an individual case because I'm not going to use any names in here of course.

The teacher suspects that this child is abused and she phones . . . he or she phones Social Services. So then what do they do? What is Social Services' first reaction, if they've been told when a child at school perhaps has been abused? What's Social Services' move then? Do they go see the teacher? Do they go see the parents or the doctors? What's the procedure?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — They would go first of all to the teacher to get the information and the allegation. If the child was available there, they would talk to the child there. Then they would proceed to follow the child to the home situation and then do an investigation there. Then if

there is any serious concern — as I say, a doctor would be called or the child would be examined medically — then the police would be called. Then the police would do an investigation.

And what you require . . . and this can lead to frustration on the parts of people reporting abuse, if the police have to have evidence that it has occurred, because if the police decide that the evidence isn't there to warrant a charge, then the process has comes to its end at that point until some new evidence is introduced.

Mr. Muirhead: — All right now I won't talk hypothetically now. I'm going to just bring a case to you, Madam Minister, but I . . . for the protection of the families I'm not going to use any names of course. And I don't have my notes here so I'm completely by my memory, but I think I understand it in generalities.

This child is approximately three years of age — some of your officials may know who I'm talking about — and it goes to . . . This child goes to a school because it has a hearing impairment. And the mother also has a slight hearing impairment. And so this child in school one day, the teacher sees marks or a mark on the child. And somebody from the hospital . . . The next thing that happens that we know about, that the hospital phones the parents and says, we have your child here, and gave the number since Social Services delivered the child to the hospital.

The mother was, in her panic, and not being able to hear very good, doesn't know whether she wrote down a wrong number, but she couldn't find out until she finally phoned. Her number didn't jibe. And then she finally went to the . . . She phoned the school. The school had closed. School was over by this time.

And then she phoned all the hospitals. And the child was not at the hospital. And then later that day or evening, someone from Social Services — perhaps the police too — came to the home and informed them that your child was in the hospital, was checked over and it was all right, and put in a home for a few days to look into the situation.

Is that the right and proper manner to go through, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Chairman, no that's not the proper procedure. The parents would be notified immediately if that occurred.

In any situation in which there's an allegation of that kind, the paramount issue always has to be the protection of the child. So you have to take the child quickly, go through the steps to see whether or not there's danger. But you can't take a chance. You can't say, go home; we'll see you tomorrow. Go home, whatever. You have to take the steps to answer the big question: is this child in danger? And you have to stick to it until you've answered that question. But the procedure would be, the parents are notified. You don't just come and take a child away. So the parents would have had to be — should — the procedure would be the parents should be notified.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you. Because that's what

happened in this case and that's my understanding of the case, that the first knowledge the parents had, the child was in a hospital. By the time the mother tracked down a number the child was taken from the hospital, already in a home. And before the evening was over . . . like they were afraid that this child would panic. A three year old child with an impaired hearing to start with, all of a sudden is put into a home where it can't see a face at all. He doesn't see anybody . . . I mean anybody, a face that it knows.

So the grandparents of the child very quickly come to the city, and they had other relatives in the city, and they asked — still that evening and also in the morning — if they could not have the child until they settled their problems. Because the grandmother is an individual that has . . . that Social Services knew very well because she had taken children in her home through Social Services. They knew she was capable. And she was denied that right.

And then I was contacted about the sixth or seventh day, approximately, and our office was contacted and they had contacted your office and several other people. And I didn't know just what to do and I didn't like . . . They asked me if I would go the next . . . That morning, the grandmother asked me if I would go with them to see the child for the first time in approximately a week — I think it was six or seven, eight days.

(1645)

I didn't think that would be the right thing for me to do. So I phoned the deputy minister's office — it was about 8:30 in the morning I believe — and I told whoever answered the phone in the deputy minister's office the story, kind of thus far as I've said here, Madam Minister. And they got some individual to talk to me — and she was a very caring person, I really liked her attitude — and said that she would see someone from her office would be represented where the child was going to be meeting the grandmother and the mother and the other two children in the family.

And I came back to the buildings here, I was in caucus, I was called out by an individual that works in your office in this building, it would be an EA (executive assistant) of yours. And I don't feel that his actions towards me were just the way it should have been. I'm not into this thing. When you start talking about children, and if they're abused, we've got to act; and if they're not, you have to act. There has to be . . . We're talking about people's lives here and I do believe that you and your officials here believe the same as I do, that it's a bad situation.

It's a bad situation to have a child away from its family entirely for whatever those days were — I forget the days. But whoever talked to me at the Deputy Minister's office informed me there was so many days goes by and then they have to meet and do something and I think that was the day that was up. And so your assistant told me that there's been a series of child abuse here and that there's going to be charges laid by the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police).

And that's the absolutely opposite story that I got from the grandparents, that there had been a problem whatsoever. And I'm not blaming your assistant, somebody had to give

him the information. In no way am I casting aspersions upon him because he just told me what was happening. And so I told him more about it then and about what I heard about the story, talking to the grandparents who live in rural Saskatchewan, and what not.

And then the story now jumps, Madam Minister, to the Social Services office where the individual that was involved, the case person that was involved through this whole week, that the parents had to talk to. And I don't remember her name. I have it in my file. Your office will know.

And she was insistent because when they met — the two children, the grandmother and the mother and the caseworker and some other individual I think from the deputy minister's office or somebody designated there — she says when they started the conversation, she was absolutely insistent that the grandmother was not going to get this child. The grandmother could not take the child out because how could the child miss a day or two of school, or what ever it was going to be — maybe a week.

So my thoughts at this moment were very serious, that here we have a child three years of age and it has an impairment and it's in a strange home and a grandmother that loves the child. And we knew that Social Services knew the grandmother and said yes, you'd be quite capable of taking care of that child, but we don't want the child to miss a day or two of school. That's the part that kind of upset me, Madam Minister.

Anyway, I told your individual in your office that this is absolutely wrong — absolutely wrong in the way this case is being handled as far as what I've been told.

And so I was phoned by the grandmother that morning, and she wanted me to bring it up in question period in the House. At that point it was going to be one of these public things. I don't like that because sometimes something comes public and named. It's happened in this legislature before. And all of a sudden they're marked people out there. Somebody says, oh I know those people in Regina. I hear they're child-beaters. And these things, you've got to be very careful.

So I pleaded with your individual in your office, if something could happen to let that child go with the grandmother. So I was phoned by about 1 o'clock that day, that the child would go to the grandmother, or I think it's going to go back home and the grandmother stay in the home until things were settled. But there was going to be . . . the police investigation was through and there were going to be charges laid.

Now what bothers me here — and I'm not normally or necessarily wanting answers here — I'm bringing this kind of a case to you because we've had several of the same and it's got to be handled in a different manner because the caseworker, when the child had to be handed over to the mother and the grandmother and the children, said: I knew this would happen if the politicians got involved. She showed temper, and I want to give you that individual's name because I think she should be dealt with, whoever she was. She should not be a caseworker if a child is running to his grandmother with open arms and

crying, Grandma, Mommy. All the brothers — the two brothers and sisters or whatever . . . and then somebody says you can go home, and some caseworker says, I knew that this would happen if the politicians got involved.

Well I thank God that I did that morning get involved as a politician because it wasn't happening. And I don't blame your office at all because they didn't know. They'd have no way of knowing.

I do thank the office, the deputy minister's office, that they had someone interfere at that point. And I don't know just what it all happened at, I just bring you this case because I think they're prime cases. Because it turned out that there was no police charges. It turned out to be just about a nothing thing.

And it upset a lot of families. I had relatives of this family phone me from different places in the province, asking me to bring this case to the House today, just so Social Services can be aware, we can be aware, and talk about things like this, how we handle the balance.

And if you want to comment on it, fine. If not, fine, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, I would welcome an opportunity to comment. I think one of the things as officers of this legislature that we have to do is that we have to work with each other on these sorts of cases.

I think you did the absolute right thing by not making a public issue of it because the real person who suffers is the child. Her picture, her name, or his picture, his name is spread all over newspapers. And that child then has to deal with other children who know and tease the child and on and on.

But I think what needs to happen is if you have those concerns, you raise them with me. And I can tell you how the process should work. But the Department of Social Services is people. The people who work there are people; they're human beings. So it doesn't always work the way it should; no system does.

And we're quite prepared if you're saying to me, as you are in this case, that the system wasn't working the way it should, we're prepared to look into it and to be sure that it does work the way that it should, and that if somebody isn't performing their job, that they're dealt with. Because it has to work the way it should, but it doesn't always.

So the process should be the same in the future. If there is any other concern, raise it, and we will look into it immediately.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you. I appreciate those words and I'm not going to say any more about the case. I'd just like to have your commitment that . . . We want to try and . . . I understand we're going to stop the clock and try to finish Social Services here because I haven't got that much more.

And I do have the member from Morse that has a case that's quite serious and I have a couple more I'd like to talk to you about. If I could just have your commitment

that we could sit down before the House ends here and talk about these things, I'd appreciate that.

And I do want to say thank you to the deputy minister's office for their co-operation with me that morning. Because I appreciated that. And I know in my files I do have the name. And I do appreciate the steps that happened from that time on.

But I do want to bring you a little bit more about the case because I do believe it shouldn't be dropped, that whatever individual, you know . . . they should be contacted. Maybe . . . There's always two sides to the stories and I'd just like to get it further a little more with you personally. That's all that I ask you to do.

And I have . . . I just want you to commit to me that, and I'm sure you will, that we can sit and talk about some of these things.

Madam Minister, I'd like to ask you your thoughts about the food bank, whether you agree with the philosophy of the food bank or not.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Well I think that food banks are a tragic reality. I think it's a very sad comment on our society that we have to have food banks.

But I think at the same time there are a lot of committed volunteers who see a problem out there that governments are not dealing with adequately. They're also seeing food in the system that is being wasted. And I know I've talked to a lot of the people involved in food banks — they think that they're performing a valuable service.

So it's a service that I would love to see some day eliminated. But in the interim, it's a service that volunteers provide, show a lot of heart in providing.

Mr. Muirhead: — What involvement does Social Services . . . Did they have any direct involvement at all with how the food banks operate? What is their involvement and what funding do they pay towards food banks?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — The food bank gets no direct funding from the government. It's just volunteers in the community. And so we have no direct role in any way.

The only relationship we would have with them is that we might . . . In the case of Saskatoon we put a social worker at the food bank because it's a good place to deal with people's problems. Or they may . . . some of the food banks have applied for community employment programs and have people on assistance working in the food banks. But other than that, there's no government funding.

Mr. Muirhead: — What's your view on how we can phase out food banks and handle the hungry people in some other manner, in some other way?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I think in the long-term what we have to look at is long-term job opportunities for people so that they don't end up on social assistance and they don't end up at food banks. And I think tackling poverty

across the piece, but especially with job creation, is the best long-term solution to the problem.

Mr. Muirhead: — Naturally I, like you, I don't want to see anybody go hungry. And as I . . . the age that I see people go hungry in the hard times, in the '30s, it's a sad situation. But I have a problem with the food banks because I think they're being created because of the lack of funding from Social Services.

I see we have another Madam Minister in the chair there now. Mr. Chairman, I'm so used to saying Madam Minister, I don't know how to address the member from Elphinstone . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . right. Do I have it straight? Are you going to be answering questions while she's gone? Fine.

Mr. Minister, what I was talking about is food banks and the connection with . . . is in the connection with Social Services and food banks and how we eliminate food banks because to me it's got a dangerous precedent. I don't know how . . . I don't want anybody to go hungry, but I still don't like people that are getting Social Service and then food banks too.

If they haven't got enough . . . if we haven't got enough funding with social aid, maybe that's why we're creating the food banks. I don't know. I'd like to have your thoughts on that, Mr. Minister.

(1700)

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — The member opposite knows that there was a major commitment made by the now government for the last few years. And, Mr. Chairman, you will know because you were instrumental in putting forward proposals as well. And the member from Saskatoon, Mr. Peter Prebble, did a lot of work on the issue of poverty in Saskatchewan. And this is not an issue or a problem that is unique to our province. And in fact in many ways we have many more solutions, let's say, than other jurisdictions at our disposal.

But the key solution to food banks is obviously trying to attain a rate of employment that's closer to full employment, having people with meaningful employment, and therefore alleviating the need for those many people now on welfare.

And if you look at the number of people on welfare in 1982 compared to 1991, you'll find that there was a fairly dramatic increase not only in the amount of monies that were being paid out in welfare, but also the number of families who were deriving their main income as a result of welfare. So obviously full employment or something that would be deemed to be full employment — meaningful jobs, a minimum wage that is a living wage, trying to have incomes that are relatively high — because we believe basically that people with income stimulate the economy.

And that's why when we talk about NAFTA and the North American Free Trade Agreement that compare average salaries in Mexico at \$2 an hour or less, we have concern that heading in that direction will create more of a problem as opposed to alleviating.

So it's full employment or something approaching full employment, meaningful income, and having fewer people and fewer families on welfare, I think would help alleviate that issue of food banks and poverty and children who are going to school hungry.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you. I agree with those statements, the statement that the minister just said, Madam Minister. But what still bothers me is, I do believe . . . but I don't know the figures, and I don't know whether the department knows or not, what percentage of people that line up at food banks are also on social aid. Have they ever taken any surveys? Do they know that?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thank you. We don't know that figure and food banks don't want us to know about that sort of information. Food banks guard very closely the confidentiality of the people who come to them. I know when we put the social worker in at Saskatoon, I know the director told me, she said, I was very nervous about having a social worker here because I don't want you prying into our affairs or into the lives of the people who are coming through our system.

And to me that's fair enough. We don't give them money, they don't get grants from the province, they are a volunteer organization. And I think that they therefore have the right to say to us, if you don't want to be funding us, keep your nose out of our affairs and let us carry on.

Mr. Muirhead: — Well, it's become . . . food banks have come into the political arena. Because I sat here on that side of the House in government for years while the NDP on this side of the House would blame us for starving people and lining up at the food banks and it's . . . maybe it should or shouldn't be. But maybe there should be some way of Social Services getting involved. You start asking people to feed the starving people, and people are good. If they've got extra garden stuff and extra money, they'll help. People in this good old country of Saskatchewan, and I guess it spreads a lot farther than that — people are always good, to try to help other people.

But what bothers me is, we went through at the very beginning of our estimates here, Madam Minister, we talked about the funding for Social Services, the \$210 homes, and dollars and cents per child, and the employable mother and father and whatnot, we went through those figures, and the figures are not high enough for today. We know that, the way the costs are growing rapidly.

Now is the funding from Social Services, did that need to be increased to slow down people lining up at the food banks? Because I think we need to know who's lining up at the food banks. The people on social services haven't got enough to go around because they're short, or are they people that just spent too much money on booze the night before and go to the food bank. And if the food bank maybe wasn't there at all, they maybe wouldn't have drank the booze the night before.

I think there's too much just being abused out there. And I'm always concerned about people say we're starving people. Well I don't think anybody needs to starve in this

good country of Saskatchewan regardless.

Because somehow or other I do believe if you're not . . . if a mother doesn't get up, or a father, and feed their child in the morning before they go to school, put at least some porridge and a piece of bread in that child's stomach, they would do it if they knew the child wasn't going to get fed when it got there. And maybe they would find the money to buy that porridge and that loaf of bread if they didn't spend the money on booze the night before.

And it's so hard to get at it because we don't know who the abusers are. But maybe Social Services need to get involved into the food banks and see who's who. Is somebody that's worth a lot of money putting on an old pair of clothes and going lining up in the food bank?

I mean we don't know what all this is about. We're making a bigger and bigger issue all over starving people. And it's not just sitting in food banks and nothing to do with the government, because they're asking for funding and we talk about it in the House. And I just would ask — maybe we shouldn't get involved — to know what is going on.

If we have to increase social insurance funding to slow the food banks down . . . or I think there should be some monitoring to know what's going on — who's feeding who?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, thanks for that question, because you're raising an important point that I want to respond to. Two things. Social assistance rates are not adequate. They do not cover basic costs of living. If you look at what the poverty line is, social assistance rates, depending on the category, are 50 to 60 per cent of the poverty line. So the rates are not adequate. They don't provide enough money to cover the basics.

But with respect to food banks, they are actually quite regulated. It varies from community to community, but I know in my own home town in Saskatoon, the problem . . . you see, they have to go to stores and they have to say, give us food. They have to go to other agencies and they say, give us money, give us a van. All of these different agencies that provide food or whatever other assistance to the food banks, require the food banks to regulate who comes through their doors.

So in Saskatoon you have to be referred by an agency. You can't just walk in the door. An agency has to refer you. It can be a church, it can be the Salvation Army, it can be a variety of agencies. But some agency has to refer you to the food bank, so that people cannot just walk in the door. I know, I've visited the food banks. They all keep records of who it is who's come, how many times have they come, and what their situation is. Are they on social assistance? Are they on unemployment?

So this information is all very carefully monitored by the food banks themselves. What they're saying is they don't want the government, they don't want my department in there prying. But they do an excellent job of regulating themselves because they have to. Otherwise, if they didn't, if in fact what you're suggesting was happening, the stores, the grocery stores would stop giving them

food; Kinsmen and like agencies would stop donating vans or whatever. In order for them to keep going to other people, other groups in the community and getting support, they have to be able to show that they are monitoring the system and regulating it.

And I'll tell you — as I say, I'm most familiar with the food bank in Saskatoon — they do an excellent job of monitoring and regulating the system that they have.

Mr. Muirhead: — Madam Minister, would it not be a good idea if . . . I don't know why they wouldn't turn their names and their books over to you, so you could find out if people on social aid were the people lining up in the food banks or not.

Let me ask you this question. Does the caseworkers for Social Services, are they one of the groups that recommend they go to food banks?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — No we don't. And individually, when I visit the food banks, they will show me their records so that I can see that, you know, this percentage of people are on social assistance.

And I can tell you, a significant percentage of the people using food banks are on social assistance and they're there because the rates aren't adequate. That you cannot live an adequate life in this country on what you get on social assistance and that's what statistics tell us as well. Now our problem is finding the money to make those rates adequate.

What they don't want is, they don't want us prying into their affairs in a formal way, but certainly they have shared this information with me on an individual basis and there's no problem.

And of all the systems we have out there, I have the greatest confidence that food banks are doing the best job they can to ensure that their system works properly and is not being abused by anybody.

Mr. Muirhead: — Yes, I agree with you. From what I understand, the food bank people that are involved are doing a good a job as they possibly can do.

So anyway you agree then that people that . . . there is people — you've seen the list and I think it should be kept confidential. There only should be with the people in Social Services. That there is people then, we have that on the record then, there is people on Social Services that go to food bank because the money's not enough to go around on the people on assistance. So that tells us then we either have to encourage food banks or raise the social assistance.

Madam Minister, I want to be through here in a few minutes so I just have . . . all I had left that I . . . because we want to finish here very shortly. But I want to put on the record and I'm just going to read it into the record, and this is from the billion-dollar man. The promises made by this government in 1991 election . . . I'm just going to quickly . . . I'm not going to get into the details of it. I'm going to read the promise that was made and then total dollars in the end.

And why this here . . . These papers were put out throughout the province at election time. Mr. Prebble used them and they hit some of the . . . I don't know how many ridings or whatever they hit. They didn't hit in mine, but I know they did hit in a lot of places.

So I'm just going to as quickly as I can put it on the record. There's about twenty of them I guess:

Resources shall be provided to Indian and Metis groups to develop appropriate counselling and support services for Indian and Metis foster children . . . NDP Policy Commission reports . . .

New programs should be developed to provide a high degree of local authority over Indian and Metis child and family services.

Amend The Family Services Act to allow Indian and Metis groups to establish child care agencies.

Establish a special provincial fund so that any school board, school or day care can obtain sufficient funding to establish and operate a breakfast and lunch program.

Increase Saskatchewan Assistance Plan rates to poor families.

Quality affordable housing is a basic human right and a deep concern for older women.

Fully accessible family counselling and therapy services are essential to reducing the stressful conditions under which many families operate.

Assist underprivileged youth.

Domestic violence must be combatted with the creation of network of support services with adequate funding.

Improvement of child care.

Stop physical and sexual abuse against children by building a commitment to a solution to the problem.

Adopt the practise of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A system of guaranteed income and universal, portable and indexed negotiable pensions.

Eradicate family poverty through a program of full employment and a system of family support.

Fund Child Counsellors at all shelters.

Put into effect a children's guardian in this province.

Day Care accessible to middle income earners.

Reinstitution of the northern food transportation subsidy.

. . . improve the lot of the disabled including a \$150 a month increase in the monthly allowance.

. . . called on the government to . . . stop deducting Canada Pension Plan benefits from (Social Assistance) cheques and to develop a policy that would bring disabled people up to the provincial poverty line.

Increase Social Assistance payments for disabled \$5 million annually . . . We . . . are calling on the PC Government to implement a plan that will see within five years all disabled persons in the province of Saskatchewan being able to live at the poverty line.

We are calling on the PC Government to stop deducting disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan from social assistance cheque of persons who receive these disability benefits.

. . . the provincial government should boost social assistance payments by 20 per cent or \$20 million as a first step to easing the problem (food bank problem).

(Saskatchewan government) should also bring in a winter works program.

(Saskatchewan government) should also increase Family Income Plan benefits.

(Saskatchewan government) should also increase the minimum wage by 50 cents an hour immediately and another 50 cents next July, in conjunction with establishment of a minimum wage board to rule on further increases.

(Saskatchewan government) should also reinstate transportation allowances.

(Saskatchewan government) should also lift the cap on utility rates for social assistance recipients.

(Saskatchewan government) should stop deducting family allowances from social assistance payments.

Department of Social Services will not provide (severely handicapped) with funding to have a live-in home maker.

The total cost of all these promises that I said are all itemized, and I will send you a list of everything itemized here. There's \$904,367,700.

Those were the promises that the Social Services and the NDP government made in the last election; and I'm wondering where that billion dollar figure is. If you're going to make those kind of promises, then should follow through with it over a long period of time. And I'd like the minister . . . That's my only . . . my last question I'll be asking. I won't be getting up again other than to closing remarks. What is your feeling on the million-dollar, billion-dollar man, that he made this promises and on

behalf of the NDP government?

And I don't see anything, any place, anywhere in the estimates that answers any of those questions. And I shouldn't say maybe "any." Pretty near 100 per cent of those questions are not answered in this budget today.

(1715)

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much. I guess my answer would be this. In politics you have to have long-term goals. Our Premier talks as well about eliminating poverty. He's not stupid. He knows that that can't be done overnight. And it's not going to be done in the first term of this government. And it might not be done in the second or the third or the fourth term of this government. But you still have to have goals there, targets that you're aiming for.

And I think that what you read there were a series of targets that at some point the government aims at. Now I didn't keep track of the list. But when you send me the list, I'll send back a little answer. We actually have begun on a number of those initiatives. Social assistance rates were increased. People can keep a little bit more of their disability pensions. We have moved to give child care centres some more assistance. And as I say, I can't remember the whole list.

But I do think that in politics, if you don't have the long . . . if you don't dream a little bit, that is you don't have a long-term dream, a long-term vision, then you're just basically a short-term manager of a bunch of money and a series of resources. And that's the way I would respond to what you read. It's a long, long, long-term vision.

Mr. Muirhead: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm going to do as I said. The copy of that . . . There's about 30 pages I'm going to photocopy in the morning and send them to your office. And we can talk again about it.

I'd just like to thank you and your officials for . . . We've been, between the two departments, about three and a half hours. And I thank you personally, Madam Minister, for your straightforward answers. And I guess that's all I can say. Thank you, and thanks again to the officials.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Yes, I'd like to thank the members opposite too. I think this has been a very civilized exchange this afternoon. And to me, this is the way the system should work, the way it has this afternoon.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 16 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 36 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Social Services
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 36**

Items 1 to 18 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 36 agreed to.

The Chair: — The chair would like to thank the minister and the opposition, and in particular, the officials for their assistance in deliberation for estimates this afternoon.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:25 p.m.