

The Assembly met at 9 a.m.

Prayers

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding I need leave to go to Committee of Finance.

The Speaker: — That's correct.

Leave granted.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Expenditure Highways and Transportation Vote 16

The Chair: — I would ask the Minister of Highways to please introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to introduce this morning a new deputy minister of Highways. This is his first experience here in the House and I'd ask you to welcome Mr. Mike Shaw, on my right. On his right is Bill McLaren, assistant deputy minister of policy and programs; on my left is Don Metz, assistant deputy minister responsible for the infrastructure division; behind Mr. Shaw is Myron Herasymuk, the senior assistant deputy minister; and behind me is Colleen Laing, director of financial services branch.

Item 1

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to say good morning to the minister and to his assistants this morning.

Mr. Minister, have just received the package of information that goes along with the questions that we have been asking by way of delivering to you a written notice of those things that we want to know about.

The first thing that we encountered here, and I might as well get it straightened up right away. I'll just read you this one little paragraph here on detailed employee position information. It says the remaining information would require a lengthy period of time to assemble and verify as it would necessitate a page-by-page review of each person's personnel file. The question number is 5.06.1 on the top of the page. That's the only identifying mark I have on here.

Other departments apparently have been giving us this detailed information. And if you would commit to giving it to us we would be prepared to accept your commitment and carry on. Have you found what I'm talking about?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I could ask the member opposite what all is asked for there, just to clarify it for myself. Is it in relation to a particular question? Is it question 5 in the list of pre-circulated questions?

Mr. Goohsen: — I don't have any identifying marks on this and it's going to take my colleague a minute to find that. But I'll read you the entire paragraph. Maybe that will give you the idea that we need.

Okay, the Department of Highways and Transportation detailed employee position information, and it says the remaining information would require a lengthy period of time to assemble and verify as it would necessitate a page-by-page review of each person's personnel file. The identification of specific individuals or a reduction in the amount of information required would enable the department to assemble this information much more quickly.

And while we agree with that last sentence, the haste with which your department gathers this information is of no consequence to us and we would appreciate it if you would endeavour to give us the entire package.

Did that help you at all?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, the concern of the department has to do with the fact that many of these people are lifelong civil servants and there are 1,200 of them. So it's information that can be provided and they will do their best. But I wonder if it may be appropriate for the department to consult with you when they're doing it to just clarify how deep the information you want is on that, so your own house doesn't get too cluttered with trees.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well my house still has some room, so just carry on and put it all together. And when it does get full, I'll phone and tell you to stop, okay? So if you can commit to trying to deliver that information to us, we could carry on.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — The department will do their best to give you the information that you require.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Over the course of the last eight or ten months, we've heard a lot about the Department of Highways. And obviously you will be aware of some of the concerns that were expressed throughout the province, especially with regards to your pavement-to-gravel program, which you have since announced that you are not going to carry on with.

I want to tell you that I had an awful lot of correspondence, both written and of course a lot of telephone calls, with regards to that program. And it is with no small measure of happiness that we all in this province heard that you were going to reconsider that position.

There were an awful lot of people that were deeply concerned about the potential of that program — not just in terms of the roads that would be converted back in certain areas, but in terms of the kind of picture that it painted of our province to outside people.

The tourist industry, as you will recall, were very concerned because it gave the impression that

Saskatchewan was sort of falling apart at the seams and that we wouldn't be able to sustain any kind of a road network that would allow tourists to even travel in our province. And while that was certainly never the case, that image was being painted out in the world around us, and we had to have that stop. And we appreciated the fact that you did decide to state that you were stopping that program.

And of course my question is: now that you've stopped the program, are there any other highways that you will be turning back to gravel? And if so, could you identify them?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I think we need to clarify exactly what we did do originally and what we are doing now. There was a reduction in the budget for . . . There are in Saskatchewan 11,000 kilometres of paved highway, 8,000 kilometres additional to that of thin asphalt surface, and then I think 69,000 kilometres — mostly municipal — of gravel-type roads.

There was . . . in the last budget, the paved surfaces kept their maintenance where they were because those are . . . we have to try and maintain them as well as we can with a reduced capital budget. Our capital budget has been reduced by \$20 million. The maintenance on the thin asphalt surfaces was reduced by 25 per cent. And the original proposal was that in order to make sure that those most used were protected as well as they could be, that 1,000 kilometres would be identified where their maintenance would be reduced and eventually there would be reversion.

We have not found \$5.3 million which is the amount that budget was reduced by. What we have said is that we will try to minimize the impact on any specific piece by spreading the maintenance dollars across the whole system. The dilemma is we still don't have \$5.3 million.

And what we've done this year is said that if within that context of a 25 per cent reduction in maintenance on that network, that before any reversion is allowed there will be consultation in the community, and we hope that there is very little in this year.

But we do need desperately to have the conversations with the community in terms of priorities. Where do we take money from in order to do this? What is of less priority than this? Because our next budget cycle still does not have \$5.3 million that is going to appear magically from somewhere.

(0915)

So what we have suggested is that we're minimizing the impact now, but we shouldn't make any doubt about the fact that there are still \$5.3 million short. And the question is, do we want to take that from the construction on our paved network; do we want to take it from some other source; or do we need to discuss with the communities their priorities with respect to their local roads?

And I appreciate very much the comments you made about the public input. It's absolutely true. The public's very concerned about that.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The next question that comes to mind . . . and I think we'll deal with public perception first of all, and then get into a little bit of detail after that. But public perception again was set into motion a couple of weeks back when the Premier was apparently in the north-west corner of our province.

And at that time there was, as in the past, there was expressed some serious concerns about the No. 11 Highway and the Yellowhead Trail, I believe it's called.

The concerns of course are genuine. There's been a lot of accidents on that highway, an awful lot of pain and misery and death has occurred on those roads. And at that point the Premier stated that there was a long-term plan being developed that would include budgeting in the future to double lane that road or at least portions of it in order to make it safer.

Could you elaborate a little on that plan and how it's going to work, how you envision that you're going to fund it, and over what length of period of time you're planning on bringing that program into effect. And while I'm at it, you might just as well expand to the potential of other roads and other highways in the province.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, this topic was misinterpreted by the press once. I don't want it to be misinterpreted again.

First of all, Highway 11 is not the Yellowhead. Highway 16 is the Yellowhead. And the concerns that the member opposite raised I believe were raised after a serious fatal accident in the Rosthern area. They have also been raised about Highway 16.

On Highway 11, if it is that portion that the member opposite is talking about, while there's a very high traffic level there, the high traffic level is highest near the city. So as we look to four-laning with limited resources, the first number of kilometres out of the city become the first priority because that's where the highest traffic volume is.

The average traffic accident rate on that highway is actually lower than the provincial average. It's still tragic when accidents happen and lives are lost and so there is no lack of concern for that. But both on Highway 11 and on 16, which is the Yellowhead, the accident rate is below the provincial average in spite of the fact that there is quite a high traffic level. What the department is doing is looking at specific small areas where there is greater risk, and the department will be looking at those areas particularly.

The point that I want to make absolutely clear so that there is not misinterpretation as there was in the press story around my original comments, is that within the provincial Highways budget now we have no capacity to four-lane in the next few years.

There is, however, discussion going on between ourselves and the federal government with respect to a national highways program. What we are calling on the federal government to do is to put forward substantial funds for the construction and upgrading of the major

traffic networks in Saskatchewan, including 16, 11, 4, 7, and others.

And so if in fact that policy . . . if there is an agreement between ourselves and the federal government in that regard, then there will be some additional funds made available, cost shared between the province and the federal government, where it will enhance our ability to be able to deal with more major upgrading projects on that major network.

There is no sense in this of us saying that the Department of Highways is not looking with priority to the places within Saskatchewan that where the greatest need is. It is simply saying that they are doing that presently within the amount of the budget we have. And they are identifying the areas of greatest need, and those areas are getting attention. And we will be responding to the concerns of the Rosthern community with respect to their intersection, making sure that it is as safe as it can be, within the provincial context.

But we will not be able to do major stretches of highway without the joint participation of the federal government. These kinds of agreements have been struck before, and we're hopeful that we will be able to strike one again, where jointly we can upgrade the major highway network in Saskatchewan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister. I just wanted to ask you a question concerning the global questions that we had presented to you quite some time ago, which I must say we just received the copies of. I was wondering why your department did not supply them in the manner similar to your other department, Department of Agriculture, where question no. 1 was supplied as question no. 1 . . . the answer to question no. 1.

If we can receive a commitment from you — because we haven't had time to go through all of them yet — that your responses, if they're not in the manner complete now, that you will supply the complete answers as were supplied by Agriculture and Rural Development, if we can have that commitment, we can move away from those global questions.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I believe that the information does follow the questions, if you follow the tabs, although I don't know if you received a tab in the fashion that ours has tabs with questions 1 to 34. Okay. It is indexed at the beginning, hopefully, and they do follow the order, although there are other page references which do not refer to the questions; they refer to an internal departmental reference. So if the department can help clarify exactly how that splits. But they do in fact follow in order from question 1 to 34, it's our understanding. There is another departmental reference in the corner.

I think the only area in which . . . other than the staffing area that you have already identified, where there has not been the complete volume of information provided is with respect to in-province travel. It is the business of the Department of Highways to travel in every corner, across the province, and the information I have is that there are 9,700 trips of individuals working for the department.

And it can be provided, or if we wanted to use our resources differently, we could provide whatever it was that was of greatest interest. And if you could clarify your requirements there, the department can provide it. It's a fair pile of work and much of the travel is relatively standard travel with respect to observing and managing the highway system.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We appreciate getting the answers with the Department of Agriculture where it said question 1(a), we had the answer as question 1(a).

On your commitment for other information, if we can just simply have that, then we can look it over and maybe we don't need all 9,600 travel things. But if we can get the commitment from you that if we have another question, that you will supply the answer.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Yes, and I appreciate the consideration on your part in that regard. When you have observed the information that's been provided, any other information that you require, we'll certainly provide it at your request, and that commitment I do make. And I'll ask the department to help clarify for you exactly the breakdown of the information provided relative to the questions answered. I think it's in order but it needs to be clearly identified.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We'll just go back to your earlier statements, Mr. Minister. I'm glad that you cleared up that business about No. 11 Highway being in the Yellowhead Trail because I too wondered when it had gotten transferred or designated as such. And I guess the problem that the press has is that there have been numerous problems on both highways and they just sort of lumped the two together. So we'll give them the benefit of the doubt that they were probably concerned about the well-being of Saskatchewan drivers and other people on the road.

It does raise the question, though, if we're looking at a situation where we can't find funding to start to correct these problems for a number of years as you've just put it, what do we do in the mean time? Do we allow people to continue to get killed on these roads or do we try to find less costly ways of assisting traffic flow in those problems areas if we can identify the problem areas?

For example, it's been brought to my attention that some turn-offs do not have turn-off lanes. One that has been identified that I'm not personally familiar with is the Martensville turn-off. Now you might be more familiar with that turn-off, or maybe your officials are. It would seem to me that for what would be a relative few number of dollars in the Department of Highways budget, you could maybe build, you know, a quarter of a mile of turn-off lane off on the edge so that people could get out of the traffic flow when they're going to turn off into places like that.

And I have in my mind, the situation of the Mendham turn off south of Leader. Now that's not a road that you may personally be familiar with as much as I am but because it's in my constituency and I know how it works there —

we haven't had a serious problem with accidents there — but we do have a situation where accidents have nearly occurred, and some have occurred. Like I say fortunately, we haven't had any real serious ones lately.

But the potential is certainly there. You can see the potential when you drive out of Leader and down that road and somebody ahead of you all of a sudden puts on his signal light and starts to make that turn and then there's traffic coming from the other direction. And there's a natural tendency to think, well this guy is slowing down I can somehow squeeze by him and keep going.

Fortunately the people in our area are fairly cautious drivers so they mostly slow down. But you can see that natural tendency when you travel out there that people might crowd around and even if they saw a car coming, they might take that chance to get by first. And a turn-off lane in a situation like that would certainly alleviate the potential for an accident.

And I think that if we look ahead and try to alleviate some of the potential bad spots . . . And I'll take this one step further to passing lanes. You're familiar with the fact that there are passing lanes down on No. 1 Highway. And I have to admit that I was a little disappointed that when you talked about the national highway program that you are discussing with the federal government you did suggest for highways like 16, 11, 4, and 7. I wish you would have mentioned No. 1 Highway because it is probably one of the more important highways that crosses our province.

But these passing lanes to the east of Regina, while they're certainly not the best answer to everybody's desire in driving, they do alleviate some of the congestion. And along with turn-off lanes, I'm suggesting to you that perhaps we should be looking at some passing lanes on highways like No. 16, and of course No. 1 as well because of the high traffic flows that we get in the summer-time especially to the Manitoba border. We have heavy congestions of traffic on what I think some people would consider a relatively narrow highway for that much traffic. If we could get those kinds of improvements made to our roads I think we could relieve a lot of the congestion and a lot of the temptation of people to take that extra chance to try and get out and ahead of some of the slower summer traffic of the campers and trailers and things that by their very nature can't travel safely at very high speeds. The high-speed traffic of course could pass on these passing lane areas.

(0930)

Now the same situation of course is very predominant from Tompkins to past Maple Creek to the Alberta border. And the people there have been concerned for many years about the accident rates that go on there. It's a reality that that too is a relatively dangerous road in the summer-time. And we need to take some time I believe to implement some of these less costly measures if that's going to be the number one consideration and try to get those introduced in such a way that they will assist the traffic flow.

And I just wonder if you have any plans to go ahead with that kind of a less costly program.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, the department has been working in a disciplined way to address the safety concerns on an ongoing basis. Traffic safety is one of their highest concerns and I most often have letters . . . or I have often received letters from people who are concerned about the diligence of the department with respect to policies designed for safety but impacting on someone else's access to a property or the signs they may have or these kinds of things.

So the department has some very diligent standards to try to encourage and improve public safety on the highways, include signing policy so that drivers are not distracted, and includes restriction on signing policies that clearly restricts how many destinations can be identified at a particular spot, so drivers don't spend their time being confused by observing signage rather than paying attention to the road.

The four-laning is considered on an ongoing basis and special laning at intersections is considered on an ongoing basis; flashing lights approaching intersections; four-way stops; rumble strips, although they have some down sides as well.

The department is spending in excess of a million dollars a year now on the kinds of special spot improvements that you're discussing, and they continue to monitor the need for those kinds of things. As the amount of money has decreased within the department for capital construction, there has been a greater emphasis on the spot improvements relative to the overall reconstruction of the highway system. And that has implications as well.

But the Saskatchewan safety record is comparable to the national safety record. On the highways you talk about, the guideline that the department has used for four-laning has been 5,000 vehicles per day. I think the hot spots on 11 exiting Saskatoon are now in the vicinity of 4,000. Some of the heavier traffic areas on 16 are about 4,000. But then there are areas that taper off substantially as well.

And I appreciate the fact that in my very quick recitation of the highways that came to mind that were in the national highways program, that No. 1 was not mentioned, and clearly it is the major highway in Saskatchewan or a major highway in Saskatchewan. And we have not had as much public attention on it as Highway No. 16, for example. But clearly improvements are sought there as well.

So I simply want to conclude by saying that the department is very conscious of those in . . . I think I've probably had 15 or 20 meetings with communities where those issues have been raised, and I appreciate the members opposite raising them. It's the same issues people mention when they visit with me about their highway needs. If you did this at that intersection, it would restrict the number of trucks waiting to turn off to an elevator and therefore free the traffic flow; it would restrict the amount of blockage in a main traffic lane if you extended a passing lane from somewhere on a hill to another intersection.

So those kinds of things are monitored by the highways system, and as the priority relative to safety considerations comes within the context of what's needed, those improvements are done.

Mr. Goohsen: — We appreciate, Mr. Minister, that you are on an ongoing program to alleviate these problems. However the problem that we have as a general public, I think, is that when we become reactive in highway safety, that necessitates that before anything is ever done you have to have a certain number of accidents. And it seems to me that if you take a highway like No. 1 Highway, it should be clearly obvious that accidents can be prevented by putting in passing lanes in certain areas. Why should the general public have to wait until they either bury their families or have to wait for them to be nursed back to health in hospitals before we get enough numbers in order to convince us that problems that are clearly obvious should be repaired.

And I will refer you to the No. 1 Highway situation because you're already aware of 11 and 16. But the Highway No. 1 has seen some terrible accidents over the years, one bus accident I recall where several people died in one great explosion. And of course that seemed to prompt reaction at the time, and a few miles of that highway was then double laned.

I think the general public is saying we can see those obvious kinds of situations developing as well down the road, and we would like to have something done about it before we see another accident like that. We don't necessarily want to see flames in the news before we can get roads repaired or fixed. And so I think what we're saying to you is that we'd like a commitment that you will go ahead with some passing lanes and turn-off lanes as some of the critical spots and locations that are clearly identified by a lot of people in the general public. And I think even the Department of Highway's officials must recognize that.

Now we had some of our roads that you had designated might be returned to gravel because there wasn't money. And one of those roads in particular that I've been informed of — you can correct me if I'm wrong here, but my information is, and I haven't been there — that we have now a road just a little ways out of Saskatoon that's now referred to as the turkey road. Apparently it's been repaved, and in particular the concern that was expressed to me is that it passes by one of the ministers of your government's farms. And the concern expressed to me was that if there's money to repave that particular road, why wouldn't there also be some money to fix things like a turn-off lane or a double lane on, say, No. 16, No. 11 or No. 1 Highway.

It's a question of priorities I guess that they raise. I don't suppose that the people that complained to me are really saying that the so-called turkey road should never be paved or rebuilt or fixed, but they're saying I guess or at least I will say on their behalf that you, sir, have to have some priorities in determining where this work gets done. And even though you have officials in the Department of Highways that are making these determinations and these judgements on an ongoing basis, obviously and clearly

there must be some pressure from the top of administration in order for that road to get priority over all of the others in the province of Saskatchewan.

And so what we're asking from you is not a defence of your minister particularly because the road has already been fixed and you won't likely unfix it. But what we want is a commitment from you that you will use your office of priority-choosing and the determination of your will to see to it that some of these problem areas like passing lanes and turn-off lanes will in fact be addressed and given that priority that they have to have if we're going to save lives in our province. And if you could give us that commitment, I think we would move on to another area.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you very much. I don't want to take too much time, but I appreciate the points you raise, both because I share your concerns and it gives me the opportunity to clarify something that has desperately been needing to be clarified.

With respect to waiting for accidents to happen, the department does not wait for accidents to happen. The department is very proactive in looking for standards and measures that determine safety. And it is when intersections are of a certain sort and a certain traffic volume both ways that certain kind of measures are taken with respect to rumble strips or flashing lights or four-way stops.

It is with respect to access to four lanes that the department restricts access to and from certain businesses which is a difficulty for businesses when highways are reconstructed. But it is in the interest of safety that that is done so that there cannot be reverse flow entering a four-lane highway at some point. Signing policies are designed so that signs are clear and not distracting, so that they are informative but not distracting to the driver. The measures for highway improvement are based on traffic volume. And so it is clear that the department is driven entirely proactively in this regard.

Unfortunately in spite of all of those things accidents do happen. And they happen sometimes because of carelessness and sometimes because of other factors of which you are aware, but whenever they happen they are tragic. And I think the department then does go examine, after every accident, the circumstances under which they occurred so that if there was something they missed in their proactive measures with respect to safety that they can then clarify those things. But certainly the department has no interest and never has in simply waiting for accidents to happen. It's not their approach. And our good highway safety record speaks for the diligence of the department in that regard.

But I wanted to then say with respect to the issue of standards and proactivity, in terms of measuring when a road needs to be built, it's unfortunate that issues so serious are sometimes clouded by the media with information that may have been intended to be funny, but is very misleading. I have appreciated my relationship with the media, but I was extremely upset when the turkey-road story was done. First of all, it was inaccurate from step 1 to step 10. There was hardly an accurate fact within the story.

First of all, the road was contracted by my predecessor, Mr. Sherwin Petersen, in June of 1991. The road was contracted after a history of conflict around it, going back about 10 years. The contention that somehow this road led to the door of another cabinet minister, equally ludicrous considering that it would be not in the interests likely of Mr. Petersen and the previous government to have built a road to the Minister of Education's door now, who was not then elected, ought to be apparent to everyone.

But the other more ludicrous fact is that the road doesn't go there. If one were driving to the farm of the Minister of Education, one would turn off of the Saskatoon highway three miles before one came to the road described in the story.

So while I appreciate the wish for the media sometimes to tell stories when they have nothing else to do, I do not think it serves the public interest to tell them so inaccurately.

Now the facts of the story with respect to whether Mr. Petersen did it or whether we did it, the Department of Highways in their measuring of safety standards, determined when the road was to be built. The road going to Pike Lake had two and a half times the average provincial accident rate. The road going to Pike Lake had 2,200 vehicles per day travelling on it, because it's a resort road. The road going to Pike Lake has a number of residential cottage properties and residential and resort properties along it, providing numerous accesses to a road that's very, very busy.

So the department redesigned it with access roads to funnel the traffic onto that highway at a restricted number of places. There was controversy about that, but demonstrates that the department was seeking up front to improve the safety on that road by its redesign.

It's an example of what you are asking for, and I appreciate you asking the question because the road did meet the kind of priority standards that are important when one is looking at safety up front. The accident rate was high, the traffic volume was high, and the road would have been built quite a bit sooner had it not been for quite a bit of public controversy along it.

(0945)

Mr. Goohsen: — Just a couple of brief comments, Mr. Chairman, with regards to the minister's last statements.

First of all, Minister, your government has adopted a practice of whenever getting into a hot spot, trying to blame the past administrations for your problems. It really doesn't matter to anybody who the past minister of Highways was or what he contracted or didn't contract, you are now 10 months into your mandate and the work being done on the highways in Saskatchewan are under your jurisdiction and you are the minister in charge. It's your responsibility and you have to accept that responsibility.

And if I might be so bold, if I were in your boots I think I would defend it on the merits that you outlined so

adequately rather than to try to point fingers at somebody else being at fault because they did it in the past or made some reference to it.

It does disturb me though that your criteria for justifying the choice of that particular road is that you have 2,200 vehicles a day when, in fact, a minute ago you said you have 4 and 5,000 vehicles a day on some of the other highways where you don't have any money to make the improvements to lessen accidents.

Now I'm not saying that we want to see accidents on this particular highway down to, I think it's Pike Lake. We don't want that obviously. But when you have budgets, you make choices based on priorities. And I'm not saying that you made the wrong choice. You may in fact, if you have saved one life, then you have made the right choice.

But I am saying that you have to be cautious in how you make your choices, and I expect that that's what the media was saying when they played the story — was that you ought to be cautious on how you make your choices of where dollars are spent, especially if you are going to reduce your budget, as you have this year, and say to the general public that we are now making more serious choices about where the dollars are being spent. If you're going to do that — make those serious choices — you also have to be prepared to defend them on their merit and on the merit of what you as the minister in charge believe, not on past records of some other ministers.

I want to just move on away from that topic because I think we have discussed it enough for the general public to get an opinion from it. My colleague pulled a couple of the sheets out of the information that you sent over to us and we would like to just mention to you the one that's marked 12.06 Department of Highways and Transportation, polls and opinion research. One opinion research undertaken since November 1, 1991, total cost \$3,375, no associated internal cost, no tender, awarded to an agricultural specialty research company conducting an agricultural omnibus, Dunvegan Group, and a copy of the report can be made available, it says. So my question is, could you table that study for us so that we can study it?

And I may as well read the other one to you while I'm on my feet so that you can get it as well. It's referred to here in the corner as 5.04, highlights of the department reorganization. It says on February 12, 1992, Transmode Consultants were commissioned to conduct an organizational restructuring of the Department of Highways and Transportation. Mr. Adil Cubukgil and Mr. Paul Power of Transmode assisted in input from department staff carried out on the study. Now do you recognize the material that I'm talking about? And what we want is to have these two studies tabled for us so that we can study what's in the studies.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Yes, thank you very much for that series of questions. If I miss one in the response, please remind me. I wanted to come back briefly to the question of Highway 60 to Pike Lake simply to say I was placing blame on no one because the highway appropriately needed to be reconstructed. I was simply explaining that there was a very inaccurate story about the construction of that highway, and I think the public has a right to know

that. A number of letters to the editor were sent to explain the inaccuracy by individuals in the area who were upset by it. I think the public deserves better from their public media than the kind of writing that was done in that case.

The construction with respect to us taking responsibility, I assure the member opposite that no one is more willing to take responsibility than I.

The construction on that piece of road was though tendered last summer and the construction began in October. So that in terms of . . . and I don't quarrel with that because it was appropriate construction. We reviewed that this spring before construction continued because of concerns that had been expressed, and we carried forward with the construction project that was there based on the fact that these are engineering-driven projects, that the department does measure safety factors and then recommends highway improvements based on engineering standards that are there.

With respect to the traffic levels, there are a varying number of standards, and I don't want to explain them here, but four-laning happens at 5,000 vehicles per day. And the member opposite is correct; I said some of those two-lane highways have reached 4,000 vehicles, or approaching 4,000 vehicles in certain spots.

What is done here is that an improvement in the highway . . . in a two-lane highway was called for as a result of the traffic volume. This has not become a four-lane highway; this has become an improvement to a two-lane highway in order to improve the safety standards on that road. But the member opposite can get further technical and detailed information on when these standards cut in.

I might also say — and it will lead into the last question you asked and I hope not to miss the middle one — that we had a consultant work with the department in reviewing the structure of the department. And one of the recommendations of the consultant was that we needed to strengthen the policy base in the department.

So in the new construction, which is as a result of the consultant's report, there are two streams — there is an infrastructure side and a policy side. And the policy side will work with infrastructure to determine hopefully even more accurately, when improvements are appropriate, what are the best signals.

The department is working on their own internal re-examination of those factors. But I need to say that it has been the discipline of the department to always base their recommendations with respect to safety on engineering standards, and that needs to be clear.

To answer the last question about the consultant's report, there are within the consultant's report — of which I have a copy — sensitive matters with respect to personnel that makes it inappropriate to release. But the members opposite need to know that it has basically been a working document from which the administration has worked to reconstruct the management structure in the department and looking forward to an ongoing evolution of a stronger department over time.

The second question was with respect to a polling study — a Dunvegan Group study. As the members opposite may know, that last winter there was an extensive process of grain transportation hearings in the province conducted by the federal government. Some information was distributed by the Department of Highways and Transportation broadly in the province and that study measures the effectiveness of the information that was sent and related kinds of matters. And that study is available . . . can be made available to the members opposite.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I will take that as a commitment then to give us the poll opinions research study.

Okay, on the other study, the highlights of department reorganization. You have hedged on giving us that and I'm going to try to think through your words here. My impression of what I heard you say is that there are some delicate informations in this study that you feel the general public and the opposition shouldn't have.

I fail to see what kind of information about employees in the Department of Highways would be sensitive to the point that the general public who pays these monies shouldn't be allowed to have. And in the view that the general study is not the offensive document, that perhaps if there are some rather personal information about individuals, for example, if somebody had a wart on his nose and you didn't want to make that public information for embarrassment purposes . . . and I overexaggerate that kind of a point.

That kind of information obviously is of no interest to me and I don't think to the public either. So perhaps if you have that kind of personal information about individuals in this study, you could black that out or cross it out and give us the general study without that particular information that might be embarrassing to some individual.

Is that possible, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, we will make available the working documents that have grown from that study which would provide, I think, all the information the member opposite would require with respect to a summary that had been produced, with respect to an internal organizational process that grew from it.

The caution with that as well is that as the department has worked from the original documentation in preparing for themselves the organizational plan, going from it there has been evolution in that as well, as a new management team has come into place. So that with that caution, both the summary and a departmental working document that grows from the original report could be made available to members opposite.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you for that commitment, Mr. Minister. Having looked at this brief outline of the study, it does indicate that the highlights of the study were such that five divisions are combined into two and that the number of branches was reduced from 21 to 12, even

though the number of districts has remained at six. Now I presume that what this is saying is that the structure throughout the province has been consolidated and centralized . . . I suppose is the only word I can really think of off the top of my head. Is that, in fact, perception correct? And how is this going to affect the general highway structure in our province?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, thank you to member opposite for that question. It is in fact the reverse that occurred. The consultant met broadly with people in the districts and with people in head office, and the result of the examination if you . . . the number of districts is the field operations, and they have remained the same. The conclusion was that while efficiencies could be pursued within the districts, that that structure was effective in the delivery as it was structured.

The questions of reducing from five divisions to two and branches from 21 to 12 is a matter of head office reorganization. So it in fact is a reconstruction of central administration with exactly the opposite goal to the perception mentioned by the member opposite.

The goal here is to decentralize, to encourage the participation and the circulation of staff between districts, in head office, to provide leadership at the head office level but to confer responsibility to the districts. So it is in fact the goal of the model that's here to decentralize the operations of the department further.

(1000)

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Perhaps you could enlighten me then. As a result of these measures being taken, have any people that formerly worked with the Department of Highways been unemployed, released, or transferred?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, there were, as a direct result of the reorganization, no job losses. The reorganization was an undertaking to more effectively position the department to do its business in the '90s in a new structure. The fact with respect to time, however, is that restructuring was happening at the same time as budget reductions. And so there were a number of positions lost as a result of the budget reductions, and that information I could give you. But with respect to your specific question, there were no job losses directly as a result of the reorganization.

Mr. Goohsen: — Yes, we would like the information on those positions that you just mentioned that were lost as a result of the budget reductions. And I had kind of thought maybe they might be in that package already, but if they aren't . . .

An Hon. Member: — Yes, they are.

Mr. Goohsen: — They are? That's good. We will peruse those a little later.

I have one rather large kind of a question here yet that I'd like you to address. The budget so far this year for the Department of Highways obviously is being spent on several projects, most of which, with the summer coming

to an end, probably are being completed. You will have some that won't be. But for those that are now completed, we would like to know how many of them have come in over budget and how many of them have come in under budget and what those figures are.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I just want to make sure that the member opposite, that I understand him correctly with respect to the reductions, the budget-related reductions, whether he is satisfied that he has the information in his book. I could outline it, but if he is satisfied he has the information, then I will go on to the other question, which is the tendering.

There are two questions here, either one of which may be the one you were asking. One is, have projects, when tendered, come in under budget? That information isn't compiled in its totality in a summary fashion. But I can say from signing all of the project tenders that the bidding has been very competitive for the projects that the department has undertaken this year. And my estimate would be that on average they would have come in under the projected costs when the department put them to tender.

The other question that you may have intended to ask is, once tendered, have they come in according to the tender? Have there been additional departmental costs? And again that information will not be available till the end of the season.

It does happen from time to time that special circumstances in a construction project require the department to provide additional funding to a contractor for reasons of increased project cost beyond the control of the contractor. And there is, I believe, annually some additional provision for that.

The question that can be answered later in the season is whether that amount of compensation additional to the tenders for special circumstances exceeds budget. That information isn't available now.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Having some experience at a lower level of government with road building, I am aware of the fact, as I'm sure you are by now, that most large projects end up having required changes to the original tenders because of the necessities of what you run into when you're constructing roads and building bridges and putting in culverts and that sort of thing. You may all of a sudden find out that the best-laid plan ran amok because you've run into some natural barrier or some problem. You may hit some big rocks that you never anticipated to be there and you have to hire somebody extra. And so there usually are some cost overruns.

If you would commit to giving us the information on these questions as they become available, we would be prepared to drop this and move on to a few questions by a couple of my colleagues as we wrap this session up.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, the officials inform me that more often this kind of information is provided in *Public Accounts* after the fact, as opposed where accounting for the record of spending of the department,

as opposed to in the estimates where we are providing the outline of what we expect to spend. The department can make those available to you, but I might ask the member to consider whether they would possibly want to wait for the possibly more appropriate time of Public Accounts to deal with that information. The department's willing to provide the information, but it is probably beyond the normal scope of estimates.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I wanted to discuss with you the condition of four highways in my constituency. I'll list them all for you and then we can deal with them.

Now the first one is Highway 317, the extension of the pavement on that. We had . . . there was a committee out there that was set up to discuss that with you. They've requested meetings with you on a couple of occasions. So far they haven't been granted an opportunity to meet with you and I think they would very much like that opportunity — Highway 317 that is, at Hoosier.

The second one is Highway 51 at Major. That highway is in very poor condition. It's a high traffic — oilfield traffic primarily — road, large trucks, things of that nature. I think it's in need of a serious look at upgrading.

The same applies for Highway 31 at Dodsland, the same sort of thing — high oilfield traffic on that highway, in very poor repair. Almost to the point on both of those, 51 and 31, I think that they are almost to the point where they become a safety hazard and I think it's important that those two ones be looked at.

And then the final one is Highway 21 south of Kindersley. That . . . I believe it was 10 kilometres last year were completed on that one and it was thought . . . at least that was my indication, of the people in the area believed that there was supposed to be another 10 kilometres of that highway additionally done this year. The gravel was stockpiled I believe last summer and last fall for that extension, or at least that's what the people in the area believed was the case, that the gravel was stockpiled for the extension and nothing's happened on that one since.

(1015)

Actually the second phase of that project, the first phase last year, the second phase this year, is probably in poorer condition than the first phase was. It was just because it was done in stages as they worked their way south. I think that there's a section in there that goes through a long, dried-up lake bed that's in very poor condition, and I think there needs to be some serious look at it by your department to see what can be done on that stretch particularly. I think on that stretch particularly, if we could look at upgrading the section that goes through that long . . . I just can't recall the name of that dried-up lake bed, but it's about, oh I would estimate three kilometres south of where the extension was completed to last year. There's probably I would guess two kilometres in there. If that section could be done I think you'd find that people there would be quite a bit more satisfied on those.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate bringing to my attention and the attention of the department

the concerns the member opposite has raised. I'll ask the department to respond to you directly with respect to each of those highways and the specific areas of concern you have and inform you as soon as they can about their position on the priority list that they now have. Thank you.

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I only have one brief remark to make to the minister and it concerns also a stretch of highway in my constituency, and that being 363 south-west of Moose Jaw . . .

An Hon. Member: — And then down into my constituency.

Mr. Swenson: — And then as the member from Morse says, it goes into his constituency.

I don't know if the minister is aware or not, but the section that runs immediately south-west of Moose Jaw, during the '80s received three separate contracts that handled the section through the hills. That area's had rail line abandonment occur in the last few years and has a very heavy volume now of trucking coming out of the Courval-Coderre-Shamrock, all the way over to Hodgeville almost area, is trucking now into particularly the new Wheat Pool terminal in Moose Jaw. And we're seeing a lot of overloading going on.

There's also several major gravel pits located in that area when we're seeing a lot of gravel truck haulage. And quite frankly the road there is under incredible pressure because of these various factors. And even the new sections that had the very heavy top put on them are deteriorating rapidly.

And that is the only lifeline to a very large area because Old Wives Lake blocks this area from going south and the Coteau Range hills to the north block them from going north. The only lifeline sort of out of this area for these people is on this highway. I know you don't have the budget, Mr. Minister, to handle reconstruction of the whole thing, but I can tell you that it is beat to a pulp right now. I was out there a week ago to look at it and there are holes all over the place.

And the big trucks, I don't know if you put officers out there or what you do, but I'd like some assurance that somebody's going to at least go out and take a good, hard look at what's going on out there.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the concerns expressed by the member from Thunder Creek. We've also had concerns expressed by other people locally about the same concern on overloading and the department instructed their enforcement staff to pay greater attention to that area in an attempt to maintain the road.

I know from other roads . . . The member from Arm River would be interested to know that other roads in his constituency as well have been . . . have suffered degradation this summer and the department's intent is to have them improved to an acceptable standard by fall.

I thank the member for raising his concerns and the

department will see to it that the concerns are answered.

Mr. Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question that relates to the terminal, the Pool terminal in Hodgeville. The No. 19, and as the member from Thunder Creek was suggesting, the 363 ends in Hodgeville, and it comes from the west and ends in Hodgeville, and then you go south on the No. 19.

The No. 19 south, it has a very serious winter problem. We initiated a survey for the amount of volume of dirt to be moved on that road I think for the first eight miles, and that's the most serious part of that for winter driving.

I know that people have . . . one of the schoolteachers in Hodgeville lives south of that eight miles, has to go eight miles east and then drive around that on the grid road in order to get to school. And there's going to be a lot of traffic going through there to fill that elevator. And it has to have significant work done on it. And I think it would be really an important part of your program and planning for the future.

I know that there's been a lot of emphasis placed on the No. 1 Highway and I appreciate that. But that's a lot of traffic that moves through the province and I think that we should give some of that funding out of the Swift Current area into those less fortunate areas like that area from Gravelbourg to Hodgeville on the No. 19 Highway and the No. 43.

One other point I want to make. Last fall there was a significant problem on the 43 Highway that was caused by a contractor moving gravel, and they got stuck on the pavement right during all the rain that we had and I think that from that there has been significant repair work. I know that the people in the community have been concerned about whether the repair is sufficient or not. And it's made the road in some places really rough when you've got to repair sections. And so I . . . just in order of time, I just want to present them to you as options that you need to take a serious look at and if you want to respond that's fine. I just bring them to your attention so that you're aware of them.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll respond only briefly in respect to both the last two questions that have been raised. It clearly is a concern for Saskatchewan that as there has been a shift to additional trucking, the impact on the road system has become very apparent. And these are the issues we've raised in the national discussions with the federal government and the other provinces with respect to the national transportation policy. It is clear that we cannot put additional truck grain-hauling burden on many of our highways without serious impacts on our cost and road structure.

And this becomes a critical discussion that we would appreciate your support in as we continue to press the federal government to respect the existing structures and the value of the rail line in moving these heavy commodities.

With respect to the special issues you raised, I would just say, I appreciate you raising them so that the department

can take note. As I've identified earlier, they have standards for each of these stretches of road that they attempt to maintain within their maintenance budget and they will as well do that in these cases. And I thank the members for raising those concerns to the attention of the department.

Mr. Neudorf: — I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I have two questions for you. The first one deals with No. 312. And I don't know if I necessarily need an answer today, but maybe perhaps your commitment to fill me in as to the status of 312, from the junction of 312 and No. 12 Highway. That highway was built about five, six years ago, and it still has a very poor topping on it. I wonder what you have in mind with that one up to the Laird corner. And then from Laird to Rosthern, the status of that section. And from Rosthern to the bridge itself, to the South Saskatchewan River, what the status of that is. So I'm asking you to bring me up to date, what your plans are, and if you can make a commitment to provide that answer to me at some future time, that would be sufficient.

The other question then . . . thank you, Mr. Minister, I see you nodding approval.

The other question that I have is something that was alluded to to our critic of Highways. He brought up the Martensville situation. And I know that even when we were in government and I was the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for the area, it's a situation that I wouldn't wish really on any minister because it's going to be an expensive . . . The ultimate solution obviously is four-laning with overpass, clover-leaf. And obviously that's a Cadillac solution that we cannot even conceive of. But I would encourage you to keep working with the Martensville council to see if we can address that situation that is going to prevent fatalities. I think over the years we've been very fortunate that there haven't been fatalities at that corner.

Then secondly a concern that I have is the No. 11, that you're well aware of. And I know that over the last three years or so, No. 11 has had a rash of accidents — of fatal accidents. And I know also that you cannot, for the most part, blame the highway for those accidents because through inattentiveness or lack of sobriety in the case of some drivers and so on . . . And you can't legislate that kind of stuff and you can't really engineer roads to forestall all of those types of accidents.

But I know, for example, that the overpass, the turn-off into Warman, for example, has been remarkably free of accidents. And I attribute that mostly to the turn-off situation where there's a checkered, separate lane where they turn off and get off the mainstream, the flow of traffic. Osler hasn't got quite that kind of a situation but, again, there's a combination of events there of curves, high volume of traffic, turn-offs, and all of these things that are very complicating.

I know in Hague turn-off, there were fatalities until the two steps that were taken — and there hasn't been a fatality since this was done — that is the speed was reduced to 80 kilometres, which I know your officials are reluctant to do because it disrupts the flow of traffic. But

that step was taken, plus a flashing light. And when that was done, there have been a few accidents but nothing extremely serious.

Then as you're aware, in Rosthern we had a double fatality not so long ago which was exactly the cause . . . the cause of which was the fact that there was no separate turning lane and the vehicle was rear-ended, according to my information. Mr. Minister, I'm not quite sure what you can do there that is within the realms of your budgetary restriction. I'm quite aware of that. But I would be interested in finding out what conclusion you've drawn since you have had that accident and your officials have restudied it again, whether indeed the widening of the road there with a separate turn-off is a possibility, which I'm sure would have prevented the accident that occurred. I'm interested in what your commitment is to the future of that highway.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the concern the member has for the safety situations described. I'm familiar with most of them. I've travelled that road frequently. The department will get back to you about each of those circumstances in terms of how they're . . . where those are with respect to planning and alternatives. I know just from a brief discussion the deputy and I were having that one of the options — and possibly not the most practical one at the Rosthern corner — is four-laning. In order to provide four-laning at a place like that costs about a half a million dollars per kilometre and would require a couple of kilometres.

But I know you've suggested other solutions. And as you have indicated, while there is no turning lane, there is a by-pass lane which wasn't used in the case of the accident the other day. So the department will get back to you on the detailed examination they've taken and provide you with the update on the information on all of those corners including the examination they've done on the Rosthern corner since the accident.

Mr. Toth: — One more question before we move through the votings. Mr. Minister, I'd like to bring up two things. First of all, the entrance into Kenosee Provincial Park, I noticed there was a fair bit of construction taking place there. And I trust what that is, is finally putting that second lane in because as vehicles come up the hill from the south — and there's a lot of potash traffic there — there was the turn-off lane and then the passing lane would basically turn right into the mainstream of traffic to form a single lane right at the main entrance. I noticed about a month ago there was a fair bit of construction taking place, and I take it that they're extending that passing lane which I hope is taking place.

But the other question I have, Mr. Minister, is regarding signage policy. Now a number of years ago a policy was designed regarding signs and assigned corridors. And that is fine, and it works excellent in communities and regarding communities.

But one problem crops up every once in a while and that's regarding farms and individual farmers advertising the farm location. And I'm wondering if the department could take a little bit of flexibility on that because it's a sign here, and then maybe it's 20 miles and another sign.

In a lot of cases what we're asking people to do is put signs way back off of the road where they're not even hardly visible or down substantially where they must change the sign. And my understanding is — and you can correct me if I'm wrong — if a person had a sign on their own property or if they had an agreement with a neighbour and it was very close to the corner, but if it wasn't obstructing a view, I would think it would be appropriate to allow those individual producers to leave their farm signs in that location, rather than asking them to transport and put that sign 250 or 500 metres down the road. And I'm just asking the department to give some thought and some flexibility to that policy.

(1030)

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Chairman, on the Kenosee turn-off I don't have the detailed information on what's going on there, but the assistant deputy believes that you're correct in your assumption of what's going on there. And he'll get back to you on the detail.

With respect to the signing policy, that is one of the challenges, to maintain safety and still not be excessively bureaucratic about those kinds of policies. The guideline that is most restrictive is the guideline with respect to sight triangles at intersections. And the higher the speed limit on the piece of road — and I'm not sure — and possibly traffic levels as well, the greater the discipline with respect to the distance leading up to the intersection that must be kept clear so that people's sight lines are not interfered with.

But I will ask the department to consult with you directly on any specific cases — I know I've sent a number of responses by letter to people with particular concerns — and identify when you think the policy may be being either too stringent in its design or too stringently enforced.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I want to first of all in all sincerity wish you well and wish you good luck in your attempts to achieve federal cost sharing in getting some of our highways fixed and rebuilt. I sincerely support you in that philosophy and concept. I'm not saying that the federal government should build all of our roads but obviously those that interconnect our nation have some federal responsibility to them in my personal philosophy. And I think we share that. So I do genuinely wish you luck in those attempts.

You earlier, I think, made a commitment to my colleague from Souris-Cannington that you would deliver to us any information that we are missing as a result of the package of material that you sent across from our written questions. And if you can extend that commitment to the deliberations that followed that throughout this morning's discussion, then I would be willing . . . And I see I have a positive response so we will take it that we have that commitment.

And with that, I would like to thank your officials for coming in and helping in the deliberations this morning, thank them for contributing to the sharing of knowledge about our provincial highway system. As the year progresses, obviously we will find more questions and

more problems, and we will relate them to you as they happen. So we want to thank you. And that concludes our need for questioning this morning.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — If there are no further questions, before the estimates are voted I would like to thank the members opposite for their understanding with respect to the concerns that they raised relative to highways and highway safety for the people of Saskatchewan, thank them for their positive approach to the discussion today. I very much enjoyed it.

I want to thank my officials as well for their participation and support here both in getting information to you and in providing it to us here, and their commitment to forward to you other information required. And I appreciate your co-operation with respect to time as our deputy is going to Ottawa this afternoon for some consultations with the federal government. So thank you very much.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 19 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Highways and Transportation
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 16**

Items 1 to 20 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Highways and Transportation
Capital Expenditure — Vote 17**

Items 1 and 2 agreed to.

Vote 17 agreed to.

The committee reported progress.

(1045)

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Bill No. 71 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Medical
Care Insurance Act**

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

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would introduce to my left, Mr. Lawrence Krahn who is the executive director of MCI (medical care insurance) branch. And immediately behind me on the left, Ms. Diane Neill who's the legislative policy analyst in the policy branch. And immediately behind me, Mr. Bryan Middlemis who's the associate executive director of MCI. Thank you.

Clause 1

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister. I think what we have before us this morning is a Bill that must not pass. It is a Bill that is diametrically opposed to the commitments that you as critic of Health and your leader and now Premier of the province made during the election when you said quite adamantly that you will be doing more with less, that Health would be funded more, and the people of the province accepted that commitment on your part.

Now, Madam Minister, we find that this Bill is actually de-insuring optometrists, it's de-insuring chiropractors, and probably de-insuring the dental program for children as we know it. Now, Madam Minister, that cannot be allowed to happen unchallenged, because it flies in the face of what you're doing on the other hand. Because on the other hand you have your wellness model, the new direction that you're taking health care.

Now, Madam Minister, something that I just cannot for the life of me, and many people as well, follow your rationale, follow your reasoning. Where on the one hand you say we must be preventative because by being preventative we're going to increase the wellness of the people and then the sickness model can take a back step as it were to the wellness model and therefore we will be saving money because it will be cost-effective.

And that, Madam Minister, is what is underlying this MCI Bill that you've got before the House right now. It's what's underlying the wellness model that you are propagating throughout this province right now. It's budgetary driven. It's deficit driven.

And, Madam Minister, what I cannot for the life of me see is why you would be doing something like this MCI Bill which is so counter-productive. Why would you want to take optometrists out of the insured service? Why would you want to take the most cost-effective, the least costly method of chiropractic services and de-insure them?

So the counter-productivity, Madam Minister, is there. But by the same token you are also the government and particularly a minister who's always proud of talking about the consultative approach, the meetings, the direction that you are receiving from the people of this province. And I don't think, Madam Minister, that that is the case at all.

We have over the last couple of weeks, almost on a daily basis, been presenting petitions to you that categorically say, we don't want this, Madam Minister, don't de-insure chiropractors. Over 11,000 petitions. Optometrists, the same way. And we could get into diabetics or we could get into the other fields where they are saying we don't like your plan, Madam Minister — don't do it.

Because I'm suggesting to you that what we're looking at here is actually a method and a means of doing what you always complain about the federal government — off-loading. You are off-loading, Madam Minister, your responsibility as a government on the backs of the sick. And you're saying to them you pay your own way; we're not going to insure you any more because we have a deficit and we have to control that.

So, Madam Minister, those things don't wash. Those things that don't wash because you don't have a mandate to make these changes.

I know in your budget speech you have a glorious statement saying in there that your mandate is to make changes because that's what you ran the election on. Madam Minister, this *Star-Phoenix* article here: When you voted NDP, did you expect medicare user fees? Madam Minister, that is an article that was in the newspaper.

And I could go into that whole business of the lost brochure or the missing brochure where, Madam Minister, you as a government, would you have been elected had you told the people that you were going to be de-insuring chiropractors? Would you have been elected if you had told the people that you were going to make dramatic changes in Health, in Agriculture, all over the place? Would you have been elected then had you told the people the truth? I don't think you would have. And so therefore, Madam Minister, it's up to me as Health critic and the rest of our caucus here, as the opposition caucus, to hold you responsible.

And what I'm going to do now, Madam Minister, is give you a period of time to reconsider, to reconsider some amendments to this Bill if you're going to force it through. Or better yet, maybe you will do as many of your other ministers are doing right now, and that is changing their minds, changing their minds on the Saskatchewan Pension Plan. Whoops, we thought it was good, but now because people have said they don't want those changes we're going to reinstate it even though . . . that's not a good example because of the hollowness of the restored program.

But you can take the FeedGAP (feed grain adjustment program) program as another example of where the people spoke out and your colleagues have listened. To the credit of the Minister of Agriculture — and goodness knows he needs credit and I'm prepared to give it to him — he did change his mind on that.

And in his role and capacity of Minister of Highways he decided maybe it was not good to churn up the thin pavement throughout the province and reduce them back into gravel. He changed his mind. He listened to the people.

You say you listen to the people. Well how many petitions, Madam Minister, does it take for you to change your mind? Is the 4,000 on optometric services, is that not a significant number of people? Or the 11,000-plus, and we're still getting them in on a daily basis, is that not a significant number — large enough to change your mind? So I think you have some interesting questions that you could peruse over the next while and maybe change your mind on these issues.

And so, Mr. Chairman, to give the minister that opportunity and to give the minister the time to reconsider her rash action here, I'm going to, pursuant to rule 55(1), request that Bill 71, the Act that is going to amend The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act, be now suspended for three days.

The Chair: — At the request of the official opposition, under rule 55(1) proceedings on Bill No. 4, An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act are hereby suspended for three sitting days. I would advise the members the suspension takes effect immediately and continues until the same hour three sitting days later.

Mr. Neudorf: — I believe it's Bill 71, item no. 4.

The Chair: — My correction. It's item no. 4, Bill No. 71 is hereby suspended.

Bill No. 47 — An Act to repeal The Health Research Act

Item 1

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, to clarify some questions that I have in my mind, perhaps it would be most useful for you to spend a few moments and explain to the Assembly exactly what you propose to achieve through this Bill.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. What is occurring in this Bill is of a housekeeping nature. Earlier in the year . . . earlier this year, we established the Health Services Utilization Commission which took over the mandate of the Health Research Board under The Health Research Act and an additional mandate, which was funded by the government, to take a look at utilization of health care services in the province of Saskatchewan.

What this Act does is simply housekeeping and transfers the rights, obligations, etc., and assets under The Health Research Act over to the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission. So it is a Bill that is completely housekeeping in nature.

Mr. Neudorf: — I guess I have a few concerns, Madam Minister, when any Bill presented by your government is just simply described as housekeeping: please take our word, trust me, and let's get this thing done.

First of all, Madam Minister, could you explain to me a little bit about the make-up of the old board? That board is now defunct, is it? Would you explain to me then where the members that were on the old board are now, how many members did the old board have, and specifically what were their duties? And as a matter of fact, Madam Minister, who were the members of the old board?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, I'm waiting for the officials to bring in a list of the names of the old members on the Health Research Board. There were 12 members on the Health Research Board, as I understand, and there have been 12 new members appointed to the utilization commission. The old members on the Health Research Board are no longer there. But we have in existence both a Health Research Board and a utilization commission. These members are the same. So you've got . . . they're both the 12 members.

And that's why this Bill is housekeeping in nature, because it is for the purposes of doing away with the one board, so we only have one board left. Right now we have

two boards, but the one board is really a shell. And the people appointed to the utilization commission are also on the Health Research Board.

Now I have the names of the new board, if the member would like those names, here. But I don't have the names of the old board as of yet, and I've asked my officials to get it and I can provide that to you.

The new board is Dr. Stewart McMillan, who is the chair; and Dr. Elizabeth Gibbings, who is the vice-chair, I believe; Jim Blackburn from Saskatoon; Alan Boulton — they're on the faculty of the university; Geraldine Dickson — and I understand she's at the faculty of nursing; Dr. Habbick; and Dr. Hindmarsh of Meadow Lake; Dr. Dennis Kendel who, as you know, is the registrar of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons; Judith Martin from Saskatoon, in the health care administrative area; Meredith Moore from Air Ronge; Dr. Popkin from the university; and Pamela Smith from the University of Regina.

And this board was comprised as a result of the very special skills they brought to it, and in particular, Dr. McMillan, who has very substantial skills in the whole area of utilization and accreditation.

And I will undertake to provide you with the names of the other members as soon as I get them from my officials.

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, what happened to the members who were on the previous board, the old? Are they just given a golden handshake?

(1100)

Hon. Ms. Simard: — It's my understanding that they resigned and the new board was appointed, and that there had been discussions with the Health Research Board prior to the new board being appointed and the utilization commission being established.

Mr. Neudorf: — Are any of these new members on the board people that were on the old board? Was there any carry-over?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — I am not certain about this, but without us having the other list we can't be 100 per cent certain. But my officials advise that Jim Blackburn and Brian Habbick may have been on the former board and that Alan Boulton may have been on the Health Research Board at another time in an earlier occasion, but wasn't a member of the most recent Health Research Board.

Mr. Neudorf: — I'm kind of surprised, Madam Minister, that . . . well first of all, perhaps I should ask you the question: who appointed these new members? And who asked the old members to resign?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — It's my understanding that there was consultation about the Health Services Utilization Commission, it's mandate and what the government was attempting to achieve, with the Health Research Board and as a result of that consultation, there were resignations from the former Health Research Board and a new board was established. It's my understanding that

there was consultation with the former Health Research Board which would have been by the Department of Health and the deputy minister of Health. The appointment would have been by order in council through the Exec Council.

Mr. Neudorf: — I'm surprised, Madam Minister, that you don't seem to be more on top of where a dozen people get appointed. When you say it was done by OC, order in council, that's Executive Council. And those appointments are done, Madam Minister, on your recommendation as Minister of Health. So I'm having a little bit of difficulty understanding how some of these may have been on the old board; they may not have been, you're not aware, you're not sure.

Well surely, Madam Minister, you know the résumé of these people that you're going to be appointing to an important board like this, and it would seem to me that you would be very aware of any carry over and of any people who would have been . . . the continuity must have been a concern of yours.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, is that these individuals come with a certain expertise. The Department of Health in consultation with the university and other areas came up with a list of names of people who are highly qualified to do this kind of technical work. That is how these people were selected. They were not hand-picked by the Minister of Health. They were selected on the recommendation of the medical community and the university, because of their qualifications.

Now if the member opposite wants a list of those qualifications, I can undertake to provide them. If he wants a list of names of those on this list who sat on the former board, I can also undertake to provide that. These people are all highly qualified and come on the recommendation of the Department of Health after consulting extensively with the medical community.

Mr. Neudorf: — I thank you very much, Madam Minister. And yes, I would appreciate if you could give me that information that you have indicated just now. Am I led to understand that you were not involved personally at all in any of this consultation that you have just been referring to? I'm getting the distinct impression that you were not involved at all, that this was done by the department only.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — I was being consulted as the consultations were taking place. The department did the consulting with the university, that's right. They did the consulting with the medical community and advised me of what they were determining, and made a recommendation to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Neudorf: — What was the utilization of these board members? How many days a year do you see them sitting and what would the per diem and the remuneration be?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Chair, we are getting the information with respect to the remuneration. I am advised by my officials that they've been meeting approximately every two or three weeks.

Mr. Neudorf: — Every two or three weeks. One day every two or three weeks, Madam Minister, or a full week at a time? Give me an idea. You say they meet every two or three weeks. Would that be for one day during that . . . It would. Okay. Thank you.

It's called the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission. Now, Madam Minister, obviously I don't think that this committee is going to do actual research other than . . . Or does that apply to the research grants and the giving out of the money for research grants? Is that that portion of their mandate?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — First of all, I can give the member now the remuneration with respect to the new members of the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission. If they're salaried, they don't get a per diem. So that means that Jim Blackburn gets travel expenses only; Alan Boulton, travel expenses only; Geraldine Dickson, travel expenses; Elizabeth Gibbings, travel expenses; Brian Habbick, travel expenses. Dr. Hindmarsh gets \$325 per day plus expenses; Dr. Kendel, travel expenses only; Judith Martin, travel expenses. Meredith Moore gets \$325 per day plus expenses. And Dr. Stewart McMillan, who is the chair, gets \$425 per day plus expenses, plus a \$12,000 per year retainer. Dr. Popkin gets travel expenses; Pamela Smith, travel expenses.

Now with respect to funding, as the member opposite asked, there is research money for clinical research as was done in the past. There has been no money taken from the research funding money that was available. There's also additional money for new utilization research. And there is a small research secretariat attached to the commission with like the old health research workers that were there, and I think there has been two more workers added.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Now the other side of it is the utilization. The commission is going to be . . . How do you perceive the commission working? Are they going to go to Prince Albert? Are they going to go to Moose Jaw? How are they going to determine what the usage patterns are? I assume that this is one of the functions of the board, to determine usage patterns and then make recommendations. Is that the idea to you as minister as to how to better be more cost effective, be more efficient? What is the aspect of this as far as the utilization is concerned?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Thank you very much. For the information of the member opposite, it isn't intended that the utilization commission do institution-specific studies because you had mentioned something about going to P.A. (Prince Albert) for example or so on. However that would be their choice if they wanted to do that, but that's not the intention. The intention is for them to do studies that are really provincial in nature.

Now what their methodologies will be, we don't know all the details of their methodologies. That will be up to them to determine as scientists in their particular area. They will be using any reported statistics that we have in Saskatchewan for health services and from health communities, for example. They will also be using

national and international models and statistics that are available to them, and where they cannot get the information already in our statistical data banks in Saskatchewan or nationally or internationally, then they would undertake surveys, I would image, to acquire that information.

(1115)

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, thank you. What do you intend to do with the information that this board is going to come up with? Do you view this board as being a research board that's going to do your research for you so that you will take the . . . Will they be coming up with recommendations for you, or will they simply be giving you a statistical analysis and then you will be making policy decisions based on what the information that this board is coming up with? Or will the board actually be making recommendations to you?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The intention is, is that the findings of the commission will be made public. And they may very well as a result of this, have to point to certain directions that may improve the quality of health care services for example in Saskatchewan. The information will be directed not only at government but also at the health community and at the public at large, so that everyone becomes familiar with what their findings are and the grounds upon which they base it.

Mr. Neudorf: — I'll be quite candid with you, Madam Minister, and one of the concerns that I would have is that this board and its findings and/or its recommendations not be used as an excuse, Madam Minister, for you to make policy decisions that are going to affect the many people that we have in Saskatchewan, be they urban or be they rural.

I just caution you, Madam Minister, I don't want to see you here next spring saying that because of this and because of these recommendations by these folks that therefore I'm going to now have a legitimate . . . to legitimize what I'm going to do anyway. I caution you very strongly on that, Madam Minister, and I'm going to be watching for that.

Secondly, I'm going to express another concern and be very candid with you up front. And that is that when I look over the names of this board that you have outlined for me, I see a stellar performance-oriented group of individuals by large. I don't know all of the individuals, Madam Minister, but I certainly recognize some of the names well-known throughout the medical community. And I would commend you, Madam Minister, for getting people like this to basically come up for their expenses and put their expertise on the line. And I think that's very commendable.

So I'm not at this point casting aspersions on this particular board and certainly not on any of its members. However, Madam Minister, I am dealing with the reality of dealing with a government that is known to use the facilities of government to its own end. And again I just want to caution you, Madam Minister . . . and perhaps what you could do is just do away with any fears that I may have as to the make-up of this board.

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Now every board that we've taken a look at so far has individuals on it that have done well by the NDP (New Democratic Party) cause. I want you to give me the assurance, Madam Minister, that there has been no entry level fee or no donation required by any board members. Now I know that you're shaking your heads, and that's a terrible thing for me to have to bring up when Dr. Hindmarsh and people like this are on the board and I recognize that.

But I don't know all of the individuals. And I just want you to give me the assurance that there's nobody on here, for example, like the competition I had during the election with Kim Dmytryshyn running as the NDP member for your party as my opponent. Yet I find out now in Social Services estimates, yes, she's sitting on the Social Services appeal board. Now I don't know whether it's a hundred dollar donation. The last that the member from Thunder Creek brought up was a \$608 donation required to get onto one of your boards. Now I just want your assurance that this board is totally free of that. And if you can give me that assurance, then I would rest easy.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The way in which the board was selected, Mr. Chair, is as follows, is that first of all advice was sought from the Dean of Medicine in Saskatchewan. Advice was sought from the old research board, and there was consultation with the old research board. The research community in general was consulted. And they went . . . The Department of Health spoke to community-centred services to look for some community-centred representatives. A list of names . . . Nobody asked any questions about what people's political involvement was or was not. This was not raised.

The fact of the matter is, is then a list of names were presented to the minister as recommendations from the department, and the minister accepted the department's recommendations, they having done all the technical work in consulting with the technical community in this regard.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I think we can move on then. I take that, your lack of denial, as the assurance that I was seeking for that indeed we will not find any of those items or any of those individuals involved that way. And I thank you for that assurance.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 47 — An Act to repeal The Health Research Act

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

The Chair: — Would the minister introduce her officials, please.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Immediately to my right is Mr. Duane Adams, the deputy minister of Health. And to my left is Ms. Lorraine Hill, the senior associate deputy minister. And immediately behind me, straight behind me is Ms. Kathy Langlois who's the executive director of finance and administration. And to my left behind me is Mr. Lawrence Krahn whom I introduced earlier this morning. There are other officials at the back as well. I'm assuming that this will be sufficient for now because they're not coming forward. Or did you want me to introduce the officials sitting way at the back. Okay, thank you.

Item 1

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think, Madam Minister, as the officials are needed an introduction at that time would be quite sufficient.

I think, Madam Minister, that we have arrived at a period of time in this session that I've been looking forward to with a great deal of anticipation. And I'm sure many of the people of Saskatchewan are also looking forward to getting some answers from you in terms of some of the concerns that they have, answers as to policy decisions which have resulted in particular directions that your government is going.

And I guess we have a couple of roads which we can travel down to get to the same destination that we all want to go, which is the culmination of the Health estimates. One obviously is going to be a very rocky road. It's going to be a circuitous path that we can take if that be your decision in terms of how well you answer questions, how forthright you are and so on. And of course also it depends on how I behave and the political rhetoric that I put into my questions. So I fully realize that it will be, I guess, feeling it out as we go along, as it were.

(1130)

But, Madam Minister, I know that a couple of weeks ago — I'm not quite sure at what point — you were given . . . it was my understanding that all ministers were given what we call the global questions. And the global questions that you received apparently were not the global questions that some of the other ministers received.

And I think that the response that we received from you, where the original question sent out as an example for PSC (Public Service Commission) I believe, and they were not the final version of the questions that we sent out to the other ministers, and I think there's a little bit of a mix-up there.

But be that as it may, Madam Minister, there were 33 questions that were asked, and those were fairly straightforward questions dealing, I believe, with the

bureaucratic aspect of running the Department of Health. None of them, I believe, were policy oriented that should have caused you a great deal of concern.

Now I would want from you, Madam Minister . . . I only received the answers last night. Quite frankly, I haven't looked at any of them yet. So I don't know what your responses are. I don't know how full your responses are.

But I would ask you, Madam Minister, to make one commitment to me so that we can get this ball rolling, and that is that you will undertake to answer your questions as fully as your colleagues have answered. And many of your colleagues — as a matter of fact, most of your colleagues in the different departments have already answered those questions to our satisfaction.

And if you would make the commitment then to answer those questions to the degree that your colleagues have, I would accept your confirmation of accomplishing that. And then we can go on to other questions.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — First of all, we didn't receive a copy of the second list that you're talking about. But we did get a copy of the first list, which is what we have answered, which have been answered very substantially. I don't know how many pages, but this is the answers to your questions. So I don't know how much more full these answers can get.

We attempted to answer them as full as we possibly could, and it will be up to you, after you take a look at them, to see whether or not you require further information. And then we'll attempt to accommodate.

Mr. Neudorf: — Let me assure you of one thing, Madam Minister. The questions that were asked were not asked as busybody, make-work project for the officials. I know they have more things to do than that. But it was asked in all sincerity because, Madam Minister, although you held up a wad of answers . . . And I appreciate the effort that the officials have gone to in order to come up with, which I am sure will be very substantive answers.

But, Madam Minister, I make no apologies for asking those questions because your department spends a third of the entire budget of this province. And as I have indicated, those questions were not policy questions. We'll deal with them in here. Those are legitimate questions, bureaucratic questions, if you will, that ask about the ways and the means of the department.

And as such, I think we are very legitimate in asking those questions and you are very legitimate in spending a great deal of your officials' time in coming up with the answers to them. So, Madam Minister, I thank you for that, and I will peruse them with a great deal of anticipation as to their fullness and completeness.

Madam Minister, if we could just get off that and get into the core of what we want to address. I have a whole series of questions obviously, and many members of our caucus here do as well. But to start things off, I want to take a direct approach, I suppose, to some of the policy decisions that your government has made — unpopular decisions, I might add, Madam Minister — with many,

many people of this province. And we want to get into one specific area that will serve to me at least as an example of some of the other impacts that your policy decisions have had on the people of this province.

Now quite frankly my first question deals with diabetics. So if your officials can start looking at some of the diabetic information that you have . . . Madam Minister, my question to you first of all would be: how many diabetics are you aware of that are in this province right now with varying degrees of the disease?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The statistics show that 14,000 individuals received one prescription or more for insulin and/or testing agents in 1991.

Mr. Neudorf: — What kind of age breakdown do you have for diabetics, Madam Minister? I'm particularly interested in the number of children that would be classified as being diabetic.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Just with respect to my earlier answer when I said there were 14,000 individuals, that has to be clarified; it's 14,000 families. That means there could be one or more individuals in a family, and we don't have that specific information.

With respect to . . . There is some 7,352 families that are non-senior. Now we don't have the breakdown as to how many children within those families would be diabetic or receiving some diabetic testing agents, for example, or insulin. But we can get that figure for you if you want it.

Mr. Neudorf: — For clarification, Madam Minister, did you say there were 1,352 diabetics that were non-senior?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — 7,352.

Mr. Neudorf: — 7,352. Thank you. So about half are non-senior and half are . . . Would it be a fair assessment for me to use the term 15,000? Obviously if one member of a family is diabetic, there's probably going to be one or two within the family that are suffering from the same disease. So if you're telling me that there are 14,000 families that have diabetics, I would assume that 15,000, 16,000 would be a fair number to use. Could you try to define that for me?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Yes, I think that's fairly close.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Madam Minister. If we use the term 15,000 families, is it correct, first of all, that the charge . . . or the cost, the increased cost of insulin to a diabetic prior to your changes in the program was \$1 a vial and that it is approximately \$24 a vial now? Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — It was \$1 a vial in 1975 when the program was first brought in, and it remained \$1 a vial. There have been negotiations that have been undertaken with the pharmaceutical association and others involved in providing insulin to diabetics. And the price I believe is now somewhere between 17 to \$19 a vial. There's been a reduction of almost one-third in the price of a vial of insulin.

Mr. Neudorf: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I thought it was somewhere around 23, 24, and if you're saying now it's eight bucks off of that, that's obviously good news in a sense. What caused the reduction? You said there were negotiations. I mean, if the cost of a vial is \$24, it's \$24. What would make that company now sell that for 18?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Okay, there's a raw drug price of course, and then the price is raised as a result of mark-ups by pharmacists and mark-ups by retail centres . . . wholesale centres, rather. And what we did is the Department of Health went in and negotiated a reduction in the mark-ups, and as a result of that were able to obtain I think it's almost a one-third reduction in the cost of insulin.

Mr. Neudorf: — Well when you say negotiate, Madam Minister, that means that you have two levels — one party here and one party here and you meet somewhere here. What incentive was there for these companies to have any reduction at all? I can't see why a company that is selling a product for \$24 would be negotiated down to \$18 unless you had some kind of a clout over them or you used some of the might of the department. I don't follow that.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — I understand that what happened is comparisons were taken with other provinces as to what the price of a vial of insulin was and what the mark-ups were, and it was discovered that the mark-ups in Saskatchewan were higher than they were in some other jurisdictions. And therefore we went to the pharmacists and to the wholesale dealers and we negotiated a reduction in those mark-ups. Under the present situation of course, they did not want to feel as though they were taking advantage of the consumer. And on the basis of that we were able to negotiate a reduction in the mark-up so that it brought it more in line with other jurisdictions.

(1145)

Mr. Neudorf: — Well if that's the only hammer that your officials have, I say all the more power to your officials for being able to accomplish that. But, Madam Minister, I have a concern here, that I don't think it makes too much difference whether it's \$20 a vial or 18 or \$19 a vial; it still is that much.

Now, Madam Minister, give me an idea, as closely as you can, what would be the typical requirement of a diabetic in terms of the average number of vials they would use per month?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The exact cost cannot be determined because the use of insulin and glucose testing agents varies from one individual to another. However on the average the cost for insulin to a non-senior family is approximately \$30 on the average, and that's insulin plus testing agents, I'm advised.

Mr. Neudorf: — That's per month? So what we're seeing now is \$30 per month is the average family cost for insulin, and at the same time that also includes the cost then of testers and syringes and all the cost involved with diabetics. Is that right? That's the average cost for

everything involved for a diabetic family?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — Mr. Chair, my officials advise me that it costs approximately \$20 for the insulin and glucose testing. And that's on average. There is another charge of, they estimate at approximately \$41 a month which is for syringes and some other things, much of which was not covered by the government in the past. And there's another charge for strips for testing. And we don't have an average as to how many strips a person would use, but I think it's \$50, for how many strips? Fifty strips is \$50.

Mr. Neudorf: — I'm kind of surprised at the tardiness, I suppose, of the answers coming back to some fairly fundamental questions here. At this rate it's going to be well into September before we even get half-way through our estimates here, Madam Minister — some fundamental questions.

We're talking now about \$20 for the glucose testing and for the insulin; \$41 for subsidiary costs, the paraphernalia. But that does not yet even include the cost of the testing strips. So we're taking a look at at least a minimum of 61 plus the number of . . . \$1 per strip for testing. And some of them, my colleague here says, from his experience, some of them have up to four test strips per day. So I mean we're looking at some major, major . . . You know, 30 days at four a day, that's \$120 in addition to the \$60 that you've identified. We're taking a look at \$180 cost of a diabetic per individual. And some families have more than one diabetic involved in their family.

Madam Minister, you talk a lot about the set up that you have in your government now to take care of those that cannot pay for such costs. You talk about the social service recipients; you talk about the SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) people; you talk about the SIP (Saskatchewan Income Plan) people, the seniors; you talk about those that are under the FIP (Family Income Plan) program as being taken care of.

Now that, Madam Minister, has always been there. When I say, always, I'm talking in the recent past. And then you talk about your program where you are saying to the people of Saskatchewan, if you're having difficulty paying for these costs, there's a safety net.

Madam Minister, I want you to be quite explicit to me now. The \$160 that we have identified — or \$180 that we have identified as a potential cost per diabetic in this province, what safety net have you got in place now that did not exist, that did not exist on October 21, '91? What have you done to increase that safety net?

Hon. Ms. Simard: — First of all, the figures that we gave you don't add up to 180 a month, Mr. Chair. It's 61 plus \$50 for strips, and we're not sure what the average number is in that regard. So we're not agreeing to the \$180 a month. We're talking about averages, Mr. Chair.

Now with respect to the issue about the safety net, let me say this. What the government has set up is a program whereby people who cannot afford their drug costs, either because they have high drug costs or low income or a combination of both, can apply to the government. And their deductible will be waived or their co-payment

will be waived, or something will be implemented by the government to help them through paying for their drug costs.

The Department of Health is administering this program, as I understand, very liberally. There are application forms at the druggist for people to apply if they need to apply for this help. We have forwarded a letter, I believe, to the 14,000 diabetic families in the province to tell them about the safety program. We have also instituted a 24-hour WATS (wide area telephone service) line for emergency service. If there needs to be a prescription filled by a person on an emergency basis and they can't afford to, the pharmacist can phone the 24-hour WATS line and have it filled. And that service is available to an individual once every six months or once every . . . once every six months.

So anyone who has high drug costs or low income or a combination of both can apply to the Department of Health, and the Department of Health will work with them to provide them with relief in that regard.

Mr. Neudorf: — Madam Minister, one quick question here. You didn't answer my question. What have you done specifically that was not in place under our government prior to October 21, 1991?

I mean these programs that you're talking about were in place all the time. Those options were available to folks even when the prescription drug plan existed the way it was suppose to exist. And you've gutted that program, and you're making all these comments about the wonderful safety net. I don't see the difference.

Hon. Ms. Simard: — The Department of Health has expanded the criteria of the special assistance program that was there before. And it is being applied in a more liberal fashion than what was taking place before.

Also there is a cap on drug costs at . . . there's a cap at \$750 a year which was not there before, so people with very high drug costs have a cap on them and the co-payment is reduced to 10 per cent. And the six-month emergency measure was implemented with a 24-hour WATS (wide area telephone service) line which was not there, as my understanding, previously.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly recessed until 2 p.m.