

The Assembly met at 9 a.m.

Prayers

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 84 — An Act to amend The Urban Municipality Act, 1984

The Chair: — I'd ask the minister to please introduce her officials and ask the other members to come to order.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have with me to my right, John Edwards. He's the assistant director of financial systems and policy services from the Department of Community Services.

Clause 1

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Madam Minister, and to the officials.

Most of the provisions of this Bill are of a housekeeping nature and we don't have a great deal of concern or problem with. The one area that we have some questions about though is with respect to fine revenue. I'm wondering if the minister would care to comment on the amount of additional revenue will be raised as a result of this Bill.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, this is an important change and it's important to make clarifications of what the understanding is. This applies only to Saskatoon and Regina because a number of years ago Saskatoon and Regina withdrew the escort services and transferred that to the provincial government. And a few years ago, under the former administration, the charge had been pegged at \$320,000 annually that would be paid to the provincial government.

This year in our budget we changed that to have full cost recovery. And under the analysis of the Department of Justice, that increase would be about . . . up to \$450,000 annually to each of Saskatoon and Regina. So the increase would be somewhere between the difference of 320,000, which it was previous, up to 450,000 which we have now.

Mr. Boyd: — And the amount of revenue loss then for each city then, Regina and Saskatoon?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The transfer of that cost would be equivalent to the difference to the Saskatoon or Regina municipal governments.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I have a question under the section 14 here. It permits a sliding scale is what it's about, and perhaps that will get your mind on what I'm saying.

It is my impression that people who can't pay their taxes, in whatever jurisdiction, are normally people that have a problem getting money. And if you impose an even greater penalty on people that are having trouble with

their financing, I don't think that that's necessarily an encouragement for them to pay, but only puts them into deeper trouble.

Now I know that you could argue the thing the opposite direction in certain circumstances where interest rates are very high in the banking systems, and people might in fact be reinvesting their money rather than paying their taxes because they're earning more money by investing it somewhere rather than to pay their taxes.

At the present time, though, interest rates are relatively low throughout the whole world as far as that goes, particularly here in Canada, throughout those vehicles that most normal people might invest their money in. That being a fact, then I see no encouragement for people to basically be sort of playing the system or sort of cheating on the system by holding back their taxes to invest their money to make more money.

That being out of the way then, what we're doing is discriminating against those people again who are in that first block that I described, those people that are having financial trouble. If you slide the scale upwards and cause them even more trouble, it is my belief that they'll have even more trouble paying their taxes.

We find in municipal circles . . . and I don't know how far this Act really extends here — if this is just for the big cities or it's going to apply to all municipalities. And I hope you'll clarify that — but the reality, no matter who it affects, would be the same. And we find though in our local municipal situation, a lot of times we can get people even to pay their taxes if we might go into some kind of an agreement where we will cancel some of the extra costs that build up. And we, I believe, have had that power in the past to do some of that sort of thing and that has encouraged people to sort of clean up at least part of what their ability to pay is. And the public purse of course doesn't get everything it should, but at least it isn't out everything the way it might be you know if you pushed the issued too hard. So I'd like your comments on that.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — To the member opposite, this is not new. For many years municipalities used penalties as an encouragement to make sure that property owners would pay their taxes. And you're quite right about the fact that in the past they would invest their money rather than pay the taxes because the returns were better.

But that doesn't change the fact that municipal governments need this tax revenue in order to operate, and there has to be some ability for them to pressure the property owner into paying those taxes. It's a long-standing part of their operations to apply penalties to tax arrears. It's been there for many, many years.

The sliding scale has already been used in many municipalities, and what we have here is simply allowing that sliding scale to be put into the municipal Act. I would like to make a comment that this is still optional. Municipalities don't have to use a sliding scale, and it is totally within their jurisdiction to decide what kind of penalties they want to apply.

So they have to take into account the ability of their taxpayers to pay arrears. This does not obligate them in any way to charge a certain scale of penalties at all. It's simply allowing municipalities the latitude to collect the taxes in the best way they can. And if they need to apply penalties on arrears, then they have that ability.

What you're saying is that municipalities should finance property owners for back taxes and that's unfair. Municipalities provide services and they need revenue in order to do that. So there is no obligation on the part of municipalities to finance property owners for their taxes. And the fact that in this Act, one other part of it, the minister has the right to set the maximum of what the penalties can be — so it isn't about to get out of hand and it is a way of achieving a balance between the property owner and the municipal government's right to collect taxes.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Madam Minister, with all due respect, the notion that penalties are necessary was not the proposition that I was challenging. The ability of municipalities though to use discretion in how it is applied, that ability must be maintained, is what I'm trying to say. I'm glad to hear you suggest or say outrightly that this is an optional program.

First of all, I have a few questions, and I think for the expediency of time, if you have a pencil I'll just give you two or three and then you can answer them all at once and we'll save a little time on this.

Do municipalities and municipal jurisdictions have the right to cancel arrears still after this Act is put into force? You said we have the option to use the sliding but we don't have to. My argument there is that in some municipal jurisdictions, especially in smaller communities in Saskatchewan, the reality is that if you take a small amount of the taxes that are owing and allow a person that can pay that to pay that and cancel his arrears, he might pay it.

Otherwise he's going to dump his property on you, and as a municipal jurisdiction, you end up owning property that you have absolutely no sale for and no use for. And it is going to bring you in no revenue. And the chances of selling it to someone else just doesn't exist today in today's market. So if you can cut a deal with a taxpayer that he can afford to pay and you have that option, you're better to take some dollars rather than no dollars. And you're not subsidizing the taxpayer, you're simply saving what you can out of a bad situation in a recession.

(0915)

With the interest rates having dropped, the opportunity for people to play the system as they used to simply doesn't exist any more. Having been in the municipal arena for some years myself, I know that at one time the rates were quite low and you could invest your money higher than what the tax penalties were. And obviously everyone did that to some extent.

It only could apply though for a certain period of time because, as you're well aware from your municipal background, the threat of losing your property soon

becomes a very big reality because municipalities do take the appropriate action very quickly. And if the taxes aren't properly paid or some settlement agreement come to, the property is put into jeopardy. And if it's a valuable property, obviously even though they're playing games with the investment money, they soon will either pay their taxes or lose something that's more valuable. And no one that has anything of value is going to deliberately lose it.

So we haven't had a big problem as a result of people playing games. Our biggest problem with non-taxpayers is genuinely people that don't have any money. And if you over-penalize people that don't have any money, I think you're just going to possibly make the problem worse. So I'm glad to hear that it's optional. I believe though that the sliding scale upward being in place, it ought to be advised to municipalities not to use that route unless they find it absolutely necessary.

You made reference to the fact that other jurisdictions are using this principle. I wonder if you could table for us the results of your studies in those jurisdictions and what their success rates have been.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — First of all, to the point that do they have a right to negotiate it. Yes of course they do.

A municipal government is autonomous, and it is totally within their jurisdiction to decide how to collect their revenue. And they don't have to apply a penalty on arrears at all if they don't want to. And they know best who the property owners are and what their ability to pay, and I don't think it's up to the provincial government to make those decisions for them. So it would be presumptuous of us to make those decisions at this level when the people at the local government level are the ones providing the service and understand the situation firsthand about the ability of their property owners to pay.

So yes of course, they have the ability to negotiate. If they want to make an agreement that if they may the taxes — and we have done that often in Melfort — if they pay their taxes on a set system, then the discounts . . . or the penalty on arrears will be diminished.

You asked about have we done any surveys. Well I was speaking from experience. Melfort for many years have had a system where they have applied a penalty on arrears, and it's a sliding scale. And we've used at least for 10 years, and it has worked very well to clear up arrears. In fact, I think when it was instituted we cleared up just about half a billion worth of arrears in about three or four years.

So it does work. Many municipalities use it. They use their discretion. They don't want to have tax title property dumped into their books. And it is best left in the hands of the people at the local level; local municipal governments are responsible people, and they are the best ones to decide how to use a sliding scale.

The Chair: — This is a Bill with 16 clauses spread over six pages. Would members agree to go page by page? It's agreed.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Pages 1 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before we move on to that, I'd like to thank the officials for the last piece of business. And we appreciate the co-operation.

Bill No. 85 — An Act respecting Fire Prevention and Certain Consequential Amendments resulting from the enactment of this Act

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have to my right, Henry McCutcheon, is the executive director of community development, Community Service department. To my right and behind me, Richard McCullough is a Fire Commissioner from the Department of Community Services. And directly behind me is Lian Schwann, Crown solicitor from the Department of Justice.

Clause 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, this is a fairly comprehensive Bill. And we discussed it a little bit after second readings last time. And I'm just wondering if you've had time to do any research on the issue of fire personnel and fire equipment crossing international and provincial boundaries.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — To the member opposite, yes, we looked at it but it can't be covered in this Act. It has to be something that is done locally as an agreement between municipalities that are across borders from one another. So it's under the local jurisdiction. It can't be covered by this Act.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, what effects would that have on insurance for those people and for the equipment that they use if they cross into another jurisdiction?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — This Act does not cover those circumstances. This covers protection and suppression of fires only. The circumstances that you're talking about would have to be covered between the local municipalities and the insurer that they use as underwriting their coverage.

So it would depend on how they negotiate with the company that they're insured with whether or not their firefighters or their equipment would be covered if they cross their . . . out of their jurisdictional boundaries.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, is there any provincial insurance in which the government is involved in or is this all just a private matter?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — It's on an individual matter. It depends on what company they want to insure with and they would have to negotiate that as part of their agreement or part of their package with the insurer.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, would you

mind explaining how the taxes on fire insurance premiums work then.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — There has been no change in that. It's 1 per cent on all fire insurance premiums sold in Saskatchewan, on coverage sold in Saskatchewan. It is allocated to the Consolidated Fund as was recommended in the Gass Commission. And it is, through the Consolidated Fund, paid back to training and programs in the Department of Community Services to cover costs in the Fire Commissioner's office.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, does the government have any rules and regulations dealing with fire equipment, fire personnel going into another jurisdiction whatsoever that would prevent a community from making arrangements to cover into another community? I'm thinking more than just from one municipality to another but from Saskatchewan into Manitoba or Alberta or across the international boundary.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I'm not sure if this is what you wanted in your question. The 1 per cent that we levy on insurance premiums paid back to the Consolidated Fund and through the Consolidated Fund to the Fire Commissioner's office is used to help communities with their interjurisdictional agreements. And also through the EMO (Emergency Measures Organization) office and support, those kinds of initiatives, if they want to jointly own equipment or pursue intermunicipal agreements, then the money . . . there is money allocated to support those initiatives. But that is the extent to which we get involved in trying to encourage or support or promote any other type of agreements.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, the Act also deals with the sale, distribution, and installation of smoke detectors and fire prevention equipment. I'm just wondering about the qualifications and who sets out the qualifications necessary to certify someone for this, to be able to install it or inspect it.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Two remarks to that question. The national fire protection association sets the standards for all equipment that is used or sold in the area of fire protection. And also the industry itself who is selling this equipment also has an interest in maintaining the standards so they have pushed for those regulations as well.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well if they're industry standards, Madam Minister, or if they're set on a national code, but it's our fire commissioners that enforce it, is it under this Act that they are given that authority to enforce it? If it's not a provincial statute, I'm just wondering how they enforce a federal statute or an industry-wide standard which is not a law.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The standards as set by the national association and through the provincial legislation, we apply those standards through regulations.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So in actual fact then the province has passed legislation or regulations dealing with those standards and making them law in this province. We're

accepting the recommendations of a body outside of Saskatchewan that these are the proper standards that should be applied.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes that's true.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, on one of the clauses here it talks of exemptions to any land, building, structures or premises or persons, that the Fire Commissioner can exempt certain things from having to be done to meet fire code regulations. I'm just wondering, what's the criteria for this, who makes the decisions, and are the same standards applied to everybody. If an exemption is given to building A, will the same exemption be given to building B?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The intent in this clause is to grandfather certain buildings so that there isn't a large expense right away on some of the buildings that don't comply with the National Fire Code at this point in time. It's left to the discretion to decide, as a matter of safety, which ones will and which ones can't. But it's difficult to roll over with this Act and to enforce compliance with a new set of standards on some very old buildings. And it would put a fairly large burden on a lot of property owners if we didn't allow some latitude and some flexibility in that area.

(0930)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well I agree, Madam Minister, and that's why I brought this up. Because I can think of a number of occasions where a building — while not ancient by any means — is an older building where some renovations are being proposed for those buildings, and yet to meet current fire codes very extensive alterations have to be made, and in some cases making it impractical to actually renovate that building. It makes it cheaper to build a whole new building.

And I'm thinking of some of our institutions. When you look at hospitals, I believe the current standard, the current code calls for 8 foot hallways in hospitals so that beds can pass in either direction. And yet in some of our small, rural communities those hospitals have hallways that are narrower than that. But if you only have 10 beds in the hospital, in the case of an emergency, I don't really suspect that you're going to have beds travelling both directions. They're all going to be going for the exit, rather than running back and forth.

So, Madam Minister, I think it's in this kind of a situation where some considerations need to be given for some exemptions; that you could still renovate within that hospital without having to meet all of the current standards fire code regulations.

I can think of one hospital that had hallways that are 7 foot 6 wide. They were short 6 inches. And yet they had to gut the entire interior of the hospital to meet the eight-foot hallway standards. And this was a very expensive proposition. And the net result was that a new hospital was built because of this. And I think in those kind of particular circumstances, that's one of the areas where exemptions should be given some serious considerations.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, the National Fire Code provides more flexibility than what we have now, because through regulations we can make certain exemptions that would place an undue hardship on certain buildings. However, if you're renovating and there are certain standards that have to be applied, those will be applied.

But we also have the ability to look at equivalency. So if the National Fire Code says it has to be 10 sprinklers for whatever square feet or something and there is another option or equivalent option that they can use instead, it allows that discretion at the local level.

The main thrust here is to make sure we have protection of life and property. And you have to be able to allow some flexibility in latitude in some situations in order to achieve the same results. You can go at it from a number of different ways. So we want to be as flexible as possible but still maintain the standards.

And secondly, what we look for is equivalency so that if the code says that it has to be this way, we can look and see how another way that you can achieve the same results.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, in the case of the hospitals, the small rural hospitals that are doing some renovations and yet have to meet these eight-foot hallway standards, perhaps something else could be done to allow access . . . I mean egress.

If you had another exit put in place, perhaps that would meet or suffice the standard. It's when you have to tear one whole wall out that doesn't need to be moved in your renovations, and that harms the structure because that may be the walls that are supporting the roof, I believe it's a very onerous burden on the institution when it has to do that. If some other method such as another exit being put in would suffice, then I think that should be given some serious consideration.

One of the other concerns that I have with the fire codes and fire regulations is the inconsistency between the fire code necessities and those of the Department of Health or some of the other government departments. When a person is putting up a new building, the Department of Health inspectors will come in and say, you have to do A, B, and C. So the owner will meet A, B, and C. And then the fire inspector comes in and says, no you can't do that; you have to do it this way.

So I would like to see all of these organizations get together a little bit so that one guy goes in there and says, you do A, B, and C and that meets the Department of Health regulations, that meets the fire code regulations. And so people will have a better opportunity to know where they're at. They don't have to do the jobs two and three times and waste a whole bunch of money that in the end costs the consumers and the taxpayers money, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, to the first comment that he made regarding hallways in the older rural hospitals. That's exactly the situation that we're trying to prevent. Right now under our

current regulations there is no flexibility; under this new fire prevention Act there would be. And this is a benefit of this new Act, to address the situations that you have just described.

To the second point that you made, on the making sure that different departments have the same standards so that the owner isn't caught between two conflicting standards, we do whenever possible do that. Of course there are instances when things drop through the cracks and there may be occasions when there has been two conflicting orders given. But to the greatest extent possible, the Fire Commissioner's office is involved in all the plans. And they do co-ordinate and integrate their decisions with all of the other departments, like the Department of Health and Education and whatever other department is.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, when a person makes an application for a permit to build and they have to meet the public health safety standards and they have to meet the fire standards — and in a lot of cases I believe it affects more so in the liquor industry where you have to meet the Liquor Board standards also — if when the blueprints are submitted, rather than keep sending it back and forth between Regina and wherever it's going to, if they would circulate through the offices, go from the Fire Commissioner to the Health to Liquor Board, so that everybody gets a say; or have three people sit down together and do the job, I think would be much more efficient and much less time involved in it than the way the current method is being done.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well from my experience with the city of Melfort, that's exactly what happens. It does be . . . The blueprints are sent from one jurisdiction to the next or one department to the next. And it is done in a one-step process. There may be occasions when that doesn't happen. But my past experience, when we've had building programs in the city of Melfort, that is exactly the process that has been used.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, perhaps I have an unusual case or something. But this fellow was complaining to me about the process, that he had to change things a number of times to meet first one group, then the next group, and then so on.

When a Fire Commissioner goes into a building or onto a location and orders some changes to be made, who pays for all those costs?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — The owner of the property pays for those changes.

The Chair: — The Bill has 44 clauses divided into 11 parts. Are the members agreed to proceed through it part by part? Is that agreed?

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 44 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would

like to thank the minister and her officials for coming in today and providing us with their answers and for their co-operation. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — I would like to thank the members opposite for this Bill and the other Bill, for their questions and their co-operation. And I would also like to thank the officials for coming in this morning.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 84 — An Act to amend The Urban Municipality Act, 1984

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

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

Bill No. 85 — An Act respecting Fire Prevention and Certain Consequential Amendments resulting from the enactment of this Act

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

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

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — I don't want to interfere with the process but I would like leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly here to introduce two very special guests, Geno Prete and Georgio Piscitelli. They are business people from other parts of Canada. They're in a number of business ventures and I have met with them this morning.

They're interested in enhancing the grain trade to Italy and we've made some contacts with the Canadian Wheat Board of their behalf. I very much appreciate their interests in promoting business between Italy and Canada, and want to welcome them here and wish them all the best in their endeavours.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(0945)

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Expenditure Community Services Vote 24

The Chair: — I will ask the Minister of Community Services to begin by introducing her officials.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my left I have deputy minister Frank Bogdasavich; to my right I have Ron Styles, associate deputy minister; behind me and to my right is Ron Davis, executive director of

financial assistance and policy services. And directly behind me is Don Harazny, director of administration; and behind me and to my left is Keith Rogers, executive director of culture and recreation.

Item 1

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, welcome to the officials this morning. I think I'd like to begin by saying that the prepared questions that were put together by our people that were sent on to the minister were answered in an exemplary fashion by the officials of the Community Services department. And here, I think, is an example of what other ministers should have done.

And I think that had they done that, we would have found that there would have been . . . this process in estimates would have went a lot quicker with a lot of other departments. They were done in a most professional manner, and I think they should set the standard for other departments. I don't believe that there was any attempt to purposely misinterpret questions, as other departments we saw tried to. I think it's incumbent upon other departments to look at how these questions were answered. I think it's quite important to say that we think that the information provided was very, very well done.

In other departments we found that when they didn't want to answer the question, they simply misinterpreted the question. And we could have accepted, I think, if they would have just stated they didn't want to answer the question and didn't want to provide the information, and we would pursue it here. But when we find when we asked rather simple questions, I think, that when a department deliberately makes an effort to misinterpret the questions, we find ourselves in opposition, I think, being a little bit suspicious of their motives.

So with all consideration to your department, Madam Minister, I think that the questions were done very well and we appreciate the answers very much.

Having said that, Madam Minister, it appears that my job to ask questions here this morning will go rather quickly and maybe disappointingly easy for you. There are a couple of areas of questioning that I wanted to pursue with respect to the questions. Maybe they weren't answered in what we considered a complete fashion although they were done, for the most part, very well.

Madam Minister, in question no. 1(a) you have said that the ministerial assistants don't have job descriptions. I wonder if you would be so kind as to provide that for us.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, we will provide the employment history and description. We'll provide you with the contracts for the minister's staff.

I want to say that the staff that's working in my office are very well qualified and suited to their positions. Two of the people came who had worked previously for SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association). One has an extensive educational background in environment. And they all are experts in oral and written communication, and interpersonal skills are excellent.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Moving on to the second question that I have is with respect to the arts and multiculturalism consultant. Your department has down-sized in an effort to save money. Could you explain to us how you can justify letting people go and, at the same time, hiring . . . setting out a new position of arts consultant.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. The Department of Community Services did down-size its staff after the budget. But since then we have taken on from the Family Foundation the cultural and recreation and heritage organizations or branch. So there was a need, when that part of our department was expanded, to also take on more personnel who had expertise in that area.

So the positions that you're talking about were positions that were required because of the expansion of the Department of Community Services into the arts and multicultural branch.

Mr. Boyd: — Madam Minister, I wonder if you would provide us with information with respect to the dismissal of Katherine Gagne and the hiring of Trudy Jackson. We see in our questioning that Ms. Jackson does not appear to have any qualifications or employment background related to this position, and we'd appreciate if you'd explain this, please.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, there was a person, Katherine Gagne, was employed on contract with the department. The contract was terminated as there was a right to do. And the department did hire Trudy Jackson. And her employment history is available to you and we'll be sending it over to you.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The next one is with respect to the employment of Mr. John MacMillan. He was replaced with a Mr. Carl Friske. I wonder if you could provide us with the same information on those folks.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. MacMillan was on contract, and the contract was terminated. Mr. Carl Friske is with the department. And a release of the information regarding his background will have to be provided by Mr. Friske. And he has not provided that, but we'll seek approval from him to do so.

Mr. Boyd: — Could you provide us with some information on Mr. John Edwards? And apparently he has some additional duties and what are those involving?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes during the reorganization of the department after the budget Mr. John Edwards took on more duties and responsibilities and it was a reclassification of that position.

Mr. Boyd: — We'd appreciate it if you would provide us with the details of that, please.

In the secondments that you have listed did the department involved, namely Executive Council, Gaming Commission, and Social Services, reimburse the Department of Community Services for the salaries and

expenses involved as the Provincial Auditor has recommended and the Minister of Finance has now stated to be government policy?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Regarding the secondments to the Saskatchewan Gaming Commission and Social Services, the department was reimbursed for those salaries at the date that the secondments started. In regard to the Executive Council secondment, a policy was established by Executive Council on June 1, 1992, and on that date the reimbursement to the department started.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you. In regard to the use of lease space, Madam Minister, would you undertake to have your staff to be a little bit more specific in regard to the purpose of this space, that the general category of office space doesn't really tell us what's going on. We'd like you to indicate what particular parts the department are actually occupying that space.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I have that information here and I pass it over to the members opposite.

Mr. Boyd: — In your answers to your department's questions, there was a category of program travel. I wonder if you could explain what program travel is.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Program travel, Mr. Chairman, is field work that department staff have to undertake in order to do their job. It's something that's required because of the nature of the services that they provide. And as I said, program travel and field work are interchangeable in their nature. It's as simple as that.

Mr. Boyd: — In response to the question, you said that the communications budget can be obtained by adding together the specific codes identified through your communications department. Will you provide us with the relevant spread sheet showing these codes?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — To the member opposite, Mr. Chairman, we will get that information over to them. We're collecting it at this point in time and we'll pass it over as soon as its available.

Mr. Boyd: — You list a northern tour in your travel explanation. Can you tell us the purpose and results of that tour? I understand you're quite proud of the results in that area.

(1000)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is a good question and we are very proud of what's happening. The northern tour took place in February. We went up to some communities on the west side of northern Saskatchewan. There were four communities; we visited with their councils. The Minister of Social Services went with me. We wanted to see firsthand the quality of life and some of the problems that were being experienced by those communities.

It was a very useful exercise. From that exercise, we determined that La Loche was indeed a community that needed some very special attention, and we have set up a

program to deal specifically with La Loche. We'll pass that information over to you, because I think it does set standards and a new way of doing things, and it's going to be very successful in La Loche.

We also at that time determined that there was a need — a great need, a pressing need — for further water treatment services and other services related to renovations and building of new homes in those communities. And as a consequence of that visit, we have established a priority for building and renovating homes from Sask Housing in those communities as well as providing the beginning of new water treatment services and sewer services.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you. You also list a trip to visit the North West Credit Union in Buffalo Narrows. We'd appreciate it if you could explain, Madam Minister, what the Minister of Community Services was meeting with a credit union . . . and the results of that meeting.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. This is a bit of an error in how it was communicated. I never went up to Buffalo Narrows to visit the North West Credit Union, although they did come down to visit me.

There is a concern. The government in the past has allocated, I believe, \$2 million to maintain the reserves in that credit union because it's in a very fragile position, and it's just in the embryonic stages, just beginning its business up North. And they were concerned that we were going to be withdrawing too much of that money out of their credit union and they would not be able to survive.

We have had negotiations with them and we have assured them that the government will maintain that deposit with their credit union in order to maintain its viability.

Mr. Boyd: — Madam Minister, with respect to the community builds program, just hours before the end of the fiscal year your department paid out \$23 million in that program. And we wonder . . . I think it's an area that a lot of people would suspect was used for political expediency. And I wonder if you would care to comment on that.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes I would, because I think that area is very important.

First of all I will say that I'm well acquainted with the recreation facilities grant program that the former government had in effect, and I'm also well acquainted with the municipal capital fund that the former government did have in effect over two years ago. And they unilaterally decided to demolish . . . or to eliminate those programs and turn them into the community builds program.

A lot of communities had contracts under the recreation facilities program with the Government of Saskatchewan prior to July 1991. And they had established a building program on projects on the basis of those contracts. When the former government decided that their budget deficit was ballooning, they decided to change those contracts and spread them out over a four-year pay-out

instead of when they were obligated to do so, without consultation with the communities affected. Their pay-out on a lot of their projects that they had undertaken was now going to be paid over a four-year spread instead of in the year and under the terms that they had thought they had negotiated with the provincial government.

Because of the pressure on the finances of the province, it was determined that we would have to forgo the community builds program in this budget year. But it was simply not fair for those communities to be left with the obligation of trying to finance projects that had been promised a pay-out in the last year from the provincial . . . from the former administration. So we decided yes, it was our obligation and it was a decent thing to do, to pay out before the end of this . . . the last fiscal year, all the obligations that the former government had made to the communities on the recreation facility program projects.

Mr. Boyd: — Madam Minister, you've indicated that one credit card has run up over \$30,000 in expenses since November. Other departments provide us with a breakdown of those expenditures and we wonder if you would also provide us with the information on that particular card.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — We would be pleased to provide it over it. When you look at that credit card and see the charges on it, it does of course stand out. But it is a central department credit card where all the charges for travel are charged against. So there is no one person in charge of it, and all the charges against it are here. And we pass that information over to you.

Mr. Boyd: — Madam Minister, your department has a rather huge quantity of audio-visual equipment listed, mostly attributed to use in presentations. I'm rather astonished that your department would be engaged in such a high volume of presentations that you would need this kind of quantity of equipment. And I expect that most of it was purchased under the previous government, so obviously it's a concern that crosses the various jurisdictions.

And I'm wondering whether or not, as Minister of Community Services, you might take it upon yourself to meet with other departments in the government and perhaps establish some kind of a pool where the equipment can be signed out as needed, rather than have the . . . each department having this sort of equipment.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, to the member opposite, we do have a lot of audio-visual equipment. Most of it, or all of it, is over two years old. And the reason we have accumulated this in the department is because of the amalgamation of the department over the last two or three years. There have been changes, as you know. The former administration started those changes and this year they were continued by taking on the culture and recreation branch. And so because of that process, a lot of the audio-visual equipment has come along with it.

The point that you make regarding the pool is a very good observation and we'll investigate that and see if it will work. I will make note of it. Although we have 13 different locations where this audio-visual equipment is used and

it is there because it is convenient at certain strategic positions around the province, and the staff who are using it need it in a timely manner.

So if we can find a way of facilitating that and providing more efficiency in the system, we certainly will pursue that.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Question no. 32 wasn't answered at all, Madam Minister. We've been receiving spotty success with that request with other ministers. Some of them have, however, been quite forthcoming. The point of the request is simply that we can receive information about the various departments. I don't think it's a way to try and heap criticism on any of the departments; simply so that we can understand how they work.

As I said, other ministers have been forthcoming with that information and I wonder if you would commit to giving us similar information.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, we do make that commitment. We think you have a valid point and we will endeavour to provide that service through the library.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Madam Minister. There's a couple of other questions that I would like to pursue now. It's with respect to the ward system. It's my understanding as a committee member that the recommendations will be coming forward some time later this fall, I believe perhaps for the next session.

We have seen in recent days that the SUMA has suggested that the government take into consideration the fact that they may — in fact they do — want the ability to opt in or opt out of the ward system. And we're wondering . . . I guess particularly opting into the ward system. They want the opportunity to choose. I think it's a reasonable request and I wonder if the minister would comment on that.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, we established an all-party legislative committee last winter to hold hearings and to examine all aspects of bringing in a new ward system. The recommendations of the committee were incorporated into the new Bill.

The point of discussion that you are talking about is whether it should be mandatory or not for Saskatoon and Regina to transfer to a ward system. Both the mayors of those cities have expressed the opinion that they thought the provision for mandatory obligation by the cities to transfer to wards was not, in their opinion, something that they had much concern with. I understand what the president of SUMA is speaking about. It's a matter of local autonomy and it's a principle more than anything else, and I respect that.

We are not bringing the ward system in, as you know, in this sitting. We are re-examining it. If we can come to some compromise on those words we will endeavour to do so. I respect the fact that local governments are autonomous and they at their own local level have the right to make those decisions.

The other new part of that Bill that had to have further discussion came about as a request from the mayor of Prince Albert to look at multi-member wards, which was not part of the committee's recommendations. And so in order to give communities, especially the cities, time to have a look at that and respond, we delayed bringing in that and we feel that next spring that Bill will be here after further consultation with the cities involved. And we feel there is a compromise with the president of SUMA regarding the word "mandatory". We'll look at it.

It was put in there primarily because they had plebiscites in those two cities, and there was an overwhelming response by the citizens of Saskatoon and Regina to bring back the ward system, and it was based primarily on that plebiscite that we put the word mandatory in. But if it is offensive we'll try to find better wording that would still maintain the principle of autonomy.

Mr. Boyd: — Madam Minister, as a member of that committee I recall the submissions that you speak of from the mayor of Regina and the mayor of Saskatoon. While they may not have any objections to the mandatory provisions of it, there are certainly a lot of people that do. As the current mayors they may not; future ones may.

And that's why I think there's a concern on the part of SUMA that they would like the mandatory obligation within the Bill to be removed. And I think that there were a number of people that provided submissions that would support that contention.

And certainly in opposition it is our opinion that all jurisdictions should have the opportunity to operate within a ward system or without a ward system. So that's certainly the position that we would have in that respect.

The final series of questions that I have is with respect to the perceived electoral problems at Sled Lake. I've spoken with you about this situation. I wonder if you would care to provide us with an update on that, if there's any information that's available on it.

I understand that it's a dispute between basically two parties in the community. It's gone so far as going to court; there's been some court action. One of the parties has incurred some substantial cost associated with it. I understand your department has declined to help with the expenses of that legal action. I'm wondering whether there's any consideration being given to reviewing that situation or reviewing that decision.

(1015)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — To the member opposite, first going back to the ward system. I couldn't resist making one more comment on that. It is ironic that now the members opposite are demanding that there should be an option. When they took it away, there was no option. And I'll remind the member opposite that there was a great outcry, especially from Saskatoon and Regina, when the former minister, without any consultation and with absolutely no pre-warning, simply said ward systems are gone.

And now we are trying desperately to bring them back,

and we appreciate your help on this but maybe if you think back in history, you'll understand where the problem is and maybe take some onus to taking responsibility for the problem that we have today. This is not a debate, but I wanted to get that on the record.

Secondly, to the issue of Sled Lake. Yes, there is a problem. Our officials have been working with the people up there. It is important that we maintain a sense of allowing the community as much as possible to sort the problems out. We don't want to intervene to the point where we're seen to be taking sides.

We are supportive. We are consulting with them. We will provide you with an update of the situation. We believe it has to be resolved by the local people at the local level as long as they are doing so under the jurisdiction of The Urban Municipality Act, which we are governed by.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Madam Minister. We were getting along so well until that last little comment on the ward system, and I think I have to respond to that. I think while there may have been a mistake made in the past — I think lots of people recognize that that may have been one example of a mistake that was made — I think that there's no reason to suggest that we have to take all of the blame for what's happened in the past with respect to that.

I think that a new dawn is starting here with a new government, and I'm sure you and your department want to get off to a flying start. And so I would encourage you to accept, I would encourage you to accept the recommendations that SUMA is putting forward in that area.

I now would like to, I guess, take the opportunity to thank your officials for coming in this morning and helping with the questions. Once again, a very, very excellent presentation that you people have put forward, and we appreciate your help.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments and the opinions of the members opposite. We do look forward to co-operating with them and providing them whatever information we can provide them in the future as well.

And I want to also thank the officials from our department. You made comments about the excellent services that they do provide. They are very professional. They're a wonderful group of people, very expert in their field, and this department is very fortunate to have them.

So I appreciate your comments about the department and, on behalf of them, I thank you.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 34 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 24 agreed to.

Consolidated Fund Loans, Advances and Investments Community Services

Nil vote.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Community Services
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 24**

Items 1 to 27 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 24 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Economic Diversification and Investment Fund
Community Services
Vote 66**

Items 1 and 2 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Loans, Advances and Investments
Community Services
Vote 162**

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 162 agreed to.

(1030)

**Supplementary Estimates 1991
Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Community Services
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 24**

Items 1 to 14 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 24 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1991
Consolidated Fund Loans, Advances and Investments
Urban Affairs
Vote 162**

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 162 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1991
Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Saskatchewan Housing Corporation
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 51**

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 51 agreed to.

**Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Saskatchewan Municipal Board
Vote 22**

Item 1

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We had a couple of questions we wanted to deal with on the Municipal Board. We had received a complaint in our office that . . .

The Chair: — Excuse me just for a moment, if I may, as the officials are leaving, on behalf of the Assembly to thank the officials for their assistance in the estimates thus far. Sorry to interrupt you, the hon. member for Kindersley.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have received a complaint in our office with respect to some of the actions of the Saskatchewan Municipal Board members. And it's with respect to an allegation of board members operating a stained-glass business out of the offices of the Saskatchewan Municipal Board.

And we're wondering if you could provide us with any indication if you're aware of it or not. And we certainly don't think it's an appropriate place to be carrying on any kind of business other than the business of the Saskatchewan Municipal Board.

I wonder if you are aware of any of the allegations and whether they've come to your attention.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — If what you said was true, of course we would be very concerned because it would be inappropriate. But what you have heard and what you have simply said is not true. There is one person who is employed by the Municipal Board who does stained glass as a hobby. But that person does not run the business out of the Municipal Board offices. That person does the work of the Municipal Board at the times when that person's there.

Mr. Boyd: — Well what we say is indeed true. Whether the allegations are true, I don't know. That's why I'm asking you. We had received a request to ask some questions about this. It's suggesting that a couple of board members are essentially carrying on a business within the Municipal Board offices. Essentially that was the basis of the complaint, that they were using the telephone, fax machine, things of that nature to conduct ongoing affairs of a business.

And I think it's incumbent upon yourself to look into that complaint and allegations to see if there's any basis for those allegations. We would certainly agree with you that it's inappropriate use of the facilities available, and I would appreciate your commitment to the Assembly that you will provide us with information relative to this to see if there is any basis for the allegations.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, to the member opposite, we will investigate that complaint, and we will report back to the member opposite of the facts that we have been able to determine regarding the nature of which you're speaking about.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 and 3 agreed to.

Vote 22 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1992
Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Saskatchewan Municipal Board
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 22**

Items 1 to 3 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 22 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1991
Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Saskatchewan Municipal Board
Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 22**

Items 1 and 2 agreed to.

Vote 22 agreed to.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Mr. Chairman, I would like thank the members opposite for their co-operation, and I would like to thank the official, Mr. Graham McNamee, who is the chair of the . . . I'm afraid I didn't introduce him when we began. Mr. Graham McNamee is the chairman of the Municipal Board and I would like to thank him for his presence here today.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, thank you to yourself and your officials for coming in this morning and dealing with these matters in a very good fashion. Thank you.

The Chair: — The Chair joins with the minister and the critic in thanking the official for his assistance, as well as the minister for introducing him before we thanked him.

(1045)

**Consolidated Fund Expenditure
Natural Resources
Vote 26**

The Chair: — Will the minister please introduce his officials to the members of the Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With me today I have Douglas Cressman who is the deputy minister; Alan Appleby, assistant deputy minister; Dick Bailey, the assistant deputy minister. At the back of the room I have Ross MacLennan, executive director of the operations branch; Bill Marr, director of management services branch; Don MacAulay, director of parks branch; Hugh Hunt, director of wildlife; and Shelleen Vandermeij, director of contract services.

Item 1

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I too would like to welcome the officials here. And I say to the minister right off the bat that the estimates as far as Natural Resources are concerned, I'm not sure that we will finish this morning. But I can say to the minister, I think quite frankly, that he can kind of relax and enjoy the morning as much as any minister will.

And that is simply because although there are a couple of contentious issues, my main interest in Natural Resources is the interest in natural resources. And what I plan to do this morning is get some answers from you, but then spend some time in a general discussion of some of the issues. So it's not that it's going to be particularly confrontational, I do not expect.

To begin with, Mr. Minister, you received 34, to be precise, global questions. And I just want to . . . I don't intend to spend any time on that at all. I just want your commitment that those 34 questions have been answered and that they have been answered fully in so far as you're capable of doing. Would you confirm that?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Chairman, we have answered all the questions as fully as we could.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you then, Mr. Minister. What I propose to do is not spend too much time on clause 1 as is normally done, but rather go through and instead of having a general global discussion first, we are going to be quite specific this morning. And as we go through on a line-by-line basis we will discuss those issues on that particular line.

The question that I have first, Mr. Chairman, deals with the precise question on line 4. So perhaps what we should do is just go through clause 1 and then we'll pick it up there.

Item 1 agreed to.

Item 2 agreed to.

Item 3

Mr. Neudorf: — Mr. Chairman, this particular line begs a particular question because I notice that under communications, on personal services, the person years in '91-92 were 7, and '92-93 the estimated is 7.4. That's less than a half-person year more, yet the amount spent on personal services is two hundred and twenty-two and a half million dollars — thousand, pardon me — as opposed to two hundred and eighty-two and a half.

Why would that big difference be there as opposed to only a half-person year?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — On the estimates book from as near as I can tell, it's the same number of person years — 7.4 and 7.4.

Mr. Neudorf: — All right, Mr. Minister. I have a photocopy of that and probably the 7.4 then has been omitted on that one. Well I guess it still begs the same question. If it's 7.4 in each case, we're still looking at approximately, well precisely \$60,000 less.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Actually, although the number of positions is the same, some of those positions are vacant. And we intend to hold them vacant through the year to keep the cost down.

Mr. Neudorf: — How many of those positions would be vacant?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — It's equivalent to about a person and a half, although it will work out . . . some people will be coming in and leaving, so it's a matter of holding those vacancies at different times of the year open. But it amounts to about a person and a half.

Item 3 agreed to.

Item 4

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, under Parks we notice something similar that in '91-92 we had 20 person-years as opposed to 19 now. However the amount of money budgeted for Parks is \$79,000 less. Could you explain that.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Basically what happened there is we deleted two people in that branch but we transferred one in. So one salary is gone completely. The other one, there's a different level of salary and that would probably make up the difference.

Mr. Neudorf: — So then, Mr. Minister, it's a combination of one getting more, one getting less. And the difference is still \$79,000.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — That's right. We cut one position completely. The other one we cut and then we transferred someone else in, what was at a lower rate, so that's why the . . . that gets the 79,000.

Mr. Neudorf: — What effect, Mr. Minister, is this going to have on the Parks' operations in terms of quality service and so on?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Hopefully have very minimum effect on the service. It was a planning position. And since we're spending less money on our capital budget, we had less need to do planning in those facilities.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, during this session we have passed legislation that is in effect going to give Saskoil, a major corporation as was indicated, the power to attract more capital and to be more competitive in its production of and research in gas and oil development.

I'm wondering if you have any plans, as a natural resource to be developed, to provide financial assistance or some kind of incentive programs that would be equally as good for the smaller, independent operators in the province to kick start to their industry and to get them back on track into the exploration and development of the petroleum and natural gas industry.

There are also a couple of major players internationally in the petroleum and gas industry that still are active in the province and of course some program that would kick start the industry should also include them, I should think. And I'm just wondering if you have any plans in that direction at the present time.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Mr. Chairman, gas and oil doesn't fall under my department. It falls under the Department of Mines and Energy. I can attempt to get some information from that department and forward it to you. I wouldn't want to make a statement on behalf of my colleague in that area.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I certainly will also be pursuing this matter with the Minister of Energy

and Mines.

But when I saw the title, Natural Resources, I presumed that gas and oil fell into the category and didn't want to take any chances on missing the opportunity to ensure you and your cabinet and your colleagues right across the board that there is a tremendous amount of concern about this particular natural resource and the lack of incentive that seems to be out there to get it going.

And so we want to be sure that every base is covered in this direction because we do find this is an essential part of our economy, not only so much for the whole province but more particularly for myself and my constituency, and it's very important down there that we keep this part going as well as those things like deer hunting and those other natural resource things like our parks and those kinds of things. We have to cover all the bases here. And there's a lot of concern in that area, so I hope you will pass that on for me.

Item 4 agreed to.

Item 5 agreed to.

Item 6

Mr. Neudorf: — Mr. Minister, we all know that wildlife in Saskatchewan is an integral part of our province and our way of life and that there's many, many millions, over a hundred millions of dollars that comes into the province as a result of wildlife. And most of our residents in one way or another participate within our wildlife programs — 85 per cent or whatever, I think your booklet indicated. So it has a dramatic effect.

And that, Mr. Minister, was one of the reasons why we were heading for a confrontation in terms . . . as far as the critical wildlife habitat amendment Act was concerned. And we averted that situation and I complimented you for that the other day.

But, Mr. Minister, I would like an update from you, if you could, in so far as I recognize that over the last number of years wildlife in this province has really mushroomed — good management skills and so on. But obviously Mother Nature had an important part to play here with the tremendously mild winters that we have had in Saskatchewan over a long period of time.

And I'm just wondering now if you could — for the benefit of the viewers and so on — explain to us where the population of wildlife . . . and when I say population of wildlife, I'm referring to the more common categories like white tail, mule deer, antelope, and . . . basically we'll start with those three. Where are they at right now in terms of population?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Just a few numbers to give you some idea of where we're at. The white tail population is at about 250,000 now. That's down from 500,000 in the '50s, largely attributable to loss of habitat over that period of time. Mule deer are at about 70,000. I think the low for mule deer was as low as 5,000, so that is very high. Antelope, we are now at . . . or over 30,000. That's the highest it's been in this century, so those populations are

very high.

I guess with those populations of those game animals, we are . . . try to attempt to manage them. They impact on farmers. You can only have so much wildlife that is feasible in regards to the amount of habitat you have that will sustain them. So we have to try to maintain our populations so that they fit within the habitat. And too much populations . . . too large populations can create problems such as disease and so on.

We find that our tools for managing game populations is hunting seasons, and we're not all that successful at being able to manage the populations. What we find is that Mother Nature is a much better manager. And when you get warm winters, the populations tend to explode on you and you have a very hard time to control it just through our management techniques. And if you get some hard winters come along, and then Mother Nature brings things back into balance.

So we want to . . . we constantly monitor and try to keep the populations up. We don't want them too high though because, you know, they outgrow their habitat. So that's part of our plan is to increase habitat and then to keep the animals in balance with the habitat.

(1100)

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I notice that you did say that we had a great increase in the population and therefore it was going to have impact on farmers. Yet when we come down to point 13 we will see where your department is not supporting the farmers that are bearing the brunt of this increase in population.

White tail, you say, is up to 250,000. From what was the low? You indicated what the high was in the '50s of 500,000. And although it's coming up, you're telling me now that because of the loss of habitat, you're saying now that you would not anticipate that that population will ever get back up to 500,000; is that right?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — I think with the white tail, it has been a fairly downward trend from 500,000 to 250 although we were down as low as 200 and bounced back to 250,000. But's it a general down-trend of population. It always look like a lot more deer, but that's because of the loss of habitat. But when you confine them to a small area, then it looks like a huge increase in population but in reality it's fairly constant.

Mr. Neudorf: — What about in the North, Mr. Minister? Does that apply to the northern bush area as well, or are we talking primarily in the southern farming areas?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — What we're look at in the North now is relatively high densities for that area although they tend to be a very low density. It's a large area, and you have a low density of wild life. That's the natural . . . habitat dictates that that's what happens up there. Right now we have high populations for that area although it's still a very sparse population.

Mr. Neudorf: — Mr. Minister, could you give me an idea of how much money that you are taking in now in terms of

selling licences, and what is your licence structure? In other words, what are you doing, for example, to see . . .

And I know one of the problems that you're experiencing, for example with antelope; you're telling me now that we have 30,000 antelope in this province. And last year I can attest to that during the hunting season. I mean antelope, it was just a matter of picking out the biggest one that you could find, at least the first week of the hunting season. My hunting colleagues on my side who are less astute in their timing went the following week after the blizzard, and there wasn't an antelope to be found in south-western Saskatchewan; they all went to Manitoba, pardon me, to Montana and came back after the hunting season was over.

But what are you doing in terms of management and to . . . I suppose the term is to entice people to become more active in hunting. By lowering the licence fees or by perhaps giving a non-trophy licence along with a trophy licence, this kind of thing? Could you give me your thoughts on that?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — We have done a number of things. I guess first of all the total numbers, our budget for total game licence fees is \$5.65 million. We did some things. We reduced the fee for non-trophy animals. We took antelope off the big game draw so that you can go in and just buy a tag. We changed some season structures which allow hunters to hunt several animals at the same time or several different species at the same time which should increase the take. And one thing we introduced last year was the youth licence where youth could get a deal on a licence, and that I think got a lot of our young people in the field hunting.

Just as to what you could pass on to your colleagues, that hunters who don't get things always have excuses why they don't get them.

Mr. Neudorf: — That's a point well made, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I'm glad that you made that second-last comment which dealt about the enticing . . . or the special deal for youth because that's the next issue I wanted to bring up and that is the hunter . . . firearm safety, hunter education program that was begun back in 1960. And I noticed here that there have been 125 students that have gone through that hunter safety program. And I know as a previous instructor on that program that it's very, very vital to have that type of training for our young people, not just so that they get the fundamentals of what a firearm and where you're pointing it and so on and so forth, but the respect for firearms that these children, well these youths, would then develop and continue on in their later life. Because we are well aware of the lobby against firearms and so on that exists in this country — and not without reason when we think of some of the episodes that are happening.

So what I want to do, Mr. Minister, is first of all recognize that firearm accidents . . . we had 106 in 1960 and only 19 last year which I think is a credit to the program itself. Now you may have some more up-to-date information than I have on this, but what I'm trying to do here, Mr. Minister, is to suggest to you and encourage you not only to continue with this program but to enhance it in

whatever way that you can and also to make the public aware, more aware let's say — not just the hunting fraternity, but the public at large — aware that you're taking this thing very, very seriously and that we have a good program in place and that it is having tremendously positive results.

So you may want to respond, Mr. Minister, but it's just a word of encouragement from me to you to continue that program and perhaps even enhance it. So if you want to respond, that's fine, and then my member from Maple Creek will have a few questions.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, the member opposite is absolutely right; the program is excellent. It's a program that's won international awards from the National Rifle Association a few years ago. It's run entirely by volunteers such as yourself, and it does an excellent job. And I think we need to expand it and to improve our hunters' safety and their attitudes when they're in the field. And I think it's doing a great job and we intend to continue it.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I was speaking to some people from the wildlife federation who expressed to me some concern that they a few years ago also had lobbied the government to increase the licence fees in the province for the purpose of having those additional monies channelled towards assistance to farmers and ranchers, property owners who suffered damage from wildlife.

The people that have spoken to me said that somehow this money has now been channelled into general revenues and that they are not directly finding their way for the purpose that they were intended. I wonder if you can confirm that that in fact is what is happening, and if you could commit to the wildlife federation that this inequity will be corrected.

I also will ask another question, if you don't mind me putting two together, so that we can save a little time on this. I understand in conjunction with youth hunting, that the age limits have been changed from 12 years to 16 years for young people that are going to be allowed — now I could be wrong on this so you can correct me.

If this in fact is true, I wonder if that might be reconsidered. Because I think under the proper supervision and with these new programs that my colleague has just outlined, they have certainly proven to be capable young hunters who are properly trained and enjoying getting out with their dads and getting some of this male bonding that is so important in parenting these days when folks just don't seem to have enough time to spend with their families.

So I wonder if you could reconsider that program or update us on how it's worked anyway.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Mr. Chairman, just in response to the first question. The money . . . 30 per cent of game licence fees go into a separate fund called the fish and wildlife development fund. It was never originally intended to compensate farmers. The fund was intended to enhance habitat for fish and wildlife, and most of the wildlife money goes into purchasing habitat land and the

fisheries money goes into programs to enhance fisheries.

Now we have used portions of that money — and there are some statutory limits as to how much can be used — we have been using some of that money in the department. And I guess when it comes to tough times and when those fish enhancement programs, for example, are set up, they need ongoing work to keep them up and running. And it doesn't make much sense for us to cut our budget in the department and let the programs collapse that we've already got in place to use the money to do new programs.

But certainly we have had concern expressed by some of the wildlife federation and particularly the fisheries people who are concerned that not enough of that fund is going directly into habitat formation for which it was intended.

I think something that . . . you know, the suggestion is that there is certainly a possibility that we should be looking at some of it for damage to farmers because that is really the main source of habitat for much of our wildlife.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. If you could comment on the age thing after I ask you . . . follow up on your answer to the compensation and the 30 per cent that's going to the fish development.

One of the complaints that I had in fact directly concerned that 30 per cent that's going to development of fisheries. And the complaint went as follows, that that money seems all to be going to the Qu'Appelle Valley fishery. I don't even know where this is, but apparently there's a fishery in the Qu'Appelle Valley that's hatching eggs, and the money's going into that.

The complaint I got was that that institution was in effect before this program came about and should not have qualified for the assistance that's going there. Perhaps you could research that and get an answer for those folks as to why money would be going there when they thought it should be going some other places for new development and expansion of that particular part of the industry.

The compensation to farmers issue is extremely important, and I think that if in the end result we are going to have habitat for wildlife in the true sense preserved, this is the key area. The most critical area of all of the province of all of the needs for wildlife preservation is the ability to compensate where excessive damages occur.

If you don't solve that problem, we have a natural build-up of hostility towards wildlife by property owners, and they will continue to fill in sloughs. They will continue to drain out areas. They will do that simply to get rid of the problem that they feel that they have with these excessive damages.

If they are paid for the damage and they are relieved of that problem, a lot of property owners love wildlife more than the people that try to protect them in any other way. And they would love to keep them, but they just can't afford the financial losses that keep going. And so gradually that animosity towards those animals and wildlife starts to build up, and they start to do just

anything they can to get rid of them or destroy them.

So I think that's critical. You have to work on that. And I want to pass that message on. But I want a comment upon the ages and that 30 per cent problem.

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — In response to the age of hunters, that hasn't changed. Hunters, youngsters of 12 years of age will still be allowed to hunt under supervision. There have been some changes of age limits in regard to federal regulations and gun law, but that does not affect our hunting age here in Saskatchewan.

As regards to the money from the fisheries, there's about 585,000 that goes into fisheries programs; 205,000 of that goes into the provincial fish hatchery at Echo Lake which provides fish for lakes all across the province; and another 45,000 goes into a wall-eye nursery at Edenwold. So that's the numbers on those.

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I was wondering about the big game season in . . . there's a slug zone, a slug-archery-musket zone around the city of Moose Jaw and extends over here to Regina. I believe it's still — is it 20 still on the designation?

I live in that zone, and I think your officials are familiar with my query probably that we have an abundance of white tail deer. I know requests have been made in the past to try something, whether we extend seasons or we up the bag limits or do something rather than turn it back into a rifle zone, which doesn't seem to wash with most of the landowners. But we're sort of . . . they're just piling up and it's becoming to be a real problem with some of us. So do you have any comments on that?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, the slug zone I think is done mainly as a safety factor. We have looked at several ways to reduce herds in problem areas. One of the things that we are doing is depredation hunts. We're trying to run those in conjunction with the regular hunting seasons this year.

So if you know you have particular problems in your area, we can try to work with you to see if we can help reduce the populations by use of depredation hunts or maybe some of the other things that we're doing that I mentioned earlier will help to get more people out and reduce the populations.

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That suggestion has been made before and I guess one of the problems I have with it is that the connotation of a depredation hunt doesn't go down well with the 35,000 urbanites that live next door to us in Moose Jaw. It's a term that doesn't engender itself to good wildlife management in my view.

I think in talking to a lot of landowners and sportsmen who do like to hunt in that area — and there are a lot of bow hunters because of its proximity to the urban areas and a lot of primitive weapons and that type of thing — that if we probably try a longer season might be a better answer than trying to designate part of that zone as being

over-populated and try and get a permit and round people up and go in there and sort of do a mass killing. Most of the people that do hunt in there, because it's on foot, it's roads and trails only, a lot of people have long-established relationships with landowners in order to gain access and that type of thing, that you tend to find probably more trophy hunters in there than you would anywhere else.

I think if more people had the opportunity to access that herd we might control it rather than getting into this other area. I just don't think that . . . for instance I, as the MLA for Thunder Creek who's at times got 200 of these things in my alfalfa field, want to be part of a depredation hunt, thank you very much, and I don't think you would either. Because that just doesn't have savoury connotations to a lot of my friends in Moose Jaw. So I prefer we try something else before we get to that.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes the depredation hunts we're trying to do this year is to do them in hunting season and certainly try to be sure that no game gets wasted and so on. Now other years we've tried them later on in the year and you're right, the public outcry is pretty great and we don't want to resort to depredation hunts unless it's an emergency.

As to the length of the seasons in that zone, there's a primitive weapon season open from Labour Day to the end of October. The regular season opens again on November, I think, 15 to December 7. So basically for the whole fall other than two weeks, there is a season in that area. So we are extending it as much as we can to try to . . . And we're certainly willing to work with you. If you have any other suggestions as to how we can help to control the population, we're certainly interested in them.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question deals with wildlife preservation in and around our parks. I'm thinking particularly of the Moose Mountain park which I believe, Mr. Minister, has probably contacted you on this — the Moose Mountain water resource management group. Their interest is in having a wildlife preserve made out of the park to relieve some of the hunting pressure that does take place within that park, to maintain a stable wildlife population within that area. And I'm just wondering if you've given — you and your department — have given any consideration to doing this.

I realize that there would be some other things that would be affected. You would have to perhaps have some buffer zones around it for the wildlife. You would have to do some things within the park system to maintain the environment for the wildlife. At the present time I believe that there's also cattle grazed on the west side of that park in a good portion of it. And in actual fact, this grazing keeps some of the areas cleared off so that grasses do develop and grow, which allow the wildlife to live in those areas and to feed in those areas.

But at times, certain parts of the year particularly, there is a significant amount of pressure, hunting pressure, within those parks and perhaps a preserve should be considered to relieve some of that pressure. Has your department given any consideration to that, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. We've just completed a wildlife . . . not a wildlife, a vegetation survey of that park. And part of the discussions there rose the thought, the possibility, of a game preserve within the park. So that certainly has been discussed. And there are ongoing discussions with the wildlife federation and the aboriginals in the area. So it is something that is under consideration. And again, we appreciate any input from the member that would help us to arrive at some conclusion there.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm pleased to hear that there is some discussion going on. There's one other stakeholder in the group though that needs to have some consideration. And that is those farmers around the area who could be impacted by an increase in that wildlife population. But I think it's a consideration that should be given some due . . . Take a serious look at it and just see what can be done. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Item 6 agreed to.

Item 7

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I want to talk a little bit about the fisheries now, the reports that one gets back from many of the people who are going up north. Now I noticed that, for example, for the last eight or nine years there's been a steady decline, a downward trend in terms of the number of fishing licences that have been sold.

And I'm just wondering . . . I realize that last year we sold a certain number — I think 165,000 licences were sold last year which is the same as was sold this year, I understand. So whether that downward trend has bottomed out that we've levelled off . . . But I'm wondering what reason you could give why this downward trend has been in place?

And I just want to make the comment that when I hear people coming back from the North for example — Doré Lake is a good example — the fishing has been less than spectacular this year. And I know that there's a dramatic lowering of the level of water in that lake. But I know also, when I talk to some of the residents and some of the businesses in La Ronge, for all intents and purposes, they're telling me that recreational fishing is pretty well finished.

I mean it used to be that when you pulled into La Ronge, there's that creek flowing through. I have stopped there in years past, many years past, dropped in a line and caught my supper there. And that's a thing of the past.

So could you comment, Mr. Minister, what you perceive the current condition and perhaps the future trends for recreational fishing in this province? And we'll get into the commercial later on. But address the issues of the licences and the levelling off and the amount of recreational fish available.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, I think with regards to the falling of licences, we're hoping that it has levelled off.

There may be a number of things that could influence that. I think the recession is on. I think we've seen that across the board. People have a little less money to spend and are not travelling as far and so on. Certainly fishing quality has dropped in terms of a lot of the lakes.

I think real access into the North really only began in the '50s and '60s and for a period of time there was excellent trophy-type fishing in a lot of the lakes. But as time went on and fishing pressure builds up, the populations drop. Some of the . . . particularly the sort of trophy fish that you can catch, drops. And you see people flying back farther into the North to get to some of the real good, quality fishing.

I think we still have . . . it's still a great resource. We still have great fishing up there. And we have, you know, a great recreational area, not only with the fish but just the beauty of the area and so on. And I think it's something we need to market.

But we also have to try to maintain balances of fish populations in the lake. We don't believe the lower lake levels are having any significant impact, although the drought in the last few years certainly has lowered the level of many lakes and may be having some effect on fish populations.

(1130)

Mr. Neudorf: — Well certainly lower water levels affect the way streams flow and fish moving and so on, so that impact would be there. I'm not suggesting, Mr. Minister, that we're at the stage where the codfish are in Newfoundland and so on, that we have to do something dramatic as that. But the quality of fishing for recreational fishermen, I would suggest to you, is definitely down.

Now at one point in your annual report you suggest that you have pretty well sold 165,000 fishing licences last year . . . no, this year, because it's a '91-92 annual report that I'm holding here — 164,938 angling licences were sold. Then prior to that on page 5, the recreational fishing industry involves more than 200 anglers. Now I don't know if you're telling me that there's 35,000 that are fishing without . . . unless it's under 16 years of age or whatever, or maybe seniors are also those that might be involved.

But, Mr. Minister, aside from that, the point that I'm wanting to make — and I'm going to get into that age-old argument — is it the commercial fishermen or is it the recreational fishermen? But you say now that recreational fishing contributes \$200 million annual in economic activity, and they take 4 million kilograms of fish. The recreational folks take 4 million kilograms of fish. The commercial industry, fishing industry, takes 3 million kilograms of fish.

So what you're saying by that is that the commercial fishing industry actually takes out fewer pounds of fish than does the recreational angler, and that it adds \$5 million to the primary producer. I'd be interested for comparison purposes if you'd be able to tell me what the economic spin-off . . . so that we have a comparable

figure because the \$200 million annual from recreational is not just your fishing licences but the whole thing. And the \$5 million is just to the primary producer himself.

What would be a corresponding figure, in your estimation, as far as economic spin-off activity on the commercial?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, I think . . . we don't have . . . there are no studies done that we can come up with any concrete numbers although we think the spin-off would be probably three or four times. So the 5 million would be multiplied by three or four. That's the closest estimate that we could come to.

Mr. Neudorf: — I suspected that, Mr. Minister, but most economic activity spin-offs that I'm aware of are in the range of six, seven, eight, so there's a very low economic spin-off on the commercial fishing, other than to the primary producers.

Mr. Minister, what can we do . . . Like white fish that are caught up North, they usually wind up getting put on a truck. They're gutted and beheaded probably by the fishermen themselves, but very often — perhaps not even that — they wind up in Manitoba and they wind up in Chicago.

What is the impediment to having more of the value added activity being done in Saskatchewan to perhaps aid that primary producer, the fisherman, and allowing him to do some of this? Now I know that there have been co-ops and so on. There have been attempts at this in the past. Are you thinking of anything along this line to keep more of the value added in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — The fish business is a very tough, competitive business. We found the best return is selling into very tough markets in the States and so on, and the economies of scale to the plant in Winnipeg make it tough to compete. We have I think about eight dealers who process locally and sell in Saskatchewan. And we certainly are looking at proposals all the time.

I think the northern people are very interested in developing something to further process the fish and I think the opportunities that are probably the best are some niche market that we can produce some distinctive Saskatchewan product that we'll be able to market. Because in competing with the huge companies and the distance we are from markets, fish processing on the sort of scale that we have here is a very, very tough and competitive business.

Mr. Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question regarding the marina at Sask Landing and I was wondering whether you could give me an update about that.

I notice that there were . . . New Careers were building floats out there and I'm not sure where they were going to be placed. And they weren't at the Sask Landing Park; they were in a little town called Stewart Valley where New Careers have a location. And I'm not sure whether they were building them for the Sask Landing Park or just where.

Would that be a project that you would be anticipating doing this winter? If so, I'd like to know about it, please.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — The project at Sask Landing is a marina project. But where it's at is basically the basin has been dug out and left there. This is a project that we're certainly excited about in terms of utilizing the resource we have at Diefenbaker Lake and getting a harbour at either end and would really enhance the sailing possibilities and so on of the lake.

Right now we just don't have money in the budget. We have those New Careers projects that are probably not related to this. We're working with the local people now to try to determine the least cost way that we can sort of stabilize and be able to make use of the basin that's already there and keep the options open for future development, which we certainly would like to do when we have money available.

Mr. Martens: — Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Minister, it probably would be a step in the right direction if some of those floats . . . There's one area where the boat launch is that people have an opportunity to tie up their boats and that sort of thing. But in the park where people have their overnight camping and where the marina dugout is and in the daytime pass park at the west side, at none of those locations do they have a place to tie up their boats.

If these options were made available to the people in the area, I'm sure that there would be some innovative ways of making available an opportunity to tie up boats. Now what they do is they just get them, tie them to a branch, and let them float there, and they walk up in the mud. And this is a new lake and you have to understand that they sink in the mud this far. That sort of thing is just not conducive to any kind of long-term sailing or any of those kinds of things.

If even temporary locations were made so that until the money is available, we could sure use some of that there. I think even people from the area would perhaps contribute if that was an option that would be available if they could do that. And I know that a permanent structure like you have at Outlook . . . or Elbow, I should say, is very expensive. And I think there could probably be cheaper ways of doing it if it could only be done in an innovative way until the marina is built.

When you get the marina built, it still won't solve the problem in those other two locations where they have the swimming area and beach area and where they have the surfing, wind surfing. It won't help in those areas because they still have to go five or six miles to get to where the marina would be. So it would be an important part in addition to the kinds of things that are there.

The reason I say it, is that the volume of people who use it locally could be extremely enhanced because of that opportunity. And I think that the local people would be interested in getting involved with that sort of thing.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, we certainly appreciate the suggestions. And that's basically what we've been talking about with the local people, some way to do a low

cost way to get this thing operational as quickly as we can. And I think the local people there are very enthusiastic about it. They've been working very hard raising money and so on. And we wish we had more money to help. But certainly that's the sort of thing that we will be working with them to do something to get it operational and get at least some place to tie up their boats, and in the future try to complete the project.

Item 7 agreed to.

Item 8

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, forestry is big business in Saskatchewan. I think your own information tells us that there's a quarter of a billion dollars essentially that rolls into the economy of Saskatchewan through the forestry program.

And I'm only vaguely, I guess, familiar because of my role in the previous four or five years on the resource caucus. But I know from the many, many meetings that we have held, that a topic that continually came up was the management of our forest reserves that are fast becoming depleted, perhaps faster than we're using them. And of course I know that there's a whole host of reasons and pressures on governments to facilitate that simply because so many people are making their living off of those products.

I wonder, Mr. Minister, could you give us an update in generalized term — whether it's Weyerhaeuser, whether it's Meadow Lake, whether it's Carrot River, wherever — the FMLAs (Forest Management Licence Agreement) and so on that you're working with as a management tool, what in your opinion is the situation in the near future in so far as being able to supply the trees, the lumber that are going to be necessary to maintain the *status quo*? In other words, to maintain the numbers of jobs that are currently dependent on the forest industry.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — I think we believe — and this is always a bit contentious — but we believe we're harvesting our forests in all areas at a sustainable, or even less than sustainable rate, so we think we can maintain the same level of harvest. The east side of the province, we've had some . . . in the past we've had some harvest that has not been quite sustainable. We've depleted some of the reserves there slightly. We have probably room for further expansion in that particular area, and we need to get our plan together there a bit because we don't have . . . Simpson Timber has left and so on. And so we need to rework that land a bit.

I think basically we think we're harvesting in a sustainable or even less than sustainable manner in many areas. The jobs is another question I think, because the technology keeps changing on us, and it's a world market we're competing in. And you can produce the same amount of product from a new mill but it employs less people, so that's always a problem.

But as far as the forest harvesting itself, you know, we're studying it. We've got an integrated forest management plan or survey going on at the present time. We've got a model forest project that we've just been able to get from

the federal government where we're going to look at forest harvesting, so we have to continue to look at these things. It take 100 years for a forest to regrow, so we don't have the experience that can say a lot of these things very definitely. But we are hopefully not going to harvest it any faster than its sustainable rate.

(1145)

Mr. Neudorf: — Well I take some assurance on your comment there that you are actually under-harvesting right now, that it is sustainable. Mr. Minister, is that sustainable harvest usable timber, accessible areas that will be competitive, that will actually be on a competitive basis for the companies that are involved?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — I think our plans are at least 20-year harvest plans. The companies that are here, we believe are here for the duration. We don't think we have anybody here that's trying to make a quick dollar and leave. And that's part of the plan, is to harvest, not to go out and just harvest around the mill and do the economical stuff and leave the rest. It's harvested in blocks and they are responsible under the lease agreement to manage the entire block.

So we believe that we will be economically sustainable as well as sustainable from an environmental point of view.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What prompted my previous question is you can go 100 miles from Prince Albert and you start running into Weyerhaeuser trucks all over the place. This is what the competitiveness . . . obviously the costs increased.

But so what you're telling the people in Big River, what you're telling the people in Hudson Bay and what you're telling the people in Carrot River and Prince Albert is that yes, their facilities will remain open because the harvests are of a sustainable type of nature. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — We certainly think the companies we have are competitive based on the market. Things happen in the forestry market which may make them uncompetitive in the future. But by and large, we think we have the fibre that's available to keep them open. And we think they will be economically competitive and therefore should be able to remain open.

There are some particular plants, I think the plywood mill in Hudson Bay, it's at a 10 to 15 years wood supply and then they may have some problems getting wood unless they can shift over to hardwood or some other thing. But basically, by and large, we believe we will be economically competitive and that we will have the fibre available to do it.

Mr. Neudorf: — Mr. Minister, I'm the last one that would make a comment that would jeopardize competitiveness of companies and so on. But the one thing that concerns me and a lot of people that I know is when I head up north to do some fishing or to do some hunting . . . and to be specific, I'm talking to an area now between Smoothstone Lake and Doré Lake, in that area — I'm still talking forestry here — that by the Smoothstone River.

I don't know if you're familiar with it, but the Smoothstone River on the west side of it before the logging road actually crossed the river and continued on to Doré hill and so on, Doré mountain, was one of the best moose hunting areas that I had experienced up to that point. Now when I drive on that road, not only are there no moose there, there are no trees.

And what I'm getting at it is the clear cut. As an individual, it bothers me when I drive by what used to be a lush, green forest and now actually a rototiller . . . not a rototiller, but a double disc has gone over that. And literally sections of land are completely clear cut. There's nothing there. Now I know that the story that we're given all the time and were given when I was in government as well, is that this is proper forest management, that you can plant trees and you'll have a much more organized forest regrowing. But I want you to put on record, Mr. Minister, what your feelings are in that type of forest management.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Well we, as I said, we're constantly looking at our forest management practices and these . . . certainly the sort of clear cutting, and we call patch cutting now because we keep it to . . .

An Hon. Member: — Call what?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Patch cutting. We cut smaller blocks all the time, so we are trying to get away from large, clear-cut blocks. The sustainability we believe is there. The esthetics of it are not great, and it's a problem. We're certainly concerned about it. And as I said, it always makes you a little nervous because it takes 100 years to know whether we were successful in our replanting totally, or 50 years or at least 20 years. So we have experience in the past where reforestation has worked in the forestry cover.

That's one of the things we're doing is the integrated forest management plan, which is looking at . . . not only looking at the forest and all the industries that are in the forest — trapping and the recreation, the hunting and the commercial fishing and tourism and so on — so that we're not taking out the lumber as the only industry in the forest. Because we want to have a balance between all those industries. And they all have economic impact. And we want to balance off the balance impact. So we're looking at doing that.

I think the forest practices that we use — the clear cutting or the patch cutting that we use — has one advantage in that we use all of the fibre that's there. We use the hardwood and softwood and we make use of all the resource. And if you go to selective cutting you get into more roads which are harmful to the environment. You get into wasting a lot of a particular species as you trap one species down to get the other one out, and they go to waste, and so on.

So you have to balance all those things out from an economical point of view as well as from an environmental point of view. And certainly clear cutting, for the best of my knowledge we think we're sustainable, we think we won't harm the environment. But we're certainly always concerned about it and are monitoring it very carefully.

Mr. Neudorf: — Could you explain to me, Mr. Minister, why clear cutting is better than . . . and when you say patch cutting, what size are we talking as opposed to the sections that I was talking about before. I was glad of one comment that you made, Mr. Minister, that you are now using hardwoods and softwoods, thanks to the paper mill that was built by Weyerhaeuser in Prince Albert area.

But getting back to the specifics, what makes clear cutting the best alternative in your mind right now, besides such things as efficiency for the operator?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Yes, I think some of the advantages of patch cutting as we do, and I think just as an example, I think NorSask's patches are now 25 hectares, or about 40 acres is their average size. And we're trying to work with local people to set up local boards to help determine, you know, how big the patches should be, where the roads should be, and how big buffers to leave around water sources and so on.

I think the advantages I mentioned earlier, so you get to use all of the wood; you build less roads when you do patch cutting. And depending on the species, there may be certain species and certain conditions where selective cutting is more appropriate. But for an example, with the aspen, if you go in and cut out the big trees you open it up and the forest is damaged. If you go in and do a clear cut or a patch cut, it will regenerate itself.

I think one of the things that we need to bear in mind in Saskatchewan, we don't have old growth forest. In a natural state, if we didn't put out fires, lightning would strike and our forests would burn about every 30 or 40 years. And then it regenerates from being destroyed by fire and regenerates itself in mixed wood stands basically.

It's not like some forests where you have over a hundred years you have one species that grows up and then dies off and then another species grows in. Our sort of natural state is the forest to grow up and then be burnt every 30 or 40 years. And so in a lot of ways, the patch cutting that we're doing emulates nature in that way.

And as I say, it's as . . . you know, you build less roads which causes less destruction. You waste less fibre because you're able to use all the fibre. And the other thing of course, which you don't ignore, is the economics of it. The only way that you can selective cut and not waste and damage large amounts of timber is to use horses and, you know, that becomes a question of whether or not that's economically feasible.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I want to jump ahead, if I may, because this ties in, and that is to section 14 which is the reforestation. And that's basically what we've been talking about a little bit here, the rejuvenation of the forest.

I notice that you've pretty well doubled the budget for reforestation from seven twelve up to a million five.

Is this your proportion? Is this what the Government of Saskatchewan is investing in reforestation? How does this compare, let's say, with the increase that companies will

now be asked to apply to the same problem? Is this proportionate?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Over the past number of years we've been shifting the responsibility for tree planting over to private industry. But in this year I think we will plant about a million trees; the industry will plant about 10 million trees. So it gives you some idea of the amount.

The industries plant trees. There's a fund that they pay into; as they harvest trees, it goes into a fund. And they are responsible for keeping on their lease the sustainable . . . keeping their lease sustainable. So they have to plant all the trees that are necessary. And what we're spending is in addition to that on areas outside of leases and fire burns and that sort of thing.

And even the doubling of the budget, it's still probably not adequate, but we're trying to keep a sustainable forest. You know, you can have all the good plans in the world of how to harvest and be sustainable, but if you don't follow through with the tree planting obviously it's not going to work.

Mr. Neudorf: — Mr. Minister, a little while ago we were talking about fires. You were talking about fires as being one of the ways in which forests rejuvenate themselves. And I know that last year, although the numbers of fires were down, the fires were large and they were costly. Now I notice that you have reduced rather substantially for this year your fire-fighting budget. Is this in anticipation of fewer fires or lower service? Or how can you anticipate what the future is going to hold?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — We tried to develop some efficiencies. We've had in the past number of years some dry weather and some droughts and so very high forest fire seasons. We think this year we're going to bring our forest fire fighting in on budget. We've had a little help from Mother Nature with a cool summer, and it looks like we're going to come in on budget unless something drastic happens in the near future.

Mr. Neudorf: — I guess I'll leave it at that. But, Mr. Minister, you can say that now. But this thing was prepared how many months ago? Certainly before you knew that we were going to have a relatively cool summer. I hope you're right in your assumptions.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps what we should do is go down to . . . and I'll get back up on item 13.

Item 8 agreed to.

Items 9 to 12 inclusive agreed to.

Item 13

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, wildlife landowner assistance has gone down to \$402,000 from \$495,000. That is a \$93,000 drop for landowner assistance. I don't know if this is another attack on rural Saskatchewan or why you're trying to save that amount of money particularly . . . and pursuant to the discussion that we just had prior about the tremendous number of wildlife and the depredation done by wildlife

to farmers. And yet at the same time you are now choosing to cut that much assistance to farmers who are bearing the brunt of this additional wildlife that they are experiencing right now.

Mr. Minister, my question number one is, why that cut? Number two: is there an alternate source that farmers will be compensated for, this perhaps through another area you're fairly familiar with which is crop insurance?

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — I certainly have some concerns as well, being a farmer, as to problems that wildlife create for farmers. And we've attempted, in very tough times, to allocate as much money as we could. A part of our decision was to — with some of the depredation hunts and so on — was to attempt to reduce the problem rather than to continue to pour into trying to compensate people for damages.

And we are undergoing a program of working with farmers as much as we can to come up with some . . . help them to come up with solutions to prevent some of the damage rather than just to pay compensation for it afterwards. And there are, as you may know, provisions in crop insurance to cover wildlife damages.

Item 13 agreed to.

Items 14 to 16 inclusive agreed to.

Item 17 — Statutory.

Items 18 to 22 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 26 agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates 1992 Consolidated Fund Expenditure Parks and Renewable Resources Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 26

Items 1 to 18 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 26 agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates 1991 Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure Parks and Renewable Resources Ordinary Expenditure — Vote 26

Items 1 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 26 agreed to.

The Chair: — If the minister would like to thank his officials.

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — I certainly would like to thank my officials. They've done a great job. And also the opposition for questions and suggestions that they've made.

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I too would like to join the minister in thanking his very capable officials for their assistance, and to the minister for being quite frank with us this morning. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you to the minister and the critic and . . . the critics and the officials for their assistance in estimates this morning.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly recessed until 2 p.m.