

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

#### NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Wednesday next move first reading of a Bill to amend The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act (Appointments Review Committee).

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Renaud:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to other members in the Assembly, two guests in the west gallery -- Mr. Reg Briggs, president, and Mr. Dennis Paddock, executive director of the association of professional engineers for the province of Saskatchewan.

Their visit is timely, Mr. Speaker, as March 5 to 12 marks National Engineering Week. The objectives of National Engineering Week are to increase the public awareness of the importance of engineering in our everyday lives and to encourage young people to consider engineering as their career.

So I would ask all members in the Assembly to join with me in welcoming Mr. Briggs and Mr. Paddock to the Assembly.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with the hon. minister in welcoming our two special guests today from the engineering society to the Legislative Assembly. Later this week I will have the opportunity to meet with their association members and discuss a subject of mutual concern and understanding. And as the minister said, everything in this province that has gotten built since we became a province, has had an engineer some place involved. And what I'd like to see, Mr. Speaker, is more engineers involved lately.

So we'd like to join in welcoming our guests on behalf of the official opposition.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**Mr. Koenker:** -- As members and the public may be aware, Impaired Driving Awareness Week has begun in Saskatchewan this week. There isn't too much we need to be aware of when it comes to impaired driving. We know it's a problem, and it's a big problem for Saskatchewan people inasmuch as almost half of the fatalities in this province are related to drinking and driving. And that's too many -- far too many.

I've had a constituent in my constituency office who has lost family members to drunk drivers. And I say the time has come to do something about impaired driving in Saskatchewan.

The Associate Minister of Health has announced consultations with the school system, through the school system, this last month, and hopes to bring legislation in to deal with this problem. I want to say to the people of Saskatchewan, if we are to observe Impaired Driving Awareness Week in Saskatchewan this year, you need to write the Premier and your own personal member of the legislature and see that there's more than consultation, that there is legislation to deal with the problem of impaired drinking and driving in this province and that there's action from the government finally on this issue. Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McPherson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to pay tribute to all those who made Kinsmen Telemiracle 18 a great success. Year after year, during tough financial times, the people of this province continue to put the less fortunate ahead of themselves. Thousands of hours of planning and fund-raising events generated the largest share of the \$2.1 million raised. It is through the generosity of Saskatchewan people that our province exceeds all others in donations to assist those whose special circumstances merit a helping hand. All Saskatchewan citizens should be proud today.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Van Mulligen:** -- Mr. Speaker, there are still some few benighted, ill-informed people who do not think that curling is an exciting spectator sport, and those poor souls obviously did not see the final draw on Saturday of the Scott Tournament of Hearts where the Canadian women's championship . . . the draw between Regina's Sandra Peterson, and Manitoba's Connie Laliberte. In particular they did not see the last incredible shot by Sandra Peterson which won the title for Team Canada.

Everyone in Saskatchewan is proud of their accomplishment of course, but I have a particular pride of ownership because two members of the rink live in my constituency of Regina Victoria -- Sandra Peterson and Joan McCusker. We also congratulate Jan Betker, Marcia Gudereit, and fifth Anita Ford, and wish them all the best as they represent Canada next month and become the first Canadian woman's rink to repeat as world champions.

We also congratulate Sherry Anderson and her Saskatchewan team from Prince Albert for an excellent first showing at the Scott Tournament of Hearts.

Mr. Speaker, as I watched that last rock go ever so slowly down the ice towards that very small target I thought of that biblical phrase, let she without nerve

cast the last stone.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also would like to congratulate the Peterson curling team for winning another Canadian world's curling championship this weekend at the Scott Tournament of Hearts in Ontario.

The Peterson team must have wanted to make the championship game against Manitoba a little bit more exciting, Mr. Speaker, since they waited until the 10th end to pull off a 5 to 3 victory. The Peterson team finished 10 and 1 at the Scott, defeating a two-time Canadian champion and a former world champion for the title.

Sandra and her team-mates will be heading off to Germany next week to compete, and I'd like all members of the Assembly to join with me in congratulating Sandra Peterson, Jan Betker, Joan McCusker, Marcia Gudereit, and Anita Ford on their success and wish them the very best in Germany.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Draper:** -- Mr. Speaker, sir, it is not only the international players that need to be congratulated today. Last week, and over the weekend, the town of Coronach in my constituency hosted the Saskatchewan High Schools Athletic Association provincial boys' curling championship. The town, its sports organizations, the school, and a whole host of volunteers made this a very exciting and successful event. I congratulate Kevin Vollet and his committee for taking on the event.

Amateur sports has always been important in the lives of Saskatchewan people and certainly curling, the sport that makes a pleasure of ice and cold, helps to define us as a people. Witness the great excitement at the previously mentioned curling event last weekend. Saskatchewan produces champion curlers and champions begin to learn their skills early.

But, Mr. Speaker, most important is the number of people who participate in the sport, excellent curlers like the students of the tournament and even duffers like me. The rotation of so many championships and so many sports to so many of our small towns is not only a boost to the local economy but exposes all participants, organizers, coaches, and fans to travel throughout our multifaceted province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, many people in the province over the last week have been very interested in the Karlee Kosolofski story -- a little two-year-old girl from my constituency of Rouleau who unfortunately came very close to death.

And I would today like to commend some individuals who came to Karlee's assistance and I think deserve

recognition for the work that they did in establishing medical history, not only in our province but indeed it appears around the world.

And I wish to commend Caroline Peck from Rouleau. Caroline is an RN (registered nurse) who ran a block and a half and started to administer CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) on Karlee. Linda Benoit, another nurse from Rouleau who was two blocks away and came to Karlee's assistance.

And then we have the ambulance paramedics, Mr. Speaker, Brenda Fry, Krista Rempel, and Jonas South who were able to quickly get Karlee into the Plains Health Centre where a waiting team of nurses and doctors had the heart-lung machine ready to go and helped Karlee on her way back to life.

I think all of these individuals should be recognized because they do show that the Saskatchewan spirit is alive and well, that when people are in most need there are folks there to pick up the challenge.

And Karlee as we all know is resting comfortably; had a little more surgery and has lost her left leg below the knee. But I think all of these people deserve recognition.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Haverstock:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I too am thrilled to acknowledge the clean sweep made by the Sandra Peterson rink at the Tournament of Hearts this weekend. Of course I admit to being very partial to any team that will carry Canada's red and white to the world championship because this has been a particularly good year for those colours so far. Although the Liberals are still one short of a curling team on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I was absolutely ecstatic to see Sandra make such a perfect shot to the end of the game. And no matter how many tough shots the team made to get the final, the mark of true champions is meeting difficult challenges under pressure. And Team Canada showed a great deal of class throughout the Scott tournament, right down to the very last rock in the 10th end.

This victory has been a tremendous boost to the morale of our province. And I believe that the true value of competitive sports is in the inspiration that it gives our society to pull together as a team, to work hard and to take advantages of the opportunities for success even when we sometimes have to plan and wait for them to emerge.

So to Sandra, to Jan, Joan, Marcia, Anita, and to their families, I want to express our heartfelt thanks and congratulations.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Harper:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am sure all of the members of the House know that the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

is holding their 89th annual convention at the Centre of the Arts here in the city of Regina on March 8, 9, 10, and 11. And, Mr. Speaker, this group of local government politicians do a tremendous job of community leaders in rural Saskatchewan. And a lot of their work is done, Mr. Speaker, more out of a commitment to the community than it is out of any other desire. And I think I can testify to that, Mr. Speaker, as having the privilege of being an RM (rural municipality) councillor in the RM of Clayton for 10 years.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to offer words of welcome to the delegates that are coming down to their convention here in the city of Regina this week. And I wish them a very fruitful and productive convention, and a very safe trip home when they conclude.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Rural Ambulance Services

**Mr. Toth:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we would once again like to present this House with a number of questions submitted to us by members of the public.

Due to the tremendous response we have had to this initiative, the Saskatchewan Weekly Newspapers Association has offered to distribute both our questions and the government's responses to their member newspapers across the province. In order to accommodate that, Mr. Speaker, we would like to move up our questioning on questions to the Premier from Wednesday to Monday, and we sincerely thank the Saskatchewan newspaper association for their interest.

My question, Mr. Speaker, comes from Debbie Norton-Brown from Rocanville. Mr. Premier, I want to know why, when the town of Rocanville has an equipped medical van and qualified EMTs (emergency medical technicians), we cannot transport our medical emergencies, but have to wait at least a half an hour for the ambulance from Moosomin. What's most important here, money or lives?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Simard:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the issue surrounding Rocanville, in order to be an ambulance service there are certain criteria that have to be met. And if the service there wishes to perform an ambulance service, they are of course able to make that application and they will have to meet the regulations and the rules and the criteria that have been set forth.

They should of course discuss the matter with the district board and work in conjunction with the district board.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Farm Leaseback Program

**Mr. Goohsen:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Premier is a question sent to us from a gentleman whose name is Jerry and it says: I would like to know if your government has anything in the works pertaining to the Saskatchewan farm land leaseback program, i.e., a longer-term solution once a farmer has used up his six-year leaseback option. A longer-term solution is needed because most people on the leaseback program aren't able to save enough money, if any in today's economy and with the prices of grain where they are, to buy back their land thus undermining the usefulness of this program.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Cunningham:** -- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Jerry for that question. The Department of Agriculture and this government is very concerned about keeping farmers on the land. That was the reason for the six-year leaseback. And that was thought, at the time that the committee struck it, to be a reasonable time period for farmers to hopefully have a chance to buy back the land.

Certainly as we come closer to the end of that period, we will be looking at alternate solutions to keep people on the land. We have been looking at a potential for community-based land trust and some other solutions but we certainly hope that there is some turnaround in agriculture that most of these farmers, if not all of them, will be able to remain on their land.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### SaskPower White City Office

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is, as well, to the Premier from Kay Ollinger from Southey. Mr. Premier, I want to know why SaskPower is moving their employees from the district office in White City to Regina when the government will have to continue to pay the lease on the White City facility for another three years.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- Mr. Speaker, the question is phrased on the premiss that the White City office is going to be closed. The White City office, it's my understanding, is not going to be closed. And I hope that pleases the person who wrote in the question. Thank you.

#### Unemployment

**Mr. Britton:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Premier. This question comes from Gloria L. Kohlman from the town of Major, and she writes: Mr. Premier, I want to know why I can't find a job now that I will be receiving my Bachelor of

Commerce degree. When will I be able to find a job? Where am I going to go to find a job? Will I have to leave Saskatchewan? And what else can I do if I don't find a job, to avoid more assistance, and how am I going to pay back my student loan without a job?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. MacKinnon:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the individual for that question. The individual should be quite pleased with the recent budget because what we announced in that budget were a number of short-term measures to create jobs such as a dramatic increase in our capital funding and our participation in the infrastructure program.

We also announced a number of initiatives which represent our long-term approach to job creation. One which will be particularly interesting to highly educated people, like I'm sure this individual is, is our ag equity fund in which we will be taking primary products, agricultural products, using the expertise we have here at the university and at places like Innovation Place to further process those products and then export them so people in Saskatchewan will get jobs, farmers will get markets for their products, and the economy of Saskatchewan and of Canada will get more exports.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Transportation for French Immersion**

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Premier comes from Les Winter, of Regina: Mr. Premier, I want to know why children from Moose Jaw are being transported by taxi to take French immersion classes. According to a news report I saw, two children are being transported from Moose Jaw to Regina; one by taxi at a cost of \$13,000 a year, the other is driven by his mother who is given \$7,000 a year by the government. That's a total of \$20,000 a year the government is spending on two children. That's enough to feed an entire family for a year.

I want to know why the government is wasting money in this matter at this time of fiscal restraint.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I want to thank Mr. Winter for the question. Let me say this: that all members of this House lobbied very hard to ensure that we saved the Canadian Air Force base at Moose Jaw, and we were successful at doing that.

We were successful because one of the constitutional obligations of any province is to ensure that those people who come from Quebec to Saskatchewan, for instance, are guaranteed their rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that is that francophone parents have the right to have their child educated in French.

Now let me say this, that I am advised that the director of education in Moose Jaw was not aware that there were children being transferred from the base to Regina. The director of education in Moose Jaw has

negotiated the transportation of the full-time student. That person will now be travelling with the air force base bus to the city of Regina. Because the kindergarten student is a half-time student, her parent will continue to drive her to and from Regina. And that is the answer to the question.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Investment in Economic Development**

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Minister, you often tell us how hard you are working to encourage investment in Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan projects. You say that you have identified dozens of terrific opportunities in our province and your approach to economic development will soon be paying dividends in terms of economic activity and jobs in this province.

Mr. Minister, if someone were to come to you with 30 to \$35 million to invest and they wanted to put it into a good, sound investment opportunity in Saskatchewan, one that would give them a good return on their money, what would you recommend and does that opportunity exist in Saskatchewan today?

**Hon. Ms. MacKinnon:** -- Mr. Speaker, to suggest where the member may be going here, he may be referring to an article in the paper about the Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan. Let me begin by telling the member opposite that those sorts of funds, which I think is what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about -- pension funds -- are invested by the Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan independent of the government. So they make their decisions independent of what the government's approach to these decisions are.

The other point I would like to make, in light of where I think the member's heading here, is that they invest across Canada because they have to spread their risk in the best interest of their members. They cannot put all of their eggs in one basket.

So if somebody came to me about the investment of things like pension funds or funds of that nature, that's the beginning of the answer I would give them.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll direct the next question to the Minister of Finance. Madam Minister, the issue is not ICS's (Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan) independence at all but you did hit it on the . . . the nail on the head. It's the lack of eggs in the basket called Saskatchewan that we're concerned about.

Now, Madam Minister, you're right. They do manage pension funds, pension funds that are generated by people in this province, you and I included because

our MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) pension funds are invested by these people. And we don't question their competence at all. They are to get the highest possible return for their investors which is the proper mandate.

But the fact is, Madam Minister, the 34 million bucks is being invested in a shopping mall, the Westhills Towne Centre in Calgary, Alberta. That's probably a good investment, Madam Minister. They had 34 million to invest in an economic development project and yet they couldn't find one in Saskatchewan to put it in.

Madam Minister, did ICS ever talk to you about making a similar investment in the province of Saskatchewan, and if so, why were they not able to find some place for their \$34 million?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. MacKinnon:** -- Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the Leader of the Opposition through some basic facts here. First of all, the source of the information, Moira Wright, former executive assistant to the Conservative minister of Finance and the Association of Saskatchewan Taxpayers.

I don't often mention a particular association and say that their familiarity with the facts is often very vague, but I will say that about this group. They are notorious for playing fast and loose with facts.

And here's another example. They start out with the assertion that 30-some million dollars has been invested in a Calgary shopping plaza. Don Black of ICS says listen, this is confidential. But I can tell you they're not right, first point.

Second point, they relate that investment to the tax rates in the different provinces. Absolutely . . .

**The Speaker:** -- Order. I want to ask the member from Estevan to please quit interrupting when the minister is trying to answer the question. Order. Order.

**Hon. Ms. MacKinnon:** -- They relate that particular investment to the tax rates in the two provinces. Again the Saskatchewan association of taxpayers is dead wrong. There's no relationship. Even if the investment did occur, which Don Black is disputing, at least in terms of the numbers, there is no relationship to the tax rate in the province because these are not taxable benefits. So once again the members opposite are using information from an agency; I'm telling you this particular information is not reliable.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question to the same minister. Madam Minister, my information comes from the **Calgary Herald**, and to my knowledge Ms. Wright isn't an employee of the **Calgary Herald**.

I'm wondering, Madam Minister, why you don't have

a better working relationship with ICS, especially when you consider one of the directors is the former premier of the province, the Hon. Allan Blakeney.

The bottom line, Madam Minister, is this: 34 million to invest in a project that's going to create jobs and opportunity and economic development and they simply couldn't find one here even though your Minister of Economic Development claims he has dozens waiting.

Now it's significant that that amount of money left Saskatchewan to Alberta, and even Allan Blakeney recognizes that Alberta is a better investment than Saskatchewan. And, Madam Minister, that's a direct result, I think, of your destructive high-tax, anti-business agenda in this province.

Now, Madam Minister, if ICS recognizes this, if Allan Blakeney recognizes this, why can't you recognize it and change some of these policies so the next time they've got \$34 million of money generated in this province, they'll invest it in this province? Why don't you do that, Madam Minister?

**Hon. Ms. MacKinnon:** -- Mr. Speaker, first of all, a general point. I guess the members opposite don't believe that in the Alberta budget when there was a 20 per cent increase in health care premiums for the average family, whereby the average family will be paying more than \$800 a year in health care premiums, this isn't a tax increase.

But back again, if the members opposite would only consider some facts instead of launching off in a particular direction. The two main pension plans in this province actually have three times as much money invested in a Saskatchewan shopping plaza than they ever projected, even according to these somewhat suspicious figures, to invest in Alberta. So they have already invested here. These pension funds are independent and they have the capacity and the need to invest in all parts of Canada -- as do other pension funds invest from outside the province in Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Same minister: Madam Minister, the bottom line is if your policies were working, your minister wouldn't have to stand up and embarrass himself on co-generation. That would be a fact of life.

Your other minister wouldn't have to stand up and embarrass himself about hiring Reggie Gross to build airplanes because you'd be building the airplanes here, Madam Minister.

You wouldn't have 21,000 more people on welfare than you had in 1991 and you wouldn't have 12,000 less working than you had in '91.

Now, Madam Minister, what we're asking you is: the next time that ICS, who are very smart managers, the 10th largest consortium of their kind in Canada, have

\$34 million to invest, could you please find a place in Saskatchewan for them to do that? Can you do that, Madam Minister?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. MacKinnon:** -- Mr. Speaker, we monitor the ICS investments to ensure that Saskatchewan is getting a reasonable level of investment from ICS, and we speak to them regularly about this. I would actually say when you look at investments in Saskatchewan, they're probably a little bit heavy on that side.

But I will also say this to the member opposite -- and this is something that I'm sure there is no understanding of over there -- we will allow an agency that is supposed to be independent of government to operate independent of government. We will not try to influence them for our own political purposes because we believe in open, honest, and accountable government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### SaskEnergy Rate Increase

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Minister of Energy. Mr. Minister, SaskEnergy recently increased natural gas rates to its subscribers by 9.5 per cent. Can you tell us if all SaskEnergy customers had their meters read prior to the increase taking effect?

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- Well I would have to assume that all customers have had their meters read some time prior to the prices taking effect. I'm sure that's the case. There's a system whereby there's a couple of months of estimate, then there's an actual reading. The timing of the reading that was done as an actual reading rather than estimate, I can't assure the minister of the exact date. But if that's important to you, if you communicate with my office, I'd be more than happy to provide that to you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Mr. Minister, because meters are not read every month, as you say, it is typical practice for SaskEnergy to estimate usage of natural gas on its billings. I have here a copy of a bill from a SaskEnergy customer who used more natural gas at the old rate than SaskEnergy estimated on his January bill. Although the natural gas was consumed before the 9.5 per cent rate hike, he was not billed for that consumption until his meter was read in January after rates had increased.

Can the minister explain why customers were billed at the new rate for gas consumed before the rate increase?

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- I don't believe that to be the case. The charge came into effect on January 1. Especially people who were on equalization payments will vary from year to year, but there's an adjustment made at the end of

the year or the end of the estimate period. People who are on equalized rates will have an adjustment at the end of the year either up or down based on the previous year's consumption.

So it depends. You'd have to give me more specifics on the actual case before I can tell you whether it's an equalized payment system or whether or not it's an averaging system. But the rate increase came into effect January 1, 1994.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Mr. Minister, it should not be up to SaskEnergy customers to study their bills each month to determine whether they have been overcharged.

Can the minister tell us whether a notice has gone out to all customers about this miscalculation and can you explain how it is possible to determine from their meter readings how much gas they actually consumed under the old rate?

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- Well I think it's prudent of anyone to check bills they get on anything, whether it's for natural gas or electricity. Or if you go to the grocery store when you get home you should check your list to make sure you were charged properly.

I believe there is good integrity in the system of billing and charges put out by SaskPower, SaskEnergy, SaskTel. And if there is an inaccuracy in some particular billing, we'd be more than happy to deal with that. And if the customer has been inaccurately billed we would be more than happy to make that adjustment.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Mr. Minister, I do have an actual case here. The customer I refer to will get a credit on his bill of \$40 because he was alert in catching the error by SaskEnergy.

How many more SaskEnergy customers were over-billed in the same manner, and what is the amount of refunds you will be issuing?

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- I'm quite sure that by the member alerting the public in Saskatchewan to this incident of someone being credited with an overpayment that Saskatchewan people will be alerted to the situation.

As I say, I believe in the integrity of the billing system at SaskPower and SaskEnergy. And if people have been incorrectly billed, we'd be more than happy to correct that. You have to appreciate there are several tens of thousands of customers in the province, and from time to time there may be an error. That's why I think it's prudent of any consumer to check the bills for services that they've paid for. If there are other incidents of this, we'd be more than happy to look at it for you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Mr. Minister, it's your Crown corporation which is doing the billing, and I believe it's your responsibility, not the responsibility of the consumer in this particular case.

Can you detail what the costs are of processing the credits? And what is the total amount of refunds that will be issued to SaskEnergy customers who have the same experience?

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- Well I don't know the person who is writing those questions for you, but if you want detailed answers to detailed questions I would appreciate that you would advise me prior to question period and I'd have that information here for you. Or if you don't want to political grandstand on something that is not a major problem, then I would contact the people at SaskEnergy.

I appreciate what you're trying to do on behalf of the consumers in the province of Saskatchewan, but I think you have a lot to learn in how you go about asking questions in the House. You give me the details, I'll provide you detailed answers. But I don't carry that kind of detail around with me.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Co-generation

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week we saw the government's decision to nix co-generation, what it had done to the Biggar area.

Each day we receive information in our office from around the province indicating the anger and frustration that has resulted from that decision.

The latest reaction comes from the North Battleford area, and I'll direct my question to the minister from The Battlefords.

A newspaper talked to the steering committee in Glaslyn about the co-generation proposal they had put together when the government announced the go-ahead. Mr. Minister, this community is out \$40,000, 30,000 of which was raised through community auctions and other fund-raising activities. Mr. Minister, while this community wasn't able to submit a proposal because they ran out of money, they believed that you and your government were sincere in asking for proposals.

Mr. Minister, you indicated that you would consider returning the funds to the communities if they requested it. So on their behalf, will you consider returning at least the deposit portion of their commitment?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- If I understand the member's question correctly, he's asking about the community of Glaslyn? Was that correct? I would inform the member that the community of Glaslyn never did put in an application to the request for proposals and so I

don't know what it's asking for you to refund. If a community wants to do a project and they've invested some money into it, it's not SaskPower's responsibility to search out companies or groups to refund money to.

I again stress that they did not indicate through the request for proposals that they were interested in a co-generation project. And I'm happy to see that they were enthusiastic enough, by what you say, to have done some work, but they never participated in the process, so no, I have no intention of refunding some money to Glaslyn.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, the reason why they didn't participate is really quite simple. You've nixed the program, and they put \$40,000 into investing in it and then they realized that you weren't going to go ahead with it, Mr. Minister.

And here's what the people of that community say. Gordon Mayor, the mayor of the community, said: we all feel like we were led down the tube. To me I think it was a political smokescreen. Mr. Mayor goes on to say: they indicated when they put these proposals out that they were going to go ahead with it. I don't think they were ever interested in going ahead with it, Mr. Mayor says.

Mr. Minister, is that not the truth? Did you have any intention of going ahead with these plans, or if you did, will you tell us about that today, Mr. Minister? Did you or did you not have any intention of going ahead with the plans, as you laid out earlier?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Anguish:** -- I find it interesting you get your information from Gordie Mayor, who was the former PC candidate running in that area for you. Mr. Mayor must still be trying to make some political hay for an opposition that has nowhere to go except the direction they're going right now. Playing politics with the community of Glaslyn is not to the advantage of this House or to the people of the village of Glaslyn.

And I would say to the member that if a community or group did not have pockets deep enough to follow through with request for proposals they certainly wouldn't have had enough money to carry off a major co-generation project that would cost in the millions of dollars when construction eventually proceeds. And I don't think you should be trying to make gains on the back of Glaslyn on the advice of Mr. Mayor.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** -- The member from Souris-Cannington, why is he on his feet?

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Mr. Speaker, with leave, to make a member's statement, unrelated to my constituency.

Leave granted.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Education Week

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 7 to 13 marks Education Week in Saskatchewan. This year's theme: Home--School: Make the Connection, stresses not only the importance of parent involvement in a child's schooling, but also education in a way to improve family life. Since it is the Year of the Family, the theme of it is quite fitting. Most schools are planning special activities and events to commemorate Education Week. The doors are wide open for all members of the community to become more familiar with their local schools. Saskatchewan people take a lot of pride and interest in our education and I believe that will never change.

It is important that, while we acknowledge our hard-working teachers, parents and school boards, that we also acknowledge the struggle Saskatchewan education is facing. Last year's massive cut-backs in funding meant increases in teacher-student ratios, strict quotas, lay-offs, school closures, program cuts and large hikes in tuitions. This year will be much the same, except the cuts will be much, much deeper. Schools are now facing operating grant cut-backs of 14.3 million this year alone. Operating grants for the 1994-95 school year are more than \$5 million below the 1989 level.

Mr. Speaker, school boards are struggling to provide basic education to Saskatchewan students and fluffy compliments won't do anything to solve this problem. So while we celebrate the achievements of Saskatchewan throughout the years, let us make sure that steps are taken to alleviate some of the suffering education is experiencing today. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** -- Why is the member on her feet?

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Mr. Speaker, with leave, I too would like to recognize Education Week.

Leave granted.

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Mr. Speaker, this is a time to pay tribute to the thousands of teachers in our province who work tirelessly each and every day to ensure that children's needs are met.

Education is our main weapon against poverty and unemployment. We must ensure that children remain the priority in our educational system and that they have access to quality education no matter where they live. Urban and rural families must have an educational model that prepares them for the kind of world that lies ahead. And first nations people must have a fast track to educational opportunities as Saskatchewan's future depends largely upon their success.

The Liberal Party would like to give top marks to all of those who go beyond the call of duty.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

## Bill No. 28 -- An Act respecting Public Health

**Hon. Ms. Simard:** -- Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill respecting Public Health be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to and the Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

## Bill No. 29 -- An Act respecting the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission

**Hon. Ms. Simard:** -- Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill respecting the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to and the Bill ordered to be read a second time at the next sitting.

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to, at the conclusion of my remarks, introduce a condolence motion.

**The Speaker:** -- I think the Premier has to ask for leave.

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** -- I'm asking for leave, Mr. Speaker, please.

Leave granted.

(1415)

## CONDOLENCES

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** -- Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of sadness that I rise today to note the sudden passing of a former colleague and member of this Assembly, Walter Robert Johnson. On Saturday, February 19, 1994 Mr. Johnson was very tragically killed in a car accident in Coolidge, Arizona, in the United States. And today, Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to his wife, Dorathea, who is still recovering from injuries resulting from the accident, and their children, Kenneth, Karen, Terry Neil and Laura.

Walter Johnson represented the constituency of Saltcoats from 1982 until 1991. The people of his constituency, which is a largely rural one, I'm sure will join us today in recognizing the role, the valuable role, that he played as an advocate for agriculture and for Saskatchewan farm families.

He operated a grain and pure-bred Hereford cattle farm in the Spy Hill area. And he'll be remembered for his personal insight into agricultural problems and for his forceful contributions to discussions pertaining to agricultural policy.

The government of the day recognized the contributions of Mr. Johnson, that we would be able to

make in development of agricultural policy, and in 1983 he was appointed by my predecessor, the member from Estevan, legislative secretary to the minister of Agriculture. After he was re-elected in 1986, he became the legislative secretary to the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation.

Mr. Johnson was also very active in his community, belonging to the Esterhazy Legion, the Masonic Lodge, and the Wa-Wa Shrine Temple. He was also a director of the Saskatchewan Livestock Association and the Saskatchewan Hereford Association, and a director of the Tantallon Agricultural Society.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my own heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Johnson. His contribution to Saskatchewan public life is greatly appreciated and he will be sadly missed.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all members will join me in supporting the following motion which I'm going to move, seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, the member from Thunder Creek. Mr. Speaker, I move, by leave of the Assembly:

That this Assembly records with sorrow and regret the passing of a former member of this Assembly, and express its grateful appreciation of the contribution he made to his community, his constituency, and to the province.

**Walter Robert Johnson** who died at Coolidge, Arizona, on February 19, 1994, was a member of this Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Saltcoats from 1982 until 1991. Mr. Johnson was born on September 27, 1927, at Spy Hill.

He received his education in the Spy Hill area before establishing a grain and pure-bred Hereford farm.

In 1951 he married Dorathea Olson.

Mr. Johnson took a leadership role in the cattle industry, serving variously as a director of the Saskatchewan Hereford Association, a director of the Tantallon Agricultural Society, and as a director of the Saskatchewan Livestock Association.

Mr. Johnson was also an active participant in his community affairs. He was a member of the Esterhazy branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Masonic Lodge, and the Shrine Temple.

Mr. Johnson entered provincial politics in 1982 by winning the Saltcoats seat. In 1983 he was appointed legislative secretary to the minister of Agriculture. Mr. Johnson was re-elected in the provincial general election of 1986, and was appointed legislative secretary to the minister responsible for the Saskatchewan

Crop Insurance Corporation. Mr. Johnson also served as a member of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Before the general election of 1991, Mr. Johnson decided to retire and announced that he would not seek re-election.

In recording its own deep sense of loss and bereavement, this Assembly expresses its most sincere sympathy with the members of the bereaved family.

I so move, seconded by the member from Thunder Creek.

**Mr. Swenson:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of honour that I rise to second the motion by the Hon. Premier in sending the condolence motion to the family of a friend of many of us, Mr. Walter Johnson, who served in this Assembly from 1982 until 1991.

Mr. Speaker, Walter was more than a colleague to all of us that had the opportunity to serve with him. Walter was the kind of person that always ended up being a friend. And that's a quality, I think, that some of us who maybe aren't as fortunate at meeting people so easily as Walter find very admirable.

Walter spent all of his years that he was in this Assembly on a committee called the ag caucus. And I'm sure that other governments have had them, but I can tell you that our ag caucus was unique, I think, because it was the body that set agricultural policy in those years. And Walter's contribution to agriculture has never been questioned by anyone in this province, whether it be on the livestock side or, as the Premier mentioned, in the areas of crop insurance; Walter was just so genuine.

And as the Premier said, he was involved in a lot of things in his own community that were also very genuine. And I think that's why when I had the opportunity last Friday to go to the memorial service, that the hall was filled to overflowing with people from Esterhazy and area, both people who were there to pay their respects to a man who had served them in a public way in this Assembly for all those years, but also in so many other ways, and a man who I think most would consider to call friend -- and it was very evident.

And I think the family really appreciated, Mr. Speaker, that so many would come and express to Dorathea and her children and grandchildren that fact, that what we were there honouring last Friday was indeed a friend.

And I think it says to all of us that enter this place and enter public life, that we should treat each other with respect and that there should be a degree of friendship amongst people, no matter what their political stripe. Certainly that was the way that Walter treated it. And I think politics was better in Saskatchewan because Walter had that attitude and passed that on to others.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say to Dorathea and the family that we miss him, we honour him, and he made a very special contribution to the people of Saskatchewan by them giving up their time so that Walter could be serving the people of this province.

And it is so unfortunate, as always in these cases, when people finally get the opportunity to spend time together, to go into retirement and plan on doing all of those things that you've always wanted to do in life but you've always been too busy and worked too hard to get to, that when you finally get doing that and then a very tragic accident happens and that relationship is broken apart. And we want to say to Dorathea, get well soon, and we will always be friends because of the role that Walter played.

So, Mr. Speaker, I second the motion with a great deal of humility and honour.

**Ms. Haverstock:** -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness that I join with members of this House as we pay tribute to the former member, Mr. Walter Johnson. On behalf of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan and the members of our caucus, I extend to the family of Walter our most sincere and heartfelt sympathy. The loss of such a respected and caring husband, father, and grandfather, has been a tremendous blow to this close-knit family.

And Walter's professional and political accomplishments have been so capably addressed by both the Premier and the Leader of Opposition that I'll put that aside and say that what I fear perhaps is that we are missing acknowledging Walter Johnson, the kind, the compassionate, the very fine individual who was a very close friend of my partner and myself.

Walter's tragic and sudden passing robbed he and Dorathea of the wonderful retirement years that they had worked toward and planned for their entire lives. And Walter's death leaves a great void in the lives of those who knew and loved him. I will miss this kind man, whose encouragement and support meant so much to me during my early years in this arena, where too often we measure our success by others' loss. Walter was one of those individuals who passed through this place without losing his conviction and his commitment to those he served and those he cared for. For that and for his very gentle nature, he will be remembered by everyone.

**Mr. Knezacek:** -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Saltcoats constituents, I rise to add my sincere condolences to Dorathea Johnson and her family, Ken and Shirley, Karen and Robert, Terry, Dawn and Corey, and their families.

I would also like to express my sincere sympathy to Walter's brothers and sisters, Sam, Adolph -- known to many as Shorty -- Swana, Anna, and Emily, on the loss on their dear brother.

In thinking about what happened over the last two

weeks to the Johnson family, I guess three things pop into my mind when thinking about Walter and Walter's character. I think first and foremost, was Walter's love for his wife, Dorathea, and for their immediate family who over the years have become active members and leaders in their communities, following in the footsteps of their father and mother.

Those qualities of family love and leadership were evident when, as a teacher, in my former life, I had the opportunity to teach Dawn -- Walter and Dorathea's youngest daughter -- and Jason, one of Walter's grandsons. That was one quality that I think has been passed on to all of Walter's family members.

Walter spent most of his life farming and ranching in the Spy Hill, Tantallon area. It was his love of farming and his dedication and hard work in raising pure-bred polled Herefords that earned Walter great respect over the years in the beef and cattle breeding industry.

As mentioned, Walter was involved in several farm organizations, adding his expertise wherever possible.

Walter had a great compassion for people, and hence his becoming involved in politics. Walter first ran for the Conservative Party in 1978 and was first elected in 1982, defeating Edgar Kaeding in that election.

My first encounter with Walter on political grounds was in 1986, in the 1986 election, and of course the pre-election period. I was his opposition at that time. It was a closely contested campaign which saw Walter return for his second term. Walter retired and did not run in the 1991 election. And once again, looked forward to his involvement in farming and towards his retirement.

Walter was and will be respected for his friendliness, sincerity, and compassion for people. This was evident by the several hundred constituents and friends who paid tribute to Walter and to his family last Friday.

I guess one could say that Walter's identification was his warm, friendly smile. And of course, how could one forget the cowboy hat that he often wore.

I want to thank Walter for his contribution to Saskatchewan and to agriculture. And I'd also like to thank his family for sharing his life with others.

I would like to conclude my comments of condolence to Walter's family and this tribute to Walter by using a phrase that he often used for others and that simply was, hats off to you, Walter. Thank you.

(1430)

**Mr. Devine:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to join with the Premier and other members of the Legislative Assembly to add a few words of respect for Walter Johnson.

I knew Walter as a fellow member of the legislature, as

a friend, and as a very fascinating individual. One way people have summarized Walter is that he was everybody's man. He was a man's man in that he would share his competitive stories with his fellow colleagues, in particular, men. He was very competitive. He liked to tell stories. And he was straightforward.

He was a woman's man because he was admired and respected as a compassionate person. And I can recall campaigning in a senior citizens' home with Walter and this senior lady came up to him and said, well hello, young fellow, how are you? And Walter, he did a jig and off came his hat and he was very friendly. And they loved him. They really thought he was a fine individual.

He was a children's man because children indeed loved him. And that's very evident not only in his grandchildren, but other children talking about him. And children aren't easily fooled. They see right through people's façades or masks. And what they saw in Walter, Mr. Speaker, was a very open, big-hearted individual. A man who wore his heart on his sleeve as easily as he did wear his hat on his head.

And, Mr. Speaker, he was a fine fellow man, and we see that in all walks of life whether it was involved at the local 4-H or in the Shrine club or in politics or at the church level or in the community or with his family or with his friends.

They say that he had three great passions in life. One was to date they're closer to his . . . recently it was his grandchildren and of course his family. He was very passionate about that and he loved them and wanted to spend more and more time with them. The second passion was politics and really that's just an extension of being involved with people, and he really was good with people. He genuinely believed he could do better. He loved a challenge and that meant dealing with people.

His third passion was the livestock industry, and particularly his Hereford cattle, and I can say that he was a fantastic ambassador for Saskatchewan and for Canada. I've had people tell me that even internationally when he was there marketing Saskatchewan livestock that while he couldn't speak the language -- perhaps it was in Bulgaria or some place -- he sold the livestock. They knew that he represented quality. And he did it genuinely and with enthusiasm, and that capacity and that affection and that respect he had for the livestock industry as his source of Saskatchewan strength came through.

So, Mr. Speaker, he was admired; he was respected; he was a tenacious competitor. One unique characteristic of Walter that people will appreciate that I did because I'm involved with the public service in various walks of life -- in government, in university, and various places across Canada, and some of the United States -- Walter really abhorred red tape. He didn't like to see things get in the way. He just said, well that sounds too complicated. And he didn't much care for bureaucracy. He always sort of brought

common sense; he said I think we could just clean that out, and so forth.

And given that attitude, it was quite unique, I found, in that the bureaucrats really liked him. They really liked him. And you can go into the Department of Agriculture today, and you can go to people who have dealt with him across the country, and lifetime civil servants, and they liked Walter Johnson. They had time for him because his dislike for red tape and bureaucracy was non-partisan. It was just, he said I think we can do this better. I think we can get to the nub of this and he enjoyed getting through and cutting through the bush and getting to the point.

I think that says a lot about Walter the man. So I'm saddened to be here speaking in this way of Walter Johnson but, Mr. Speaker, we don't know when we're called, and while we're here, we give it our very best. And we can say for Walter, he was a very loving individual. He cheered a lot of people up. Sometimes we wonder who cheered Walter up and we know who that was; it was mostly his wife, Dorathea, and his family because he was very close to them.

I extend my very best wishes to his family. We'll really honour and remember the spirit of Walter Johnson. He represented a lot of what is really good about Saskatchewan and Canadians. And indeed, thank God, for his life with us.

**Mr. Martens:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too want to say a few things about a friend of mine, Mr. Walter Johnson. One of the things that I believe that Walter did well -- he served people well. He came to this Legislative Assembly, and I would say he was a person who went out and went to work to serve his constituents; he went to work to serve the people of Saskatchewan.

One of the things that Walter didn't like to do, he didn't like to speak in this Assembly, and it was difficult as a whip to encourage him to do his public duty in this Assembly. But I'll tell you that when he went to the international lounge at Agribition, he had no trouble speaking with people. It was just the atmosphere here intimidated him until he said no, I don't think I'll want to do this.

But when he went to speak to the farmers and ranchers at Agribition, there wasn't one thing that he loved more than that, except his family, and that was to go there and visit with his bigger family, that was the people in the livestock industry. And he did that very well. People there appreciated him very much.

He could tell stories about how he sold livestock all through the United States and all through Canada, how he hauled them all over the United States and Canada. And then he would break into stories about how he would, as a young man, had transported livestock in a trucking business that he was involved with, and he recounted many stories about that to us in ag caucus and to anyone that would listen.

And I remember one distinct story that he had that

dealt with him moving livestock, and it dealt with pigs. And he said, you know, a pig is the most difficult thing to get into a semi-trailer. And, he said, they'd always be backing in. In fact, he said, God probably put the head at the wrong end. And that was his line as to the solution to the problem. He was always trying to find a solution, trying to make the thing work out well so that everybody could be well served.

Walter did that everywhere he went. He was a kind, considerate individual who I believe served his constituency and the people around there well. He worked hard for the various kinds of things that he wanted done in his constituency, and he was always marketing. He was marketing wherever he went. He would sell bulls, he would sell livestock, he would sell his political party, he would sell the well-being of the people of the province. And I think, Mr. Speaker, we all will remember that about Walter.

And I particularly want to say this: he was a business associate of mine for a while because he had livestock at our ranch in south-west Saskatchewan. And he had 60 cows there for a while, and there was probably the most amiable businessman that I've ever had to deal with in my life. Never overpowering, never overwhelming by the demands that he made on us, and we didn't on him either -- but that was a very significant part about who Walter was.

And so as we recognize him as a colleague in this Assembly and say to his family that he will be missed, he will be missed by those people who were his colleagues in business as well.

And he never ran short of talking about his children, but he always talked about his brother, Shorty. We always heard that from him, all over this province. It was Shorty who was working at the farm there, doing the work for him; it was Shorty doing this, and then his sons and his sons-in-law. And they were always working on his behalf, and he never underestimated the value of his family in relation to his service here. And we want to acknowledge that as a part of who he is and who he was, and we want to say to the family, we will miss him as well. And thank you for giving him to this Assembly and to the people of the province for the period of time that he served us here.

**Mr. Toth:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to add a few comments in memory of Mr. Johnson. I guess, Mr. Speaker, my first impression of Walter was shortly after I was nominated as a Conservative candidate in the Moosomin constituency. And Walter was one of those individuals who . . . and a number of people have talked of his compassion and how he just became a friend, and he was one of the first MLAs to welcome me as a candidate and just made me feel at home. And it felt good to be around him, and maybe even sort of, kind of covered by that big hat that he wore, by the shadow it cast over you.

But as I indicated to the family, Mr. Speaker, one thing about Walter that will always stick out in my mind is he reminded me a bit of my father. And that was at

times when you got into heated argument or heated debate, whether it was caucus or it didn't matter where you were, there were times where Walter could be very exuberant and really speak his mind and his opinion, but there were other times when he'd just be sitting back and all of a sudden Walter would speak up in kind of a quiet manner and bring a bit of control to the discussion, kind of bring the discussion to a head, something that I really admire in my father.

And I indicated that to Dorathea the other day, that that was something that really stuck out in my mind about Walter -- his ability not only to speak up but just to be able to be there and almost be a fatherly figure to many of us who were fairly young rookies at the time.

Mr. Speaker, as well just extend my condolences to Dorathea and the family. And at this time we think of, I just am aware of the fact that Dorathea lost her mother just before Christmas. And so my situation a couple of years ago when my mother left so suddenly and so dramatically. And when you're not expecting, it's really hard to understand why. We can always ask the question why.

But as I talked to people at the memorial service the other day, Walter's life, he lived it to the full. And I would almost think though that the fact that Walter left this life's . . . in our minds it would be so suddenly. But also if you were to ask Walter today, he would probably say that that was the way he would like to leave life.

And as I stopped just to visit a gentleman who's just going downhill with cancer, when you see how some people struggle and suffer through life, we certainly don't like to see life come to an end, but I think most people at the end of the day want to think that they will be remembered for the good things, be remembered for their input and how they . . . the significant aspect they played and the role they played. And I think each and every one of us, when our time comes, would almost as well think that to be taken in that sudden moment is maybe the more preferable way to leave life.

But our hearts go out to Dorathea and the family because we all know what it feels like to lose someone so suddenly. And so I express my condolences on behalf of myself and my wife and family as well to Dorathea and the family, each one involved in their remembrance of Walter Johnson.

Motion agreed to.

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move, seconded by the member from Morse constituency:

By leave of the Assembly, that the resolution just passed, together with a transcript of oral tributes to the memory of the deceased, be communicated to the bereaved family on behalf of this Assembly by Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

### ADJOURNED DEBATES

#### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

#### SECOND READINGS

##### SECOND READINGS

##### Bill No. 12

#### Bill No. 27 -- An Act to Amend The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Pringle that Bill No. 12 -- An Act to amend The Ombudsman Act be now read a second time.

**Hon. Mr. Shillington:** -- Thank you very much. I will at the conclusion of my remarks move second reading of a Bill to amend The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act, 1994.

**Mr. Toth:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I again rise to speak on this Bill, An Act to amend The Ombudsman Act.

Mr. Speaker, since 1984 the legislature has entertained at least five Bills to provide for or to amend early retirement programs. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, provides for retirement at a time earlier than what is otherwise provided in the pension plans to whom the Act pertains. The retirement option and any payments to be made to the employee are at the discretion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that this Bill will establish a Children's Advocate in the province, which will be associated with the Office of the Ombudsman. And as I indicated the other day, my colleague, the member from Rosthern, when he was minister of Social Services for a while, had looked at such a program of bringing forward an agency or an individual into play that would be able to be available to children or young people who would be looking for someone that they could speak to on a very quiet level and confidential level regarding problems that they may face in their lives.

The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act pertains to a number of public sector pension plans, namely the public employees government contributory superannuation plan, the public service superannuation plan, the Liquor Board superannuation plan, the Power Corporation superannuation plan, the Saskatchewan Telecommunications superannuation plan, and the Workers' Compensation Board superannuation plan.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I look forward to further debate in the Bill when we get to committee, and we have a number of specific questions that we would like to bring to the minister's attention as we discuss the Bill further in committee.

Except for the public employees government contributory superannuation plan, each plan has its own legislation. The major purpose of The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act is to deal with all those issues that are common to all plans.

It's my sincere hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Children's Advocate will accomplish what the minister has indicated and the government is indicating that they hope it will.

At present, 30,000 active and inactive members are enrolled in the plans. It is fair and reasonable, Mr. Speaker, to offer an early retirement option to those employees who have been affected by downsizing or those whose provisions have been abolished.

I don't think there is anyone who will dispute the fact that there are no worse crimes than those against children. And if the Children's Advocate can in any way alleviate a child's pain and suffering, I welcome that position to our province.

Those are brief comments, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of An Act to amend The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Act.

Mr. Speaker, through the years it's just an ongoing thing. We have witnessed some horrific treatment of children in this province, but they're not unique. They're problems that happen worldwide. It's all too often that you turn on the news and are subjected to violence against children across this land and indeed the world.

(1445)

**Mr. Toth:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take a lot of time this afternoon to discuss the Bills. I'd like to have an opportunity to review the comments that were made by the minister, and we'd like as an opposition to follow up with any interested parties. I would think, just from listening to the minister, that certainly some of the superannuates out there would be looking forward to the Bill and have already offered some ideas, and hopefully the ideas have been included in the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, we're aware of the fact that the New Democratic Party promised to establish a child's ombudsman before they formed government, when they sat on this side of the House. And so it's gratifying to see that the government is finally moving in this direction, although we would ask why we've waited almost two and a half years to bring forward this legislation. But at the same time I commend the minister for coming forward with that legislation.

So therefore at this time to allow for the debate, I move adjournment of debate.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that in the Year of the Family it's appropriate that we address this issue, as it is something that is very important. And of course it's on the minds of people right across this province as we think of the most recent scandal that has arisen out of the Martensville case, the Martensville sexual scandal.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing though I think is very important that we have some very definite guidelines for the child advocate to follow. Last night there was a disturbing news item on the news and I'm not sure how many individuals happened to catch the late news. In fact I'm not sure, it may even be coming on tonight. But it was talking about children taking their parents to court. And we've just witnessed, I believe it was down in the States, where a 12-year-old child took his parents to court and actually won in the court and won a large settlement.

I think, Mr. Speaker, when we look at listening to children and giving children an avenue in which they can voice their concerns regarding what's happening in the home, we better be careful that we don't totally usurp the responsibility of parents. I think children must, as adults must, be responsible and held accountable for their actions.

Sometimes things can be said by children, as they can by adults, that can be said in a point position of anger, or when a child is maybe angered over a decision by a parent administering discipline, that could at the end of the day become an avenue whereby a family is really taken through a very difficult circumstance.

So I trust that, Mr. Speaker, as we look further into this Bill, as we look at the responsibility of the child's advocate, that we're not just setting up another avenue whereby we're opening up a whole new kettle of worms and we're usurping the total responsibility and maybe destroying the family life and the family relationship even to a greater mode than we already have it happening in our province today and across our country.

Mr. Speaker, the minister reported on some of the task force's findings, specifically that people want an advocate who will be a voice for children and youth in crisis, will have a role in community education and prevention, is independent of control or influence of any government department or minister, is visible and accessible to the community. And I certainly do not object to these four themes or ideals.

We agree with the fact that the individual should be totally removed from government. We most particularly agree that this should be an independent body, one who is not bound to the government's ideals. In other words, no patronage. A political person will not be acceptable. The minister himself agrees that this individual must be free of any political or other outside interference.

And I trust that and I believe that as we have seen in recent days, that the government will consult with the opposition parties and the third party prior to this

individual being hired, so that at the end of the day the public in general will have a strong feeling that whoever fills this role is a person who has very solid qualifications to meet the guidelines, that a person who is beyond the political interference atmosphere that may follow, a person who will have the ability and the freedom to really be out there and to listen to the needs of children as they are brought before him.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I believe that even though we're still waiting for some responses from third-party interest groups that we can allow this Bill to proceed to committee.

**Ms. Crofford:** -- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have just a very brief comment. And I want to attach myself to some of the comments made by the member from Moosomin because I do think it's important that we don't replace the role of the family but work as much as possible in this type of legislation to support the good functioning of the family in cooperation with the good functioning of government.

But I do want to say that I think this Bill's important because it illustrates a point of view. It says we care about our children and that we're prepared to illustrate that caring by providing children and their care-givers with a stronger voice in the community.

And even more importantly, it says that spending is choosing because we all know there's no new money and yet we have still been able to place a priority on spending that affects family and children. I have this discussion fairly frequently with people these days where they say, well if there's no more money, we throw up our hands. And obviously in the circumstances in Saskatchewan and Canada we can't take that point of view because if there's no more money and we throw up our hands, what does that then say about the ongoing development of our society and our communities?

So I appreciate that this kind of a Bill comes forward at a time when money is scarce. And there was other examples of these kinds of choices, I think, in the '94-95 budget in the areas of child nutrition, initiatives to deal with preventing family violence, and young offenders programming to deal with more prevention that keeps kids again in the mainstream of their schools and their families rather than being moved off into institutions and out of school. So these are all good examples.

But in returning to The Ombudsman Act, I have a little bit of an example from this morning. I was speaking to a group of grade 3, 4, and 5 students from Athabasca School, and the students had their own question period there where I was the only target for their questions. And they asked what our job is as an MLA. What do you do as an MLA?

And I replied that MLAs can work with individuals and communities to solve problems and to improve the way

the government works for people. This is the intention of The Ombudsman Act, is to provide an avenue to solve problems and to improve the way government works for people, particularly for young people.

So I speak in support of this Bill, and I'm grateful that we still have our priorities in order. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Stanger:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to support The Ombudsman Act of 1994. Shortly after forming the government in 1991, we made an important decision, a decision which has improved and will continue to improve the lives of thousands of children and families throughout Saskatchewan.

That decision was to make the well-being of Saskatchewan children, youth, and their families a priority. This in the face of a great deal of financial restraint -- we made this conscious decision. And in the background we are working towards these three goals, Mr. Speaker: prevention, early intervention, and support enhancements.

This government recently announced a series of initiatives under Saskatchewan's action plan for children, something that I am very proud of. These initiatives underline the importance we place on prevention services for children and support to vulnerable families.

Being a teacher, a mother, and a grandmother, I am personally concerned with our children in Saskatchewan, their well-being and their security. Prevention is most important; support to children and families at the right time. And my mother used to say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And this is still true today.

These initiatives resulted from consultation and planning involving many government departments, agencies, private organizations, many NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and individuals.

Establishment of a child's advocate as an independent voice for children and youth is a key component of the Saskatchewan action plan. Saskatchewan people want a child's advocate who will do these things: will be a voice for children and youth in crisis, will have a role in community education and prevention -- again, the word prevention is important; is independent of control or influence by any government department or minister, and that should allay the fears of the opposition in that department, and is visible and accessible to the community.

As a result, we are proposing implementation of a child's advocate to be associated with the Office of the Ombudsman. And again, to the members opposite, let me say that most children have at least one, if not many, natural advocates, including their parents and others who love and care for them on a day-to-day basis. They know there is someone they can turn to for help, someone who will listen to their concerns and who will take action when it is necessary. But the child's advocate is not intended to

replace the role played by these individuals.

There are other children, Mr. Speaker, who have no such independent voice. They may be children who are living away from home because of abuse or neglect within the family. They may be children who find themselves growing up in families where their parents, through fear, family belief systems, are unable or unwilling to speak on their behalf. They may be youth serving in custody in a young offender facility, far away from home and with little family contact. These are the children and youth who will most benefit from the presence of a child's advocate.

The purpose of the advocate, Mr. Speaker, will be to protect the interests of children and youth receiving services from the government and to ensure the services provided are appropriate. This includes children of foster care and group homes.

The advocate will be appointed in the same manner as the provincial Ombudsman and will be associated with that office. I was surprised to hear the member opposite even insinuate that it would be used in a political way. The Ombudsman will have overall responsibility for ensuring the efficient and effective administration of both parts of the office. The Children's Advocate will play a significant role in ensuring the rights of Saskatchewan children and the youth and see that these rights are protected.

(1500)

To recruit the most suitable candidate, the government is committed to holding a public competition for this important office. Over the past few years the knowledge we know about what causes children and youth to drop out of schools, become violent, break the law or display antisocial behaviour has grown rapidly. We have much information.

Invariably the findings of research and studies emphasize the importance of strong, healthy families who are able to consistently and adequately meet the developmental needs of children and youth. So this is the most important thing, is to give support to these families at a critical time.

Today, for a number of reasons, many families are experiencing levels of stress which they are ill-equipped to cope with. The results can be conflict, dysfunction, and in many cases, abuse of children. Often these results could be avoided simply by making parents more aware of what constitutes normal childhood development. Again this is prevention, education, and awareness. Also providing parents with effective parenting and conflict resolution skills is critical.

Mr. Speaker, amendments to The Ombudsman Act provides the advocate with the power and responsibility to become involved in public education regarding the needs and interests and well-being of the Saskatchewan children and youth. This provides the advocate with the ability to educate the public and to help reduce the number of children requiring

services.

It is fair to say that we are committed to a compassionate package, Mr. Speaker, since there was a 9.3 per cent increase in funding to social programs; a 1.6 per cent increase in health in the 1994-95 budget when all other provinces are going exactly in the opposite direction.

And certainly we are providing more leadership than the Leader of the Third Party from Greystone who effectively, when she voted against the budget, she voted against SIP (Saskatchewan Income Plan) increases; she voted against SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) increases; she voted against the child action plan; she voted against labour legislation, occupational health; she voted against minimum wage increases; she voted against increases to day care grants; she voted against assistance to teenage mothers in schools which keeps moms in school. So I want to say . . .

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Stanger:** -- So I want to say, in contrast to this, we are proposing plans that are going to help and assist the youth of this province. So I will be voting for this Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mrs. Bergman:** -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying that there has been far too little emphasis placed on the rights of children in our society to a safe and protected start in life. The Liberal Party is pleased to see that this legislation has finally come to the floor of the Assembly for debate. As is the case with any new undertaking, we must approach this issue with objectivity, and I think a great deal of optimism. I will offer some critical analysis today, but I hope that the members opposite will take this constructively and not personally.

I believe that after nine years of sitting in opposition, many of the members opposite should have an appreciation for the value of input from this side of the House and a sense of challenge that it is to . . . the sense of the challenge it is to review legislation without the benefit of having worked through all of the stages in its development.

So I want the members opposite to know that we in the Liberal Party care a great deal about this proposal and are genuinely interested in contributing our perspective on what are the positive elements and also in fulfilling our obligations to question those aspects of the Bill which should perhaps be examined more fully before proceeding.

Mr. Speaker, I have spent a long time talking with people who deal with children through non-government agencies and others, people who counsel children. And I have personally been involved in therapy for children for many years, and I've talked with educators and lawyers and people in social services. The minister will know that I have

appreciated the opportunities he has extended to meet and discuss issues of concern, and our caucus is committed to doing what we can with the resources at our disposal to participate fully.

I have undertaken to review the report of the task force on the child advocate and I have spoken with people involved in the preparation of the report.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was unfortunate that after having nine years to contemplate the direction it would take in government, and then following the election having power to act since 1991, the New Democrats opposite would strike a task force that had just five months to investigate and prepare its final report.

I am particularly astonished that the task force, in establishing the Children's Advocate, was given less time to do its work than the commission on judges' salaries, the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and others. It does give me pause to wonder about the importance placed on this task force when they were hampered by such unreasonable time constraints.

The report clearly states that there were no consultations with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations or the Metis Society of Saskatchewan. I know the minister recognizes the significance of that exclusion from the consultation process, and I wonder just why the department would not allow for sufficient time for that process to be undertaken.

The other alarming trend for which this government has become notorious in its other commissions is the accusation, and I quote from page 1 of the task force report: that the department had a preconceived notion about the role of the provincial advocate and that the task force was a means of rubber-stamping that process.

In spite of those difficulties, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the individuals involved delivered a pretty good piece of work. I believe it is significant that the child advocate differs significantly in mandate from the Office of the Ombudsman, and I am satisfied that this legislation will achieve that separation which is of critical importance.

I appreciate the empowerment of the advocate to be able to take initiatives in public education and in initiating investigations and challenges to the status quo where agencies are involved in delivering services to children and youth. What is of concern to me, Mr. Speaker, is that the legislation appears to be deficient in some critical areas when it is held up against the recommendations of the task force, and I hope that we will have considerable time to do some further consultation about these discrepancies before the Bill is voted.

Mr. Speaker, the task force on the establishment of the child advocate raised something which I believe is absolutely crucial to the advocate's role in defending and advocating for the rights of children in Saskatchewan. The force recommended, and I

heartily concur with this, that the advocacy process must be available to all children and youth.

It is apparent from the way in which the legislation is worded that the New Democrat child advocate model is definitely restricted to serving those children receiving services from departments and agencies of the government. I suggest that there are many circumstances in which a child who is not receiving services from a government department might need those services.

For example, I refer to a recent incident in a Saskatoon school where there was an incident of violence after hours in a park between two schools. At the time, neither the victim nor the party accused of perpetrating the act were receiving services from a government agency or department.

Some time after the incident a youth was held after class and drilled by police about the incident, accusing him of committing the violence and asking for his alibi. The youth was proven innocent but was visibly distraught by the actions of the police constable.

The parents were not informed that the questioning was taking place and were thus unavailable to offer support and reassurance to their child after he was released. The youth's parents have challenged this police procedure with the Saskatoon police department and have been told it is routine to question children without obligation to inform the parents until charges are being laid.

Mr. Minister, is it the responsibility of the parent to initiate a review of this process, or is she able to turn to the child advocate in this situation, given that her child is not receiving a service from the government agency or department?

Clearly the Saskatoon City Police is not considered a government agency or department, so would the child advocate be able to initiate a review of this policy, which clearly does not serve the best interests of children who are subjected to such interrogation without their parents being aware that it is happening.

I think we have to be very specific about what we want to see result from the creation of this department. I believe that those involved in the task force, as well as those of us who support the creation of a child advocate, do not simply want another level of bureaucracy in which unresolved situations can rattle around outside the purview of agencies which have set them aside.

I believe we all want to see, all of us in government and opposition and the NGOs, we want an effective instrument to address and promote the well-being of our children, Mr. Minister. What is of concern here is that the legislation actually create what we expect and needed to create.

Mr. Minister, the legislation itself is only one component of producing the results. What is of equal

significance is the resources provided to the department which will actually empower the advocate to do the work outlined in the mandate.

The legislation refers to receiving letters from children which will be forwarded unopened to the Children's Advocate. I think it is commendable to offer that kind of respect for the confidentiality of approaches made by children. At the same time, we are unable to see from the legislation how children will be made aware that the Children's Advocate exists, what protection that the department provides for children.

I think it is important that we be made aware prior to enacting this legislation just what resources are going to be made available to this advocate, so that we can judge whether this department will be truly empowered to do its work.

I note that other provinces provide for a very extensive awareness process to make children aware of the function of the child advocate. And I echo the concerns of the task force that children should have first call on the resources of society.

I have talked with many people about the legislation itself, and there is considerable concern that without seeing the funding proposal for the advocate, we are unable to assess whether this will be more figurehead than functionary.

There were many recommendations made by the task force which do not appear in the legislation, and it is extremely difficult to assess whether the advocate will be able to address those recommendations unless sufficient resources are provided. The task force specifically recommends that the principles outlined in the report become part of the operational policies and practices of the child and youth advocacy commission. It is regrettable that the legislation does not indicate that those principles will become the foundation for the operation of the department.

I note as well that the task force specifically indicates that the advocate must report to the legislature. However, it is somewhat vague as to how that process should take place and the legislation itself seems to avoid the process of reporting to the legislature completely.

That concerns me, Mr. Speaker, because I believe there is a useful function here in having an advocate report to an all-party committee that represents the Legislative Assembly. I say that because the child advocate may indeed need an advocate when it comes to requesting appropriate funding and resources to carry out the mandate on behalf of children.

Obviously there has been some study of what budget would be required to fund the advocate, but I believe it is important for that information to be made public so that we can determine whether there will be adequate money provided for test case litigation for instance. If we cannot have that assurance, then it should be included in the legislation that provision be

made for those resources.

In examining the proposed budget put forward by the task force, I note that a budget of 1.7 million has been put forward, and that budget is specifically tailored to the model the task force has suggested. In comparison, the provision of resources for the Ombudsman department which will encompass this department has risen by just \$247,000. So I question just what divergence there is between the recommended model and what the government intends to deliver.

I urge the minister to take note of warning issued by the task force on page 46 of its report, and I quote:

If the government creates a voice without giving it the resources to speak, it will simply result in false hope and another broken promise to children.

I certainly hope this will not be the case and I would like to have some assurance of that for the children of Saskatchewan before this legislation is implemented.

Mr. Minister, I believe that this is an important first step towards protecting the rights of children and indeed advocating on their behalf. I remain unconvinced, however, that the Bill in its present form accurately reflects the model proposed by the task force. Further, I question the wisdom of commissioning a task force if we are then going to ignore its recommendations when enacting legislation.

Mr. Minister, I will be undertaking further consultation with those affected by this legislation and will have further input when this Bill reaches Committee of the Whole.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(1515)

**Mr. Lyons:** -- Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in this debate today to indicate support for the general overall thrust of the Bill. I think it's clear that even from the remarks of the member opposite that it's an initiative that has been overdue in the province, and it's with some pride that members on this side of the House take a great deal of pride in having this legislation come forward. I mean after all, I don't think there's anybody in this Assembly who would put a price tag on the life of a child, of any child in this province. And in the enhancement of children's lives, we feel that this Bill moves their right to protection under the law, to develop their full potential as individuals, as individual human beings, is enhanced by this. And therefore we see it as a good step forward.

But I'd like to speak for just a couple of minutes about some of the issues that the member has raised. First of all is the question of time line. She said that the report of the task force . . . the task force did not have enough time to report or to do an in-depth study or to develop

its mandate in a proper time frame. And that I think is a debatable point, Mr. Speaker.

But I'd like to bring it to the attention of the hon. member that the task force which brought forward this legislation had a lot greater period of time to deal with its report than the provincial departments of Social Services, Education, manpower and training have to deal with the two-month, restricted time line put forward by the federal Liberal government who wants to reform the whole social safety net system in two months.

Now, Mr. Speaker, without any consultation, without a period by which the resources of the people of this country can be brought to bear on that problem, the Liberals there stand. And I believe it's somewhat hypocritical of them to talk about, well, we're going to have five months for this task force to bring forth its report, yet in terms of trying to reform the whole social safety net system in this country that that is limited to two months.

And perhaps the member would write the Prime Minister and ask for a greater extension on behalf of all the people who deal with the social safety net, not only in her constituency but on behalf of the people of this province. Perhaps she would take pen to paper and ask for a greater extension so that as we're designing a new social safety net for the people of this country, we have a greater period of time than two months.

So you can't have it both ways. It's either too short or too long. Perhaps it is . . . perhaps the task force didn't have a long enough period of time, but if that's the case then certainly the reform of the whole social safety net system in this country needs greater than two months, a greater period of time than two months.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Lyons:** -- Mr. Speaker, the hon. members raise the question of the reportage to the Ombudsman when incidents arise other than dealing with government departments or government agencies. And while certainly, certainly somewhere down the road that may prove to be a deficiency and a weakness in the particular Bill, I might say, Mr. Speaker, that in terms of the incidents that she raises, there are other agencies to which those kind of complaints . . . those kind of complaints can be brought forward. I'm sure that the minister will have much more to say on that at a future date, so I won't go on.

But I do want to take up the issue of resources because the comments of the member centred on the resources that will be provided to the ombudsperson -- the children's ombudsperson -- and the question of how much; what's the quantity?

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, it's plain that nobody in this Assembly puts a price tag on a child's life. I think that that's clear. But there are some practical realities that one must deal with in terms of developing a program. And while the

legislation . . . while the legislation outlines a general framework for the activities of the ombudsperson, what is not known, first of all, is precisely how much activity that the ombudsperson will have in terms of developing the function. This is an evolutionary process by which the office will unfold and the role of the children's ombudsperson will mature, if you like, over time, so one does not know exactly how much it's going to cost us to run it.

But secondly, secondly, the member seems to criticize this legislation based on the fact that she does not know or does not think that there will be enough resources given to the children's ombudsperson to run it. And I would ask the hon. member to be a little more precise. Either the hon. member or perhaps the Leader of the Third Party would be a little bit more precise into the dollar figures that they would provide.

If they criticize the government for not putting enough resources into the children's ombudsperson, the question remains, how much is enough and how much would they put into it? How much would a Liberal government, should they form the government, how much would they allocate to the children's ombudsperson? I don't think we'll get an answer.

I don't think we'll get an answer to that because, like the member from Shaunavon's flippant use of a write-off of \$167 million when it comes to farm debt, we're not going to get them to try to precise the amount of money that is needed to run the program. All I would say to the hon. member is, prior to throwing . . . or prior to criticizing the amount of resources dedicated to the position, perhaps it would do her and her party a much better service to watch and see how the program unfolds, how much is needed and how much indeed may or may not be lacking in the future.

And it's surprising though, Mr. Speaker, finally -- let me just say this -- that I find it somewhat surprising the enthusiasm that the member exhibits for this legislation, given the activities of her leader towards other children's initiatives and other initiatives that this government has brought forward that in fact deal with some of the problems faced by children in this province.

After all, it was the Leader of the Third Party who voted against the child action plan. She voted against the FIP (Family Income Plan) and SAP increases. She is taking a position regarding the minimum wage for working families. And we'll see as time unfolds what her position is on the new labour legislation as it relates to those at the bottom of the economic heap when it comes to working.

We want to see what position the Liberals take when it comes to the new labour standards initiatives that this government is going to put forward, and whose side she stands with. Will she stand with the children of working people of this province or will she stand with her corporate masters -- those who pay the coffers of the Liberal Party? You know the proof of this pudding

will be in the eating, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to seeing that.

But not to be totally uncharitable, I must say that it's good to see that at least there's a preliminary indication that the members of the Liberals support this particular initiative, and look forward to hearing the response from those of the Progressive Conservatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

**The Speaker:** -- Before we move in to the next item, I would like to draw members' attention . . . during the last debate I had three people cross between the Chair and the member speaking. I would like to draw members' attention to your own handbook on page 69, under decorum in the Assembly, which says, no. (4):

A Member must not pass between a member speaking and the Chair.

I would appreciate, members, if you would abide by your own rules. Thank you.

#### **Bill No. 13**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Pringle that Bill No. 13 -- An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Assistance Act be now read a second time.

**Mr. Toth:** -- Mr. Speaker, as I indicated the other day, I agree with the minister in his general assessment that the social assistance plan has to be reworked. And I applaud Saskatchewan's decision to participate in the intergovernmental review of social programs recently announced by the federal government.

During such trying economic times, Mr. Speaker, reform is necessary. It is especially important to develop and impose reform programs when the number of people on welfare sky-rockets, as it has here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we're all aware of the welfare rate in Saskatchewan, how it has increased dramatically in the last two or three years and again in December. Mr. Speaker, let me remind you the number of people on welfare in Saskatchewan has jumped to 78,406 in December -- an increase of over 1,600 from one month earlier and over 21,000 since this administration took office.

These numbers, Mr. Speaker, are an indication of the government's failed economic policies and the devastating effect they are having on our province's families. Members opposite would have everyone believe that the increase is due to the federal

government's decision to stop funding Indians living off reserves. The downloading did have some effect, Mr. Speaker, but accounts for less than half of the total increase in welfare increase cases through the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, we have always maintained that people don't want a cheque from government; they want a cheque from an employer. Education and training are integral in achieving this goal. Being the members opposite are talking about reform in this area, we hope to see some movement in this regard.

I understand that essentially this Bill will allow the department to enter into an agreement with Indian bands, tribal councils, and others to deliver the social assistance programs. It will allow first nations people to assume some or greater control over the delivery of programs and services to their people.

The minister noted in his second reading speech that departmental officials are currently holding discussions with the Prince Albert Tribal Council for the establishment of agreements with five northern bands to continue to deliver social assistance to their members. Lac la Ronge, Peter Ballantyne, Montreal Lake, Hatchet Lake, and Black Lake bands have delivered the social assistance program since the federal government withdrew from providing social assistance to Indian people living off reserve.

The minister noted that discussions are also under way with other bands throughout Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we have some questions on this which we will address during committee.

The Bill also removes all references to municipalities and their power to administer social assistance programs. Mr. Speaker, we have not discussed this with the municipalities, how they feel about being removed from this legislation. However, being no municipality has delivered the social assistance program since 1989, it may not be a problem. We will continue on with our consultations and report back to the Assembly if there is a problem in this regard.

Again, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I look forward to further debate in the House regarding the Bill before us, and we will have more questions to bring before the minister regarding this Bill. Thank you.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

## COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

### General Revenue Fund Education, Training and Employment Vote 5

**The Chair:** -- At this time I would like to ask the minister to introduce the officials who have joined us here today.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Thank you very much, Mr.

Chair. To my right is Dr. Brij Mathur, who is the associate deputy minister of Education, Training and Employment; immediately behind me is Robin Johnson, acting executive director of finance and operations for the department; and to Mr. Johnson's right is Jim Benning, who is the CEO (chief executive officer) for the Saskatchewan Communications Network which is the distance education and broadcast network.

### Item 1

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, officials, thank you for coming in today. It's appropriate that we be discussing Department of Education on Education Week.

Education is very important in this province. Without it we will have no future. It's the future of our children that education is all about. It's what they learn throughout the whole education system that provides for our future.

Madam Minister, I believe that today education is in jeopardy. We look at various cuts that have taken place in the funding for education over the years and those funding cuts, Madam Minister, cannot fail to have an impact on the quality of our education. When you take a 2 per cent cut, followed by a 2 per cent cut, followed now by a 4 per cent cut, something has to give, Madam Minister.

If the people of Saskatchewan could be assured that all of these cut-backs took place within administration, within the so-called waste and mismanagement of the department, I'm sure they would be happy about it. But when they look at their own school systems, they find that that is indeed not the case.

Let's take a look at one example of what this budget means to our province's K to 12 education system because of the 4 per cent cut to operating grants in this budget. Now that's 4 per cent projected cuts, Madam Minister. In approximately 66 per cent of the school divisions within Saskatchewan that cut is above 4 per cent. In some cases as much as 100 per cent.

That is going to have an impact, Madam Minister. Now if you lose 100 per cent but it's only \$1,000, that won't have a major impact. But in some of these divisions, Madam Minister, they're losing millions of dollars. And that will have an impact.

Most of the cases, Madam Minister, as I've said, will take place. The cuts will be between 5 and 30 per cent for the K to 12 education system. And these cuts total up to \$14.3 million -- \$14.3 million out of the operating grants of the K to 12 education system in this year alone.

And it gets worse. In addition to the loss of these operating grants, Madam Minister, the boards will face additional costs of \$3 million in teacher salary increases, and new benefits are estimated for teachers which will cost an additional 250,000; salary

increases for non-teaching staff estimated at some two and a half million; natural gas increases of 390,000; UIC (Unemployment Insurance Commission) and CPP (Canada Pension Plan) increases in excess of one and a half million.

(1530)

Now those may change, Madam Minister, because of the federal government's budget where they cut the cost of UIC. So I'd like to know when we get to this point, Madam Minister, just what impact those changes will have.

Workers' compensation increases of 125,000 this year, and the list goes on, Madam Minister, particularly when you take into account the other utility rate increases that have occurred -- SaskPower, SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), SaskTel.

Madam Minister, the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) says that you cannot remove more than \$20 million from an education system in a province the size of Saskatchewan and not expect that there will be consequences. We already see some of those consequences taking place across this province. The SSTA says that children in classrooms are going to feel the effects of funding cut-backs. School boards cannot take the hit like this and deliver the same services and opportunities to students that they have in the past. Further, this year's budget is jeopardizing the ability of communities to provide high quality education.

Those aren't my words, Madam Minister, these are quotes directly from the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association. They say that program cuts are inevitable; they say that education is in jeopardy. The SSTA says that most school boards will have no choice except to make significant increases in their mill rates which mean that local property taxes will be going up.

And, Madam Minister, when you go out and talk to the property taxpayers of this province, it doesn't matter whether they're urban or rural, they will tell you that they cannot afford to pay any more. In fact, if you take a look at the budgets of most municipalities, you will find that as the property tax rates increase, they pick up very little new money because what they gain from those who can afford to pay, they lose from those who can no longer afford to pay their property taxes.

And, Madam Minister, that's what you called no program cuts. This is what the NDP (New Democratic Party) have called delivering the promise. Maybe the member opposite has forgotten the kinds of promises that they made regarding education when they were sitting on the opposite side of the House, Madam Minister, on this side.

The Premier, the member from Riversdale, said in the **Yorkton This Week** newspaper of October 16, 1990: Increased education spending is a priority for the NDP. All I can say is that we simply have to find the money.

And that's a quote from our current Premier, Madam Minister. We have to simply find the money.

The SSTA says that there's been a decrease in K to 12 funding of \$20 million or more, and yet this government has found \$25 million for casinos -- \$25 million to buy VLTs (video lottery terminal), Madam Minister. There seems to be some sort of a priority error here with the government. And yet the Premier said that we simply have to find the money for education.

Again a quote from the member from Riversdale, April 19, 1990 in **Hansard**. After a 3 per cent increase in operating grants to university, the Premier said in this legislature that the government was cutting back on their own responsibility for education and loading it up on the local property taxpayers and that's wrong.

Well, Madam Minister, if it was wrong in 1990 when the member from Riversdale said it, why is it right today? What's the difference? The mere fact that now the NDP sit on the government side on the government benches that it's right to offload onto the property tax base? I think not, Madam Minister. I think if it was wrong in 1990, it's still wrong today.

Again, he said, and I quote again, this is the member from Riversdale:

. . . you're passing the buck from Regina right on to the ratepayers and the local property taxpayers, putting the crunch not only on the teachers but on the trustees.

April 19, 1990 from **Hansard**.

**An Hon. Member:** -- Good speech. Just a little out of time though. Things have changed since then.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Well the member from Regina Churchill Downs says things have changed. And indeed they have.

In 1990, when the member from Riversdale spoke those words, he didn't have to deliver. But all of a sudden come October 21, 1991, the people of this province elected him based on these words.

And yet when it comes time to deliver, all of a sudden those promises are not met. Those words were hollow, Mr. Minister, and the Premier should not have said that if he didn't mean to follow through. And, Mr. Chairman, these comments were made after an increase of 3 per cent, an increase of 3 per cent in the operating grants to the K to 12 system. Again I quote the member from Riversdale, May 7, 1990, from **Hansard**:

I think every one of us in this House understands that these cut-backs to higher learning university education by the government opposite are not only an attack on education and the opportunities of our youth for tomorrow, but it's really an attack on one of the largest economic engines in our economy in Saskatchewan.

Well at a time when the minister responsible for Economic Development has difficulty coming up with examples of economic growth within this province, the Minister of Education is cutting what the member from Riversdale claimed was one of the largest economic engines in our province. It seems strange that if this large economic engine was so important in 1990, why it isn't that important today, why the minister allows the Finance minister to cut her budgets.

I quote again from **Hansard**, March 21, 1990, from the member from Riversdale. So when the NDP talk about delivering promises, how about this one? The Premier promised that the NDP were going to, and I quote: "We're going to give education the top priority."

That's what he said, Mr. Chairman -- the top priority. Well if education is receiving the top priority under this government, how do they explain a 2 per cent cut and a 2 per cent and then a 4 per cent cut? Perhaps what is really happening here is that the ministers of Education don't have the clout to maintain their departments and to provide the best service that they can for education within Saskatchewan.

And what's happened to all these promises? What happened when the Premier was asking the then minister of Education:

How could you allow education funding to deteriorate to this state of affairs such that your government's underfunding at the university has left people like Dr. Ivany in a position where he had to say that there is nothing which is sacred, nothing that can be protected?

And this is from May 7, 1990, again from **Hansard**.

Well, Mr. Chairman and Madam Minister, perhaps it would be interesting to talk to the presidents of the University of Regina and the university of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. What is happening to their programing with your funding cuts? They've already had to hike tuition fees up significantly last year. I believe the number was 13 per cent. And that was under the NDP that said education must be a top priority. Some priority.

Mr. Chairman, again this was after increases to operating grants, and the NDP said it was not enough. They said they would do better. But that wasn't enough, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of today went on to say:

Don't let any government tell you (that) they don't have enough funds for education. The money is there.

I'll read it again.

Don't let any government tell you (that) they don't have enough funds for education. The money is there.

And that's a quote out of the Moose Jaw *Times-Herald*

of February 19, 1988.

Well, Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, it doesn't seem like the money is here. Significant decreases to funding; more than \$20 million cut from the K to 12 system. What's happening to those promises that were made back when the Premier was sitting on this side of the House, when the Minister of Education was sitting on this side of the House. What's happening to our operating grants in the system today?

Last year's budget cut operating grants for universities, regional and federated colleges and SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) by 2 per cent. And this year's budget, the budget of supposedly no program cuts and no tax increases, slashes the operating grants by a further 4 per cent on average, 4 per cent on average. It's certainly a lot more than that for individual institutions.

Promises were made by the members opposite, Mr. Chairman, and those promises have been broken. And this budget is no exception. The present Minister of Education was no different while in opposition from her leader, the member from Riversdale, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman. She also had a lot to say about education. Addressing the increase in operating grant she said:

. . . how on earth can you say to the public of this province that education is a priority of your government when we see massive school closures in rural Saskatchewan, massive teacher lay-offs in rural Saskatchewan . . .

And that was a quote from the current Minister of Education on April 25, 1991 in **Hansard**.

(1545)

Well, Mr. Chairman, if we take a look at what's happening in the education system today across this province, we see school closures. They don't seem to have slowed down a lot since this member became the Minister of Education. We continue to see massive teacher lay-offs. I believe last year it was 288 teachers less in the system than there was the year before.

And how many more are going to be gone, Mr. Chairman, when this supposed 4 per cent cut hits the school boards, when those school boards, a good number of them, are looking at 10, 20, 30, 40 per cent decreases in their grants? They're either going to have to go to their property taxpayer who can't afford to pay any longer or they're going to have to cut programs. If they cut programs, which the government says isn't going to happen, then they're going to lay off teachers.

So you're going to have less programs and less teachers. And in the long run that means less income for the government and the whole cycle keeps on going again. When those teachers no longer have employment in those communities, are they going to stay there? Maybe some, but a good many of them will pull up stakes and move elsewhere looking for jobs.

And so that means the property tax base goes down -- less income for the school divisions and again the cycle rolls on. In the end it means that education is going to be hurt in this province.

The Minister of Finance, and I'd like to quote another quote from her:

When you take all of the rhetoric out of the budget speech, we learn that the operating grants to universities, technical schools, and the school system have only increased by 2.9 per cent at a time when inflation is running at 4.8 . . . I would like you to explain to the young people of this province how you (can) justify your government's decision to cut educational funding.

That was from April 2, 1990.

And perhaps that's a good question that that member asked at that time, and perhaps she can explain it today. How do you explain to the young people of this province, when you're cutting the K to 12 system by 4 per cent when inflation is only running at about one and a half? You seemed to be seriously concerned there, Madam Minister, about a decrease of 1.9 per cent less than the inflation rate. Well if you take a look at your budget, Madam Minister, you're looking there at a five and a half per cent difference between your cuts and the inflation rate.

And even if you say the inflation rate is zero today, that's still 4 per cent -- more than twice the cut you were complaining about in 1990. Madam Minister, I think you have a lot of explaining to do to the people of Saskatchewan as to what your cuts are doing to education today and what you were talking about in 1990.

The same member that made that quote is now the minister responsible for Education, and she's the one that's handing out the 4 per cent cuts. And that's going to mean quotas. It's going to mean school closures. It's going to mean teacher lay-offs and program cuts. And, Mr. Chairman, the minister knows it.

Mr. Chairman, we've already seen headlines in newspapers that read: trustees still scrambling; fees up, job cuts at the U of R (University of Regina); schools face reductions; quality of education threatened by cuts; school cuts will be felt; U of R prepares to make major cuts; school officials fret about previous cuts; and many, many more.

And the members opposite say that there will be no program cuts and no tax increases. Well, Mr. Chairman, if that's delivering the promise, I think they rate a zero, a failure mark, because programs will be cut. And while the government . . . the Minister of Finance might not be signing her name to the tax increases, her cuts will certainly mean tax increases to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan through their property taxes. It also means that there will be increases through utility rates, and that in turn will be offloaded onto the property tax base.

I guess the Minister of Finance thinks that because her cuts are 4 per cent, and the Minister of Education, that these cuts were announced last year, that they don't count this year. Well, Madam Minister, you may not count them but the people of Saskatchewan are certainly counting every dollar extra that will be taken out of their pockets to make up this difference, and they are counting every dollar that's taken out of their school divisions because their children are suffering because of it.

Mr. Chairman, Dorothy Fortier of the SSTA says, and I quote:

. . . the fact that school boards were warned about the cut doesn't make it any easier.

From the *Star-Phoenix*, February 18, 1994. She says that:

Boards can't keep providing the services they are now without an increase in education funding.

Either the programs are cut or education funding from the province is increased. Well it doesn't appear that the minister has the capabilities of increasing the funding, as she failed to convince the Minister of Finance that education did have an importance in this province.

Mr. Chairman, there is no way the board can escape program cuts. A representative from the Saskatoon trustees says, and I quote:

Previous cuts in funding resulted in two school closures, trimming 13 staff . . . and a cut in student transportation last year . . .

Material and equipment budgets have already been cut this year and the board won't be contributing as much to the capital . . . (projects).

And this is out of the *Star-Phoenix* of February 18 of 1994.

When the minister made the announcement last year that education funding was to be cut 4 per cent this year, a number of the boards went ahead and cut their staff, they cut their programs, they cut their material purchases, they cut their transportation in preparation of this. So some of that hit is happening. They've projected that in their budgets and it's taking effect this year. But there will be further increases because of the change to the formula which raised up the mill rates. And that is going to have a serious impact also.

How can the member opposite claim that this budget means no program cuts? How can the government say that this budget is a good news budget and that there will be no adverse effects?

Well, Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, I think there will be serious adverse effects in this year's . . . from

this year's budget to education in Saskatchewan. There will be a good number -- although I use the term "good" advisedly because it will mean school closures. There will be schools across this province that close as a direct result of your 4 per cent cut. Your 4 per cent cut. There will be teachers who are losing their positions because of your 4 per cent cut. And there will be students, Madam Minister, who can no longer carry forward with their program because that particular part of their program will be gone.

And, Madam Minister, how do you explain your rhetoric of the 1990s and the actions you're carrying forward today?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I want to thank the member for those serious . . . a series of questions.

**An Hon. Member:** -- And they were serious questions.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- And they were serious questions. And they certainly are questions that I would expect the member to raise.

Now let me say this to the member. That when our government came to office in October of 1991, it became clear to us after the Gass Commission that this province during the previous 11, 10, 9 years -- 9 years under the former Devine administration, had become somewhat of a financial basket case. And in fact at that time it appeared as though the deficit was going to be some \$1.3 billion for the fiscal year 1991-92. Our Finance minister and our cabinet at the time got busy and we were able to reduce that deficit to some \$800 million.

We then decided that if we were going to maintain the solvency of this province, that we had to come in with a fiscal plan over a period of time that would allow us to maintain ourselves as a solvent jurisdiction, that being the Government of Saskatchewan, the people of Saskatchewan.

Now if you look at the budget estimates, in this fiscal year our department, the Department of Education, Training and Employment, has a budget of \$888.7 million. If you look at what we are going to pay for servicing the public debt, and this can be found on page 8 of the Saskatchewan **Estimates** for 1994-95, we will pay \$842.5 million on servicing the public debt.

Now basically if you go through your **Estimates** book, you will see that the largest expenditure in this province is in the area of health care. The people of this province consider our health care system to be of primary importance to them. And in this fiscal year we will spend \$1.5 billion as a people on the collective health of our citizens.

The next important priority item for the people of our province is the area of education, training and employment, and we will spend \$888.5 million on education.

And then of course one would expect that it would be

some other government department that we would be spending the next budget item on. But no, in fact it isn't. Servicing the public debt, \$842.5 million. Now why would this be? It is because of the financial incompetence of the previous government.

Now our government made a decision that we were going to get to a balanced budget by 1996-97. And we set forward a plan. And if you look to other provinces across this country, and even if you look to the federal government, after we laid out our plan to get to a zero budget, no deficit, balanced budget, all other provinces have begun to do the same thing.

Because what we have learned in this exercise of spending a lot of money, money that we didn't have, is that we were basically mortgaging the future of our children and our youth. And that's why we see some of the difficulties in Canadian society, particularly when it comes to our ability as a people to deliver services and programs that are important to our people.

Now our government has decided that education and health care will remain priorities of the people of this province. And that's why you see the commitment that we've made to these two particular government departments.

We think it is important that we educate our young people for the future of this province. And you would think that, based on the member's comments, that our education system is going to hell in a hand basket. But I want to assure the member it's not.

Our department just released a provincial indicators' report that shows, among other things, that Saskatchewan students are doing very well in comparison to other parts of the country. In fact Saskatchewan students excel at English language. We excel. We have the most literate population in the country. Regina, Saskatoon were named the reading capitals of North America.

And why is that? Because of the emphasis that all governments in this province, including the previous Conservative government, the previous Liberal government, and CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) governments before that, have put on the education of our people. That is important to the people of this province and that is found through the people that they elect, education is important.

Now if you look at what other jurisdictions are doing, I just want to say this. And I've had the opportunity to meet with my provincial counterparts from various parts of the country, all the way from Liberal Nova Scotia, Liberal Newfoundland, Liberal New Brunswick, Liberal Quebec, NDP Ontario, Conservative Manitoba, NDP Saskatchewan, Conservative Alberta, and NDP British Columbia. And what struck me is what Premier Ralph Klein has done.

(1600)

And what has struck all of our educational partners in this province, because there's no question, we have had a minus two, a minus two and a minus four in the last three years -- but what has struck our educational partners is this: "Klein could take education lesson from Saskatchewan." This is a headline in the Saskatoon **Star-Phoenix**, February 21, 1994. Because what Ralph Klein, Conservative Premier of Alberta, has decided to do is take his scythe and making sweeping, sweeping cuts in education -- some 12.4 per cent cuts, over 10 per cent in this year alone to the K to 12 system.

We've decided not to do that. What Ralph Klein has decided to do with the stroke of a pen is reduce the number of school boards in his province from 142 to 60. We're decided not to do that. What we have said to school boards who are interested in amalgamation, that there are three to five pilot projects that will be available and we want to evaluate those pilot projects to see whether in fact it does mean better education for our students, and whether in fact it does mean a reduction in administrative costs.

As well, I should point out that parents of kindergarten children now in Alberta will pay some \$800 in order for their children to attend kindergarten. In this province, parents don't have to pay for their kids to go to kindergarten. Kindergarten is provided as a public service on behalf of all taxpayers in this province.

Now the member will say that the NDP government could have done it differently. I would say to you that having had the opportunity to visit with six, I guess you would call them bond dealers and bankers from New York city on the day of the budget, they said this to me -- that Saskatchewan will be the first province in this country to come out of the fiscal madness that we've undergone in the last 20 years in this country.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- That we will be the first province to have the economic turnaround which the people of this province so rightly deserve, because of the prudent fiscal approach that we have taken to our massive deficit.

And may I also say this to you, that as a result of meeting our budget targets for the last two budgets, we've come in on target as a result of our desire to meet our fiscal target for this year of \$189 million deficit. That we have been able to announce to all school boards in this province, all teachers in this province, all taxpayers in this province and, most of all, all students of this province, that barring some unforeseen circumstance like major Liberal federal offloading, that we will not have any further funding reductions.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Well, Madam Minister, I have to comment on your last statement about the federal offloading. I think Mr. Martin and Mr. Chrétien were taking lessons from the Minister of Finance here. Because if there is one government that is an expert at offloading in Canada, it has to be this government.

Because they've certainly been at it ever since they became elected -- offloading onto the municipalities and everyone else in the province.

Talk about offloading. When you increase natural gas prices nine and a half per cent, that's offloading, Madam Minister, because every school board has to pay that nine and a half per cent increase. And yet there is not corresponding increase . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I hear one of the members wants to get up and speak too. Perhaps she'll have her opportunity later. But that nine and a half per cent increase, Madam Minister, which took effect on January 1, there's no place in the budget that allows for that kind of an increase. That cost is simply going to be offloaded onto the property taxpayer.

The minister was talking about Alberta. Well, Madam Minister, even in your own indicators, little pamphlets you sent out, Saskatchewan takes second place in most occasions to Alberta. There are some areas though, Madam Minister, where Saskatchewan is on the left-hand side of these graphs, which in some cases is better and in some cases is worse.

But when you look at expenditures on education per capita, Alberta exceeds ours. When you look at expenditures on education cost per student, Alberta exceeds ours. Even with the cuts, Madam Minister, in Alberta -- of which I believe it's 13 per cent to education -- even with those cuts, Alberta will continue to be ahead of Saskatchewan because of the cuts here of 2, 2, and 4.

Now these numbers in your indicators are for 1989 and '90. This indicator program studied children in 1990-91 and a small portion of 1992. So the results that come forward in this program, Madam Minister, are before your cuts. It would be very interesting to see what impact those cuts will have on the numbers that are generated through the indicators' study. I would hope that you would continue this program. In fact, I would hope that you would expand it so that we have a comparison to what is going on in the rest of Canada.

Now it's fine to say that we study ourselves and we think we're doing great. But how do we compare to what everybody else is doing? And I hope, Madam Minister, that it is favourable because we do spend a significant amount of money even though you have been cutting the budgets.

There are a number of people around this province who would like to see education in this province move to standardized testing as an indicator of how we're doing in comparison to everyone else across Canada and around the world, how we're doing within our own communities. A good many parents have apprehension when their child graduates from grade 12 and didn't have to write a test. How does that measure up against the other student? How does it measure up against the school down the road? And how does it measure up with anyone else in the province, for that matter?

If you talk to people in universities, they seem to have

a great deal of concern that people coming out of our K to 12 system cannot function in university. They don't have the abilities to read and write. They don't put their English structures together properly, and yet you quoted that we are doing very well in English.

And yet the high school review committee, Madam Minister, is recommending that we cut two credits out of education in grades 10, 11, and 12. And I know that there's a good number of people across this province are very apprehensive about that happening. And perhaps some of those people are apprehensive because they're English teachers.

But I think there's a good many of them that are apprehensive because they see people coming to work at their locations, their businesses, that cannot properly read and write, prepare a report, write a memo, whatever it might be. Or the same things in university.

That's why universities have English entrance exams, to find out whether or not people are capable of performing in university at a level that they should, coming out of the K to 12 system.

So that's one of the reasons, Madam Minister, that people would like to see standardized testing implemented so that they can measure what is happening in the system that they are paying for. And in fact, a system that they are paying individually, directly more and more for.

SSTA now tells me that they're paying approximately 60 per cent of the funding for education. The ratios are 60 per cent on property taxes and 40 per cent paid through by the government. And as people pay more and more, Madam Minister, they want more and more say. And that's one of the reasons they're talking about standardized testing.

Also one of the other things that parents are talking about, Madam Minister, that they want to see happen within education in this system, is more direct parental involvement in the education system, more actual hands-on control.

And one of the things that the SSTA did bring out in their convention last fall was the -- it's already in place in a lot of cases in the rural areas but not in the urban areas -- is direct parental involvement with the individual schools and their communities. And I would hope that you would take a very serious look at that recommendation, Madam Minister, because it is important.

It allows parents within that individual school community to have an involvement -- and not just selling cookies at the door at some event, raising funds for the basketball team, or whatever it might be, but actual hands-on involvement in the hiring of teachers, in the curriculum within the school, and the whole, entire operation of the school.

In the rural areas we have the local school boards. But, Madam Minister, there are times when those local

school boards are simply there to provide the assistance and that kind of funding, such as selling cookies at the door, that the local school division needs. I think that all of the schools across this province, the individual schools, need to have the hands-on, direct control by the parents.

Now I wouldn't want to necessarily say that they should have all the funding, the budgetary powers, but they need some, Madam Minister. They need some involvement. So I would ask, what are your plans, dealing with that particular issue, and on the standardized testing?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Thank you very much. When you said earlier that you think it's important that we know how we're doing relative to the rest of the country, I agree with you. And at the ministers of Education meeting last Monday in Toronto, all of the ministers of Education in other provinces agreed that they would do a program similar to ours, where you would look at indicators, not just testing, pencil and paper testing, but they would look at drop-out rates, teacher/student ratios, administrative costs, gender equity issues, aboriginal drop-out rates -- all of those other indicators that assist us in determining how well our education system is doing.

On your assumption that funding will determine the quality of the system, I think I have to somewhat take issue with that. I think if you look at our province over the last number of decades, just because you didn't have all of the amenities of say, big city, Canada, did not mean that you weren't adequately educated and weren't prepared to go on and take the challenges of the world on.

So I don't know if I agree with your argument that dollars determine outcomes. I think what determines outcomes are several factors. One of the key factors is the commitment of the family to that child's education. Another factor is the quality of the teaching that takes place in the classroom. Another factor is the kind of value that communities and families put on education and the importance of education. It seems to me that despite spending and throwing money at a situation, does not necessarily mean that you get high quality outcomes. So I guess I would somewhat disagree with you on that point.

I think the other point that you raised in terms of the high school review, it is true that the High School Advisory Committee has recommended the reduction of English language credits from six to four. It is also true that they are recommending some standardized testing, particularly for grade 12 students. I think they're recommending 50 per cent of the mark would come from standardized tests and 50 per cent of the mark would come from the work that the teacher was able to do in terms of testing.

I've said to all educators in this province that we want to take some time to look at the implications of that report, and it is my expectation that we will respond to that report by the end of March or sometime in April because we want to respond to it quickly because as

you probably know a lot of work has been done on curriculum development for the lower and middle years but no work has been done in curriculum development for the high school years. And before that work can begin we have to know where we are going in terms of high school credits, and that's why we intend to respond to the high school review very quickly in order that we can get on with the job of doing curriculum renewal in the province.

The other point that you raised was the issue of direct parental involvement. The Saskatchewan School Trustees Association made that recommendation in the context of reducing the number of school divisions in the province to 35. We have said this, that we are not prepared to go forward with full-fledged, full-scale amalgamation of school divisions. What we are prepared to do is enter into three to five pilot projects for only those school divisions that are ready to amalgamate.

(1615)

Obviously there are many, many issues that have to be considered in terms of going to larger school divisions, and we want the pilots to, I guess allow us to take a look at what amalgamated school divisions might look like, because of the very issue that you raise.

We have communities complaining right now that they do not have input into decisions of their local school board, which is much smaller than what is being looked at in terms of some of the amalgamations that are being proposed.

And so the key question will be, how do we make sure that parents are in fact involved in the education of their children. And obviously that will be one of the criteria that will have to be met, in terms of going forward with amalgamations that are presently being proposed to the government.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Well, Madam Minister, I'm glad to hear you state that the value of education is not merely in the dollars that are spent there; that the community involvement and community life are part of education. Because when I look back at your comments in previous years while you were the opposition member responsible for Education, it seemed to be then that it was merely a matter of dollars that met the quality of education.

And I really have to wonder when you became a born-again fiscal conservative. It seems to have been a dramatic change in your rhetoric from October 20, 1991 to October 22, 1991 -- that now it's no longer the dollar bills that matter in education, but the value.

Well, Madam Minister, there are a large number of communities across this province that believe the value of education is indeed tied up with the community. And when, because of your budget cuts, those schools close in those communities, what impact does that have on the quality of education that those children are going to receive? Now they're

going to be riding the buses longer hours, and all the other types of things associated with that school closure. What impact does that have on their education, Madam Minister, when you take into account the value of the community?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- In terms of your question, when did I become a born-again fiscal conservative? I became a born-again fiscal conservative, to use your words, when this government was confronted with the very real possibility that we weren't going to be able to renegotiate any of the long-term debt that your relatives on the Conservative benches had racked up in the last 11 years. And as a social democrat I think it's important -- and I consider myself a social democrat -- that in order for a province to remain sovereign that you have control over your own fiscal resources and you do not want the bankers and the bond dealers calling the shots.

So it's much better to take control of the financial situation in this province in order to have freedom from New York and Zürich and London and Tokyo telling this province what to do. And so if that means in order to have a sovereign province that is not subjected to the outside whims of bond dealers and bankers, by making some cuts now in order to have that financial freedom, sir, then I guess I am a born-again fiscal conservative.

Had we known the kind of debt that you folks were busy racking up in the 11 years -- we knew it was bad but we did not know it was \$15 billion. We did not know that it was going to be difficult for you guys to float your bonds, and we inherited the mess. And so what we have done is gone very systematically through all of the budgets of all of the government departments in order to arrive at our targets. And because we've been able to do that, we're going to have a balanced budget in 1996-97. And as a result of what we have done, we can now renegotiate some of your bumper deals at lower interest rates.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, thank you for that revisionist history lesson, but I'm afraid it's falling on deaf ears throughout Saskatchewan today. But I'd like to raise with you a couple of matters that are of specific concern to my constituency, particularly the Dodsland School in Dodsland and the Eatonia School, the Eaton High School in Eatonia, Saskatchewan.

Now I'm not sure whether you're familiar with the situations, Madam Minister, or not.

**An Hon. Member:** -- Yes she is.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Good, I'm pleased to hear that she has acquainted herself with it.

The situation in Dodsland, as I understand it, Madam Minister . . . And I'm just simply looking for comment from the department about I guess asking on behalf of those people for direction from your department and your government as to what they see the future is for this particular school. We'll deal with the Dodsland

one first of all if you wouldn't mind, please.

As I understand the situation, Madam Minister, there is some concern that the Rosetown School Division is giving consideration to closing out the school at Dodsland. Now that's of particular concern to the people of Dodsland, particularly in light of the fact that they've had their hospital closed by your administration and now they're looking at their school potentially being closed as well. So they're obviously concerned about the future of their community, Madam Minister.

And as I understand the arguments, at least as they've been advanced to me, they're saying that their school unit, I believe it's something in the neighbourhood of 7 or \$800,000 they contribute to the Rosetown School Division, and in return, to operate their school, the Rosetown School Division provides them with something in the order . . . magnitude of \$320,000. So essentially the Rosetown School Division is a net benefactor from the RM of Winslow, which the school is within.

So, Madam Minister, I'm wondering what your position and your department's position is on things of this nature. It's of grave concern to the people of the Dodsland area, and I wonder if you'd comment, please.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Yes, I am familiar with the situation because I happen to be from that part of Saskatchewan originally. So I have had contact with people from Dodsland who have contacted me personally about their concerns.

As I understand the situation, it's not the closure of the school; they are talking about sending grade 7 and 8 students to Plenty, which is 8 miles from the Dodsland School.

As you know, decisions regarding school closures and administrative matters are within the purview of the local school division. Board members are democratically elected by ratepayers in the Rosetown School Division No. 43. Elected trustees have the authority and the responsibility to make decisions as they see in the best interests of their division as a whole.

I certainly can appreciate the concerns that are being expressed by some people in the Dodsland community, and it is of particular concern to several local residents. But I am not in a position, because of The Education Act and because of the position that local school boards have local autonomy, to interfere in that decision. And I'm sure you'll understand that.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Madam Minister. While I understand what you're saying and I believe you're correct when you say that initially the school is not scheduled to be closed, they fear that that will be the end result; ship a few grades off to Plenty and then after that it's a short, slippery slope to a closed school is what they fear, Madam Minister.

So, Madam Minister, I'm just wondering then, do you have the authority or do you not have the authority to overturn that if you wanted to?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- As I understand it, decisions of this nature are under the purview of the local school board. Local school board trustees are democratically elected by the local property taxpayers. As I understand it, I think elections are coming this fall so we can all once again elect our local school division trustees, and elected trustees have the authority and the responsibility to make decisions regarding how they determine or how they best think that they can administer their local school division.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Madam Minister. As you probably are also aware, they're considering a number of options relative to their position. They are considering pulling their school out of the division; they're considering maybe even . . . the thought has crossed their mind to look at operating a private school, things of that nature.

And I would like some comment from you with respect to that. Is there some kind of a procedure that they can go through or do they have to have ministerial approval to withdraw their school from that division? Or exactly how does that process work? I just want to I guess get it on record for the people of the Dodsland area so if they . . . when considering their options, they have the blessing of the minister.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I'm advised by my officials that they could make application for a boundary revision, and at that time we would consider their proposal.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- When you say a boundary revision, does that mean they could withdraw from the Rosetown School Division?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Yes, that's what I mean. They could apply for a revision to the boundary and at that time we would consider their application.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- So do they form their own division then or do they go shopping for a division to locate into? Or how exactly does that process work?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I'm told by my officials it would be a boundary revision with another school division.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- So they would have to have essentially the agreement of another school division prior to making application?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- That is my understanding.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Does it have to be an adjacent school division or can they opt into a school division elsewhere?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- It would have to be an adjacent school division.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Is this becoming a matter of more and

more concern in rural Saskatchewan? I know that the other school that we're going to deal with after this is finding pretty much the same circumstances. They're uncomfortable about their position within the school unit they presently are in.

And I'm just wondering whether we're starting to see this happening more and more. Is it an increasing problem particularly where schools have declining enrolments?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- As I am advised by the department, that rural school closures is not a recent phenomenon, that rural school closures have occurred over several years. Communities will do whatever they can in order to prevent their schools from being closed. For instance, in the last 10 years, I'm advised, from 1981 to 1991 we saw the number of rural schools drop from 578 to 512. So over the years closures have occurred, and obviously different communities attempt different strategies in order to save their school.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Well, Madam Minister, it does seem like it's an ongoing and a problem that seems to be getting perhaps worse -- I don't know. Or whether it's just what's happening in the Kindersley and Rosetown school divisions at the moment.

But it's something I guess that's of particular concern to those communities when you find that . . . particularly when they put in a net surplus into a school division and then are operating their school on a relatively low cost basis.

For example, in the Dodsland School, as I'm aware, they tell me that their academic standing within the division is excellent compared . . . relative to the rest of the division, they're high, very high. Their cost per student of operations in something in the neighbourhood of \$900 less per student than the other schools within the division.

They also find themselves in a circumstance where the division is looking at closing out or scaling down, shall we say, their school and they're also looking at the rest of the division and they see expenditures of, say, 40,000 I think I was quoted the figure of for underground sprinklers for a baseball field or a track field or something of that nature.

And I think, you know, under today's economic conditions, they look at that kind of an expenditure by the school division and they wonder whether that's a very good cost benefit type of an expenditure when the division is actively pursuing and looking at school reductions.

(1630)

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I know what you're saying, that increasingly the public is scrutinizing expenditures of not only governments but also local authorities such as municipal governments and school divisions as an example, and that we all have to be vigilant as elected people -- and I include provincial politicians as well

as local politicians -- about our decision-making process and the importance of including our respective constituencies in those decision-making processes.

But as I said earlier, as the Minister of Education, obviously I'm charged with the task of overseeing education training in the province of Saskatchewan, but The Education Act is very clear that I am not in a position to administer school divisions and nor do we want to go that route. That is a decision of the local property taxpayers.

They democratically elect their school division trustees. They charge those school division trustees with the administration of the school division and all of the schools within the school division. They have the authority and the responsibility.

And while I recognize that there are many local ratepayers who have concerns in the Dodsland area, my only suggestion, given my limited ability, is to continue to work with the local school division to determine whether there is some other alternative.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Well that's fine, and I accept your answer, Madam Minister. I guess, you know, if you have any more advice that you might be prepared to . . . Do you advise them, quite frankly, when they call you up and say to you, what are our options, do you provide them with the answers, essentially the answers being that you can look at moving to other divisions or that sort of nature, or do you just say it's a local school board decision and leave it at that?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- There's no question that I've met with many people from across the province on many issues -- local parents, local ratepayers -- who may have concerns, because I've tried to be as open and accessible as possible as the Minister of Education.

I'm not in a position of offering any kind of legal advice or those kinds of things, but certainly if questions are asked about what can we do, my message has been to go back to the local school division and see whether some things can be worked out.

We have regional directors in various parts of the province and we've had regional directors often working with directors of education, trustees, and parents to see whether there are compromises. So we've tended to take more of a mediation role than a role of trying to get in there and direct what are in essence a locally autonomous, elected people

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm sure the good folks of the Dodsland area will be interested in your comments.

Now if we could move to the other school that I had some questions asked of me and promised to ask of you, which were the school in Eatonia, Saskatchewan, the Eaton High School. And while it's not a specific concern of that school, it's more of a

general nature concern of that particular area within the division.

What is being contemplated at the moment by the Kindersley school division is reducing the number of wards or divisions within that school division. And what the people over in that south-west corner of the Kindersley school division feel is going to happen to them is essentially that they will be left with one less representative than they currently have. And Kindersley, town of Kindersley, will receive another representative -- move from two representatives up to three.

And while I have no particular position one way or another on this, Madam Minister, the fact of the matter is it obviously raises a great deal of concern with the people out there, naturally. They feel that their . . . It's basically the same type of issue. They see it as a situation where they are losing some of the levers of control that they had, and they also are concerned about the . . . that their tax dollars essentially not seeming to balance with what the . . . the representation they feel they should have.

So, Madam Minister, I'm wanting some comment on those types of situations as well with respect to the Eaton High School and then Dodsland . . . or pardon me, the Eatonia-Mantario area of the constituency.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Well I can understand why you would have no opinion on this matter. You happen to be the member of the legislature from Kindersley and Eatonia and so obviously you wouldn't want to take a position because you might offend someone.

What I can say is this, that I had the opportunity to read Ken Clarke's editorial in the Saskatoon **Star-Phoenix**. That's as deep as my knowledge goes on this matter. I also had an opportunity to briefly speak to the director of education for the Kindersley school division last night at a LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents) conference so I'm not fully familiar with this issue and neither are my officials.

So I'm not really in a position to say what the government's position is. But I think I would agree with you that when we see shifts in population, that these kinds of issues I think are going to emerge as issues for people living in rural Saskatchewan.

At this stage Eatonia, as I understand, does have a school. It's not as though they don't have a school. This is an issue outside of the city of Saskatoon where a group of parents don't have representation on the local school board and they obviously want representation. They don't have a school.

But I can assure you of this, that I will try and get the information for you. I don't know if we'll be able to get it today, but certainly I'll get the information for you so that you can pass the information on to your constituents in both Kindersley and Eatonia.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Madam Minister. What is the

procedure, shall we say, that they would be going through? I want some sort of guidance for those folks, I guess, if . . . Do you have to give ministerial direction when they are planning on reducing the number of divisions within the Rosetown school . . . or Kindersley school unit I mean, or ministerial approval, or how exactly does that process work? Or does the board simply have the authority to reduce the number of divisions?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I'm not in a position to answer your question. We don't have the official here that can help me with that question. But as I said, I will get that information for you.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Yes, thank you, Madam Minister. I appreciate that.

You'll be interested to know as well that the good folks of the Eatonia and Mantario area are planning on having a public meeting on Thursday, this coming Thursday, in Eatonia I believe it is, at the school -- probably the school gymnasium, I would guess -- to raise the awareness of it, and also to I think put together a brief or something to present to the Kindersley school unit public meeting that they are planning on hosting, which is the following Monday. I believe that would be March 14.

So the time is sort of of essence here. I think people in that area are looking for some direction, Madam Minister, and are wanting to know what their options are. I think the primary concern is, can this be done without ministerial approval or can it be done . . . is it a board decision? And I appreciate you taking the time to look into that and getting back to us as soon as possible on that. And the people out there are obviously concerned about it and want some kind of direction as soon as possible.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- I will take an undertaking that we will get this information for you tonight. The official who is knowledgeable in this area is up at the LEADS convention in Saskatoon, but we'll get that information for you.

**Mr. Boyd:** -- Thank you, Madam Minister. Just to wrap up and turn it over back to my colleague, I think these are certainly serious matters of concern that are happening in rural Saskatchewan. And you're indeed correct when you say it's an ongoing process that's happened over 30, 40 years. I remember rural schools closing all over the place, little one-room schoolhouse types of things. But I think we're getting into something of more significance perhaps than then.

While they were . . . you know, the old country school type of thing, now we're talking about in a lot of cases the lifeblood of small communities. If they see their school close as well as their hospital, that some of these communities are seeing, witnessing, and actually happening in places like Dodsland, it becomes an issue . . . tremendously emotional and an issue that the residents of that community feel is, you know, the final death knell within their community.

I think your department should be really thinking about some kind of strategy of how you're going to deal with these kinds of things in the upcoming years, because I anticipate when you start looking at school board amalgamations, it will make . . . it will exacerbate the problem even more than we have today, Madam Minister. So I think perhaps you should be looking at some kind of direction to communities and to school units when they are doing these kinds of things, because it creates a great deal of problems in particularly smaller communities.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Well I want to thank the member for the advice. As I said earlier to your colleague, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, at their annual convention, passed a number of recommendations about amalgamation of school divisions in the province. And they were recommending that we reduce the numbers to 35.

I think that as a result of a number of questions that are raised by massive restructuring of education in this province, K to 12, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, our government chose to proceed cautiously and deliberately. We are going to look at three to five pilot projects because there are school divisions in various parts of rural Saskatchewan that are interested in coming together in an amalgamation process. They believe that it will lead to a better quality of education for their students, and they also believe that with the savings they can redirect that money into the classroom.

We have said that we will agree to three to five amalgamations that are voluntary, that go through a public consultation process. But we want to evaluate those amalgamations to determine whether some of the things that you're talking about in fact could possibly come true.

So I know that there are major challenges for people living in rural Saskatchewan. The demographics are changing; there's no question. If you look at the numbers in the annual report, we have declining enrolment in rural Saskatchewan. It becomes a real challenge. How do you deliver a broadly based education system to decreasing numbers of people?

We are doing some more work in the whole area of distance education because we do have the problem of distance and geography in this province. We do have the problem of small numbers of people in certain parts of the province. But I can say this, that our government is committed to a public education system for all of our citizens, regardless of where they live in this province, because education is important.

And I agree with you that there are some challenges for people in rural Saskatchewan and for some of the locally elected trustees in rural Saskatchewan. But I think that with distance education and some other possibilities, we will ensure that students residing in rural Saskatchewan have access to the kind of education that is of high quality and will allow them to go anywhere in the world and be successful.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I think in the discussions of amalgamations I think we should be very clear that any amalgamations be voluntary.

And I'm not necessarily sure I agree with my colleague when he says amalgamations will exacerbate the problems of school closures. In my own mind, I think if a school is going to close, it's going to close regardless of whether or not you're in a larger or a smaller school division; that the amalgamation itself will not close the school.

Madam Minister, you talked earlier about the fiscal responsibility, or irresponsibility as the case may be, during the previous administration -- that you didn't know what the circumstances were. Your own Gass Commission pointed out that the books were always open, that the figures were there to be looked at if you wanted to see them. In fact, the Premier in the election television debate stated that the debt was greater than \$14 billion.

**An Hon. Member:** -- So he knew.

(1645)

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- So he knew. Now whether he told you or not, I don't know. But he knew that the debt was \$14 billion plus.

So when you stood up in 1990 and 1991 saying that you needed to spend more money on education, if there was fiscal irresponsibility taking place in spending those dollars, then, Madam Minister, you were a direct part of it. It may not have been your name on the cheque that went out to the school boards, but you were part of the group, Madam Minister, that was pushing the provincial government of the day to spend more and more and more.

It was never . . . I haven't found a single quote, Madam Minister, from you that said, cut back more. Not one. Lots that say spend, spend, spend, but none that say, hold back, you're spending too much. Not one.

So, Madam Minister, when you talk about fiscal responsibility or fiscal irresponsibility you, along with everyone else in this province, have to bear some of the blame. Perhaps a large portion of it has to be put on the government of that day for not having said no.

But everyone else in the province also has to bear some of the responsibility. Myself too; I never said don't spend any more on education, so I have to bear some of the responsibility also -- as we all do. But you, Madam Minister, stood up in the House in those days and said spend more, more, more.

I go back to the question I asked you that precipitated this. Madam Minister, in light of what my colleague brought up about the school closures, and I asked you then, how the closures of those schools will impact on the quality of education to those students whose schools, whose community school has closed.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** -- Right. Just to clarify a point, I would say this, that I don't think we can say that education spending in this province led to the horrendous deficit that was built up over the nine years of your administration. What we can say is that there were some very bad deals that were made -- Supercart, GigaText, just to name a few -- some bad privatizations that were made; some problems with the heavy oil upgrader here in Regina.

I think swimming pools . . . people could build swimming pools in garages and put in saunas and carpets. And the home program, I think that might have added to it. I think maybe taking off the gas tax may have added to it because it wasn't a tax that we could take off because we really couldn't afford it.

I don't think spending money on education, in my view, contributed to the massive \$15 billion deficit, because if you look at education funding over your years in office it was small -- very small -- relative to other areas of government. You spent big bucks in agriculture, big bucks in economic development, quite significant dollars in health care, but a less significant amount in the whole area of education. And I think if you look at my remarks of the time, they will tell you that I was of the view that you could spend lots of money over here, but you couldn't spend money on education.

Now the times have changed. We're cutting, every government . . . every department of government and we've had cuts all across the board, member. It's not as if there was spending going on, and we're spending lots of money in Agriculture and lots of money in Economic Development and no money in Education. We are cutting everywhere, and we have had to make reductions everywhere because of the horrific deficit that was run up under your tenure.

Now in terms of school closures you asked the question, you know, what does this mean to the community. And there's no question. I come from a community where the school closed and it's significant . . . I will say it significantly changed the community.

But every summer there's a home-coming in that community. People still say they're from Springwater, Saskatchewan. They still get together. There's still people that enjoy the community hall. There's still the ladies' aid in that community.

Community isn't necessarily, sir, an institution. Community, from my point of view, is the people who live there and work there and have their families there.

And so I guess I will say to you that community in this province is much more, from my point of view, than a local government institution -- community is the people of this province.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** -- Well, Madam Minister, it's indeed interesting that you said you didn't call for more spending in those other areas. You mention a

number of different things, such as GigaText, \$5 million; that's only six 0's on GigaText and yet that was the reason for the huge deficit. And it is huge; there's no doubt about it, a huge debt.

Your members, when in opposition, you talked about the large spending in agriculture. Your members over here were calling for more and more spending in agriculture; that the government of the day was not doing enough. And fact is your Premier went to Rosetown, went to the rally there and said that elect me and I'll get more money for you. The member from Rosetown was holding his hand probably, helping him out that day, explaining to him about agriculture.

You talked about the spending on swimming pools and saunas in homes. Yes, there was some of that, Madam Minister. There was also a large number of people who fixed up their homes, put in new windows and all the other things that happen in a home; it wasn't just solely swimming pools. The fact is, I would suggest, that on a \$1,500 grant, you're not going to get a very big swimming pool. You might be able to put in a decent-sized tub.

Your program in 1986 election, 7-7-7 -- \$7,000 grant, 7 per cent loans on a \$70,000 mortgage, Madam Minister, and that wouldn't have cost the province any money? No, Madam Minister, everyone in that time period was looking to spend money. It wasn't just the government of the day and it wasn't just the opposition of the day calling for more; it was society as a whole, Madam Minister, that wanted more spent on them because they never believed that it would end.

Madam Minister, yes, the gas tax did come off and it cost the province a large amount of money. But it wasn't any different than the promise to remove the PST (provincial sales tax) in 1991 which also cost the province a large amount of money. The projections on that one, Madam Minister, was that the province would collect something like 200 to \$250 million. And that was gone.

Yes, Madam Minister, political parties sometimes make stupid promises to get elected. The gas tax cost us a lot of money and in retrospect, from what I can remember of the 1982 election, not having run in it, was that the elimination of the gas tax was probably not necessary as a political promise. But it was made and it was kept, just as in 1991 the promise was made to eliminate the PST. The PST, the provincial sales tax, is still there, but the harmonization of that tax is gone. The benefits that harmonization would have provided to business and to farmers is gone. But the provincial sales tax is now . . . The education and health tax is now 9 per cent.

And there are a good number of people across this province, Madam Minister, when they look at the cut-backs that they're receiving in education, wonder why, wonder why their education and health taxes have gone up by, what is it, 20, 25 per cent? Gone up by 20 to 25 per cent since 1991 and yet the hospital has closed in their community, the school is closing in

their community, programs are being cut, teachers are being eliminated, the property tax is up, just as their education tax is, and yet they are not receiving any benefit for it, or at least they're not receiving the benefit they believe they should be receiving for that increase in their E&H (education and health) tax -- the provincial sales tax

\_ Madam Minister.

It's a problem in rural Saskatchewan and it's a problem in urban Saskatchewan, Madam Minister, when the school closes. It doesn't matter if the school is in Dodsland, if it's in Glen Ewen, or if it's in downtown Regina, the people in that community are hurt by it. Their children have to travel where they didn't before.

A lady came up to me a couple of years ago very upset because her child now had to travel down the road to the next community, and this was a kindergarten child. Parents have contacted me in Regina with the very same concerns, Madam Minister, because their child can no longer attend the school close to their home because that school has been closed by the funding cuts that your government has put in place: 2 per cent on K to 12 in 1992; 2 per cent in 1993; and 4 per cent in 1994. And that 4 per cent cut, Madam Minister, in the city of Regina meant, I believe it's \$2.4 million; \$2.4 million that you cut out of the funding for Regina schools for the public system.

And there's a good number of other communities across this province that have taken a substantial cut, Madam Minister, while the taxes in their areas have gone up. Property mill rates are projected to go up by 3 mills or better on average across this province. For a good number of communities that's going to mean a lot more than that, Madam Minister, and it's your government and you who are responsible for that.

I don't have the quote with me, Madam Minister, but I believe you asked the question during the previous administration to the minister of Education, why he couldn't go into cabinet and get more money for education. You suggested in that, that somehow he was incompetent because he could not get more money for education from cabinet.

Well, Madam Minister, I don't want to suggest that of you because I think you are trying, but for some reason the Minister of Finance will not provide that. And it's not just the K to 12 system. You look at the university out here. They're being cut. Their tuition fees were up 13 per cent last year. How much more are they going to have to go up? How many students are not going to be able to attend school because of those tuition fee increases? In a time of recession when people cannot find jobs, one of the things that they look to is to further their education to give themselves a better opportunity in the future.

And these kind of increases, Madam Minister, deny them that opportunity. They can no longer afford to take advantage of what the university can provide them if they can get in. Because one of the things that's happened with these tuition fee cut-backs . . . not the tuition fee cut-backs, the cut-backs to operating grants

to the universities, means that there is quotas in place in certain departments; that you have to have a certain grade level to be able to get into a certain faculty.

Now, Madam Minister, I don't believe that's what education in Saskatchewan is meant to do -- to deny people access. We have a universal program of taxation for education, and we had a program that if you met the minimum requirements for university you were allowed to enter into your faculty. And that's no longer the case, Madam Minister, because you have cut funding.

Madam Minister, across the board these cuts are hurting. We have the teachers that are losing their positions, Madam Minister. And it's not just one or two or three teachers, but it's by the hundreds, Madam Minister.

There are going to be again a significant number of teachers who will no longer be in the system. And it's not necessarily, Madam Minister, those that some of the communities would like to see eliminated as teachers -- because there are a few teachers that seem to aggravate parents in the community -- but it's the teachers who are not in a position to protect themselves. They're the young teacher who's just come into the system; it's the teacher who knows the newest methods, who has just come through the education system, and understands the new curriculum, the new direction that education is taking -- but that is the teacher who is being removed from the system.

Now some of the teachers who have been there for a good many years understand the system also very well. But when you eliminate the new person in the system, you save a very small amount of money. It's not in comparison . . .

**The Chair:** -- Order, order. Members will be able to continue after supper. It now being 5 o'clock, the Committee of Finance stands recessed until 7 o'clock p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.