

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of 18 grade 7 students. They're from St. Augustine School in Regina. They're accompanied here today by their teacher, Cathy Jelinski.

I had a brief visit with them, and I look forward to next year so that they can have a longer stay in the legislature. I would ask all members to please join me in extending them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Tchorzewski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House an 8-person working group from Jilin province who are here today in your gallery. They are led by Guo Shaokun, who is the deputy minister of foreign affairs office, Jilin province, People's Republic of China. And I'd like him to stand, and I would like also others to stand when I have finished my other comments.

The Jilin working group arrived on Sunday, Mr. Speaker, and they will be visiting various private sectors throughout the province. As well, they will be meeting with government officials to discuss the Fifth Plan of Action to be signed in Jilin this June.

I have the honour of having dinner with this group from the People's Republic of China tonight, and I'm looking forward to that. And I'd like members of the House to join with me in extending a warm welcome to our friends from Jilin province in the People's Republic of China.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to join with the Deputy Premier in welcoming the group from Jilin to Saskatchewan.

About 18 months ago I had the opportunity to be in Jilin in Ch'ang-ch'eng, and visited many beautiful spots in that part of the world. And I want to say to the visiting delegation, I hope that our province — and I'm sure they will — treat you with the same amount of respect and appreciate your company as much as I appreciated the hospitality given to me while I was in Jilin visiting with you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I have the distinct honour today to introduce through you and to all members of the Legislative Assembly two representatives of the well-respected international

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or the OECD.

I'm proud to indicate Jennifer Evans and Josette Combes have come to Saskatchewan from their home base in Paris, France, to study two Saskatchewan projects which they have deemed exemplary projects for dealing with children and youth at risk. They will visit Princess Alexander School in Saskatoon and the West Flats Community in Prince Albert.

I would ask all members to help me welcome these international guests to our Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Child Care Week

Mr. Knezacek: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 22-27 has been proclaimed as Child Care Week in Canada. This week affords child care groups the opportunity to promote awareness and the importance of providing quality services.

We are also pleased to acknowledge the dedicated work of child care providers. Their work is challenging and so vital to our children's future. Quality child care is a service that must be planned and delivered by skilled people who understand and are able to respond appropriately to children.

Quality child care ensures that children are able to develop and grow in an environment that is healthy and safe. Even in these difficult times, this province is committed to continuing its support to child care. For the third year in a row we are providing more child care services for teenage parents attending school. We provided more funding for emergency child care and for preschool children at risk.

We are facilitating an aboriginal child care network to enhance the delivery of aboriginal child care services. Through forums, workshops, information sharing, and giving peer group support, aboriginal child care providers will have greater access to culturally appropriate programs and services. We are continuing to work with the provincial association and community groups to improve child care services in Saskatchewan.

Nurturing and caring for children as we guide them through their developmental stages is a valuable investment in our future. We thank the many care-givers who are contributing to our province's children. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ceylon Students Writing in Golden Taffy Book

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago the member from Moose Jaw Palliser mentioned that Saskatchewan, with 4 per cent of Saskatchewan's

population, has produced a disproportionate number of significant Canadian authors. On a slightly smaller scale, a similar large literacy contribution has been made by a small school in my constituency.

Recently six students from Ceylon School had their writings selected for publication in *The Golden Taffy Book*. The *Golden Taffy Book* is published by the Saskatchewan Teachers of English Language Arts. There were 1,119 submissions by Saskatchewan students from kindergarten to grade 12, entries in poetry, short story, essay, and illustration. Only 200 were selected for publication — six from Ceylon School, a school of 94 students.

Impressive figures, but not when one considers the creative ability of people in the constituency of Bengough-Milestone and not when one considers the dedicated ability of teachers who inspire our students to exercise their imagination through the arts.

I congratulate the teachers and principal of Ceylon School and the talented students: Trisha Sorenson, Landon Lillejord, Ashley Bousfield, Carla Rowland, Kaela MacCutcheon, and Susan Ayotte for their accomplishment and for the honour they have brought Ceylon School.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

OECD Visit to Saskatchewan

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we heard a few minutes ago, Saskatchewan is honoured to have two guests this week representing the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Jennifer Evans and Josette Combes are international experts on educational services for children and are here as part of a study being conducted by the OECD, an international study on service integration for children and youth at risk. This study is phased over a three-year period and covers the preschool, school-age, and transition-to-work periods.

OECD experts like our guests will be visiting sites in Europe, the Pacific region, and North America. They will study innovative approaches to service integration, synthesize their observations, and submit a final report to the member countries. In simple terms, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this visit and this study is to find more and better ways to keep our kids in school and ease the transition from school to work.

Saskatchewan is honoured to have two of the Canadian sites selected for study and for the opportunity to discuss our provincial policies with the OECD. We welcome the two members. We thank them for the opportunity to display our two innovative projects in education, and we look forward not just to the final report but to the beneficial consequences of this international study.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join others in welcoming our guests from the OECD who are here to visit the two sites in Saskatchewan.

Tomorrow they will visit Princess Alexandra School in Saskatoon. This school, Mr. Speaker, is an example of what can be done in core areas when school officials, parents, community representatives, and government agencies work together.

Princess Alexandra is a school challenged by many characteristics associated with the urban core. Because of that, it is part of the community schools program. There are several activities designed for the special circumstances of Princess Alexandra and schools like it. Activities that increase community involvement, that enhance the learning of children and adults, that foster racial and cultural understanding, that generally make the school a centre of community activity for the whole family as well as a school for the students.

The program, Mr. Speaker, is a working example of our commitment to improving the lives of children at risk by breaking down the barriers to education. We are all pleased at the international attention our programs are receiving and hope they contribute to Saskatchewan's reputation as a leader in social programs.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

20th Anniversary of School of First Nations Social Work

Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College's school of first nations social work is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. It began in 1974 with 18 students, and since then it has produced 480 certificate and degree graduates. It offers a unique opportunity for first nations peoples. It's guided by the spiritual strength and wisdom of elders. A nurturing cultural component is mixed with academic requirements to enable the students to receive an emotional and spiritual development as well as an academic education.

The program also boasts a very high rate of employment for its students upon graduation. In addition to honouring the recent graduates, celebrations in Saskatoon this week will also honour the founding elders' contributions by returning alumni, special guests, and many academic and political communities who have made contributions to the program.

The graduation ceremonies will be held for the most recent class this week in Saskatoon. And I think, Mr. Speaker, we should congratulate the SIFC (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) and the school of first nations social work, and recognize the

important and valuable contribution that it's making.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Aboriginal Self-government

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our caucus has been very pleased with the response we have received during the past session to our “Mr. Premier I want to know . . .” initiative. The level of response we have received has been a tremendous indicator of the spirit of democracy and public involvement in this province.

This week we have a special example of how people appreciate this opportunity. We have a series of questions submitted to us from a number of residents of the northern community of Green Lake who have gotten together to have their concerns heard.

Today we would like to present this entire package of questions from the constituents of Green Lake. And the question I have, Mr. Speaker, this question comes from a Mr. Kelvin Roy, and he asks: can the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Affairs Secretariat define Metis self-government in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well the Metis are an aboriginal people, so recognized in section 35 of the constitution. All jurisdictions in Canada, Mr. Speaker — federal, provincial and territorial — have recognized the inherent right of aboriginal people to govern themselves; so that the answer to the member's question is, so far as Metis are concerned in Saskatchewan, they have the inherent right to govern themselves.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question comes from Edward Kennedy, Sr. Does the current government see governance of Metis and Indian peoples throughout the non-profit Act as self government for Metis and aboriginal people? Further, does this also include co-management boards which have no real authoritative process?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I think that up until now both the Indian and Metis in Saskatchewan have used the non-profit provisions of the Saskatchewan legislation in order to structure themselves. This method of structuring has shortcomings which are not satisfactory. From a number of perspectives, and in the long run, I believe self-government arrangements are going to have to be based on something other than that piece of legislation. In fact I'm certain that that is the case.

So far as co-management is concerned, there is a great deal of interest in co-management from a number of sources. The levels of government, provincial and

federal, are quite pleased with the way in which the process has worked so far. Aboriginal groups are also participating in it and are pleased.

A number of problems have arisen, but the federal government has become quite enthused about it and in fact the federal minister, Ron Irwin, has targeted, or has identified Saskatchewan as the lead province in the development of co-management arrangements, which are seen as an essential part of the move towards self-government.

Funding for Metis

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my “Mr. Premier I want to know . . .” question is directed towards the Premier's designate. It comes from Roderick Bishop of Green Lake.

On April 29, 1994 the minister responsible for Indian and Metis Affairs alluded in the *Star-Phoenix* that if MSS (Metis Society of Saskatchewan) president, Gerald Morin, relinquished control of the organization, the organization would receive funding.

Could the minister confirm to the Metis people that he did or did not issue an ultimatum to the Metis people, in that if the organization gets rid of its leaders, they may receive funding?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I have never suggested any such thing, Mr. Speaker — no such thing at all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Green Lake Forestry Agreement

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question for the Premier also comes from Rod Bishop. The question is — our community would like you to answer in the legislature — Green Lake is entitled to 30,000 cubic metres of soft wood volume allocated to the Green Lake saw mill in the 1988 FMLA (Forest Management Licence Agreement) agreement with NorSask wood products limited. Why has it taken the past three years to negotiate an agreement which has not yet been signed with Green Lake?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, this government, practically since the day we took office, has been working with various people in the Green Lake community and other people who are interested in the forest, trying to work out an agreement. Several times we have come to what we thought was an agreement, only to have it slip away from us.

Those efforts continue. As late as last week efforts were being made in order to resolve these questions. So the answer to my old pal, Rod Bishop, is that we continue to try to work something out. And if he will approach those discussions in the same spirit, we'll be able to arrive at an agreement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Debt Bank Account

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today comes from Raymond Moskowec of Green Lake. And his question is: why is it that the government is not able to establish a debt account in a financial institution where people could pay directly towards reducing the provincial debt? This way Saskatchewan people could know where the money is going and could receive a tax receipt or an exemption.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for that question. I will discuss with the member opposite the details of what's being proposed there.

But what I would say in response to the issue raised, is that's the purpose of Saskatchewan savings bonds. It allows people to invest in their province. It ensures that the money that is paid in interest from the Saskatchewan savings bonds remains in the province so that the level of economic activity is promoted within Saskatchewan, rather than elsewhere.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Labour Legislation

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Minister of Labour. On Friday, Minister, the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce released the results of its survey about the effects of your labour legislation. The chamber says that these Bills could put as many as 6,000 people out of work in Saskatoon alone.

Now 6,000 people thrown out of work, Mr. Minister, in a city where over 10 per cent of the population are already going to the food banks. That's 6,000 more families that will either have to move out of our province, Mr. Minister, or turn to unemployment insurance or to welfare, just so that you can complete a political agenda.

Mr. Minister, how much evidence do you need that this legislation is going to devastate our economy and hurt thousands of Saskatchewan people? Or is it simply that you just don't care how many people you hurt?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I have received nothing more than simply the press release on this.

Let me say with respect to many of these so-called surveys, they are questions put to people along the following lines: if your worst fears are realized what will be its effect? Well if their worst fears are realized, it'll be pretty bad.

All I say to the members of the Saskatoon business community is, your worst fears aren't going to be realized. This legislation will operate in a manner which will be part of an economic revival which is already underway.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister continues to say there's, in effect, no evidence that this legislation will cost jobs. Well, Mr. Minister, even someone as ideologically blinded as yourself has to see the evidence that is coming forward on a daily basis.

Just look at Saturday's *Star-Phoenix*, Mr. Minister. One headline reads, "Labour laws risk 6,000 jobs in city . . ." Another says, "Legislation has . . . firm ready to relocate."

How can you not see what you are doing to the working men and people of our province, Minister? Will you at least acknowledge that your labour legislation will cost jobs so that we can get on with the work of making the necessary changes to ensure that not even one job is in fact lost in the end?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I would point out to the member from Maple Creek, in case it escaped his attention when he read the press release, this was a survey done at the beginning of this process, before the amendments were introduced, actually, also . . . before the House amendments were introduced. Also I think before the effect of the legislation was very well understood.

I would say again to the member opposite, this is the comment which is made about every significant reform of labour legislation, from the repeal of the child labour laws to the amendment in The Trade Union Act in 1972. The comment is: jobs will be lost, this will devastate the economy. Well none of that happened. It didn't happen with the repeal of the child labour laws in the last century; it didn't happen with the changes in The Trade Union Act in the early '70s.

I'm not suggesting these people aren't genuinely concerned; I think they are. They are genuinely concerned in part because members opposite are doing their level best to ensure that their worst fears are what they assume to be the case.

And I simply say to members opposite, when the legislation is in effect it will be about as controversial next year as Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety were this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, tonight in Saskatoon business people will be rallying to voice their concerns about your anti-business, anti-employment legislation; legislation that could cost up to 6,000 jobs in the city of Saskatoon alone. And what they want to know, very simply, Minister: are you going to listen? Are you going to listen to their concerns about the businesses that will be forced to lay off workers? Are you going to listen to their concerns about the people you are putting out of work and the families that you're going to be hurting?

Mr. Minister, will you listen? Several members of the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus will be attending tonight's rally, and they're going to listen to the concerns of the people there. And very simply, Mr. Minister, will you do the same? Will you come along; will you be there to listen?

And then after you've listened, will you in fact do something positive and act on what you've heard from the people themselves and do what they want in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — With respect to the event this evening, let me say it was made clear that we were . . . that I personally was prepared to attend the meeting and prepared to discuss the legislation. That invitation was not acted upon. I assume, in fairness to the organizers of the event, they did not want to turn it into a political discussion, which I can see the members opposite are anxious to.

So my response to whether or not I will be there — we made known our willingness to attend to answer questions and that invitation was not acted upon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Creation of Crown Corporation for Casino Revenue

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the minister responsible for the Crown Investments Corporation. Mr. Minister, the New Democrat legacy is one of job creation through the expansion of the bureaucracy. On Thursday, the minister of Gaming dreamt up a new Crown corporation and we can only assume that this was yet another afterthought on his part, since there is no legislation on the agenda to deal with that this session up to this point, and no mention of it in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Minister, over what period of time have the discussions of forming a new Crown corporation to operate casino gaming taken place, and is the creation of a new bureaucracy the only option that your government has considered?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to respond to the question. There are many things that happen over the course of the legislature that are not outlined in detail in the throne speech. The throne speech is, historically, an overview of government's direction in a session of the legislature. So to answer the member from Greystone's question, let me say that accountability with respect to casino revenues is one of the prime and the most important aspects, we believe, of the development of the casinos.

This Crown corporation, as the member will find out when we get into the discussion and the debate on the Bill that will establish this corporation, she will have ample opportunity to see that in fact we have thought through very well the revenue sharing, and that we

have thought through the way the funds will be accounted for. And certainly we are hopeful that the member from Greystone will be in full support of good accounting practices and proper procedures with respect to this revenue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, you have indicated that you have a tentative partnership, but some of the partners that you talk about aren't quite sure of the details as of yet. Given that you have now provided the latest twist to this in the creation of a new Crown corporation, will you in fact put a hold on this whole expansion of casinos until you have provided a detailed plan complete with job creation prospects, an objective economic impact study and a budget for your Crown corporation bureaucracy?

I mean none of these things have been put forward, Mr. Minister, and everyone seems to be quite confused by what it is you're doing in the province of Saskatchewan. Would you be willing to put that forward, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say to the member from Greystone that it is no secret that she is confused. She has been confused day after day, and you can tell quite clearly by the line of questioning that she embarks upon on a daily basis.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, what is not confusing is government's policy. And government's policy is that with the expansion of the casinos in Saskatoon and Regina we will ensure, through the Liquor and Gaming Authority, that there is very tight regulation and licensing control through that body. We will ensure through the new corporation that there will be a proper administration and a proper accounting of the funds that come from these casinos.

So, Mr. Speaker, to answer in brief the member from Greystone, we don't expect her to believe or even bother with the economic analyses that are done with respect to casinos and their operations because she's not interested in that. But what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that we will have a tightly regulated and a well-organized operation with respect to the development of the casinos, both in Regina and in Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, at exactly the same news conference where you gave birth to a new Crown corporation, you also announced \$1.75 million signing bonus to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to, and I quote: cover the costs of developing the partnership. End of quote.

It appears that your new Crown corporation is spending money before it's even being created. Can you explain precisely what the \$1.75 million is supposed to cover, and whether the exhibition association partners as well will receive a similar

signing bonus to cover their costs associated with developing their side of the partnership?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, let me take the member from Greystone back to the policy and the policy announcement that was announced in February of this year. We indicated to the exhibition associations that because they may not be directly involved in the operations of the casinos, that we would ensure that their revenue would be maintained whole. And that was a commitment that we gave to them then; it's a commitment that I give to them now. They will be in a position to tender through the RFP (request for proposal) process on the management of the new casinos or the construction, or both if they so desire. And that is an option that's open to them as well. But the bottom line is that we did commit to them to maintain their revenues whole and that hasn't changed.

Mr. Speaker, let me say to the member opposite, if she has forgotten the policy and the development of this policy, I can one more time send her a copy of one that's been sent to her before. But if her memory doesn't serve her correctly, I'd be more than willing to reacquaint her with the policy that was outlined quite clearly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I think what you should be doing is being in contact with the various exhibition associations around the province because very few of them, sir, have heard from you. They have no idea what role they play as far as a partner with you and the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations). And they would like to know why it is there is being given particular monies, for whatever kind of reason they don't understand, up to the point of \$1.75 million of the taxpayers of Saskatchewan's money. And they do not know, sir, what it is, first of all, you are using that for with FSIN, nor do they know the role that they are playing in this partnership.

So I think it only stands to reason that what you should be doing is putting forward your policy and exactly the role that all the partners are going to be playing, and why it is it appears one partner is being given remuneration for being in your partnership while others are not.

Will you today table what it is the exhibition associations are going to get from you? Because most of them have not heard one word from you and they don't know what's going on.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say to the member from Greystone that we have met with the exhibition associations in Regina, in Saskatoon, in Swift Current, in Prince Albert, North Battleford, Yorkton, and other areas throughout this province over the past months.

We have been very clear in terms of what we believe their role to be, and that would be that they have the

ability to tender on management and/or construction of the casinos in Regina, as other proponents may. We have indicated to them quite clearly that we would be maintaining for them and assisting them to maintain their existing revenue base. And that is quite clear. We have told them that we would use a five-year average in terms of determining just how much revenue they generate from their existing casino operations.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, if the member from Greystone is still confused, I'd be more than willing to sit down and explain to her in more detail exactly how the conversations have gone. I can send yet another copy across in terms of the consultations we've had with exhibitions, with aboriginal groups, with Metis groups. I can send all of that across.

But I would just wish, Mr. Speaker, she would take the time to sit down and read the information that we've already sent to her.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Human Rights Commission Newsletter

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Speaker, recently all MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) received a little brochure entitled "SaskRights", spring edition of the "SaskRights" brochure — a newspaper put out by the Human Rights Commission using taxpayers' money.

And as I was glancing through it, Mr. Speaker, I noticed this newspaper went to great lengths to promote lesbianism. Let me give you a couple of quotes:

Try casting doubts in people's minds about your own sexual orientation every once in a while. Make it clear . . . it would be no insult to mistake you for a lesbian.

Or:

Try to make sure . . . there are lesbians and gay men in your children's lives.

Mr. Minister, you've indicated in this House on many occasions you do not support these type of promotions. I was wondering if you today support the various recommendations given in this article and whether you believe taxpayers' money should be used to promote homosexuality.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well I don't think taxpayers' money should be used for any purpose related to sexuality. I mean that's a matter of an individual's own choice, own preferences, and not something I think should be promoted by anybody.

I'm not familiar with the publication that the member refers to. And perhaps, Mr. Speaker, he'll send it across to me that I can have a look at it.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and to the minister, yes, I'd be more than happy to send this edition to you.

Mr. Minister, the Human Rights Commission is there to enforce government policy, in particular the Human Rights Code. However in this article they are also taking on the role of a taxpayer-funded lobbyist trying to change government policy. And some of the changes they are lobbying for are in direct contradiction and open defiance of the statements you have made as minister.

In this article people are encouraged to write the Justice minister and insist that homosexuals be given the same social and employment benefits as heterosexuals. Mr. Minister, on many occasions you have spoken out against social benefits like adoption rights and spousal employment of benefits for homosexuals. Yet in the human rights brochure, the taxpayer . . . taxpayers' money is being used to promote these forms of sexual orientation.

Mr. Minister, is this an appropriate role for the Human Rights Commission to be playing? And if not, what steps do you intend to take so the commission understands its role to enforce policy, not to lobby for changes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the steps I intend to take are the following. I intend to sit here in my seat until the member sends across the publication that he's referring to; the second step is that I will read the publication; and the third step is I'll decide what action will be appropriate after I've done the first two steps.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'll take a moment just to send this publication across to the minister. Mr. Minister, as well, recently the Saskatoon City Council refused to proclaim a Lesbian and Gay Pride Day. The Lesbian and Gay Pride Committee of Saskatoon is appealing this decision to the Human Rights Commission, as is their right. But it is also the right of the Saskatoon City Council to expect a fair hearing, and it's pretty doubtful that they are going to get one given the obvious bias your commission has on this issue.

Mr. Minister, don't you think the Human Rights Commission's independence and impartiality is compromised when they take on the role of a taxpayer-funded lobbyist? How can the city of Saskatoon possibly expect to get a fair hearing on this matter?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well I think that the member draws a pretty long bow when he suggests that the Human Rights Commission is biased. I don't think it is.

And I will read the material that the member has sent to me, but I think he draws a pretty long bow in that connection.

Certainly I know all of the members of the commission and I don't think that any of them have a bias with respect to any of these matters. People like Donna Greschner and Chief Blaine Flavel and Marjorie Hutchinson and people like that are people that don't carry around the kind of axes and the kind of biases that the member refers to.

So I just don't accept for a moment that the Human Rights Commission is not capable of receiving and dealing with the complaint such as the member refers to in an entirely unbiased manner. I don't think you can draw a connection between this publication and the conclusions that the member comes to as a result.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, the minister has indicated that we're drawing a long bow on this matter. It would seem to me, Mr. Minister, that a newspaper article appearing in the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, "SaskRights" brochure that has the headline: "Do you know a lesbian?" and gives a list of arguments as to why you should maybe refer to lesbianism and refer to those acts, is going way beyond what the commission should be promoting.

And I think, Mr. Minister, as I earlier indicated, it just isn't right for a taxpayer-funded organization to become a lobbyist for an organization that is going to use its arm in whatever way possible. Mr. Minister, will you give us a commitment to look into the use of taxpayers' dollars by the Human Rights Commission in this matter?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I earlier described the three-step process which I think should take place in relation to this matter. The first step has already taken place. The member has sent across the publication to me. The next step will be step number two, which is to say I will read the publication.

The third step will be, I will then decide what, if anything, to do about it. Stay tuned to this channel to be updated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Family Fishing Weekend

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say a few words about Family Fishing Weekend, set for Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12; a weekend during which everyone in the province can fish without a licence and without charge.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Family Fishing Weekend is a cooperative program to promote recreational fishing in Saskatchewan. The Family Fishing Weekend focuses on providing opportunities for youth to

experience recreational fishing, learn about the environment and conservation techniques firsthand.

The core of the program rests in the belief that fishing is for everyone. In addition to the emphasis on youth, special programs have been incorporated to accommodate adolescents, the physically and mentally challenged, and senior citizens.

Last year a record number of celebrations were held throughout the province in recognition of the Family Fishing Weekend. Across the province many fishing organizations will host free fishing days to encourage individuals to enjoy one of Saskatchewan's most popular outdoor leisure activities — recreational fishing. Through fishing derbies, fishing clinics, and a variety of other activities, hundreds of youngsters and adults are provided with a wonderful fishing and environmental experience.

Since 1994 is designated as the International Year of the Family, we encourage you to introduce a brother, sister, nephew, niece, or another member of your family, to one of our most popular outdoor leisure activities — recreational fishing.

We encourage everyone in the province to plan to participate in the Family Fishing Weekend. June 11 and 12 will be a time to celebrate the fun of recreational fishing. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with the minister in wishing everybody well on Family Fishing day, especially since the minister says that there is no charge for the licences, which is kind of a change for this government because they put the charge back on to seniors to go fishing.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, we have to be a little careful though when we go fishing because fishing is . . . you are four times more likely to have an accident while fishing than you are hunting. And so I think it is very important, Mr. Speaker, that people be very careful when they're out there in the boat or along the shore and fishing. I just wish everybody well, that they have fun, and remember to wear your life-jacket.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I'd like to table two annual reports, one of the Saskatchewan . . . The 1993-94 annual report of the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner.

And also pursuant to section 222 of The Election Act, a report respecting annual fiscal returns of registered political parties for the fiscal year 1993.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTION UNDER RULE 16

Federal Firearms Legislation

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a motion to the House dealing with firearms use in this province and across Canada. And the motion reads, which I'll move at the end of my speech:

That this Assembly urge the provincial government and the Leader of the Third Party to make every effort to convince the federal government to reconsider its impending changes to firearms legislation in light of the harmful ramifications that these changes would have on Saskatchewan farmers, sportsmen, aboriginal people, and other responsible gun owners.

Mr. Speaker, on April 26 during this session, we saw a rare show of unanimity in this Assembly, when this Assembly passed a resolution affirming the continued enjoyment of responsible firearm use in this province.

This amendment was initiated in part by the responsible firearms owners of Saskatchewan when they approached all three political parties in the House and asked them to bring forward an amendment dealing with firearms use that would be then sent to the federal parliament and to the federal Liberal government to express our concerns about any possible changes.

And since that point in time we have received a response from the responsible firearms association thanking us — I'm sure that every MLA in the House received it — thanking us for our cooperation and for moving this motion.

I'd like to read one paragraph from a letter that they sent:

Our members are very concerned with the dispensation of the present gun control laws, and it is very heartening to have our legislative members working with and for us.

This group is thanking us, Mr. Speaker, for our motion, but they still have some concerns — some concerns as to how some of the members of this legislature think on this matter and what they're prepared to do on this particular issue.

Further on in the letter, Mr. Speaker, it says — and this letter was sent out to all the members of this association — and I quote:

There are 66 elected MLAs in the Legislative Assembly. Of these 66, there were 37 who voted in favour of this resolution which was a unanimous vote. Following are MLAs who were not in the Assembly and did not vote on this resolution. Where were these MLAs? How would they have voted? These people are your elected officials. They represent your concerns to the Government of Saskatchewan. If you feel

you have not been represented in your best interests, write your MLA a letter, and find out where they stand on issues that affect you.

Mr. Speaker, they included a list of the members who did not vote in favour of that motion who were not present. I won't read that, Mr. Speaker, but the people . . . the responsible firearms association has a concern of where the members that did not vote on this particular issue, where they stand on the issue and what their point of view is.

Particularly in light of the fact that the member from Saskatoon Greystone gets a headline in the paper that says she backs tougher gun laws, these people feel that there is indeed a concern that needs to be expressed in this legislature and that the member from Saskatoon Greystone, the Leader of the Third Party, needs to hear what those concerns are, needs to respond to them, and clearly state where she stands on that particular issue.

(1415)

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has chosen not to listen to what the people have had . . . to our motion that was in the Assembly here, and announced at the Liberal Party convention that it would bring in tougher firearms legislation this summer. Well, Mr. Speaker, somewhere in the background I remember hearing similar statements made by the previous administration in Ottawa. And I opposed those changes then and I let the members of that parliament know about it. I spoke out. And for their moves a number of the members of that government — the previous PC government in Ottawa — lost their seats, Mr. Speaker, and I think it would be very incumbent on the members of the current federal government to pay careful attention to what transpired in that particular case.

As I mentioned earlier, the Leader of the Third Party came out publicly in support of the federal legislation in spite of her party's earlier stand on the resolution before this Assembly. And we would ask her to clarify that position today.

The federal legislation, Mr. Speaker, is particularly offensive because it is being done deliberately and admittedly for pure political reasons. The federal Liberal Party has made no secret that this legislation is meant to embarrass the Reform Party on crime control.

Well, Mr. Speaker, crime is indeed a very serious concern in our major cities — in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. But, Mr. Speaker, bringing in further firearms legislation will not impact on that. It will impact on the legitimate and legal owners of firearms, but it will not impact on the criminal use of firearms. Those who wish to use firearms for criminal purpose don't come up to the local firearms registrar and say: I would like to licence my firearm. They don't go and take the training. They will not turn in any firearms, Mr. Speaker, if the government requests that they be registered and turned in or, as one of the Liberal

members suggested, bringing them into a central location for storage.

Mr. Speaker, that's the criminals; they're not going to do it. But who will do that? It's the legitimate, responsible firearms owners on whom this burden will be placed. And those are not the people that need to be questioned, that we need to be concerned about, Mr. Speaker, it's the criminal element. And the criminal element can only be dealt with in a manner that is very severe, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Justice needs to contact his counterpart in Ottawa and talk about enforcing the firearms regulations that we already have in place. That's what needs to be done, not adding new laws to the books that aren't going to be enforced. Enforce the ones that are already there, and enforce them whether or not there are juveniles involved. Everyone needs to have these kind of laws enforced and implemented upon, Mr. Speaker; acted upon rather than simply adding more and more rules to the books — just simply deal with the ones that are already there.

This serious issue of crime in the country can't be reduced, Mr. Speaker, simply by a tactical ploy by the federal government. Mr. Speaker, to deal with crime it needs to be done in a most . . . in a direct and serious manner. It needs to be dealt with, not by as I said earlier, adding simply more piles of rules and regulations, but to . . . if a person commits a crime involving a firearms — involving any weapon, not just firearms — firearms, knives, axes, two-by-fours . . . We've had a couple of murders in this province the couple of years, using two-by-fours. Out at Kelowna last week there was a gentlemen there attacked with an axe.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan most homicides and attacks are done with knives; not with firearms, but with knives, Mr. Speaker. And we need to deal with those problems; with the social problems; with the problems of poverty; with the problem of lack of employment, Mr. Speaker, not with firearms.

The government is simply trying to take firearms as a scapegoat rather than dealing with the other issues that are much more difficult to deal with. It's very easy to say, Mr. Speaker, no one in the country could have firearms. It's easy to say that, and the legitimate and honest people will turn in their firearms. The criminals will keep theirs, but the honest people will turn them in.

But will that solve our problem? No, Mr. Speaker, that'll just mean that the criminals are armed and nobody else is. The suggestion has been made — in fact is on the radio on a political forum — that only the police and the army should have firearms. And this was made by the representative of the New Democratic Party — that only the police and the army should have firearms.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if no one has firearms in the country, why do the police and the army need them? Or is it really an admission that the criminals will

continue to have firearms and that the honest people will not? That's what it's an admission of.

An Hon. Member: — Who said that?

Mr. D'Autremont: — That was said by Sandra Mitchell on the CBC Radio, Mr. Speaker. That's what she said, the representative from the NDP (New Democratic Party) Party. That only the police and the military should be allowed to have firearms and no one else. Well I think, Mr. Speaker, that simply admits that the firearms laws will not work.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the cities and their problems with crime, we have to ask: why are the people in the cities so concerned about firearms? Well, Mr. Speaker, what are their access to firearms, what is their knowledge of firearms, have they ever had an opportunity to work with a firearm? And in most cases, no.

Their entire concept of a firearm, of a gun . . . which the police always term as a weapon because to the police a gun is a weapon; they have it strapped to their hip to use in case of assault in which they in turn will be assaulting someone else. They're a weapon to the police, Mr. Speaker. But to most legitimate owners of guns, they are firearms.

Mr. Speaker, the people in the city, their only connection with firearms is what they see on TV. They see Bonnie and Clyde driving down the roads robbing banks, and the police catch them and shoot their car so full of holes that it just sort of disintegrates like the one horse shay did. Mr. Speaker, that's their only concept of firearms.

But out in rural Saskatchewan, in the North, Mr. Speaker, we use firearms on a day-to-day basis as a tool as we would use a pair of pliers or a hammer to fix a fence. Whatever it might be, Mr. Speaker, to us it's a tool. In the city, because people have never had access and the opportunity to be around firearms, they go by what they see — which is on TV — and it is dreadful, Mr. Speaker. If you happen to watch Detroit cable TV all the time, you see a lot of bad things on there in their news programs — somebody being killed, somebody being shot.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we see it in this city also. But it's not being shot, it's being knifed and clubbed. Because the people who have firearms in our society, for the most part, are honest and straightforward and fair-minded people, Mr. Speaker.

You wonder why people in rural areas want firearms. Well, Mr. Speaker, I was reading in an article just this past weekend dealing with travel, airplanes, and a doctor was writing in there about the various countries around the world and what you had to watch out for disease-wise. And Canada, Mr. Speaker, is rated as having an epidemic of rabies.

And we all know that, Mr. Speaker. In Saskatchewan, my area of the province, south-east corner, we're always being warned about rabies. And rabies, Mr.

Speaker, is carried mainly by skunks in the area. A farmer sees a skunk running down the road acting strange, he has a firearm with him, and he dispatches it. And it's for the betterment of society, Mr. Speaker, that this happens.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking last week with the member from Athabasca who said that a bear came into his yard over the weekend and looked straight in the window at his wife, who was quite frightened because this was a very large bear, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Minister, she frightened the bear off with the use of a firearm by firing it in the air. Unfortunately, she missed and hit the window-sill also, but she did frighten off the bear though, Mr. Speaker.

Firearms are also very important to our entire economy — the tourism industry, outfitting and trapping all play an important part of our society, Mr. Speaker, and these are some of the issues that the Liberal leader in the House here needs to realize, Mr. Speaker, when she says that she backs tougher gun laws. Mr. Speaker, she's talking about the livelihood of a good many people in this province and across rural and northern Saskatchewan.

Part of the economy that firearms also deal with are with gun shows and sales. Every community has a gun shop of some form or another, every larger community, Mr. Speaker, and it is one of the areas where a lot of rural people do take on as a sideline as gunsmithing, Mr. Speaker, or as guiding people in their areas. So it is a very, very major . . . has a very major impact on the economy of our province.

We also, Mr. Speaker, have watched the Olympics this past winter and we saw Sylvie Daigle win the biathlon, two medals in the biathlon, Mr. Speaker. That involved skiing and shooting, Mr. Speaker — skiing and shooting.

So we also win trophies for this, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would invite the Liberal leader to state her views and I would invite the provincial government to once again join with us and repeat our earlier protest to the federal government against this unbalanced approach to the firearms legislation.

I would also invite the third party leader to stand up and state her views, Mr. Speaker.

And if I have the opportunity now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read my motion. And I move:

That this Assembly urge the provincial government and the Leader of the Third Party to make every effort to convince the federal government to reconsider its impending changes to firearms legislation in light of the harmful ramifications that these changes would have on Saskatchewan farmers, sportsmen, aboriginal people, and other responsible gun owners.

Seconded by the member from Maple Creek.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased that the member from Souris-Cannington brought forward this motion today to provide me with an opportunity to speak to this issue.

The last time that it was before this House, I was meeting with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses over serious concerns that they had with what was transpiring in some of the nursing homes in Saskatchewan, and I think that they were quite courageous in their move the week following that meeting.

Mr. Speaker, I have in fact tried to communicate my views on this issue with people throughout Saskatchewan, in fact wrote both the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* and the Regina *Leader-Post*, put out a news release. And interestingly enough my own news release was entitled “Gun control must consider provincial concerns”; when it appeared in the newspaper it said, “Haverstock: gun control must be national in nature.”

So I don’t know why it is there seems to be this view that somehow I’m supposed to have joined the anti-gun lobby, but it is not the case, and I am very, very pleased that I was able to comment on this this afternoon.

The use of firearms is a different issue for Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, from what it is for those people who live in large urban centres across Canada. And that’s not to say that it is an issue that should be treated lightly nor does it imply that Saskatchewan people do not understand the need for safe, controlled use of firearms.

Most of us grew up in our province having ties with Saskatchewan agriculture, with the farm. And in fact I don’t know how many people would have no memory of having used a .22 to go out and shoot gophers, or at least the opportunity of being able to feast on wild fowl or venison when a family member returned from a hunting trip. I was making mention to the member from Kindersley that when I went off to university with my daughter, in fact if it hadn’t been for my brother providing us with venison, I don’t know if we would have had much meat to have in those first few years.

Few have any frame of reference for the violence involving firearms that is becoming very common in cities like Toronto and Montreal. In fact some people have talked about how tragic it is that in some of our centres we now have metal detectors in our high schools. So we don’t want to underestimate how serious an issue this is for some people in Canada.

(1430)

Because the people in our province have always used firearms as tools rather than weapons, we’ve always been safety conscious about guns. And we do understand that we have had a different reality. If we’d gone out to shoot firearms out in the countryside, most

of us who have lived on farms would come home to a home at night where we don’t even lock the doors. Our reality for safety, our reality of crime, is very different from other places in the nation.

And we acknowledge that we are concerned about the accidental deaths or the violent crimes involving firearms, but they have indeed been very, very minimal in our province of Saskatchewan. Although the number of deaths involving firearms has declined significantly in Canada, and I think it was in the paper the other day, from 292 incidents in 1975 to 218 in 1989, our province has had only eight homicides involving guns in 1990 and just three in 1991.

I would suggest that that’s an incredible record, and in fact one that, although we would prefer to have that at zero, there’s a lot to applaud in our province of Saskatchewan, especially when you put that in the context, Mr. Speaker, of 170 deaths involving vehicle accidents. One murder at gunpoint is too many, but three gun-related homicides in one year is hardly what one would consider an alarming number.

And the trend, of course, is where we want it to be; the trend is decreasing rather than increasing. The current laws are sufficient enough to prevent all but most of the random incidents of violence. Problems really appear to be that there are very tough laws for illegal sales, illegal possession, and in fact improper use of firearms, that are simply not enforced. And if they were enforced to their maximum, Mr. Speaker, there would not be the kind of proliferation of illegal weapons that some of the people in urban centres appear to be so concerned about.

I have communicated with the Minister of Justice federally, and I will be indeed making sure that I forward today’s comments for their consideration. And I want to ensure that law-abiding owners of firearms are not further penalized, they are not further regulated, until the existing laws against possession of illicit weapons and the dangerous use of firearms are fully enforced. Because it’s quite obvious, when one reads the Criminal Code of Canada, Mr. Speaker, that the laws that exist are not enforced for those people who break them. This would be the very best course of action, rather than trying to bring in further regulation and further laws.

I believe that we can all agree that the increase in crime and the proliferation of illegal weapons are part and parcel of the same problem. Licensed firearm owners, as the member from Souris-Cannington pointed out, are not typically the ones to be involved in illegal activity. And therefore making tougher laws for them will do little or nothing at all to get to the root of the problem.

Justice Minister Rock does have a problem and he’s trying to solve a perceived fixation with rising crime rates by invoking tougher gun control laws, and I really do not believe nor can I be convinced that the two are as closely related as many people contend. I contend that we should get tougher on the imposition of current laws to ensure that those individuals found

to be irresponsibly using or illegally possessing firearms are dealt with very severely.

And I also contend that we must focus a good deal of attention on what is at the root of violent behaviour. Saskatchewan has a far higher incidence of violent attacks with knives rather than guns, as has been pointed out. And what is of great concern to me is not limiting access to knives, although there must be far tougher enforcement as to where it is appropriate to have a knife in one's possession. I mean carrying a knife while hunting or fishing or on a trap line is obviously acceptable; tucking one into one's boot when they go into a local bar is not.

We must focus as well on getting to the true root of real problems of violent behaviour. And I think one of the things that was most disconcerting to me was some two weekends ago a couple in Saskatoon talking about having been pulled out of their vehicle, violently beaten up, and two things happening that seem to point out that we have a very serious, fundamental problem with our society, and that is that first of all, innocent people could be attacked like that; and secondly, that people in our province who saw that transpiring didn't even come to their rescue.

This indeed indicates a frustration, a lack of respect for one another. The fact that no one would come to the aid of these people indicates a lack of empathy, and it does demonstrate an apathy that is of great concern to me, as we have always been, I think, very proud of a province that would stop to help people under almost any circumstance.

I support the examination of gun control in our laws as long as it is done with respect for the traditional way of life for those people who rely on firearms to earn a living, those who rely on firearms for protection on farms and in isolated areas, and respecting the rights of those who abide by the current laws which permit the restricted use of firearms for such things as collection, for sports, for competitive purposes. And I believe that all such examination must be done openly and with input from all of those affected.

I would not support, Mr. Speaker, changes to gun control laws which further penalize those who have a record of safe and responsible use of firearms. I would very much — unequivocally — support changes that would increase penalties, and especially increase enforcement of the laws that are already there for the illegal use of firearms or those found guilty of using guns for criminal purposes.

I'm very pleased that the member from Souris-Cannington brought forward his motion today, and I will ensure that I send these remarks to Ottawa. And hopefully they will be heard in the manner in which they are meant and that is to point out the uniqueness of Saskatchewan's situation and how important it is to the people of this province that their responsible use of firearms be recognized. Thank you.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter the debate this afternoon in the motion as put

forward by the member from Souris-Cannington with respect to gun legislation and gun controls.

The member from Saskatoon Greystone has apparently gone to great lengths to distance herself from the comments that were made about her and her party following the Liberal convention in Toronto or Ottawa, wherever it was, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding however, Mr. Speaker — and I'd appreciate it if the member from Greystone at some point would clarify this — but it's my understanding that she supported the increased gun control legislation that Mr. Rock is planning on presenting. At least that's my understanding.

And I'd offer an opportunity for her at some point to address that issue because I think people in Saskatchewan are confused, Mr. Speaker, about the Liberal leader's views on gun control. It seems that while in Toronto there is one set of gun control legislation that she is in support of, and in Saskatchewan there is another kind of gun legislation that she's in support of, and they are two directly different views, Mr. Speaker. And it is, I think, of great concern to the people who are avid sportsmen and sportswomen in this province, and gun control is that issue, Mr. Speaker.

So I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that the opportunity be given to the Liberal leader to clarify that view. I don't think you did clarify it enough for the people of Saskatchewan, because the media reports out of the convention, the Liberal convention, were that you were in support of tougher, substantially tougher, gun legislation, as is the view of the current federal Liberal government, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, it is I think confusing to the people of Saskatchewan that there's two standards, Saskatchewan standard and Toronto standard, when it comes to this kind of legislation.

In spite of the protests from this Assembly, the Saskatchewan Responsible Firearms Owners, and many other concerned people across Canada, the federal government has decided to push ahead with new restrictions on firearms. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's in direct result of a number of gun-related incidents in major cities that nowhere near have any bearing on what's happening in the rural areas in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I think the federal Liberal government is trying to embarrass the Reform Party of western Canada into playing politics with a very serious issue. In my view, there's no justification for the new restrictions that are being talked about. The restrictions brought in by the former prime minister, Kim Campbell, have not proven to be effective, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I was a supporter of Kim Campbell in the federal leadership campaign. It was one area that I had some difficulty with in her campaign. And, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately she is not the prime minister of Canada any longer, and it's the federal Liberal government that is now bringing forward these new types of gun control legislation.

The provincial Minister of Justice said in relation to the last round of regulation, and I quote: as far as Saskatchewan was concerned, it was just a pain and very little accomplished, very little of any importance. End of quote.

The Auditor General of Canada himself contends that no one has ever done a serious assessment of firearms legislation to see if they're actually accomplishing what they're supposed to. The federal government seemed to take it on faith that more and more gun control is good.

Current firearms legislation is more than adequate to protect public interests of safety. And as the member from Souris-Cannington alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker, the incidence of firearms-related problems are going down in Saskatchewan, and that's something that I think everyone is in favour of and is proof positive that the legislation in Saskatchewan is working.

Even as it stands, the firearms acquisition certificate is an offensive document, Mr. Speaker. We've all heard about the notorious question 35 on the firearms acquisition certificate which asks:

During the last two years have you experienced a divorce, separation, or relationship breakdown? Have you experienced failure in school, loss of job, or bankruptcy?

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a real invasion of the privacy of people when they're asking these types of questions prior to a person having opportunity to gain a firearms acquisition certificate. Mr. Speaker, as Larry Fillo of the Saskatchewan Responsible Firearms Owners characterizes this question, and I quote:

We are paying \$50 to the police to collect files on the academic, financial, and sexual history of every hunter and trapper and rancher and farmer and rural resident in Canada because they have a crime problem in Toronto and Montreal.

It's absurd when you think about it, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly agree with Mr. Fillo on that view. The key is not more legislation but proper enforcement of the already existing laws. Firearms legislation is a very narrow view of the crime problem because it ignores the serious issues of abuse, poverty, and frustration that exist in our society. A real crime policy would address these problems and not find a scapegoat such as the gun owners of Saskatchewan and Canada.

In the meantime, it is ordinary rural residents and sportsmen of this . . . and women of this province who pay the price. The federal legislation seems directly pitting rural area residents against urban ones, urban residents. The new firearms safety course was written by a Toronto psychologist who knew nothing of the realities of gun use in rural areas and wrote the test for someone at an advanced university level.

The fee structures for firearms retailers inordinately

penalizes small sellers such as local hardware store owners in small town Saskatchewan. It also makes it impossible for gunsmiths to make a living or practise their craft since the licences to sell a few guns a year are far too steep.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government seems to be trying to centralize gun sales in the urban areas and starve the rural areas, where firearms are used the most responsibly, from access to them. This does not solve crime, it only makes life harder for responsible citizens. It makes life harder for farmers and ranchers; it makes life harder for northern residents who require guns for protection against wildlife; it makes life harder for people who wish or who have to live off the land. In other words, it makes life harder for many honest citizens who can least afford it.

Mr. Speaker, none of these points are all new. All of us in this Assembly have debated these very points a few weeks ago and then passed, unanimously passed, a resolution, Mr. Speaker. As we all know in rural Saskatchewan it is very commonplace for people to have a firearm or two or a number of them in their home, Mr. Speaker.

(1445)

I as well have a couple firearms at our home simply used for control of varmints, I guess you would call it, Mr. Speaker. Skunks, fox, occasionally stray through the yard. In fact last spring I recall one coming through the yard appeared to be in a state of some concern to us, Mr. Speaker. The fox had, oh I forget what you call it, mange or something it looked like. It seemed disoriented; gave me reason to believe that that animal may have rabies or something like that.

It was at that point that we decided to deal with the animal and that was done, Mr. Speaker. And it was simply out of concern for my family and for the pets and animals that are on our farm. I think that's the type of action that takes place on a fairly regular basis on many farms and ranches in Saskatchewan, all across our province, Mr. Speaker.

And we saw, as my colleague from Souris-Cannington points out, on the . . . yesterday I believe it was, in Regina there was a bear strayed into the city of Regina. Something that's probably almost unheard of. And it was interesting, I was driving this morning, Mr. Speaker, in and I heard how the conservation officers dealt with that problem. And I was interested in hearing that because I expected quite likely that they'd have been using a tranquilizer pellet on that bear as it strayed into the city of Regina.

However, that wasn't the case, Mr. Speaker. The bear was shot and killed this . . . or yesterday, I understand, by a conservation officer, and I guess the question is, why? And the answer the media was given by the conservation officer yesterday was simply this: that in order for . . . Because the tranquilizer takes some time to react — it's a few minutes, I understand, up to five, ten minutes — there was great concern for the residents of Regina during that period that the bear

would probably be very agitated, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed.

Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity at this point to enter into the debate and to support in principle the intent of the motion of the member from Souris-Cannington. I'd like to make a few remarks and then I would like to move an amendment.

I'm pleased as well to have the opportunity to place my position on the record because the last time, I believe on April 26, that this subject was discussed, I was present for most of the debate but wasn't able to be here for the vote. So I'm pleased to say that I do support the spirit of the motion.

And perhaps it seems like a bit of a contradiction since my maternal heritage is pacifist in being of the Mennonite persuasion. But also my family were pioneers in north-eastern Saskatchewan, and indeed in Canada, and we lived the kind of a lifestyle where with trapping, farming, hunting for meat, that firearms were a part of our daily living. And in fact I inherited my grandmother's 410 shotgun and have had occasion to discharge it many times myself in dispatching magpies, starlings, gophers, moles, and mink that were eating my chickens.

The member from Kindersley mentioned his encounter with foxes and coyotes, and that's probably our most recent experience. And I often wish that people who talk about the anti-fur movement and that type of animal rights could have the opportunity to observe what mother nature does in cases of overpopulation, which is currently what's happening with the situation in mange in coyotes and foxes. And we often have had coyotes and foxes in advanced stages of that disease become disoriented and come into the yard. And probably the kindest and quickest way to dispatch them is with a single shot.

There are many other valid reasons for owning firearms, not the least of which is competition where Canada has had in the international competitive field some very outstanding successes in international competition.

I guess it's a matter of your experience and your personal background. I suppose a golf club could be considered an effective weapon as well, if used in a certain way. I've never been interested in being a golfer, but I certainly do get a lot of satisfaction out of target shooting which takes a keen eye and a steady hand and I think that is a valid use of firearms.

Of course, in the culture where I came from, where firearms were part of the daily life, safety and proper care and handling were paramount and the family . . . children growing up that were exposed to the presence of firearms for whatever valid reasons were always taught to treat every firearm as if it were loaded and how to handle it, how to handle it safely — that was very important.

And it continues in the present day, perhaps even in the urban context where people are not exposed at such a tender age, that the firearms safety classes and educational opportunities that are available have been taken up by many times more than a hundred thousand people in this province since their inception and they're currently graduating, I understand, about 5,000 people a year who take formal training in the handling and care of firearms.

Another point I think that's important is the current application form that is used and it contemplates questions like in your personal life and background, like recent failures of examinations, recent history of traumatic problems in your personal life like divorce and so on, and I think it is foolish to bring in regulations or pass laws that we're not prepared to pursue; because I'm wondering, if that kind of question is an issue on an initial application, then whether there's a monitoring of those people who are already in possession of a firearms acquisition certificate and a firearm to monitor the situation in their lives and see whether those situations occur after their acquisition.

So I think that the protocol that's in place right now with references and so on that lead up to the acquisition of a firearm do not need to be strengthened. I think what does need to be strengthened is the dealing of the justice system with unlawful and violent uses for firearms.

I think on the last time that this was debated, I made that day a member's statement with respect to the police commission report for 1993 in Saskatchewan, where approximately a thousand peace officers discharged firearms only 13 times in the course of their duties during the year. Not one person was injured in any of those. The subjects of the incidents were usually — I think in all cases — animals. And I think it's important that our peace officers are able to set the example where they can enforce the law without violence, and it sets an example to the rest of us as opposed to the kind of things that we see on American television, for example.

I think what's important is to find a balance between the safe use of firearms for protection, sport, hunting, and competitions, as well as bona fide collectors of firearms, to balance those against the unlawful use of firearms in acts of violence.

And it was interesting this morning when I was driving from Saskatoon to Regina, I happened to catch a segment of the Peter Gzowsky show on the radio where he was interviewing the chief of police of the city of Ottawa who was warning against knee-jerk reactions to some unfortunate incidents that have happened in our major cities involving firearms recently. And he was acknowledging that there are valid uses in rural Canada and northern Canada, and in sport, and the other areas that I have mentioned. And this was the police chief that was saying these things, the chief of a police of one of our major cities where there has been an unfortunate violent incident quite recently.

So I would like to say that I think consultations to make sure that the diversity of Canadian culture is recognized are very important. Which leads to the amendment that I wish to propose, Mr. Speaker:

to delete all the words after "provincial government" and substitute the following words therefor:

to continue its efforts to convince the federal government to thoroughly consult with all provinces before proceeding with changes to firearms legislation, and to consider the impact that these changes would have on farmers, sportsmen, aboriginal people, and other responsible gun owners.

I so move that amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak again on this very important subject. We did have a very good debate on April 26 and the details of that debate are recorded in *Hansard*.

Since then our Hon. Minister of Justice has met with Hon. Allan Rock, the federal Minister of Justice, and conveyed to the federal minister the concerns raised by many people in Saskatchewan. And our hon. minister has also written to Mr. Rock on April 21, and I would like to just quote part of this letter to the federal minister:

Dear Mr. Rock:

Your recent comments in the media concerning further gun control initiatives in the wake of recent tragic events in Ottawa and Toronto have raised some concerns in Saskatchewan. While the Government of Canada has legislative authority in this area, it is the provincial Justice departments and the police serving under provincial jurisdiction who must administer and enforce the programs.

Considerable difficulties were encountered with the implementation of Bill C-17. Changes to the law as a result of Bill C-17 have generated negative public reaction from law-abiding people throughout Saskatchewan. The Government of Saskatchewan supports the provision of an effective national gun control program. However, we are committed to an approach that balances the need to protect the public with the need to avoid unreasonable interference with law-abiding shooters, hunters, and gun collectors.

The problems in urban central Canada have not been as evident in largely rural Saskatchewan. It will be important that full consultations take place before we see further expansion of the gun control program and that in any changes balances the interest of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, since Bill C-17, the province has worked cooperatively with sportsmen organizations and other groups in continuing to develop a very effective hunter safety education program.

More recently, we've involved the group called SAFE, Saskatchewan Association of Firearms Education, and we have incorporated what was required by Bill C-17, and that is the federal laws and handguns sections of the federal legislation are being incorporated into the provincial hunter safety education program. And it is through cooperation that we are able to achieve this.

It is very interesting that we have a number of other provinces from coast to coast contacting Saskatchewan to see how we have done this so that they may follow in our footsteps, and again work cooperatively with us.

(1500)

Criminal acts involving firearms is a very serious offence and just as serious as any other crime and must be dealt with accordingly. Law-abiding citizens who use guns for legitimate purposes such as hunting, trapping, farming, competitive shooting, and others should not be penalized because of the criminal element in society.

The Saskatchewan minister has clearly conveyed to Mr. Rock full consultation with all provinces and territories must be conducted before any further changes to federal gun control legislation be considered. Also, law-abiding gun owners and users should also be consulted widely because this segment of society are very knowledgeable about firearms and the use of these firearms, and are also very concerned about the criminal element of society using firearms. And they have a lot that can . . . these groups have a lot to offer and should be involved in any further changes to federal firearm legislation.

Well this government will continue to act in a very responsible manner with regards to gun control and looks forward to working with all jurisdictions including the federal government in designing any future gun control legislation which must take into consideration the needs of law-abiding gun owners while attempting to control the criminal use of firearms.

Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons that I am very pleased to second the amendment by the member from Saskatoon River Heights. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that I think we will certainly support this amended motion because it does say the proper thing. And I have a copy and I've read it.

I was confident that the member from Indian Head-Wolseley would not second the motion on this subject — that would be out of order as far as we in opposition are concerned. Although it does disturb

me that they feel that they can't go with the things that we're doing instead of trying to play that little bit of politics of having it their own way and putting their own signature on everything.

And to repeat, Mr. Speaker, the words of the member from Humboldt in our previous firearms debate: it's about time that some degree of logic was injected into the legislation on firearms. And I think that was a very good statement that the member made. We don't very often find ourselves agreeing with the member from Humboldt and so it was refreshing to find out that we at least had some common ground at least on one subject. And so thank you, member.

The people in the federal Liberal Party, Mr. Speaker, who wish to crack down on firearms are largely urban dwellers who do not have the full picture of the role of firearms in this country. When they talk about storing guns in central depots they show that they have absolutely never been on a farm or ranch where a gun is needed to constantly to defend livestock against predators or pests or for any number of other kinds of things that happen in places like rural Saskatchewan.

They have absolutely never walked through the northern woods and unexpectedly come across a bear. Do they think, Mr. Speaker, that the bear is just going to freeze and stand there and that you can drive to Prince Albert and go to pick up your gun and then come back to defend yourself? I can certainly assure you after this past weekend that it doesn't work that way, Mr. Speaker, because me and my two sons had the experience of bear hunting in northern Saskatchewan this past weekend. We spent the weekend with Brent Mitchell and Pat Bockus, and we certainly enjoyed that period of time, and I would hope that nothing would happen in gun control legislation that would destroy that opportunity for my sons, myself, or for the people of this province and for the people of Canada. It was certainly an enjoyable weekend.

And it's so very important to the people that make their living, as the member from Kindersley has pointed out, Mr. Speaker . . . Federal Justice minister, Allan Rock, said that when he was in Saskatchewan that he would take into consideration the needs of legislation and responsible firearms use. The recent announcement by the Prime Minister has shown that words of the federal officials are empty promises.

A great many areas of Saskatchewan's life stand to be damaged by tougher legislation, Mr. Speaker. Tourism will be damaged. The traditional lifestyle of aboriginal people will be damaged; the habits, the traditions, and needs of rural residents will be encumbered; and furthermore, increased gun legislation will continue an attack on the human rights to privacy of responsible gun owners.

Why does a farmer who has a shotgun or a .22 for shooting skunks need to have a dossier at an RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) headquarters that is more detailed than the kind that you might expect for political dissidents in a totalitarian state? Firearms

legislation has gone so far in this country that the country has run out of abusers and criminals to pursue. In order to keep the firearms legislation bogymen going, they have to find more and more areas of gun legislation to regulate.

And certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think most people in Saskatchewan realize that we're already regulated to death in this country and we really don't need any more of it, especially in the area of gun control.

This situation is clearly absurd and has nothing to do with preventing crime. Most violent crime is done with knives, and yet no one proposes that we restrict the access to knives or have a steak-knife acquisition certificate. The absurdity of this situation was further underlined by the words of the member from Regina North West, who said in this Assembly on April 26, and I will quote, Mr. Speaker:

We have very strict and wide-reaching rules about what people can and cannot do in a motor vehicle in order to protect public safety.

In spite of those rules, 170 people were killed in traffic accidents in Saskatchewan in 1991. Some of those accidents are simply unpreventable, but many result from a conscious decision on the part of (the) motor vehicle operators to break the laws set out for their protection. I suppose we could consider the abolition of motor vehicles but would the detriments outweigh the benefits?

Of course the concept of abolishing the rights to own or operate motor vehicles is (considered) absurd by virtue of the fact that the number of people killed or injured by vehicles is minute when one considers the number of trips taken.

That's the end of the quote, Mr. Speaker. And the member from Regina North West went on to note that in spite of the fact that 35 per cent of Saskatchewan householders have guns, that there were only three deliberate anti-personnel shootings in this province in 1991.

There is a great deal of sense to the arguments made by the member from Regina North West, and I hope that the member will stick to her guns. If she does not, we can only assume that she no longer wishes to speak for the people that elected her, but only for her Liberal bosses in Ottawa.

The member correctly pointed out that the main problem with firearms is not making new laws, but enforcing the ones that we have. An interesting example of the public misconception of this issue was a study done by, or at, Concordia University which showed that the majority of students polled thought that the gun laws should be tougher; however a majority of students also admitted to being unaware of what the current laws were. When asked for suggestions for gun legislation, their ideas for tougher gun laws were actually looser than the current gun

laws that we have.

Gun owners are an easy target for public frustration with crime problems in urban areas. This does not, however, make it good government policy to go after this particular group.

The federal government knows well that the causes of crime go much deeper than access to weapons. There are many weapons that will always be easy to come by, as was demonstrated recently when someone smuggled a crossbow into a dinner where the Prime Minister was about to speak.

The federal government is ignoring the real roots of crime — the poverty, the social problems of abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, and gambling — that lead people to desperate measures. Instead they choose to play cheap politics against law-abiding citizens, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial Liberals and their leader seem to be content to play along with this cynical game. So much for the new style of politics that they were talking about. The Leader of the Third Party should be speaking for the people of Saskatchewan to the federal Liberal Party, not parroting the party line to the citizens who elected her and her caucus colleagues.

I hope that in spite of the recent statements of the Leader of the Third Party, that members of the third party will once again support us in this motion, and at least support the amendment, if the rest of the Assembly chooses to go that way.

This issue brought a rare consensus in this House on a previous occasion and I sincerely hope that we can do that and see that happen again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to join in this debate for a few minutes — I used to be able to see the clock — for about 5 minutes, till it ends, and put my voice alongside others who are supporting a rational method of dealing with gun control.

I want to say at the beginning though, I'll have to research and read *Hansard* tomorrow because I think the Leader of the Liberal Party came very close to promoting poaching there, when she was talking about the venison that she was fed in early days. I'll review that and report back to you later.

The problem we have here, Mr. Speaker, is that, as some members said, what we're doing is using gun control as a political football — a very serious issue — playing political games with it. And I want to illustrate that. Now the Liberal leader says that in this House, well that's not what I said about gun control. What I really mean is this.

But then if you read the press articles that come forward, you'll have to question that. You'll have to question it because . . . the front page of the . . . I'm not sure what paper it is, but the headline is: tough gun

laws coming, PM promises Liberals. And I want to quote from this article, Mr. Speaker:

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien strongly backed stricter gun control on Sunday, promising a tough new law by fall.

This was at the Liberal convention just the other day.

"There shouldn't be any more weapons in our streets or in our playgrounds," Chrétien told cheering delegates at the end of a four-day Liberal (planning) . . . policy convention.

It goes on to say:

And Chrétien challenged Reform Leader Preston Manning . . .

And there it tells you very clearly that this is a political football. We're trying to gain political points on the backs of those honest people who are law-abiding gun owners.

And it goes on to say:

" . . . What Canadians want, and what we must provide, is tough action."

And in Saskatchewan I don't think we're calling out loudly for tough action, but yet the Prime Minister says what Canadians want is tough action.

Then it goes on to say, and here's the point I want to make, Mr. Speaker:

Earlier, Liberal delegates unanimously approved a resolution demanding:

Severe restrictions on private handgun ownership.

Now let's do that again. Unanimously approved a resolution. And the Liberal leader in Saskatchewan was at this convention. Now maybe she was absent at this time, but unanimously severely restricting private handgun ownership, and that's the thin edge of the wedge on the issue; denying people to have guns for targets, for trading, for historical purposes or handing it down from generation to generation.

So I ask the people of Saskatchewan to question very closely and critically if . . . ask if the Liberal leader in Saskatchewan really says what she means. Because if she was at a convention that unanimously supported this, and she comes back to this House and says well, no, this is my position, which is different than this, then there's some obvious questions that come forward.

Mr. Speaker, the political problem with this issue is that we're seeing government playing central Canada off against the west. I understand the Liberals have more votes in central Canada and maybe that's the way the world works, but I don't think using it as a political football in such a serious issue is the right

thing to do as far as the Prime Minister of the country is concerned.

In Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, knives control . . . knives contribute to more death and injury than guns. We have to be reasonable, rational about it.

One of my colleagues read the letter than our Minister of Justice sent to the federal minister. And that is the type of approach that we want to see taken. We don't want to see the Prime Minister challenging the Reform Party to get ahead of him on the issue or keep up to him on the issue. We don't want to see the Liberal leader taking one position in Ottawa, another position in Saskatchewan. We need, as the letter from our Minister of Justice said, consultation from all provinces, all provinces, on this issue.

And the fear that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that if we open up this Bill, if we open it up, the conscientious law-abiding gun owners will lose. Because there are a lot of what I would call people who are on the fringe, or the wing-nut fringe on the issue, who just close their eyes and say, guns kill people so we shouldn't have guns. Cars kill people so maybe we shouldn't have cars, if you use that logic. And in Saskatchewan, I'd say knives are far more dangerous than guns.

(1515)

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan we've seen many organizations come to the fore, organizing rallies to stop the Allan Rocks of the world from destroying the common sense approach that's being taken to gun owners and gun control. Common sense approach that has included associations, firearm associations, collectors, hunters, native people, and others, who come around and sit down and talk about the problems that some people have with guns, people who like to go around and murder other people. But then how the effect on that . . . the question is whether it's a policing problem or whether it's a gun control legislation problem.

I think, for the most part, most of us think it's a policing problem. The police have a very tough job to do when it comes to handling criminals with guns, there's no doubt about that. But is the solution to take away all the guns? Well I'll tell you, you can try to take away all the guns if you want, but I'll guarantee you, the criminals will still have guns. I'll guarantee you, you'll still be able to get a gun if you want it. And that's the problem. So what we should be working on is the enforcement of the legislation, as all the fair-minded, conscientious people have done.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to support the amendment, and I think the amendment's important because it puts in words what many of us have been saying here. And I would like to support the amendment and the rational discussion of gun control legislation. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The total time of 65 minutes . . . no,

has not quite elapsed. But we now have, according to our rules, up to a 10-minute comment and question period for those who participated in the debate — comments and questions may be directed to them. So we will do that at this particular time. I'll recognize any questioners or those who wish to make comments.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would direct my question to the member from Saskatoon Greystone. In the quote in the paper it says that the Liberal leader says she supports tougher laws to prevent gun ownership from becoming a way of life in Canada.

Madam Member, since this was what the paper reported and you give a different line in the House here today, what exactly is your stance? And if you support the motion that we brought forward today, why did you not speak out in the same vein when you were at the convention in Ottawa?

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer your question, Mr. Member.

I did not speak in Ottawa. I did not speak at the convention on this issue, and I was not interviewed about this in Ottawa. I was interviewed about this particular issue upon my return to Saskatchewan. And that interview, as has been acknowledged by the individual who interviewed me, did not contain all of the information that we had had in what I considered to be a substantial discussion, and I appreciated his coming to me and being willing to actually have that discussion.

My view on gun control in Saskatchewan has been unequivocal. It has not changed from what I stated today, and it is precisely what I sent out last week. It is precisely what I have indicated to anyone who has called and asked my position on this issue, and that is that I think Saskatchewan has a very specific and unique way of dealing with firearms in our province and that people who are legitimate firearms owners, whether they be hunters, whether they be people who are in competition, whether they be collectors, that they indeed should not be punished by stricter gun laws. All we need to do is to ensure that the laws that are already present through the Criminal Code of Canada are applied.

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the member from Greystone if she was at the debate to its conclusion on the gun control issue at their meeting in Ottawa.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much. I appreciate the question from the member from Humboldt. The answer is no. I was unable to attend that. I was meeting with two different ministers at the time.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order.

Mr. Upshall: — It was very similar to many of the

votes in this House that you miss, Liberal leader.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The member knows he's out of order when he makes that kind of a comment.

Mr. Upshall: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to just make a statement further to the discussion. We in this House now have voted twice basically on almost the same resolution talking about gun control. The Minister of Justice from the province of Saskatchewan has sent a letter to Mr. Allan Rock stating that we have to have long communications put in all provinces before we make a decision on future restrictions or changes to the Act.

Despite the words of the Leader of the Liberal Party, I would challenge her to put her words in writing to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Justice, the federal minister, declaring her intentions on the issue and also stating whether or not she will follow federal party lines on this issue, which has unanimously — as I read from the newspaper — unanimously voted for severe restrictions on private handguns. And of course that flows over to all other weapons.

So that's the challenge I offer. And we've done on this side, Mr. Speaker . . . the government has taken a clear stand on this. And I think because it's such a serious issue and I just . . . it bothers me to see the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Liberal Party playing political football with a serious issue. I think they should be clearly on the written record.

Thank you.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the member from Humboldt, and that is I'm curious as to why it is he's made the assumption that I have not written the Minister of Justice federally on this issue. And I'm also wondering why it is he's under the assumption that Liberals must behave like New Democrats, and if in fact there's a resolution that comes forward at a convention, that each and every person is assumed that they have been in absolute favour with that.

We have every intention of being able to stand up for what it is that we believe as Saskatchewan Liberals and individual members of our party. So I would like to pose the question again: you are under the assumption that there was no letter sent by me; I'm wondering where it is you got that assumption.

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, as I just finished saying, we've been around this issue twice in this House, with the Liberal leader present making no statement that she's sent a letter to the minister. So I mean I'm sorry if I assumed that you didn't, but you had ample opportunity to declare your position on it, in writing, and you didn't.

And also when we're talking about the . . . when I was talking about the Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, rally, or the Liberal policy session, it said: candidates, Liberal delegates unanimously approved. And I just assumed

-- yes, I maybe wrongly assumed — that the Liberal leader went down there to attend the convention. But obviously there again she says she wasn't at the vote. So then I'm still assuming that I don't know what the Liberal leader's position is, as I don't know what it is on gaming, as I don't know what it is on social services, and as I don't know what it is on many, many other issues in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one more question for the member from Humboldt. Did the member from Humboldt, or any member of the government side, make any comment at any time on the motion regarding gaming that was put forward in this House one week ago?

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, would the Liberal leader clarify what motion she refers to?

Ms. Haverstock: — Yes, I will indeed. The member from Humboldt has made mention that there has been no part taken by me to make my position clear. In fact the member from Regina North West did speak to the motion on the afternoon that gun control was discussed, firearms were discussed in this House, and placed on record the view of our caucus.

And indeed, private members' day where there was a full discussion by myself on the casino gaming and gaming overall in the province of Saskatchewan, not one member of the government side chose to even comment on private members' day. And the official opposition in fact were the people who carried the ball that day besides ourselves. There was very, very little discussion. Out of 53 people, I'd like to know how many out of 53 members of the government side, put their position forward on gaming.

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of Gaming speaks for the government on the issue. Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what happened there. A number of members in the House thought we were winding down the session. And so normally at the end of session a lot of times we go from private members' business on a Tuesday, which is private members' day, to government business.

The official opposition and the government met and didn't even put a resolution in because that's sort of what happens in the tradition of this House. But for some reason, despite the fact that there has been many times in this legislature that the Leader of the Liberal Party chose not to speak on an issue or grace . . . no, I can't say that. Anyway I think you know what I'm meaning.

Then she puts forward a motion to filibuster the House. Why? Why does she want to spend the taxpayers' dollar in here when basically the session is over? I don't know why. But I mean you can talk about not making a statement on the issue. You asked many questions on . . . and your advisers, many of them who organized casinos in Moose Jaw; yourself, who was big into the horse-racing industry, or into the

horse-racing industry, I mean that's . . . And then you say you're opposed to gambling. Well you can't have it both ways.

The Speaker: — This debate is getting wide-ranging. It's certainly not on the topic any longer. And I wish members in the future would direct their comments through the Chair rather than to individual members in the House. Direct them through the Chair and I think we can avoid these personal attacks on one another.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Mr. D'Autremont: — With leave, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly, I would like to introduce a group of, it says here 20 grade 9 students from Arcola, but I counted them and I can only get 18. So I'm assuming that there's two of them didn't show up today.

We'd like to welcome them here today. Their teachers are Terry Fellner, and chaperon is Terry Johnston. I'm not sure what happened to the bus driver; perhaps one of them is driving the bus.

But I'd like to welcome them here today. I hope they enjoy the proceedings, and I hope to get together with them for a few minutes. I'd like to ask the Assembly to welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1530)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS AND ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 53 — An Act to amend The Health Districts Act

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on The Health Districts Act. We believe, the opposition, the official opposition in this House, that this is a very important piece of legislation, particularly in light of the government's inaction in dealing with The Health Districts Act and the opportunity to allow people in the province of Saskatchewan an opportunity to have a vote on health district formation in the province.

As the government has promised right from the very outset, Mr. Speaker — of health boards in this province — they committed to and promised the people of Saskatchewan as a carrot to try and get some degree of support for the formations of the new health districts, they promised the opportunity for people to

have direct input — electoral input — into the formation of these districts, and now it's becoming increasingly obvious, Mr. Speaker, that that isn't what their plans are at all; that they feel that unfortunately the people of Saskatchewan, they feel, don't understand the issue and therefore shouldn't be given the opportunity to vote at this time, Mr. Speaker, in direct contrast to the promises made at the time of the changes in the health districts, Mr. Speaker.

It's time that this government listened to the people of this province, and therefore it's time for a Bill like Bill 53 to be given the proper hearing that it should have been given earlier on and passed in this legislature, and we're hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that this afternoon that that will indeed happen.

Rural and urban people are demanding health board elections be held this fall. Health board elections are backed by the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, Mr. Speaker, are just a few to mention of people who are supportive of health board elections being held this fall.

And just a few short weeks ago, SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) issued a joint release on this matter, Mr. Speaker, and at that time they were unequivocal in their support for health board elections this fall. Sinclair Harrison, the SARM president stated at that time, and I quote:

Elected district health boards were promised to the people of this province when health reforms began nearly two years ago. The provincial government promised local authority and accountability in health care services. It's time for the provincial government to live up to those commitments and to keep its promises.

And I agree with Mr. Harrison completely. The government has been dithering on this issue for two years now, Mr. Speaker, approximately since the introduction of health care reforms in this province. They've had ample opportunity to form the health districts. They've had ample opportunity to deal with this issue and to form the wards that were . . . however they're going to be dealing with that situation to outline the various districts and opportunities for people to have a vote.

At the recent annual convention SARM and SUMA delegates passed resolutions demanding the health elections be held this year. Both associations have repeatedly asked the minister to announce the elections will be held in October with local government elections. To date, Mr. Speaker, their requests have been ignored.

Mr. Speaker, we can only ask the government members and government minister responsible for Health: why are they delaying this so long, Mr. Speaker? It's becoming obvious I think to everyone in

Saskatchewan they simply do not want these elections this fall. I think the health board issue they feel is too hot a topic still for the government to be dealing with. I think they don't want the open sores of health care reform to be investigated once again, Mr. Speaker, to be looked at once again. They feel that this is an issue that given time will heal up.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's going to be the case. I think it's going to be a festering sore that the government is going to be dealing with for a long time into the future. And delaying them is only going to make it that much worse, Mr. Speaker.

The only action we have witnessed is in regard to the appointment of Garf Stevenson as a one-man commission to investigate whether elections will be held this fall. Whenever this government gets backed into a corner they set up a commission.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to just talk about this one-man commission of Garf Stevenson going to be heading around the province shortly holding meetings all over the place. And even before the very first one, Mr. Speaker, before the very first one, Mr. Stevenson, as being interviewed by CBC Radio, suggested to the interviewer that day that it was unlikely that they had time now to have the elections this fall. Well, well, well.

Costing us \$200,000 and already the most important question has already been answered — the question that's been called for by SUMA and SARM and other groups, and the official opposition. And this Bill speaks to that. Right from the very beginning, Mr. Speaker, there was no way this government was going to allow health board elections this fall, and Mr. Garf Stevenson confirmed that, Mr. Speaker.

And we asked the minister responsible for Health one day in the legislature and in question period I asked the question of the minister that if at those meetings that Mr. Stevenson is going to be holding upcoming, if the people demanded at that time that the people of Saskatchewan wanted an opportunity and demanded at that time for health district board elections to be held this fall, whether the government would go along with those recommendations. And the minister stood up and just wavered all over the map on that because they know very well that they don't want them held this fall and they know that people across this province do.

The government has had no intention of holding these elections this fall right from the outset. So why, Mr. Speaker, are they so intent on spending \$200,000 on Garf Stevenson's study, Mr. Speaker? Surely, Mr. Speaker, that isn't necessary. Why doesn't the government want to hold democratically elected people to hold those positions on district health boards? Why does the minister think her appointed NDP friends can do a better job? Are elections being held off so the government won't be criticized by health boards, Mr. Speaker? I think that is exactly the case, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, \$200,000 is being spent on a commission study with Mr. Garf Stevenson heading it up and the most important questions have already been answered. Surely the people that are already on those boards, Mr. Speaker, can deal with the issues of the wards and all of the timing and all those kinds of issues without having to spend an additional \$200,000 on a commission that's already had the most important question answered.

Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatchewan would rather see \$200,000 being spent on the delivery of health care services rather than on a study that's no more needed in this province at all, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the decisions made by health boards will change the delivery of health care in this province for ever. These decisions should be made by elected individual, not by appointed people. Appointed members can only carry out the will of the government, Mr. Speaker. The people have no faith left in this government with respect to health board elections.

If health board elections are integrated this fall, the cost will be minimal, and SUMA and SARM believe that to be the case. They say that held in conjunction with municipal elections this fall, the cost would be a very, very minimal cost to the taxpayer of Saskatchewan. If elections are held outside of that framework, Mr. Speaker, they'll cost the residents of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan taxpayers, about \$500,000 just to have the elections in Saskatoon and in Regina, Mr. Speaker. And that's a horrendous cost for something that could have been dealt with in the municipal structure.

If health boards are not added to the ballot, expect the cost to be similar to a year down the road, Mr. Speaker. About a million dollars is what's being estimated right now. And I think we're about \$500,000 for holding it outside municipal, \$200,000 for Mr. Stevenson's study, and an additional \$300,000 for having them outside of Regina and Saskatoon. The cost will be about a million dollars to hold them across the province if they're held outside of the municipal elections this fall.

The Health minister must wonder who is keeping the books for our cities, towns, and villages. Because she obviously doesn't believe SUMA and SARM when they approximate the cost of the elections. In fact, she said, separate health board elections may not automatically be more costly — May 21, '94, the minister said that. And just what figures did the Health minister base that false statement on, Mr. Speaker? One can only wonder.

When health reform was first initiated by this government, it was promoted as a cost-saving mechanism. But it seems the only money saved is from closed hospitals, fired nurses and other health care related personnel, and fewer doctors in rural Saskatchewan. That's where the savings have been made up. Less service to the people of the province of

Saskatchewan and still an ongoing and increasing administrative costs to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan to operate the health care system in this province.

The government has all the money in the world to spend on its appointed board members, commissions, and councils, but little for health services to rural people. Who knows how many people are employed by the Saskatoon and Regina health boards, let alone all of the other boards and their new offices, etc?

We've had calls from nurses and other health care professionals that are disgusted by the amount of people being hired for public relations and what not else for the boards. During the recent cut-backs announced in Saskatoon, a mere handful of administrative staff positions were cut while nurses were laid off by the hundred, Mr. Speaker.

It is actions such as these that have people wanting elections to be held as soon as possible and wanting investigations of these kinds of actions. They want people they trust to be on health boards, Mr. Speaker. If the appointed members are well-liked, trusted, and capable, they'll be re-elected, Mr. Speaker, and that's the way the democratic process works. If these people are doing a good job on health district boards, they'll be re-elected. If they aren't, they will not be returned, Mr. Speaker, and there'll be other people put into those positions of responsibility.

It is time to allow the people to elect their representatives just as the government promised. Day after day we see letters to the editor on this issue and our office receives calls and letters.

A fax that was received this morning, Mr. Speaker, from the mayor of Macklin, Saskatchewan, over on the west side of the province, and it was entitled, "Saskatchewan voter disenfranchised", Mr. Speaker.

And it goes on to say, it states:

Are Saskatchewan residents losing their right to vote? Are we losing our right to chart our own destiny and that of our children? As I understand it, western democracy operates on the principle of universal suffrage — one person, one vote, with a majority winner representing and acting on behalf of the electors.

What has happened to this right with regards to Saskatchewan district health boards? Members to the district health boards were appointed, many of them contrary to the wishes of the people in the areas they represent, certainly not respecting the wishes of the population at large nor the majority of people. Adding to the erosion of public right, these appointed board members are now being asked whether health board elections should proceed as promised by the government in the fall of 1994.

Nowhere does the public at large have any say in this matter. The Saskatchewan Urban

Municipalities Association, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, whose members are duly elected by the population across this province, have made strong representation to the provincial government with regards to health board elections and have met a deaf ear.

If there is to be any credibility at all, if there is to be any semblance of fair representation, if there is to be a vague semblance of local autonomy, the least that should happen is that fair elections should be undertaken. Major, long-lasting decisions are being made by appointed people at the board level and administrative positions, who really are not accountable to the electorate.

How far can the electorate be removed before it is really ineffective or becomes totally annihilated? There is a major error here; please correct it.

(1545)

I say the mayor has made some very solid points, and if members opposite are interested in keeping their chairs, I would think they had better listen, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately it appears the government is not listening on this issue at all. Saturday's *Leader-Post* says, and I quote:

The NDP government may decide it doesn't want health board elections at the same time as this fall's municipal elections . . .

That was in May 21 edition, 1994.

And that should be no surprise, Mr. Speaker, to anyone in this province, because the minister responsible for Health has been wavering on this issue right from the outset, Mr. Speaker. And it's very, very unfortunate. That is why, Mr. Speaker, it was incumbent upon the official opposition to bring a motion . . . pardon me, a Bill, forward with respect to health districts.

Because we feel it is so critically important that the government act on this issue. It is something that they promised right from the outset. And we, the official opposition, are here to hold the government accountable and hold them to their promises. And that's why this Bill was presented, Mr. Speaker. It's time for the NDP to stop wasting taxpayers' dollars on frivolous studies and reviews and start owning up to their own responsibilities, Mr. Speaker.

And that is now, and we would want and ask the government to support this Bill and give it opportunity for the elections to be held this fall, Mr. Speaker. And that's why this Bill is before us and we would like the government to debate this issue and, as well, to vote on this issue this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — I'd appreciate being able to make a few comments on this, Mr. Speaker. In the city of Prince Albert we had one of the first and earliest health boards that was established. And if there was any board that was ready to go for elections it probably would be the Prince Albert Health Board, and the city of Prince Albert is probably prepared as much as is anybody in terms of an election, in going for an election.

And before I go any farther about this I might mention that we are looking at something quite historical here. We are looking at actually electing members to the health board, those people who run our health institutions, for the first time in the province of Saskatchewan. This is historical, and you have to set up an entire electoral system. So when you're thinking of doing . . . setting up a new electoral system you're not altogether in a much different situation than South Africa was when they were setting up an electoral system there. Perhaps not nearly as profound, not nearly as profound, but think of the decisions that you have to make.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, we have to put in place and make decisions as to who is going to comprise the electorate. These decisions have yet to be made. Who is going to draw up the ward boundaries, and how should they be drawn up? And that issue, particularly in a case like us, like ours, needs a bit of debate and needs some thought.

If we did it on a straight per capita basis, on a one-person, one-vote basis, and set up the wards so we take the entire population and divide it by eight, that would result in a much different make-up of the board than if we set aside certain wards for rural areas and certain wards for city areas. That needs a bit of thought and a consensus should come from within the district on that.

The fact of just of the type of timing that you should use between elections. Should these people be elected on an annual basis, for a two-year period, for a three-year period, or for a four-year period? That question needs to be answered. We need to answer the question of should the people all be elected at the same time? Should we have all eight up for re-election at the same time or should we be setting up a system which is going to stagger this electoral process? Perhaps elect people say for six years but every three years. Those are questions which are yet unanswered.

Should we be making use of some type of electronic voting system rather than using the traditional system, or do we need a new kind of enumeration system? All of these questions need to be answered. Then once we have those questions in place, we can say that we've got an electoral system which people in the community have had an opportunity to comment on; have had some consensus on; will debate it here probably — I hope we'll have a chance to debate it if we get some recommendations coming from Mr. Stevenson; and when we get those, we'll be able to

debate them and set up a system that's going to work.

You know, to go helter-skelter into an election and just say, let's have an election. And then what? Then who is going to set it all up? So it requires a bit of advance planning and we need to do it properly because this is going to be something that has to last.

Mr. Speaker, so when it came to the situation in Prince Albert, where personally I felt that yes, we were, in that area, as ready as anybody for an election, and we could have put two or three things . . . or several of these things into place. I look to my neighbours and I say: what's happening in the Nipawin area or what's happening in the Battleford area or the Biggar area? Or I look at areas in the South, and I see that in those cases many of the boards had just finished hiring their CEOs (chief executive officer). They have hardly even got their studies done, their needs studies done, let alone implementing some of these studies.

So they'd be putting themselves into a situation. If we demanded an election — Prince Albert — and if I, as an MLA, demand an election there, then those people would not have the privilege of being able to implement their wellness system, and getting their community together on it and moving in the direction as fast as the cities have been able to, because they will be bogged down into electioneering. And that would take six months to do; probably another six months in order to get new board members — those that would be newly put into place — trained in operation of boards and used to the direction and trying to set up the direction from the board. So it'll become rather awkward.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we will find it very advantageous to get some good advice from the commission which Mr. Stevenson has agreed to work on; take his advice; amend it, if necessary; make it where we see that there may be particular cases that we feel is necessary; and then take the whole concept and put an election in place right across the province, one that we know will be historic and that will work.

There may be other comments I might want to make or other members might want to make on this, but I do believe we have agreement at this stage, Mr. Speaker, to go on to some other business.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of debate on this motion.

The division bells rang from 3:54 p.m. until 4:01 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 26

Van Mulligen	Hagel
Wiens	Bradley
Tchorzewski	Pringle
Lingenfelter	Lautermilch
Shillington	Calvert
Johnson	Murray
Goulet	Trew
Atkinson	Sonntag

Kowalsky	Cline
Mitchell	Scott
MacKinnon	Kujawa
Penner	Kluz
Cunningham	Jess

Nays — 6

Swenson	D'Autremont
Boyd	Goohsen
Toth	Bergman

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 66 — An Act respecting the Superannuation of Teachers and Disability Benefits for Teachers

The Chair: — I'll ask the Minister of Education, Training and Employment to introduce her officials to the members of the committee.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. To my right is Arleen Hynd, deputy minister of Education, Training and Employment. To my left is John McLaughlin, the executive director of the Teachers' Superannuation Commission, and behind Ms. Hynd is Michael Littlewood, an official with the Department of Education, Training and Employment.

Clause 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Madam Minister, I'd like to welcome you and your officials here today. I wonder if you could give us a brief run-down of the purpose for this Bill.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The purpose of the legislation is to have the Bill comply with the federal Income Tax Act. That's one purpose.

The second purpose is to amend the Act to meet the requirements of the collective agreement that was arrived at with the provincial government and trustees bargaining committee and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Would you explain the required annual contributions to the teachers' pension plan by all the parties involved?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The requirements are this: 7.85 per cent times the yearly basic exemption of Canada Pension Plan plus 6.05 per cent times the yearly maximum pensionable earnings minus the yearly basic exemption of the Canada Pension Plan, plus 7.85 per cent times earnings beyond the year's maximum pensionable earnings as set by the Canada Pension Plan, and they're matched by the teacher.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Does this cover the entire amount required to build up the pension plan for a teacher over the long term?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — At present there is a \$1.878 billion deficit in the plan. And these additional contributions have to be made up by ongoing provincial governments. And this is the unfunded pension plan; it is not the money purchase plan which was changed in 1980.

So any teachers that got into teaching after 1980 are in the money purchase plan — we'll call it that for public consumption. Those people prior to 1980 are in this plan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. So a teacher who's contributing today — say they started this year — into the pension plan, when they retire the monies that they have contributed, along with the government portion, will provide for their entire pension contribution. It won't require any further inputs by the provincial government at some point down the road — is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — For teachers who started teaching after 1980, what you've said is true. For teachers who started teaching before 1980, that is not true. There will have to be additional revenues put into the plan in order to meet the requirements of the plan. That's the unfunded liability.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. As I understand it, when the teachers' pension plan was initially put into place sometime in the mid-1930s, it was unfunded. And from that time until the change — you say 1980 — that that accumulation is now \$1.8-plus billion. Does that amount continue to grow? Does it cost the province more money to put in to make up for the teachers that are retiring? Or is there a fixed amount of money that goes into that plan at present time and that isn't growing?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The present shortfall in the plan will probably continue to grow. There have been changes made in the past collective agreement, which is recognized in this Act, that says that interest has to remain in the fund. Governments cannot take the interest out of the fund any longer. That goes against the collective agreement. It goes against this piece of legislation.

As you will probably know, the previous government was being sued by the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) for taking interest out of the fund and putting it into general revenues. What we have done is stopped that. The money has to stay in the plan.

And I also want to make this point: that we acknowledge that this unfunded liability will continue to grow, but it will not grow as readily because we've stopped the reaching in and grabbing interest by various administrations.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. That leads me to two other points then. It's my understanding that the way that the teachers' pension fund works, that it used to work, was as follows: the total pension pay-out, plus government-matched

contributions, less monies freed up by retiring teachers, plus interest, earned above 7 per cent.

Now during most of the 1980s, budgetary estimates of requirements were actually higher than actual requirements. Excess monies were allowed to remain in the fund, which resulted in a surplus beyond the minimum amount required, the minimum fund balance. The surplus was allowed to remain in the fund, in recognition of the fund's large unfunded liability.

I understand the auditor questioned the government's authority to leave the surplus in the fund and in the following years the surplus was reduced because budget allocations were not sufficient to meet pension requirements. However, it is my understanding that the surplus, a surplus of almost \$100 million, remained beyond the minimum requirements.

The government was challenged by the STF because the surplus had been reduced. Could you please give us an overview of the outcome of that challenge, and what has happened to that \$100 million surplus?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Of the 100 million that you talk of, 45 million is still in the fund and 55 million is being . . . has been drawn down in the last three years, I understand, because the actual appropriation was less than what was anticipated.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I think I need a little more explanation on it rather than just the document.

You were saying earlier that it was wrong that previous administrations had drawn down the surplus that had been built up, because of interest rates. Now you're saying that you drew down \$55 million from the surplus because it was above the requirements, is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The technical surplus is an argument that doesn't make a lot of sense, but there was money that was drawn out of the fund. There still is a deficit of \$1.878 billion. There are tables that have estimates and actuals, and I can send those to you in order to expedite the proceedings.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, Madam Minister, if you would please.

I think where we're running into a problem here is, while there's only one teachers' pension plan, there's actually two portions to it, or maybe three portions to it, well two portions. That is the portion before 1980 which is unfunded, and the portion after 1980 which is now a funded program — a money purchase program — in which interest can accrue because the money is actually sitting there. And hopefully it's in there at a good rate of return so that it will build up faster than what inflation will eat away at it.

Madam Minister, in your Bill — and this deals with the same particular issue here — you have in here a formula for the removal of the surplus funds. And this,

according to the formula, would take until the year 2030 for the complete withdrawal of the surplus. I wonder, in the light of your previous comments that it was wrong for governments to draw down on that surplus, how you explain this formula and what it's in there for.

(1615)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As I understand it from the officials, the \$45 million is not attributable to teachers, so it's a question of who owns the fund and that wasn't clear in the previous legislation. And so what we're doing is following the legislation — the new Act — in order to attribute that money to someone, and that's why it's being allowed to be drawn down over a period of time.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Then if STF went to court for determination to gain control of the hundred million dollars that was in surplus and now you're saying that the \$45 million remaining in that fund has no clear ownership, what were the results of the court case and how could STF try to gain control of it?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There was no court case because we were able to resolve this issue at the collective bargaining table; so there was no court case. And I want to make something perfectly clear when I say there was withdrawals of funds: it wasn't just your administration that withdrew funds and I said that, so I'm not attributing anything to you that I'm not attributing to others.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister, for making that clear. Perhaps I need a clarification then on where it says: teachers' superannuation fund to the General Revenue Fund — you mean the General Revenue Fund of the teachers' superannuation and not the government's Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We're talking about the General Revenue Fund of government; there is no fund of teachers. So when we talk about the General Revenue Fund, that is like the Consolidated Fund — it's the new name, I understand. Because of the \$45 million and technically who owned it was in some question, we couldn't allow that fund to grow on forever. So it had to be apportioned some place and that's why there's a time line. We did not want the fund to come out all at once and that's why it's coming out over a period of time.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, how do the teachers then gain control of this fund if you're pulling it out of a specified account, a specified area, and placing it into the Consolidated Fund? The Consolidated Fund is used for the government's general purposes. How do the teachers in the end gain access and control of this \$45 million if it's going in with the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The Act is very specific now. The Act clearly states what can be drawn out of the

fund. What was at question was money being drawn out of the fund when there was interest in excess of 7 per cent. So now the Act is very clear under what circumstances funds can be withdrawn from the fund. I think the other thing I'd like to say is there is a distinction between the new plan and the old plan. The legislation we're dealing with now is the old plan.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. One of the sections of this Bill deals with a quorum, and I went through it I believe with the Minister of Finance and the Crown foundations corporation when that was set up dealing with a quorum. And out of the seven members who would be represented on the board of the Teachers' superannuation fund, three will come from nominees from the STF, three from Lieutenant Governor in Council, and hopefully those six will choose a chairman; and I say hopefully because there is provision in the legislation to allow someone to be appointed by the Educational Relations Board.

I wonder if you could explain for us who the Educational Relations Board is?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The Educational Relations Board consists of five people, two chosen by the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, two chosen by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, and then they jointly agree on a chair. And the role of the Educational Relations Board is to act as the Labour Relations Board for matters that are in dispute, and that's why there's a reference. If they can't agree on a chair, they would then go to the Educational Relations Board. There are two chosen by the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association and two by the STF, and they jointly choose a chair.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. I thought that might be the case, that the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) would have some representation on that board.

Does that cause any concern for you or for the STF, that the SSTA could have some input into the person chosen to be the chairman of the teachers' superannuation fund?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No, it causes me no concern.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. As I brought up with The Crown Foundations Act, I would have liked to have seen the quorum state that one of the members of the quorum would have to be a representative of the STF. I would hope that you would give consideration to that, instituting that in the future.

The minister responsible for The Crown Foundations Act did give me a letter with that intent, not in legislation, but that they would practice that, that one of the members of quorum would have to be a member, in this particular case, representing the university involved.

And I would hope that you would give some

consideration to that, because I can see a possibility at some point in time where the board could be split. A decision is coming down; the chairman may not have been chosen with agreement of the STF side, that it could have been chosen by the Educational Relations Board, and you would have to look there and see what the quorum was for a meeting of that group.

So I can see that . . . it may be remote, but there is potential for conflict here, and if quorum were to say one member chosen from the STF nominees, I think it would help matters somewhat.

I have to assume that the STF is in favour of this, Madam Minister, for when we contacted them they had no concerns about this particular Bill. Therefore, Madam Minister, we're prepared to allow this Bill to proceed.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 51 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. I would like to thank the minister and her officials for coming in today and assisting us.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'd like to thank the critic for his thoughtful questions. They were very well researched and done. Thank you.

(1630)

Bill No. 47 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Government Insurance Act, 1980

The Chair: — I'll ask the minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) to introduce his official to the committee.

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have with me on my left here, Randy Heise, the vice-president of finance for SGI.

Clause 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Minister, and Randy Heise. I shouldn't ask this question in here, but are you related to Rod Heise perhaps? Okay.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, this Bill I believe is a result of the fact that SGI at one time had a number of subsidiaries that were owned by SGI but not reported as such or not clearly identified as such, and that the Provincial Auditor said that SGI did not have the legal authority by which to own subsidiaries. Is that correct, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — No, that's not correct. It's for a different purpose. Basically this Act is an Act that is corresponding with a federal Act that was passed in 1992, the Insurance Companies Act, in Canada. And it replaced the old Act of 1983, the Canadian and

British Insurance Companies Act and the department of Finance Act.

And some of the changes in this Act in regards to investment could have been done back in 1988 when the Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan was created. At that time on the auto fund side, we were able to go ahead and have the investment done by the corporation on the auto fund side. And in this particular case therefore, when we wanted to do some investment, we had to go through the Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan; and what this new Act does is that it deletes the approval to go to the investment board.

And so what we're doing is basically having, you know, the ability to go ahead and do the investment and dispose of any investment and as well as the power to make regulations. So it's basically, overall, a housekeeping amendment which is keeping up with the federal changes in the Act and also corresponding to The Crown Corporations Act, you know, as well. So that's the reason for the Act.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What investments were being made through the Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan that will now be made through some other vehicle through SGI?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — We've been acting with Investment Corporation, as I previously said, since 1988. We could have . . . the government of the day could have made those changes in regards to the insurance Act at that point in time, but I guess when it was done, you know, for the auto fund, it wasn't done for the insurance side.

So in regards to investment, we have always gone through the Investment Corporation and this now just provides us what was provided for in the auto fund. And so, you know, SGI is able to then make investments through its insurance Act.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What types of things would you be investing in? What are you investing these funds in that you have up until now been going through the Investment Corporation of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Primarily we go with both private, corporate, and governmental bonds, and as well we go to a short-term paper as well as equity investments. And we also go with mortgages.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So basically this is just money management is what it is. Rather than owning actual physical properties or corporations, it's buying liquid assets, liquid money assets, is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, that's generally correct.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Was any of this investment done since 1988 outside of the Saskatchewan Investment Corporation?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — All of the investments have been through the Investment Corporation except, you know, when we did the SGI CANADA Insurance Limited when we went out of province. And that was the only other investment.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So SGI CANADA was done outside of the Saskatchewan Investment Corporation vehicle?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — When I was replying to your question, you asked whether it was done outside the Investment Corporation, and yes, that was the only one that was done outside the Investment Corporation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. I don't have any other questions to deal with this particular matter so we're prepared to allow it to proceed. Thank you.

Clause 1 agreed.

Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

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

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, I would like to acknowledge Randy Heise for his help, as well as the member from across who asked very concise questions. Thanks very much.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister and his official for coming in today. The official's brother and I hung around a bit together at the lake and his brother was the RM (rural municipality) secretary in my home town. So thank you.

Bill No. 61 — An Act to amend The Municipal Revenue Sharing Act

The Chair: — I will ask the minister responsible for Municipal Government to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have to my right, Ron Davis, who is director of financial services, assistant deputy minister; behind me I have Paul Raths and Grete Nybraten, the people from our department, from financial services.

Clause 1

Mr. Swenson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, since 1991 my numbers show that the funding to municipalities has been cut from 66.7 million to 45.3 million. That's very close to a 35 per cent cut.

Now that the infrastructure program is in place, can you give assurances that that particular program will not be used to make even further cuts to municipal funding? Are the proper controls in place to make sure

that we don't see more reductions taking place?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well that's an easy assurance to give. The Minister of Finance has said this year during our budget debate that there would be no further cuts to third-party funding. And it's not contingent upon infrastructure program, it is simply our commitment to third parties that following this last cut there would be no further cuts to their transfers.

Mr. Swenson: — Well I'm sure people will be glad to hear that, Madam Minister.

I wonder if you could just very quickly . . . regarding the infrastructure program, could you give me a brief overview of what the ongoing consultation process is like as this develops? Can you give me an idea of sort of, on a daily or weekly basis, what exactly happens with you and your department as far as the allocation of these funds?

(1645)

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, thank you. As you know, the municipalities have had their list ready and prepared for some time and those applications now are coming in to the provincial municipal screening committee. We set up a municipal provincial project screening committee early this spring. They are the people who screen the projects and approve them and forward them then to the federal-provincial committee. And it is our commitment that as a province that we will forward those projects as quickly as we can to the federal government. This committee works every second week, and we are anticipating making announcements as quickly as we get approval back from the federal government.

Mr. Swenson: — Madam Minister, you, at the beginning of this process, indicated that there would only be 50 per cent of the infrastructure program would go to municipalities, even though a lot of them felt that the way the program was presented last fall that they should have gotten 100 per cent of that.

Do you see that 50 per cent number being hard and fast, or are there some allowances if your committee comes forward with some recommendations that would take the share over 50 per cent? Is that feasible or are you simply staying hard-pressed on that 50 per cent number?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — When we made the allocations under the federal program, the infrastructure program, we made it clear that it would be divided into two pools, one dedicated strictly to municipal infrastructure and provided on a per capita basis of \$37 per capita — that is for the urban governments, \$28 million. That \$28 million pool is made up of 18 from the federal funds and 10 from provincial funds. There is also on top of that a \$4 million intermunicipal pool and then the \$10 million allocated to RMs.

So that pool of money has been agreed upon by our partners and we are allocating project approval based on, for urban governments, the \$37 per capita.

What happens next year . . . there will be a review of the entire program next year. And it would be, I think, premature to talk about making any changes in the allocation at this point in time. The pool that is under the direction of the provincial and federal government, which is the remaining \$24 million or \$25 million, will be going to help municipalities as well, but it'll take on a different form. Like, for instance, the project that was announced in Cumberland House last week which does not fall under the municipal provincial infrastructure program, so it does not have a per capita allocation to it.

So there are many forms it does take. A lot of municipalities will be gaining by both approaches — both the provincial pool and the municipal pool as well.

Mr. Swenson: — Is there any sort of cross-checking or criteria, Madam Minister, because communities are allowed to access both pools of money? And there obviously were a number that won't receive any just given the way the process works. If your name comes up once, are you sort of put to the back of the list?

The concern out there is that a lot of communities are voicing to us, is that we simply are not going to be able to get in on the process because our plans either weren't formulated quick enough, or we didn't have a ready-made project, or because of the various cut-backs that we've gone through, we simply haven't had the opportunity to allocate any of our own funds there.

Can you give us some assurance that they will have an opportunity to at least be viewed?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well certainly. This is a two-year process and they're under no obligation to make their application this year. If they want to sit back and review their priorities, then I highly recommend that they take their time and do it so that the project that they do, finally get funding for, is one the community needs.

If they have some concerns about the process, if they write to us, we certainly would go out and talk to them — send our officials out — and let them understand how their projects may be approved and the time lines that are involved. And we would work with them to help develop their budgets as well.

So we'll provide whatever support we can, and whatever communication they need we'd be more than willing to go out and talk to them.

Mr. Swenson: — Well I'm sure they would appreciate that, Madam Minister, because one of the things that is evidently clear is that their property tax base which, when you look at this year with Education having another decrease of 4 per cent, with some added environmental rules and regulations, they're all wondering about the two new labour Bills.

Certainly the public sector is a big area of wage and employment in this province and all of these things thrown in on their property tax base — the ability to raise funds for next year even, given what they may have to do as far as mill rate increases — is quite substantial. And I guess they're really concerned that their portion that's going to be necessary to be raised, which they can only get from one place if they don't have significant reserves, is from the property tax base, is under a lot of stress.

And that's why I ask the question if there was some flexibility here because everybody's naturally hoping that next year will be better. And your assurance that there won't be any more cuts, I think, will be taken to heart. It's what happens in so many of these other areas that they find very bothersome. And perhaps some public statement from yourself and your department to once again reinforce the fact that they will have an opportunity a year from now maybe after their house is in better order.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, the member opposite has of course brought to the House some of the concerns that are out there and the pressure that the municipal government budgets are under, and we're very sensitive to that.

Again I want to say that the mill rates this year are not going up dramatically. There has been, as we have made the changes in health care and in the SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency), there has been a benefit of about four and a half million dollars to the municipalities, to their budget. So not every municipality is experiencing a crisis situation with their budget. Some of them are and some of them aren't.

There are however . . . if you look at the funded reserves that municipalities have, they do have a fair amount of funds placed in reserves and the financial health of most municipalities is fairly good; not to say that they're not, of course, experiencing some stress as they go through their own internal analysis of programs and service delivery and some impacts that have occurred in the last couple of years. But municipalities are coping fairly well. They've had a benefit of about four and a half million dollars because of the health care changes that we made and the health care funding.

And what we have seen so far in regard to the pressure on municipal budgets, some of the mill rates have been going up, but some of them have actually been going down. I know the city of Melfort reduced their mill rate by 2, and they are able to do that because of the change in health care funding, taking into account the change in the SAMA requisition at the same time.

So I know you are expressing concerns, but I think you have to not generalize; there are some specific areas where there are some problems, but there is also some municipalities that are coping very well.

Mr. Swenson: — Well they are real concerns, Madam Minister. I use the example in Moose Jaw. Our police

force I believe has decreased from about 70 officers and their superiors down to in the low 50's — 54 currently — and there's talk of it reducing even two more.

People from the police association have expressed to me grave concern because they don't have the manpower, they feel now, to adequately to protect the community.

They raised the point that they currently have a three-time convicted child sex offender walking the streets of our city and simply don't have the manpower to watch, and they're really concerned that that individual may offend again. Policing, and you and I both know, is becoming a real touchy point with a lot of people in our society. Most jurisdictions are cutting back on their manpower in order to cope with their budgetary requirements. And at some point in time you can only cut policing so far and then citizens . . . well they start doing things that we would probably not like them to do.

I am told that there are contemplated cuts in policing across the province. Now well my own city is a good example of what they've gone through there to cut back. If that's the case, I think that we really need to look at the priorities here and the whole question surrounding early parole. There are all sorts of issues there that involve public safety. Cutting our municipal monies is having a direct impact on that.

And I wonder if you could provide me with some type of an answer back to Saskatchewan, particularly urban municipalities and those that rely on RCMP policing, about what your view is with the cut-backs that have occurred as far as policing costs and the safety of the public in the next year or two.

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well as you know, there are standards from the Department of Justice where you have a specific number of officers per 750 people; I think one officer for every 750 people. So there are those standards that have been in place for a number of years. You are right in saying that the costs are going up and they're becoming a greater concern.

As a department, though, we have to let municipal governments manage those affairs. Those are internal to their own decision making, and they have to set their own priorities and manage their own budgets. And we are providing them with the amount of transfers that we can, under our limited ability to do so, realizing that we have a BBB credit rating and a debt that we have to pay, and we're providing them with the amount of support that we can.

Again we have in Saskatchewan . . . I don't think we have a crisis in property tax. Saskatoon has the third-lowest residential property tax in the country, and Regina has the eighth-lowest property tax in Canada. And so I think it is unfair to characterize what's going on as a crisis across all of our communities.

Property tax definitely is creeping up, and it's a

concern for everybody, but when we look at what's going on across Canada, I think we fare fairly well in comparison to other jurisdictions.

Mr. Swenson: — Madam Minister, you said there was a net benefit under the hospital revenue tax back to Saskatchewan communities. I haven't detected any lessening of the commitment by communities to have this thing removed. And once again I ask you: the commitment made by your Premier in 1993 to eliminate that tax, is there any movement yet beyond the short-term plan which you've put in place to actually take that off of the rolls and move onto something else?

Hon. Ms. Carson: — Well again, we made a commitment to reduce health care funding on property tax, and we did that when we reduced it from the union hospital requisition to a 2 mill levy. And so that was a commitment that we made and that we delivered on. We reduced the health care on property tax . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. It now being 5 o'clock, the Committee of the Whole will stand recessed until 7 o'clock p.m.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.