

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
February 27, 1995

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions today from the Tompkins and Gull Lake area and I'd be happy to read the prayer for those people today:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to allocate adequate funding dedicated towards the double-laning of Highway No. 1; and further, that the Government of Saskatchewan direct any monies available from the federal infrastructure program towards double-laning Highway No. 1, rather than allocating these funds towards capital construction projections in the province.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will every pray.

And I'd be happy to table these today.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition on behalf of constituents today.

The prayer is as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to oppose changes to present legislation regarding firearm ownership, and instead urge the federal government to deal with the criminal use of firearms by imposing stiffer penalties on abusers.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And the constituents here are from Limerick and Assiniboia and McCord area.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to present some petitions . . . a petition from petitioners in the north-west part of the province — from Neilburg, Maidstone, North Battleford. And I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to unequivocally oppose changes to present legislation regarding firearm ownership, and instead urge the federal government to deal with the criminal use of firearms by imposing stiffer penalties on abusers, and urge the federal government to recognize that gun control and crime control are not synonymous.

I present this on behalf of constituents and the people from the north-west area. Thank you.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 11(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province of Saskatchewan petitioning the Assembly to allocate adequate funding dedicated toward the double-laning of Highway No. 1.

And of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to oppose changes to federal legislation regarding firearm ownership.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 21 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the Department of Finance: what was the total amount of money borrowed by the province of Saskatchewan for the '94-95 fiscal year; (2) what was the total amount of money borrowed outside of the province for '94-95 fiscal year; provide the name of the institution, the location of the institution, and the interest rate; (3) what was the total amount of money borrowed by the province of Saskatchewan for the '93-94 fiscal year; and (4) what was the total amount of money borrowed outside of the province for the '93-94 fiscal year; provide the name of the institution, the location of the institution, and the interest rate.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the legislature a group of grade 7 and 8 students from Davin School, accompanied by Mrs. Wynne Edwards and Mrs. Lea Johnson. The students will be having a tour of the Legislative Building, and afterwards I'll be meeting with them to visit and have a photo.

So we'll see you later, and please join me in welcoming to students to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Carlson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly, two students from Lebret who are taking a law 30 class, and their teacher, Darlyne Hoberg. I'll be meeting with this huge class after question period for a few minutes and for a photo opportunity. And I'd like all members of the Assembly to welcome them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce

to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly, in the west gallery — and I'll refer to you as Mr. Speaker today instead of Mr. Gallery — a constituent of mine, Chris Betker from Meadow Lake. Chris, you should have told me; we could have travelled down here together today.

So welcome, Chris, and please join me in welcoming him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I see in the east gallery a former Member of Parliament for Regina East, I believe it was, and still a full-time farmer. And I wonder if you could join with me to welcome John Burton.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Yorkton Speed Skater Wins Four Gold Medals

Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to congratulate all the Saskatchewan athletes who were participating at the Canada Winter Games in Grande Prairie, Alberta. There is one competitor from my riding of Yorkton who has done exceptionally well; 19-year-old Jason Parker has won four gold medals in speed skating, at the same time has set new game records in receiving these top honours at the games. Jason was a member of the Saskatchewan speed skating team at the 1991 Canada Games and has won 10 medals at the Canadian championships since 1989.

Now he can add four more medals to his list. In December, at the Games trial Jason made for the 1,500 metres, was the second fastest of any Canadian this year in that distance. I know that everyone in Yorkton is especially proud of the performance Jason has put on at the Canada Winter Games in Alberta and I want to congratulate, with all of my colleagues here, his accomplishments. If Jason keeps on skating at this level he stands a good chance of making the Canadian Olympics team in 1998 in Japan.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also mention that during this weekend our Saskatchewan hockey team won the gold medal by defeating Alberta 3-1 in the finals. The first half of the Games are over and Saskatchewan is in sixth place overall with 18 medals.

And to all of the participants I want to wish them all the best of luck during the remaining days of the competition and a special congratulations, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Jason Parker for his exceptional accomplishments. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Through-put Elevator in Unity

Mr. Britton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I thought I might bring to your attention and through you to the

rest of the members present here, some of the things that's happening out in my constituency which indicates the confidence that Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and others have in the farming community in our area.

Mr. Speaker, they just finished a high through-put elevator in the town of Unity. The official opening will be, I think, April 14, but they have been in business since last fall. Mr. Speaker, the elevator capacity is 10,000 metric tonnes, which is 400,000 bushels, and they have sold condominium storage there to the amount of 16,000 metric tonnes, which is another 640 bushels capacity. Mr. Speaker, this is the first concrete, high through-put elevator the Pool has in Saskatchewan tied onto a condominium, and it went over very well. They spent in the neighbourhood of \$5.3 million building this elevator, Mr. Speaker.

It carries a staff of 16, and they have a very, very good farm supply there too also. Mr. Speaker, they have shown, as far as I'm concerned, a very high rate of confidence in our area.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, there is another one being built, will be started in February . . .

The Speaker: — Sorry, but the member's time is up.

Saskatchewan Hockey Team Wins Gold Medal

Mr. Knezacek: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the best hockey players come from Saskatchewan, whether they are in the National Hockey League or in the minor hockey leagues across the province or right here in the Assembly. And to support that view, I am proud to rise today in this Assembly to congratulate the Saskatchewan hockey team for winning the gold medal at the Canada Winter Games in Grande Prairie, Alberta over the weekend.

And to show their strength, our Saskatchewan hockey players beat the host team, Alberta, 3 to 1 in the final. This is the first time Saskatchewan has won a medal in the Canada Games hockey competition since the games started in 1967. And rightly so, with a gold medal performance, we are all proud of this accomplishment.

These hockey players who fought their way to the gold medal came from all across the province. Saskatchewan beat the favoured team from Quebec in advance of the gold medal game because of the great goal-tending and an overall team effort.

This gold medal in hockey says a lot about the calibre of hockey players who train and play in Saskatchewan. Our team was ranked sixth heading into the games, but the team didn't let that stop them from believing in themselves and showed true grit and determination in winning the gold medal.

And so, Mr. Speaker, congratulations to all the hockey players on Team Saskatchewan, and congratulations to the coaches and trainers for the gold medal performance.

I know everyone in the House today extends his or her congratulations to these fine athletes who are now national champions — the best in Canada. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Shaunavon Kinsmen Telemiracle Fund-raiser

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment today on a very worthwhile fund-raising event which took place in my home town of Shaunavon this past weekend.

As in other towns across Saskatchewan, the Kinsmen service club held its annual radiothon and bar night to raise money for Telemiracle. Just as they have done in the past, the people of Shaunavon and area gave generously, contributing some \$13,000. And along with the \$5,000 they raise each and every year from the schools, will bring an amount of some \$18,000 to this very worthwhile cause.

As one of the founding members of the Shaunavon Kinsmen, it gives me great pride to know that money raised will be returned to these people in the cities and towns and villages, who are in need of this support.

I was privileged to take to the air waves in this year's radiothon, and would like members to join me in paying tribute to everyone who made this year's event such a terrific success.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Semans Telemiracle Fund-raiser Chautauqua '95

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to report on a fund-raiser held in my constituency.

I had the pleasure of participating in the opening ceremonies of Chautauqua '95 in Semans, Saskatchewan. Even though it has been about 65 years since this type of event was held in Semans, this one was a huge success in raising over \$2,200 for the upcoming Telemiracle telethon which will be held this weekend in Saskatoon.

It is fitting, as we recently celebrate Heritage Day in Saskatchewan, that I am able to speak about this event which upheld the philosophy of the original chautauqua which was held locally in the 1930s in Semans, Lestock, Ituna, and Elfros, and that is to uplift, education, and to entertain.

In the late 1800s the original version of chautauqua was born as a program to train church workers and Sunday school teachers during the summer, but it eventually included entertainment and education.

Mr. Speaker, almost 700 people turned out to the last two shows which were recently held in Semans, and entertainers came from Davidson, Lanigan, Govan, Raymore, Punnichy, Wishart, and Semans. All of the participants and volunteers are

to be congratulated for bringing back a part of our heritage and at the same time raising money for a very worthwhile cause. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Misty Valley Farms

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I am pleased to report on good news, at a good news event from my riding. Given the number of success stories in rural Saskatchewan, I'm sure this will be one of the many more items which I report.

Today I wish to congratulate a family in my constituency who have made a great success out of their ranching business. The Oddan family of Maidstone own and operate Misty Valley Farms. They recently held their 19th annual production sale of horned Herefords. The sale is always sure to draw a crowd and this year was no exception. Buyers were on hand from the four western provinces, Ontario, and Wyoming.

The top sale of the day was for a 1994 bull calf which fetched \$10,400. In total, Mr. Speaker, 46 bulls averaged \$2,800; 32 registered females averaged \$2,000; while 49 commercial females averaged \$1,400. Add it all up, Mr. Speaker, and you have a tidy sum of money for Maidstone and for the Oddans. For this, they should be commended.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed that while I was speaking the opposition members have turned green with envy. I guess this is because they wish they could collect as much money for their bull.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farm Credit Corporation in Partnership with Edenwold School

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this Assembly I reported on a school program sponsored by the Pilot Butte Lions Club. One characteristic of this program involved students teaching adults how to teach students — as good an example of cooperation as you can find, I think.

Today I want to tell you about another school in my constituency which is also working cooperatively with an outside organization — again, for the mutual benefit of both. Edenwold School has recently kicked off a partnership with the Regina headquarters of the Farm Credit Corporation. Representatives from the FCC (Farm Credit Corporation) recently came to the school to officially launch the partnership.

For its part, FCC will provide computer hardware and software, educational tools that are now as essential as chalk and a blackboard. In addition, the FCC will sponsor awards for various school contests. Finally, the school will have access to FCC staff as resource people.

In return, students will provide art work and project work for display at the Regina headquarters. Classes will travel to Regina on occasion to provide entertainment for the FCC staff; and the school, in turn, will invite FCC staff to its annual Christmas concert and other school events.

Mr. Speaker, in the grand scheme of things this agreement perhaps is a small matter, but it is a significant effort I think by both parties. It takes students out of the classroom and into the outside world they will soon enter, and it reminds representatives of that world that the corporate bottom line is not all there is. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Support for Agriculture

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Minister, it's extremely disconcerting to have to listen to the NDP (New Democratic Party) and the Liberals argue about who has done the most to hurt Saskatchewan farmers. The fact is, sir, that you are both guilty and you're both trying to deflect criticism by blaming the other party.

Mr. Minister, you are the government that gutted GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) and you allowed the Liberals to take back hundreds of millions of dollars of GRIP premiums. The NDP and the Liberals, Mr. Speaker, have been co-conspirators in the attack on Saskatchewan farmers. And the Liberal-NDP attack on farm families is only going to get worse when the Liberal budget is read.

Mr. Minister, how can you have any credibility in attacking federal Liberal cuts in agriculture when you have set the precedent?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question and a chance to explain our agriculture policy. Mr. Speaker, we have cut in agriculture as we have cut in health care and education and other places in government. We cut programs where we were not spending our money smart. We cut programs to save budget. We cut programs to spend our money smarter.

We have maintained a very strong, core support for agriculture. In fact with the federal government's StatsCanada numbers, we've reduced our ag spending by something like 20 per cent, and as I say, we have a plan. We have tried to help farmers adjust — 6-year leaseback to help farmers.

What we're seeing from the federal government is 60 per cent cuts, and probably greater than that by the time this budget clears. Hack and slash and burn with absolutely no vision or

adjustment or help for Saskatchewan farm families. And that is the difference between our policy, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Your total spending has not been cut. In fact 19 of your 27 departments have increased their spending, Mr. Minister.

Now, Mr. Minister, the point that you are refusing to acknowledge in your answer is that you are equally responsible for the Liberal attack on agriculture because you invited it. You invited it by sending a clear signal to Ottawa that it's okay to rip up contracts, that it's okay to take away hundreds of millions of dollars in GRIP premiums. You set the precedent and the Liberals are following, and now you're trying to absolve yourself of the blame.

Mr. Minister, according to Agriculture Canada and StatsCanada, total net farm income is expected to fall by 44 per cent this year, from 795 million down to \$445 million. And that estimate, sir, was made before today's Liberal budget. How much further do you expect net farm income to fall this year as a result of the Liberal-NDP attack on agriculture; and how many more jobs would you expect will be lost in the agricultural sector?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Mr. Speaker, we expect that Saskatchewan agriculture will do better because of our program in agriculture. We have a plan to revitalize rural Saskatchewan, and we continue to work on that in spite of the cuts we're going to get from the federal government, which we will hear later today.

Mr. Speaker, both opposition parties would like to go back to '91 GRIP. That is their stated agricultural policy. We don't believe that that was a smart program. We don't believe that was a proper way to spend taxpayers' money. It was not sustainable, it was not trade-neutral, and it was not market-neutral. And it was not going to help the province, as well witnessed. That program was in effect when we took office and thousands of farmers were losing their farms with that program in place. And I think we have taken the responsible approach with taxpayers' money and we are spending it smarter and we are still maintaining a strong base of support.

And, Mr. Speaker, I invite the opposition parties to look at the safety net that we've negotiated with the federal government and see whether or not that is going to be better than the other provinces are going to be able to negotiate after this budget comes down.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Neudorf: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you say you're spending smarter. You're spending more, we all know that. And you took \$189 million out of farmers' pockets

and you cut and you ran with it. That's precisely what happened.

But, Mr. Minister, a story in today's paper speculates that \$500,000 capital gains exemption for farmers could be cut in today's budget. Now I don't know whether it's true or not, but it wouldn't surprise me in the wake of the Liberal-NDP attack on agriculture.

And you know, Mr. Minister, many farmers have no retirement savings. All they have is their farm, and the capital gains exemption allows them to afford to retire when they sell their farm or pass it on to their children. And the thought of eliminating this exemption reminds me very much, sir, of your old inheritance tax — the death tax — that went after families who were trying to leave something for their children or for their spouses.

Mr. Minister, if the capital gains exemption for farmers is reduced, can you give us a commitment? Will you guarantee that farmers will not have to pay any additional provincial taxes on capital gains? Could you make that commitment sir?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Mr. Speaker, we do not yet know what is in the federal budget. I can assure the member opposite that both myself and the Minister of Finance have made submissions to the federal government on behalf of farmers in regards to the \$500,000 capital gains exemption. I think the question should be more aimed at the Liberal Party than at us because we certainly have made submissions to defend our farmers. And whether or not those cuts are going to come in the budget, we do not know.

Federal Taxes

Mr. Martens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Madam Minister, our province stands to be hurt the most by any federal tax increases. That's because you have put us in the precarious position of already having the highest tax burden in Canada.

For example, Saskatchewan people pay the highest provincial income tax in Canada as a percentage of the federal tax. And that is compared to Alberta, where we have 72 per cent and Alberta has 49 per cent. What this means, Madam Minister, is that any increase in federal income taxes, like reduction in the farm capital gains exemption, is going to hit Saskatchewan families harder than any other province.

Madam Minister, how can you criticize federal tax increases when it is your government tax policies that puts Saskatchewan people in the position to be taxed the most?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we've said consistently to the federal government

is they have no mandate to increase taxes for two simple reasons. First of all, they were elected to eliminate the GST (goods and services tax) which led people to believe there would be a declining not an increasing tax regime.

The other point that is probably more significant in light of the budget is that numerous provinces, various groups across Canada, have consistently said to the federal government, reform your tax system, overhaul the whole system. Don't send somebody like Mr. Peterson across Canada to ask a very narrow question: what would you like to happen to the GST? And come back with a very narrow answer: we'd like the old Tory GST, thank you very much. They needed to lay everything on the table, let everybody have their chance to have a shot at the tax system. Then they may have been in a position to say listen, we can show you all the loopholes are plugged. The system is fair. We have been absolutely consistent in our message to the federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Martens: — Madam Minister, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, Saskatchewan people already pay the highest . . . second highest provincial gas tax — second only to Newfoundland — of 15 cents a litre for tax. In Alberta they only pay nine. And it sounds like the Liberals are going to increase the federal gas tax later today. This is just one more area where our province is at a competitive disadvantage with other provinces and it's going to get worse. An increase in gas tax is going to hurt every Saskatchewan family.

In fact, Madam Minister, the average farmer, if that one and a half cents goes on, is going to increase the tax to farm families of \$500 per farm. It would be nice if your provincial government could speak out against this tax increase, except that you have no credibility when you're talking about provincial taxes.

Madam Minister, have you let the federal Liberals know what a negative effect an increase in gas tax will have on Saskatchewan's economy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, in response to the members question. Yes, what we have said when this issue was raised is gas tax increase would be very detrimental to the average family, relative to other choices they have at their disposal, because it affects the average family.

But I want to say this to the member opposite who's going on and on about taxes relative to Alberta. One thing about Alberta. When we took over, the debt per capita debt for the province of Alberta was \$9,000 per person; the per capita debt for this province was \$14,000 per person.

It's absolutely hilarious the opposition talking about, well we wouldn't have balanced the books this way; we wouldn't have balanced the books that way. The key thing is we did balance

the books of the province. We did it in a fair way; we did it with a plan involved and it's about time that they conceded that point.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Martens: — One of the things that Madam Minister doesn't want to talk about is the advantage, the tax advantage, of investment in Alberta over Saskatchewan. I agree with your conditions and criticisms of the federal Liberals and of the Liberals in general, but the problem is though, Madam Minister, you condemn them for increasing taxes; you increased taxes. You condemned them for downloading; you download. You condemn them for attacking agriculture and you attack agriculture.

Madam Minister, how can you really stand up for opposing . . . or representing Saskatchewan and opposing federal Liberals or Liberals in general, when the Liberals are attacking farmers and taxpayers the same way you did?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is very selective. Did we increase taxes? Yes. What about the Government of Alberta? Here is a Premier that's trotted all across Canada lecturing everybody about two things — balancing the books, which by the way he hasn't done; and not increasing taxes, which by the way he has done, although he doesn't quite call them taxes.

If you look at the increase in health care premiums in the province of Alberta in the '90s, they are higher than the increases in the sales tax in this province. We in this province do not charge people to send their children to kindergarten.

Mr. Speaker, we have balanced the books of the province. This is still, in terms of the basic cost of living — taxes, basic utilities — this is still the least expensive place for the average family to live.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people should be proud of the fact that they faced up to their situation. They balanced the books, but they've also sustained a high quality of life in this province. I'm proud of it. I know the people of this province are proud of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Size of Government

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats have made a tradition out of bashing the federal government. It is unlikely that the Saskatchewan Minister of Finance or the Premier will ever be in a position to defend or promote the actions of a federal New Democratic government.

It's interesting to note their height of hypocrisy as well. It

doesn't bother them at all to abuse the federal Liberals and then to sit in meetings with those very same individuals, Mr. Speaker, and pretend to be supportive, hoping for hand-outs.

Federal New Democrats like Svend Robinson are on record and they believe that the solution to reducing the deficit is to increase the size of government and to hire more people on the government payroll.

My question is to the Minister of Finance. Madam Minister, since the NDP in Saskatchewan seem to be following the same approach, do you support the belief that bigger government and more program spending in Ottawa is the key to deficit reduction and lower unemployment?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I would say this to the member opposite. I would say first of all, let's look at the basic facts. Since 1991 we have cut the cost of government and programs in this province by \$275 million. If you take account of the fact that in that period of time we have also absorbed a quarter of a billion dollars in offloads from the federal government, that number would be greater.

I keep saying to the member opposite: please, let's look at basic facts. The cost of providing the basic programs and services in the province of Saskatchewan is lower than the province of Alberta, lower than the Maritime region where all the Liberal governments are. And the number of civil servants per capita in this province is amongst the lowest in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we run a tight, lean ship and we are committed to ensuring that we improve our public services. But I will say this to the member opposite. We're not about to take a vampire-like approach to finances — each and every year, cut, even if there's nothing there but bone to cut; each and every year, cut, even if you have sustained a balance in the long term in this province. We believe in sustaining balanced budgets. We also believe in sustaining a high quality of life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is most interesting that this Minister of Finance stands up and says that they've done a great job for the people of Saskatchewan. The great job is we should look at the number of tax increases versus the percentage of expenditure reductions.

We should actually look at the 27 per cent increase in revenues overall and the 1 per cent that they did in terms of cutting spending, which is now erased with their most current budget.

It will be interesting to note today what the ratio is of spending cuts to tax increases in the federal government. Mr. Speaker, the eyes of the world are watching today, just as we are, to see if the Government of Canada has the courage to make government smaller, to reduce the cost of programs rather than putting further burden on already burdened taxpayers.

Saskatchewan taxpayers, it's been said earlier, are the most

beleaguered of all, Mr. Speaker, having suffered tax hike after tax hike after tax hike from this very NDP administration, which has vowed to keep on spending as much on government as they ever have and more than in the history of the Government of Saskatchewan.

My question again to the Minister of Finance: your government, Madam Minister, is marching one way while the rest of the country is going in a different direction. Do you believe that the federal government should follow your lead of increased taxes and increased government spending? Just answer that.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to answer a question, but only if the question is properly framed. What does the member opposite know that Wood Gundy doesn't know, which gives us praise in its recent review for holding government spending flat, having government spending under control.

What I will say to the member opposite is I hope the federal government follows our example. That is, I hope they put in place a long-term plan with a vision of what Canada's going to look like when they're finished; that is, what social programs, what education programs are going to be in place. And I hope they approach their task with fairness, so that every region and every individual says, I have been treated fairly.

Of course the federal government is going to reduce the cost of government because they are going to massively cut programs which is what we had to do in this province. But the member opposite has to come clean. The only way to significantly reduce the cost of government is to dramatically cut programs. And I say again, we're committed to sustainable balanced budgets; we're also committed to a sustainable high quality of life in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, it's very, very interesting how there's selective attention in this House all the time. I suggest the Minister of Finance read the latest Nesbitt Burns rather than quoting Wood Gundy.

It is also interesting to recognize the height of hypocrisy, talking about the GST when this very Premier in this House talked about eliminating the PST (provincial sales tax) at midnight when he slammed his hand down.

Mr. Speaker, let's deal with one concrete financial example — one concrete financial example. Analysts predict today that the federal budget may contain an increase in the cost of gasoline. Whether there is a federal increase or not, Mr. Speaker, residents of Regina this very day are paying 14 cents per litre more for gas than the people in Edmonton. They're paying 8.5 cents per litre more than the individuals in downtown Toronto.

Can the minister explain why Saskatchewan is at such a continual disadvantage in gasoline prices, and what her

government is going to do about it?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, what I would say to the member opposite is you can pick this little tax here . . . We're not the highest, by the way, in gas taxes. You can pick sales tax and then say, well look it, 9 per cent sales tax. Recently I was in Ontario; 7 per cent sales tax rate in Ontario. Do they pay more tax? Yes, they do, because their sales tax is on a broad range of commodities.

If the member opposite wants to get onto records about taxation, I would remind her what she said when the federal government proposed to harmonize the GST with provincial sales taxes. She said she would be prepared to look at a tax on food and medicine. Mr. Speaker, everybody's got to live by their record.

And I would say to the member opposite, one of the things that she can be assured of: this government will never support taxing food and medicine.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Investigation of Justice Minister

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, on Friday you committed to investigate and report on the misleading and false report given to the independent prosecutor by your deputy Justice minister regarding the investigation into the former Justice minister.

Can you report to this Assembly the results of your internal investigations and what remedial and disciplinary actions you have taken as a result?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Yes, I believe I can, Mr. Speaker. The information that was contained in the letter, as it turned out, was inaccurate. There had been a charge preferred in that case contrary to the information provided. I have asked the deputy minister for a written report on this matter. I expect to get it.

I think it'll suffice to say for the moment that there was no intention to mislead either Mr. McIntyre or anyone else by the members of the department.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I guess maybe you want . . . you're calling that an honest mistake, and there seem to be a number of those occurring lately.

Casino Decision Appeal

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, another question to the minister. Mr. Minister, Crown prosecutors from your department announced on Friday that they are proceeding with the appeal on the court's decision to acquit the operators of an Indian-run casino on the White Bear Reserve.

Now I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, why they would proceed with prosecution given that your government has subsequently granted White Bear a licence to operate a casino on the reserve. It just doesn't make sense, but then again not much within your department recently does make sense. Can you explain the latest twist to this, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I think . . . just to be accurate, I do not think they made an announcement last week about the launching of an appeal. I think that was done some time ago. I think, rather, the date when the Court of Appeal is going to hear the matter became public, and I think that's all that happened last Friday, was the date when the Court of Appeal is going to hear it became public.

Suffice it to say that there is an important question of law involved in the view of the prosecutors. I also want to add, for the benefit of the members opposite, that this province — unlike some others — this province has a relatively long history of having independent prosecutors who make decisions on these matters independent of political considerations. It's been an important and useful fact of administration of justice in this province, and one we want to continue. But I don't want to comment endlessly on this matter, but suffice it to say that the prosecutors felt it was an important question of law here.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, it would seem to me that there are a lot of questions to be answered here. There's no doubt about that. And it certainly, I think, it's very puzzling that we would have prosecutors now filing for an appeal after you have already agreed to working together with native bands in support of possible casinos on a number of reserves across this province. It would seem to me that . . . I'm sure only the O. J. Simpson trial could be more convoluted than the logic you've presented to us this afternoon.

Can you tell us, Mr. Minister, why your department has decided to launch the appeal after you've begun to work with the native community in the building of casinos? And can you also tell us what the cost will be for this appeal trial. How much more will taxpayers have to shell out to prosecute your gambling partners?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I would point out for the benefit of the member opposite, as I did just a moment ago, the decision to appeal was made within a few days of the time the conviction was handed down, as it must be. Long before the agreement was entered into, the decision was made to appeal, as by law we must make a decision to appeal or not to appeal. That was done because there is an important question of law involved.

Again I don't want to get into it extensively, but it's the issue of whether or not a mistake of law is a defence, whether or not a person must know the law. That will be appealed. And indeed, as I understand it, during the negotiations with the native people leading up to the agreement, it was made clear to them that they may expect to see the appeal to continue because of the question of law involved.

So I don't think the aboriginal people are surprised at this. They were told during the negotiations that this appeal might well proceed in any event of the negotiations.

Mr. Toth: — Another question to the minister. Well I'm glad, Mr. Minister, that you agree with the fact that ignorance of the law is no excuse. However, Mr. Minister, the taxpayers are going to be footing another bill, and you've just been telling us that there was . . . under the agreement process you let the White Bear . . . the band realize that this appeal may still come forward.

I think, Mr. Minister, there should have been some discussions beforehand, before you sit down and negotiate a deal, when you've got a process of law facing you and the cost to taxpayers. And I wonder, Mr. Minister, why in the world there would be such a convoluted twist to this problem that we're facing here today.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Let me try one more time. The judge, Judge Goliath, in acquitting the operators of the casino, did not pass upon the constitutionality of it. Whether or not there was a right to gamble on reserves — that transcended the provincial jurisdiction. None of those issues relating to gambling were part of the decision.

What he said in his decision was they thought they had a right to establish a casino, and on that basis they weren't guilty. If that principle of law were allowed to stand, it would be difficult to convict a great many people. If ignorance of the law were a defence, a great many people would have a defence, and the administration of our justice system would be very, very different than it is now. This is an important principle of law which far transcends the issues of gambling.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 23 — An Act to establish The Agri-Food Innovation Fund

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to establish the Agri-Food Innovation Fund.

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

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day, I have a Speaker's statement to make in regards to a point of order raised.

On February 23, 1995 the member for Regina Rosemont raised a point of order concerning the matter of private members' Bill No. 04, The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1995, and the possible pecuniary interest of those members of the Legislative Assembly who are also members of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Rule 37 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan* states that:

No member is entitled to vote upon any question in which he has a direct pecuniary interest, and a vote of any Member so interested shall be disallowed.

It is noteworthy that since this rule was adopted from the House of Commons standing orders in 1906, it has not been utilized in this Legislative Assembly.

Instances when members have declared a personal interest and then voluntarily refrained from voting can be cited, but in no case has the vote of any member been questioned.

For this reason it is important to address the point of order by outlining the purpose of the rule and the proper procedure by which the rule is invoked.

At the outset, it is necessary to establish that rule 37 does not apply to a member's participation in the debate. The rule applies only to the vote of a member who had declared a pecuniary interest or had been found to have a pecuniary interest.

It is demonstrated by the parliamentary authorities and by our own practise that when a member declares a personal or a pecuniary interest in a question before the Assembly, that member is not precluded from participating in debate or even from moving amendments.

If members wish, they may refer to May's 21st edition on page 359 and to a ruling in the Committee of the Whole of this Assembly on December 21, 1991.

Whether or not a voluntary declaration of pecuniary interest is made, I can find no case of a member being prevented from voting at either the House of Commons in Ottawa or at Westminster. This is the case even when concern has been raised about a member's private interest.

The time to question the entitlement of a member to vote is immediately after a recorded division.

The practice in this regard is outlined in both the sixth edition of Beauchesne's at paragraph 316, and the 21st edition of Erskine May at page 357 where it is stated:

An objection to a vote on the ground of personal interest can only be raised on a substantive motion; (secondly) it cannot be brought forward as a point of order. (And thirdly) The motion must be made as soon as the division is completed and cannot be heard at a later stage.

In such matters, I hasten to point out that the Speaker is not in a position to determine the pecuniary and personal interest of members. It is stated at paragraph 316(1) of Beauchesne's that such matters:

... must be decided by the House and not by the Speaker.

Given that this Assembly has no experience with a vote being disallowed under rule 37, and because the same rule has remained in use at the House of Commons in Ottawa since 1867, the usage of the House of Commons will be observed by this Assembly pursuant to rule 1 unless the Speaker is otherwise directed.

Consequently, proceedings pursuant to rule 37 will be taken up by means of a substantive motion moved without notice after the vote, and not by a point of order. The debate on the motion to disallow a vote provides an opportunity for the member in question to explain his or her interest if indeed one exists.

The debate will allow the Assembly to hear the views of any member and come to a decision accordingly. A member whose vote is questioned may speak in the debate but may not vote.

Secondly, as stated at page 357 of Erskine May, the motion must be made as soon as the division in question has been decided. This is because the House must assume that any member with a personal interest will voluntarily abstain from voting. Rule 37 is meant as a mechanism to disqualify a vote from being cast, not to prevent a member from voting.

In this regard, I do want to recommend, as it is recommended in Erskine May, that members should be guided by their own feelings in the matter of their personal interest and should vote or abstain as they see fit.

For assistance, members may consult The Members' Conflict of Interest Act and the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Members should also be aware that they run the risk of having their vote disallowed by the Assembly.

For the reason cited, I must rule that the point of order by the member for Regina Rosemont cannot be accepted by the Speaker. Whether or not a member has a pecuniary interest in a proposal before the House must be decided by the Assembly itself and not by the Speaker.

I thank the member for raising this subject and affording me an opportunity to make all members aware of the procedures attached to rule 37.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: —Mr. Speaker, in accordance with this government's practice of being open and accountable, we are in a position to table answers to all of the written questions, 6 to 9. I point out to members as well that there is only one motion for debatable. All the others I think have been answered, keeping with our custom.

The Speaker: — Questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 — answers have been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 6 — An Act to Amend The Crop Insurance Act

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of my remarks I will move second reading of An Act to Amend The Crop Insurance Act, 1995.

Being presented to the House today are proposed changes to The Crop Insurance Act. Mr. Speaker, according to existing legislation, the Minister of Finance is responsible for allocating grants to the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation. The proposed amendments to the Act change the reference from Minister of Finance to minister, reflecting the authority under which funds are allocated to the crop insurance program. This authority would thus be under the direction of the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Speaker, under the existing administrative structure, an order in council is required for each transfer of allocated funds from Saskatchewan Ag and Food to the corporation. The proposed amendments would allow for the direct transfer of funds appropriated by the Legislative Assembly to the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation when the balance in the Crop Insurance fund is not sufficient to cover indemnity payments in a given year.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, this Act proposes a change in reference from Consolidated Fund to General Revenue Fund to make the wording of this section consistent with the wording used in The Financial Administration Act.

A further amendment will resolve an inconsistency between the Act and the regulations. Currently the Act requires an insurable person who desires to obtain crop insurance to apply to the corporation in a form prescribed in the regulations. These regulations delegate the authority to prescribe the application to the corporation. However, Mr. Speaker, the delegation of this authority should be made under the Act. The amendment accomplishes that objective, eliminating the inconsistency.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, an amendment is proposed regarding the payment of funds from the Consolidated Fund to the Canada-Saskatchewan waterfowl crop damage compensation program fund. The Act currently required an order in council to transfer the necessary funds allocated by the Legislative Assembly to the waterfowl crop damage compensation program.

Mr. Speaker, with this amendment, funds that have been appropriated by the Legislative Assembly for the waterfowl crop damage compensation program will be released to the corporation directly without requiring an order in council on an annual basis.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the members of this House to support the amendments to the Act and I move second reading of The Crop

Insurance Amendment Act, 1995.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just a few comments before I move to adjourn debate on An Act to amend The Crop Insurance Act.

I understand from the minister's comments that the Act as it currently exists basically has the Minister of Finance in the Act and that's where . . . the only funding can come from an approval by the Minister of Finance. And if I understand the minister correctly, he is suggesting the Act now is going to be amended to just read minister, which gives the Minister of Agriculture, if I hear correctly, the ability to approach Executive Council for funding for the operation of the Crop Insurance Corporation.

It seems to me that there are some questions here that will certainly need to be asked regarding The Crop Insurance Act as we get into second reading and certainly debate in the House in committee.

The fact of the waterfowl funding released, I guess if this money is released directly and it would thereby then be able to . . . we're now able to put it in the hands of producers who are being affected by waterfowl damage, I would imagine that that would be an appropriate form for the waterfowl depredation program to be handled. There again we want to have some clarification as we get into further debate on this question, and then certainly into committee on the issue.

So to allow for the further perusal of the Act and to look through it a little more carefully, I now move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 7 — An Act to amend The Apiaries Act

Hon. Mr. Cunningham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of my remarks I will move second reading of The Apiaries Act.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food works closely with producers and industry organizations in preparation of any proposed changes to legislation that affects their industry. These proposed amendments demonstrate that characteristic.

The Act currently requires authorization for the importation of bees into Saskatchewan on comb, brood combs, honeycombs, or any used bee-keeping equipment that has been used in any apiary outside of Saskatchewan.

When the original Act was written, Mr. Speaker, packaged bees were not available from within Canada. This now causes us and the industry concern. Federal legislation prevents the importation of packaged bees from continental United States to prevent the importation of viral mites. The viral mite is

established in other areas of Canada, while to date Saskatchewan is free of this serious pest.

However Saskatchewan legislation currently does not prevent bee-keepers from importing packages from within Canada. The industry has understandably expressed concern with this situation and seeks amendments to the Act in the interests of prevention of infestation in Saskatchewan from the viral mite.

To address those industries' concerns, this Bill presents an amendment to ensure that packaged bees may not be imported into the province without authorization. Also of concern to the industry is the practice of rob feeding where open containers of such things as sugar or syrup are used for feeding bees. This practice is of concern to the industry because of the potential to spread disease to foraging bees from other apiaries.

The Act currently provides that no person who owns or possesses bees, honeycomb, brood comb, honey, or beeswax capable of harbouring a disease or any other bee-keeping equipment shall allow it, through exposure on their premises or elsewhere, to serve as an attractant to bees that might be foraging in the area.

These provisions are not clear in the practice of rob feeding. The Saskatchewan Beekeepers Association passed a resolution requesting the prohibition of the practice of rob feeding. The proposed amendment will strengthen the Act in this regard.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it is proposed that the maximum fine for violations under the Act be raised from \$500 to \$5,000. The implications that bee importations alone could have for the whole industry warrant this increase in maximum fines for violators.

These proposed amendments are based on close contact with the industry and an understanding of their concerns and desire for amendments to the Act. I ask the members of the Assembly to support these amendments and I therefore move second reading of Bill No. 7 — The Apiaries Act.

(1430)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It almost appeared for the moment that we had a few bees giving a few problems to the minister over there a while ago.

But, Mr. Speaker, regarding The Apiaries Act, this question and concern that was raised by the minister has been something that's been on the minds of bee-keepers across this province for a number of years. Certainly it's been an issue that's been raised in my area.

And the fact that the control of the importation of bees from the States to make sure that there was control on the mite and the spread of this mite into the bee populations of the province, it was necessary to bring in legislation to maintain control and to police the importation of bees.

As I hear the minister saying, the problem is not just a problem in the States but is a problem in parts of Canada now. And if I gather correctly, this Bill is going to address the importation of bees into the province of Saskatchewan from any area, even within Canada.

I suppose at the end of the day for the bee-keepers out in rural ... or across Saskatchewan, the individuals who make their living from bees, the ... what we need, and I hope the department and the minister is aware of this, that we do have a program in this province whereby there will be enough bees or breeding stock available within the province to meet the needs of the producers who would desire bees.

It seems to me that if we're going to put restrictions or limitations or close our borders, that we'd better have a supply in place. So I trust that the minister and his officials have indeed looked into that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the opposition would like more time and wish to take a little bit more time to review the legislation that we have in front of us so that indeed we can question the minister and bring some of the other questions that may come forward from the bee-keepers across this province, so that at the end of the day the Act indeed meets the needs of the industry and provides for those needs. And therefore at this time I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 10 — An Act respecting Private Vocational Schools

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to outline the purpose of the new Private Vocational Schools Regulation Act which completely replaces the existing statute.

The private vocational schools review panel's report of March 1993 contained 38 recommendations. The proposed Act provides the legislative framework for translating the recommendations into practice. The proposed legislative and regulatory changes will support improved student protection, greater emphasis on program quality, and greater industry involvement in the development and administration of schools.

The Act will also establish a training completion fund and training completion plans to improve student protection. The fund will be insurance for our students that they will be able to complete their training if a private school closes. Every school will develop a training completion plan as part of their annual registration. The plans will help ensure a minimal disruption for students, should their school close.

As well, Mr. Speaker, a program approval and review committee will be established to develop an appropriate set of standards for assessing program quality. The committee will be required to approve new programs and review all programs at least once every few years.

The proposed legislation also provides for a school's program to be placed on probation and new enrolment suspended until approval is reinstated. The changes incorporated in the new Act will encourage greater involvement and accountability by private vocational schools, the provincial private vocational schools association, teachers, and students. All of these groups will be part of committees that will oversee the training fund, approve and review programs, and deal with ethics and complaints.

Mr. Speaker, I introduce this new legislation because there is increasing concern with the degree of financial protection and quality of education provided for students who attend private vocational schools. This situation, Mr. Speaker, is unfortunate because it does, in the past, adversely affect students, and unfairly tarnish the reputations of good quality private vocational schools.

In the past few years, some schools have closed, causing disruption to students' studies. My department and our government and representatives of the private vocational school industry have worked with students and good quality schools to minimize this disruption. But I continue to be concerned with the level of protection and quality of education offered these students.

Mr. Speaker, others in the public share my concern. Owners of successful private vocational schools that offer high quality education are concerned with the ramifications of school closures and student dissatisfaction. They do in fact consider improvements important to the continuation of the private vocational school industry. And the private vocational school review recommendations clearly identified the need for improvements.

We've consulted with the Chair of the Private Vocational Schools Review Committee, as well as with ministries of education in other provinces, to find out how they deal with regulation of private vocational schools. We have found, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan, with this new piece of legislation, will once again lead the way in this country when it comes to the regulation and control of private vocational schools. When these proposals are implemented by regulation, our students will receive high quality education and the best consumer protection available anywhere in this country.

Mr. Speaker, members will appreciate that the proposed changes will facilitate the effective administration of a statute which governs an important element in the education and training that is available to Saskatchewan residents. This updating of the legislation, in response to the review chaired by Ailsa Watkinson, is a way for us to afford better consumer protection and remedies. It will also help to build public confidence in private vocational schools.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move that Bill No. 10 — The Private Vocational Schools Regulation Act, 1995 be now read a second time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments before moving adjournment of debate on the Act here respecting private vocational schools.

As the minister has outlined, private vocational schools have certainly created a problem for many people across this province for the past number of years.

And I'm sure that many government members, as well as my colleagues, have had individuals come to their office with some of the problems they've faced, problems that have arisen where they have entered a course and part way through the course — maybe a third or a half-way through or a little more — they find out that all of a sudden the operator pulls the pin on the course and they're left out in the cold.

All of a sudden they don't have any recognition for the course studies that they've entered into. They don't have the certificate that they were hoping to have at the end of the day which . . . plus the funding that they've put into that course has now disappeared and they're in the hole.

So as I was listening to the minister, it's something that needs to be addressed. I notice as well — and we're quite aware of it — the fact that there are some good vocational schools operating across this province; in fact many good schools that give sound, basic, fundamental vocational training. And unfortunately when one or two operators shut their program down and bring ill repute, I guess, to this industry, the rest of the schools are affected by it. The students then begin to wonder, well should I enter a vocational program?

I think, Mr. Speaker, the fact that in the changing times we're living in, we may find that vocational opportunities and vocational schools will be providing more of the fundamental education a lot of the young people will be needing in our society, rather than everybody being channelled through a university program.

And I think it's important that we address this, and I certainly commend the minister for having taken the time to sit down and discuss this problem — as I indicated earlier, we've all run into similar circumstances — so that at the end of the day we do have a piece of legislation that sets some guidelines whereby vocational schools know what they can operate within, whereby students have a knowledge of the fact that when they enter a program they're going to be able to complete that program, and that the education they receive through that program will lead them to a solid and sound job opportunity or job opportunities and hopefully within our province — not just outside, but within the province.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that there are other questions we will raise, and just to converse with the minister at a later date, I would move we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Education, Training and Employment
Vote 5

The Chair: — Before we proceed, can I ask the minister to please introduce the officials who have joined us here this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Deputy Chair, the officials with me are Dan Perrins, deputy minister, on my immediate right. Immediately behind me is Mae Boa, the executive director of finance and operations. To Ms. Boa's right is Lily Stonehouse, assistant deputy minister of Education, Training and Employment. To my left is Ernie Cychmistruk, executive director educational services branch. And as well with us is Brady Salloum, director of student financial assistance; Michael Littlewood, director of third party funding and legislative services; and Paul Fudge, executive director of operations SCN(Saskatchewan Communications Network).

Item 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to welcome you here today, Madam Minister, and say welcome to your officials also.

Well as we know, education is a very important piece of Saskatchewan's fabric, and we have to, in estimates today, find out what the government is planning on doing to further that fabric and keep it knit in one whole piece.

And that seems to be a great deal of difficulty today in the province. I get complaints from across the province of problems within the school system, mostly within the K to 12, but also, Madam Minister, within post-secondary education. In fact, on the Speech from the Throne day I believe it was — or perhaps it was budget — I had a presentation given to me by students from the University of Saskatchewan who had concerns about the direction that funding for education was going in this province.

And, Madam Minister, we'll be getting into that in a bit. Madam Minister, in the past couple of years, we have sent over to you a set of generic questions. And they range from people working in your office, the budgets for such, for travel and all of the other sundry costs, purchases within the department.

(1445)

Madam Minister, can you give us an assurance that you will supply us the answers for that before these estimates are completed?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can give you assurances that the packages are currently being developed for the fiscal year '94-95, and we'll make sure that you get those estimates. I can't assure you that they'll be given to you before these estimates

are dealt with, but I can assure you that you will get them.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. If we don't get them while these estimates are on, that raises a bit of a problem for us because then we don't have the opportunity to review those and then return with more questions in relation to that if something is unclear.

Perhaps what we would have to do in that case then is either ask the questions on the floor here, go over them one by one by one as we go through this today, tomorrow, and the next day, or whenever that might be, unless you can give us an assurance that we will get them during the estimate process so that we can come back and ask you questions on them.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think in the past we have not come up for estimates this early in the legislative session. What I can assure you, member, is that I will make sure that you get them. I just can't assure you you can get them between now and whenever we end estimates for the Department of Education, Training and Employment.

But I know that it's been very helpful in terms of the process that the opposition goes through. It's also helpful for government. And I think it's been an effective way of providing information. I'll try my best.

But I think nowadays politicians want to be able to keep their word. And I just can't assure you that I can do what you want me to do. I can assure you, however, that I will get them for you, but I just can't tell you when.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I look forward to them. But I don't look forward to this, but I'll have to stay on my feet asking questions until we get the answers.

Madam Minister, I'd like to start off though with a couple of questions that I hope that you can answer today, and that would be dealing with your own travel. Where have you travelled in the last budgetary year, Madam Minister, and what plans do you have for the future that would be affected by this budget?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Do you want precisely each day and where I went . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay, I'll get that for you.

Apparently they don't have that information. I can tell you that in terms of out-of-province travel I have been to Calgary this summer to meet with the western ministers. It was a one-day trip.

I was to two or three ministers of Education meetings. The cost of that travel was paid by the council of ministers for Canada.

I also made a trip to Geneva on behalf of the federal Government of Canada, paid for by the federal government.

Another trip to Spain, where I represented the ministers of Education; also paid for by the federal government.

All of the other travel has been inside the province but we will get you that information.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if for those travel outside the province, if you could inform us who travelled with you on those trips?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm going from memory. The trip to Calgary to meet with the western ministers, I was accompanied by the associate deputy minister, Ken Horsman. The trip to Spain, there was no one from the province that accompanied me.

In terms of the council of ministers, when they have their conferences, I'm usually accompanied by the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister, the associate deputy minister; and I think on one occasion, I was accompanied by a ministerial assistant. But once again, I will get you that precise information. In terms of the trip to Geneva, the deputy minister of Education, Training and Employment accompanied me, and his expenses were covered by the Government of Canada.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I look forward to those responses. I wonder if you could please give me the information as to who is presently employed in your office here, your ministerial staff here, and their employment, when they started?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I can tell you that the only new changes in my office are Anna McCashin. She's the intermediate secretary, and I believe she started today. All other people, when we had our last year's estimates, I think I gave you that information. There have been no changes in my office with the exception of Anna McCashin who started as the intermediate secretary this morning.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well I guess this morning, Madam Minister, is fairly current. Madam Minister, are there anyone within your staff that . . . within your office that are related to anyone in this Assembly?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, my ministerial assistant, the senior ministerial assistant, is Janet Mitchell. Janet is the daughter of Bob Mitchell. Janet Mitchell . . . that's a well-known fact; that's not news to people. She's a highly skilled individual and I think most people who deal with her would bear out that observation.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. The people working within your ministerial office. What have been the changes in pay scales that have occurred there since 1991?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I don't have all of that detail since 1991, but what I can tell you is that all of the people in my office are at the bottom of the range — all of them. None of them are above the bottom of the range for their various positions.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder

if you could please give us the numbers for that range then.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — For the junior ministerial assistant, the range is \$3,018; the maximum is \$3,563. For the senior ministerial secretary, the range is 3,092 to 3,762. The senior ministerial assistant, 4,406; maximum 5,171. The junior secretary is 2,225, that's the minimum; maximum, 2,579. The intermediate ministerial assistant, the bottom is 3,454; maximum 4,216. And the intermediate secretary is 2,892; and the maximum is 3,381.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Could you please send that over to us, that you read from it. Thank you, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, when you promote someone within your staff, does a salary change normally take place at the time of promotion, or does it take place at some other time?

The Chair: — Can we have some understanding that when documents are sent across to one opposition party that copies also be provided for the other party so that we don't duplicate the requests? Is that agreed? Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — If a person . . . it's not unlike the civil service. If you get a promotion you go to the bottom of the range and you start at the bottom of the range. So I don't think you're going to find anything untoward in terms of what happens in my office. You can try your best, but I can assure you you won't.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you for that assurance, Madam Minister. I have a thing here that says the lady in question, Janet Mitchell, became a senior MA (ministerial assistant), dated December 1, 1993. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I don't know. I believe that that's probably true, that that's the date, but we don't have that information here. You're going back into a year that I don't have the information here. We'll get that for you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I also have a notification of change in monthly rates and fees, ministerial assistants, for the same person, that says, calculated as and from October 1, 1994, and the salary range. So I'm just wondering, when did she get the salary increase?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We'll have to get you that information; we don't have that here. That isn't something we have available for you at this moment.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, welcome, and welcome to your officials.

A few questions I'd like to bring up, Madam Minister. And basically it's going back to a symposium that was held last fall, November 17 to 18. It was entitled: working together towards sexual and reproductive health in Saskatchewan: an opportunity to explore relevant issues regarding sexuality and sexuality

education. And this was held November 17 to 18, 1994 in Saskatoon at the Ramada Renaissance Hotel. And I'd like to quote the symposium agenda:

The goals of the symposium are to encourage positive, healthy attitudes to sexuality and promote the delivery of comprehensive sexual health education and services to youth.

And out of this symposium a number of questions have arisen. First of all, Madam Minister, as the Minister of Education, did you attend this symposium?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — No, I didn't.

Mr. Toth: — Did any of your department representatives attend this symposium? If so, how many and from what divisions?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The deputy minister was there for part of the symposium and we believe we had two curriculum people there. But we can get you the precise numbers from the department that attended this symposium.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in view of . . . I'm sure you were made aware of this symposium and the fact that the symposium was on at the time. And it seems to me that must have almost been running in conjunction with the NDP convention. It was fairly close to the weekend there.

But as you see it, and whether it was brought to your attention, what did you understand was the purpose of this symposium or was there any involvement on your part or inquiries regarding the symposium and the reasoning for the symposium?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well the symposium was put on by the Minister of Health's Family Planning Advisory Committee and the purpose behind this symposium was to look at various methods for reducing teen pregnancy in the province, because I believe our province has the highest teen pregnancy rate of any province or territory in the country. If not the highest, the second highest.

As well, there was a study that was done by Queen's University that shows that our grade 11 students are the most sexually active students in Canada. And as you probably know, we now have sexually transmitted viruses that kill people.

And so what we have to do as responsible citizens in this province, not only ministers of Education and ministers of Health but also parents and members of the opposition, is to make sure our young people have all of the information available to them so that they can protect themselves against the deadly viruses that now are killing young people, not only in Canada but across the globe.

And so it is interesting that you raise this question. And I know where you're coming from, but let me tell you where I'm

coming from. And I am obligated as an elected member of the public to do everything in my power to make sure that our young people are kept safe from deadly viruses.

(1500)

Mr. Toth: — Well, Madam Minister, after listening to your answer to that very simple question, I can see that it's a subject, from the letters I've received in my office that have probably crossed your desk, that I haven't made you very happy.

I have some straightforward questions here that I'm looking for some answers and would like to receive. And we're not really getting into a large political debate. We may get into that later on, once we get into the meat of the subject.

But you've mentioned that you didn't attend and you're giving your reasons why you feel it was important that the symposium was held. It was . . . I think you indicated that the Department of Health had actually promoted it or it was brought forward on that basis. But it also was brought forward with the idea that it's an educational process as well.

And I'm wondering if you received a written report from department representatives attending the symposium and did any of your representatives have anything to say or what did they have to say regarding the symposium?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The main role that the department played at this symposium was to provide information on what the current K to 12 curriculum is regarding this whole area of family life education.

Mr. Toth: — I'm wondering if department officials felt that there was a lot to have been gained by attending the symposium, that it seems to me that this was . . . as I reviewed the agenda, there must have been a lot of information made available, and I'm sure that the department officials that attended would have put an evaluation on the type of information.

And did they feel that this was a worthwhile symposium, that there were some positive ideas to be gleaned from the different topics that were raised at the symposium? And if so, what type of report did you receive from your department in that regard, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As I understand it, the symposium was evaluated by the vast majority of people who attended, and we can share those evaluation results with you.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, how many teachers would have attended this symposium? Would the department have that information? How many? At what cost? From which areas of the province? From public or separate school systems? Was this a wide-open invitation? Was . . . maybe we should be . . . since the Minister of Health is sitting here, maybe he can answer some of these

questions for us.

Well it appears to me from the finger-pointing that is coming that some of these questions probably should be going to the department. At the same time, the concerns that are being raised with us is the fact that some of the information that was brought forward at the symposium may become part of a curriculum down the road in our educational system. And certainly teachers are going to be the individuals that are going to have to put forward this information.

And maybe you could make a commitment to us to at least get us some information as to who attended and whether teachers . . . what the broad base was of people who attended that symposium. And maybe as well where the cost came from to support the symposium. Was it the administration, or was it the individual administration, or was it something done on a broad basis through a department or whatever?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — First of all, our department wasn't involved in this symposium. The Family Planning Advisory Committee did the arrangements. I understand that this was an entirely self-supporting conference; the registration paid for the cost of the conference.

In terms of your question about whether or not the information garnered from the conference will become part of the K to 12 curriculum, we don't develop curriculum based on conferences or symposiums.

Mr. Toth: — So what you're telling me, Madam Minister, then is that . . . My next question was, are any of the materials distributed or presentations given at the symposium going to be adopted by the school system in our province? If so, which and why?

Now you're telling me that you don't adopt them. But somebody in the department must be bringing forward recommendations that had been . . . it doesn't really come to this House as far as school curriculums down the road, and I'm wondering if maybe you could just inform us whether or not some of the material that was gleaned, or any information that might have been brought forward, whether that has a potential of becoming part of the educational format in the future.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Let me say this, that the department has curriculum available for school divisions in this subject area. What you're really talking about is sex education.

It is up to the local school board, in consultation with parents, to determine whether or not they're going to teach the department's curriculum. And as you know, there are groups that are in schools teaching a viewpoint on this — on sex education — that have not received the department's approval in terms of curriculum development. But nevertheless they're there because the local school division determines what is or is not taught, based on local standards and mores.

And what I will tell you is this: that we are presently renewing

our high school curriculum — grade 10, 11, and 12 — that there is not a possibility that we will have compulsory sex education for grade 10, 11, and 12 in this province because of this problem: we already have a credit crunch for our high school students.

There are many pressures on high school students to have a whole myriad of subject areas if they're going to go on to post-secondary education. And it would be impossible, at this stage of the game, to change our curriculum. We've already said what our curriculum will be for our high schools. That's clearly . . . we've enunciated what it is; we did so last May or April I believe, and so that's already been determined.

In terms of what sex education is taught in Saskatchewan schools, it is up to local school divisions to determine whether or not they want to follow the provincially sanctioned department curriculum or whether or not they want to vary that curriculum to adapt to local customs and mores. And there are many communities in this province that have groups into their school teaching sex education that are acceptable to the local standard of the community.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, you bring an interesting discussion into the discussion we're having this afternoon, or the topic we're discussing this afternoon. And the fact is that you've indicated it's the local boards. Now first of all, might I ask: are we talking unit boards or the local individual boards?

Because what I'm hearing from a lot of people is that a lot of people, certainly in our area, in other parts of the province, and a lady which I had a chance to chat with the other day, are saying they really don't have any say whatsoever any more. And some of even the local boards feel that their reason for existence basically is not there any more. They feel that even if they bring things forward, the unit board makes decisions contrary to what they feel that they would like to see in their local board.

Now as you've explained it, if indeed parents have the ability to inquire to their boards as to what there will be in the sex education program, where it's going to be taught, whether in the health curriculum or whether part of it is in English curriculum or part of it may come in the history curriculum, as we've been informed, it seems to me that there are many parents out there who do not feel that they really have the input.

I can say in our area we've been quite fortunate. We do have a school board and we do have . . . at least the school that our children attend, where the educators are quite straightforward. They send home a note informing us as to what they will be teaching in the health program, and especially the sex education part of their program, with a little box for the parent to check off whether or not they want their child to receive that portion of the program.

And we have that privilege. A lot of other communities would like to have it. Unfortunately it doesn't appear that seems to be

as consistent, although what you were saying earlier . . . it would seem to me that what you're telling us: it's your understanding this is what it is, but apparently in a lot of schools they don't really understand it or don't have the opportunity to have the same input as you're telling we had.

What I'm wondering is, what does the department do? Does the department have a policy whereby they reflect what they feel should be done and how the course structure is held, and the fact that parents are certainly kept informed, whether it's through the local board or the unit board or indeed through the teachers? I wonder if you could just enlighten us on that, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We do not have compulsory sex education in the K to 12 system in the province. There are many people obviously that hold the view that we should have compulsory sex education. There are other people who hold the opposite view. So what we have done is leave it up to the local division board to determine whether or not they want to follow the provincial curriculum when it comes to sex education or whether they want to vary the curriculum to deal with local customs and mores. And that is why there are various parts of the province where certain groups have access to the school and teach a particular philosophy when it comes to sex education, because that's what the local people have determined they want taught.

Now that's not to say that people with that same philosophy are not in a minority position in some other school division and the school division is going to other, enhanced sex education programs within the curriculum. It is up to the school division to determine whether they want to follow the provincial curriculum or vary the curriculum.

And in many parts of the province they're varying the curriculum, and they have Teen-Aid, for instance, in teaching the curriculum. In other parts of the province, they have another group in with a different perspective, teaching the curriculum. But that is entirely a division board decision. We do not have compulsory sex education in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, you just said you don't have compulsory, but do you have a provincially sanctioned curriculum dealing with the sex education in our schools? And I'm wondering if you could make that available to us, please.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We do have a provincially sanctioned components that deal with the whole issue of sex education. We don't have a subject called sex education. What we do is have subjects called health or wellness or family life.

I should tell you that the government, not unlike when your party was in office, we don't do curriculum development. The way we develop curriculum in this province has a history behind it, where we have representatives of the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, representatives of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, representatives of the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and

Superintendents, along with the colleges of education. And they serve as advisory committees to the curriculum development people.

So this is not something that's cooked up in the minister's office. There is a long, proud history in this province for curriculum development.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, a number of other questions that were directed at me, and for sake of not presenting the question as the inquiries may have come in, I'd like to raise a few questions with you.

First of all, we've been receiving a great number of letters from parents concerned both about the symposium and the concept of mandatory sex education in our schools. And a lot of parents are seeing the symposium as a stepping-stone for mandatory sex education.

A recent call received in our office from a parent opposed to mandatory sex education. And she stated that a Lily in your office confirmed that sex education will be a mandatory course as of September 1995. Is this accurate and does your government have a policy regarding sex education in schools?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There's no Lily working in my office, so I'm not sure who this is. There is a Lily Stonehouse, who is the assistant deputy minister on the post-secondary side and she does not deal with K to 12 matters, so I'm not sure who your person talked to. There will be no mandatory sex education come September of 1995.

Mr. Toth: — Now, Madam Minister, all we have is a name, and I'm not exactly sure where. And for a lot of people out across Saskatchewan, whether it's in your office, when they call the government office, the Department of Education, they're thinking they're talking to the minister's office. So you can appreciate that.

I understand as well, another question, that the Regina public school system has adopted a sex education program. And I'm wondering, Madam Minister, if you could let us know if you have information regarding the Regina public school sex education program. Would that program be available, and do you know if it's directed to the whole K to 12 or just to certain groups within the school? Is it possible to get that information, please?

(1515)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — First of all, I don't think it's a compulsory subject because it has to comply with the credit allocations that are determined by the Department of Education, Training and Employment.

What the Regina School Division Board has done is locally determined by them. It's not something that the department would be involved in, and it's not something that I would be involved in. And no Minister of Education would be involved

in that. We have locally determined options, and they have the ability to have sex education as part of their curriculum. But we're not aware that there is a subject in the Regina public school system called sex education.

Mr. Toth: — So what you're saying . . . basically the department really isn't involved in the sex education program, that the Regina public school system may be introducing or may be making a part of or maybe they've already got it a part of their curriculum. So it's not something that would just . . . because it may be taking place here, then it's going to automatically fall into other areas of the province.

Madam Minister, if I understand correctly, there is an opting-out opportunity for parents regarding the sex education programs. I understand that parents can take their children out of any class or course that they do not want their children to take. Can you explain the opting-out process to me, keeping in mind you mentioned something about curriculum and credits.

Now I guess the other thing, on the other hand, would parents feel that even though they may not like the course that is being particularly taught in their school, the fact if there's a credit attributed to that class they'd be forced to leave their children in that class. And I'm wondering if you could just explain the process.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — When I referred to credits I'm talking about high school: grade 10, 11, and 12. We do not have a course in Saskatchewan called sex education.

Now in elementary school there are provisions for division boards to determine that they want to teach family life or family planning or sex ed as part of a unit in a particular course. And parents have the right to take a look at what's going to be taught when it comes to sex education. And if they so wish — I'm advised by the officials — they have the right to remove their child for that particular unit, and the child could be given a course or some information that would be appropriate from that parent's point of view.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, just coming personally, do you think that taking children out of the course is the right thing to do? And you did mention that there is a possibility of alternate courses, and I'm not sure how widespread this is. Do you believe that an alternate course should be offered so that the child doesn't feel singled out, for example, especially the sex education program? And perhaps parents believe abstinence is the best method to teach their children. What happens in this instance?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think one of the things that you should know is that abstinence is taught, and it is part of the curriculum that is sanctioned by the province's Department of Education, Training and Employment. And I realize that if parents decide that they don't want their children to partake in the curriculum, i.e., sex education, that it can create some difficulties for that young person having to leave to go elsewhere.

But there are other children in the province, particularly those children who may be not of a particular religious viewpoint, and when religion is being taught, they may go elsewhere. We have those kinds of incidents or occasions in the province where children go elsewhere because of what's being taught in the classroom. And it's not only sex education but it also can be in terms of religion.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Madam Minister, in regards to abstinence, you mention that it is part of the curriculum. I guess one of the complaints I hear from parents more than anything is that the education system may argue that the abstinence portion regarding sex education is there. Unfortunately it's a very . . . almost glossed over; that a lot of teachers really don't spend a lot of time on.

I remember just before Christmas a couple magazines actually did a survey. And it was interesting to note how many teens they had surveyed and talked about. And abstinence happened to be one of the priorities in their views as far as the wholesome nature of the sex education and sex in their lives. And I think that's what a lot of parents feel. And some students were even led to believe that it isn't appropriate for them to even discuss the abstinence model if that's the model they choose.

And I think the feeling that people run into is intimidation because we have such a push, as you indicated earlier, because of the potential of the spread of certain diseases, that it's important that we basically push a certain sex education program upon people. And I think people want . . . parents want the fact known that they really do have an alternative, that there is an alternative out there. And as well, Madam Minister, they want to feel that they have a say.

And I'm wondering, Madam Minister, do parents, if they really feel and wish to really promote the idea, do they have the ability to keep mandatory sex education out of their schools?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well first of all we have a family life education component to the health curriculum. And I'm advised that it's much more than sex education — much more than sex education. That it talks about the notion of self-respect; it talks about the notion of responsibility; responsible relationships. It talks about how to be assertive so that you can have self-respect. It talks about personal standards and value and morals. It talks about family violence and alcohol and drugs. It talks about divorce as part of this whole unit on family life education. And it talks about other things, like pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

One of the things that troubles me is that we have young people, particularly young girls, that somehow can make it through grade 7, 8 with their self-concept and self-image intact, and something happens when they get to high school. And I've seen this so many times, because I used to work with young women who found themselves in a position of an unplanned pregnancy. And kids go through . . . something happens to young people, particularly young girls, when they hit high school, in terms of not feeling good about themselves — in

terms of all these things.

Now I don't mean to generalize, but self-image, self-concept, respect for one's self — something happens. And so what we have to do is not only work on the notion of responsibility and abstinence and self-respect, assertiveness — all of those values that are important for young people to have — but we also have to be very precise about what happens to people at a particular age when they've come from that kind of value base and all of a sudden they find themselves feeling not very good about themselves.

And I think there's a variety of reasons for that. Some people have suggested we need to go back to the days of all-girl schools so we could promote the notion of leadership amongst young women.

And I'm not suggesting that this is a girls' problem only, but the whole notion of unplanned pregnancy tends to show up with girls. It does in fact show up with girls. And we have the problem that is associated with that — children having children. And it's worrisome and very troublesome that Saskatchewan has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the country. And I think that we have . . . second highest teen pregnancy rate in the country. I guess we've come a little ways since last year.

But it's troublesome and it's worrisome and I think we need to really take a look at that. Because there are many implications — implications in terms of putting infant child care centres in high schools, and that doesn't come without a cost; implications in terms of providing support services for teen mothers and fathers; implications in terms of providing added support services. And we know that the education of a mother is one of the key determining factors of what happens to her children. And I think that one particular perspective is not going to solve this problem of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

And I accept your premiss that abstinence is something that needs to be taught in our schools, but we also have to realize that there are young people who are sexually active. And the report showed Saskatchewan has the highest numbers of young people sexually active at the age of grade 11, and we have to determine how we can keep people safe from sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies.

Mr. Toth: — I thank you, Madam Minister, for your comments, and I would certainly concur with the fact that there are a number of values that we have — and certainly society has in general — a number of values that need to be instilled. And the fact that people feeling good about themselves, be they male or female, it doesn't really matter because boys have problems really asserting themselves and really feeling good about themselves as well.

But I think at times what we have and what we face in our society, especially when we come to the whole discussion and debate on sex education, is what's being thrown at us by the media. And I think television even more so, as the type of

programming we are seeing more and more hitting our screens during the, what you would call, the family viewing area.

And it just seems to be promoting more and more an explicit form of sex, rather than a responsible form of recognizing sexuality in its wholesome manner which most of us believe in. And I guess one of the questions that continually comes up and is continually raised and maybe you have a particular view on it, Madam Minister, and that question is: are schools better equipped to teach our children sexual values and sex education versus the parents? I'm wondering if you have any particular feelings regarding that question, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well obviously I think that many parents in the province are quite equipped to teach their children not only sexual values, but all kinds of values.

But we also know that 40 per cent of our young people are coming to school with a variety of problems. And that's one of the reasons for the children's action plan. We know that 40 per cent of our students come to school with problems in the family home and that for many students the family home is not the safest place to be.

Now that doesn't mean all homes, but there are a number of homes where there are problems. And the school, because of the caring and nurturing place that the school is, or certainly has been and is in this province, teachers and principals and administrators are taking on roles that they have not historically had to take on.

And we know that there are many parents in the province that are quite equipped to teach their children values and mores and give their children advice, and all of those kinds of things. But we also know that there are children in the province where their parents lack the tools to do that, because their parents are damaged or hurting or they have suffered great neglect.

And so the school is taking over the role for many children in this province of parent. Now do I like that? No, I don't like that. I think that parents should be parents and teachers should be teachers.

But one of the things that we never teach each other is how to be good parents or what kinds of skills do you need to be a good parent. And we know from experience that many parents are now taking parent effectiveness training, parenting courses, in order that they can equip themselves to deal with the issues that their young people are facing and in order to equip themselves with the tools that they need to nurture their children. And so I guess that's the answer to your question.

(1530)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I understood some of the Liberal members had some questions, but I guess I'll have to carry on with the process this afternoon, at least for the time being.

Madam Minister, you raised a few points that I think are interesting as well. I think we're quite well aware of the change in the demographics in our society. And I'm not sure if it's for the good, for the better, when we see the number of single-parent homes. Yes, there are children that really are affected. They don't have . . . in some cases probably they're lacking some of the tools, especially if that single parent is away working all day.

Mind you, it's not just single-parent homes. There's two-parent homes where the parents are both out living . . . I shouldn't say living, working and endeavouring and striving. And maybe sometimes as parents we're striving to provide more on the material side, and on the other hand we're failing or neglecting in the area of reaching out and providing some of the emotional support that our children need. As well, drug and alcohol abuse is quite a serious matter.

So when it comes to even just the sex education course and the problems or the concerns that people have, it definitely is a broad concern, because yes there are a lot of solid, sound homes where children do receive solid leadership in seeing how a relationship can be built. And there are other areas where children don't see that. They're in abusive situations, and they see the, I guess, the absolute horror of what we would consider to be a normal process of growing up. And that's unfortunate.

How do you, as minister, deal with people when they come to you with real opposing views to mandatory sex education or with the content of course material? Will parents have an opportunity to preview course content and course materials? Now there's two separate questions there. I'm just asking you, Madam Minister . . . I'm sure you get a lot of these question on many occasions; I'm wondering if you could respond in relation to those questions.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I mean obviously as the Minister of Education I do have people that come to see me and write me about their views on sex education in schools, and they are totally opposed to it — totally opposed to it. They think that that is something that should be taught in the home. And once you become the Minister of Education, you don't . . . your personal opinions don't enter into this. My personal opinions are irrelevant as to what I think should or should not be taught in school because they're my own personal beliefs, and I have to put aside those personal beliefs for the overall good.

And I know that there are many parents that have the tools, the skills, the values that you talk about, and they're quite able to provide leadership to their young people and determine what is right and wrong for those young people, according to that family's standards or values.

But I also know, having worked with at-risk young people, particularly young girls, young girls on the street, and that's quite different I think for those of us who come from rural Saskatchewan; what we see in rural Saskatchewan schools is a little bit different than what you see in the city. And the whole notion of a homogeneous community with shared values and

shared views of the world is a notion that still exists in rural Saskatchewan. And so you can have people coming together who share the same values in determining what they want to or don't want to have taught in their school.

But when it comes to larger centres, that's a bit different because we have people who come to this province from — and to our larger centres — from all over Canada, from other parts of the world. And they have different views on this matter and they come with different issues and different problems.

And so I think that when you asked me, what do I think should or should not be taught in these particular schools, I do know this: that there are many young people in this province that don't share your value or maybe share my values. And I am obligated as an educator and as a Minister of Education to make sure that those young people are protected as much as we can.

Now it doesn't necessarily mean that they have to listen to the information. It doesn't necessarily mean they have to take this information into their being and their souls. But I think that we not only talk about the values of abstinence, as you talk about, but we also say to those young people, if that's not your particular value and your standard and your view of yourself, then for heaven's sakes make sure that you protect yourself against some pretty deadly viruses — viruses that kill, like AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) — in order that we can ensure that you live.

And I think that if you were in this chair, member, you'd be taking the same approach.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Madam Minister, there's no doubt that we're all concerned about our young people. And it's not just young people. Like we're dealing with young people but we even get into the little later years of singles and what have you.

And the unfortunate part is statistics are also showing that no matter how much we teach, no matter how much protection that you bring forward, that some of these diseases still . . . some of this protection may not be the protection we really have been taught that it is or that we're putting our hopes in, and protection can break down too.

Laws are made and unfortunately laws can be broken, and it can be very costly and deadly at the same time. So I think it's important that people realize that and the total concept of sex education is presented.

As you indicated, the abstinence values, yes, they are values. And I think it's important that we raise those values and let teenagers know that those are values; if they believe in them, that they shouldn't feel or succumb to peer pressure to accept the fact that maybe a high percentage of students in grade 11 are sexually active.

But if a person chooses, whether they're a girl or a guy, that they should feel that that is still an important value for them to hold onto and we need to support them in that.

Madam Minister, a couple of questions regarding parental input. Have parents been consulted in the past, or will they be continued to be consulted in the future, on the matter of compulsory sex education in schools? If so, through consultations, what type of consultations have there been? And what input has been garnered that you may be aware of or your officials aware of that has been adopted and been made or put into part of the sanctioned sex education curriculum that we presently have?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well first of all, we don't have compulsory sex education in the province. That's number one.

Number two, it's impossible to have compulsory sex education in our high school curriculum, because we simply don't have the flexibility, because of the numbers of credits we're delivering to students, to have another core subject in our high school curriculum.

Now certainly in our health education curriculum K to 9, there is a family life component in the curriculum that parents can say that they want their children to participate in, or they can determine that they don't want their children to participate in that particular unit. So parents do have some involvement as to the say whether or not their children are in the classroom. That's number one.

And number two, many school divisions consult with parents about the family life education component of the curriculum to see whether or not it has community support — whether or not it meets the test of community standards and mores. And that is being done in the province.

Now there are some parts of Saskatchewan where the people who have a particular view on this subject have not been successful. And those people have talked to me and I keep saying to them, please continue to work with your school division.

I do know this, that abstinence is spoken of and is taught as part of the approach to family life education in our curriculum. It is a value that is taught. Now that's not to say that all kids are going to be abstinent. If they're not going to be abstinent, they need to have access to other information, which they do have access to.

And I think there's one group of people that don't want children to have access to that other information, and I think that's where we would disagree. Because I, having taught with high-risk young people, I think it's extremely important as an educator that you give all of the information. That doesn't mean you don't impart values and you don't have a standard that you want those young people to meet, but they also need to protect themselves, if they're going to be sexually active, against AIDS and unwanted pregnancies.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, it's obvious that some parents may not have the same opportunities to probably have access to or review some of the course curriculum that you're talking of.

Is there an avenue whereby they can . . . I'm not sure where they would go — if they feel that they are not really being given the opportunity by their local or the unit school board.

Is there an avenue, or just a matter of continuing to pursue with that unit board or with that local board what type of curriculum the board has okayed for that unit, and access to the information so that they can be informed as to the content of the family life or family planning or sex education portion of their family planning educational program?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think that they should continue . . . the parents who have concerns about this should continue to work with their teacher, the classroom teacher, the principal for that school, the school division board. And they should continue to work, as you say, with the local people.

I think it's fair to say that we can't possibly — sitting from our seats in Regina — determine what's best for each community across the province and that is why we've left this to the local people to determine what meets their community standard or mores.

So I would suggest that you say to the people that are contacting you — just as I have because I've had those people contact me as well — that they need to continue to work with their local teachers, the local principal, the director of education, the school board, in order that they can have a kind of a curriculum that they want.

I guess the one thing I would say is that while the people that you and I know that have been speaking to us, they need to consider that there may be some people in their community that don't share their particular viewpoint. And while we have incorporated abstinence into our curriculum, there are other views incorporated into the curriculum as well.

And maybe if we all work together, all of us who share the various perspectives when it comes to this subject matter — I'm not convinced that all of the perspectives are right or wrong — but if we work together as people are doing in Santa Fe, New Mexico where all of the various viewpoints have come together and they have, as I understand it, successfully reduced the rate of unplanned pregnancy . . . they have reduced the rate of therapeutic abortions, and they have a young population that is very knowledgeable, has access to the information, and is in fact practising good health for young people.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Madam Minister, what you've just laid out I think most parents would feel that that's appropriate, and they'd appreciate that. And a lot of parents probably feel that they do have access to, and that they're talking to a concerned teacher or school director or school board that is willing to listen. And not only listen, but at least do something to show they're listening and keeping them informed.

Unfortunately, I guess probably the ones we hear from many times are the individuals who feel that they're talking to a brick wall and they're really not getting anywhere. I'm not sure

exactly how we totally change that, but certainly there are those problems that exist out there.

I would also say that if we're going to have a wholesome sex education program in our society, and if we're going to talk about some of the values, I think one of the most important aspects is not just establishing some guidelines and setting some values, but having a core of support groups out there that would be there to help young people, regardless of who they are — regardless of race, religion, nationality, colour, creed, male or female.

I think maybe that's one of the things that's lacking in our society. People don't have someone to really turn to to maybe ask questions of and get some support, and maybe bringing forward their ideas. And I think as a whole our society has a responsibility to, while we're demanding certain guidelines as far as sex education and family planning and what have you, if we hold to certain values then we should be there to support our young people as well when they're facing problems and when they have a lot of questions out there. And I would certainly agree with that.

A couple more questions I have here. The Minister of Health received recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Family Planning. And I also realize that the recommendations can be found in the document, *Toward Sexual and Reproductive Health in Saskatchewan*. In fact I received one, I believe it was either before or after Christmas.

Have you seen this document, Madam Minister? Do you endorse the recommendations of the advisory committee? Will the recommendations be adopted by the Department of Education? If not, which recommendations will you be adopting, if any?

(1545)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The report was sent to our department and they are going through the recommendations. And I've not yet received any recommendation from the department as to which recommendations we should or should not implement. So I'm not in a position to respond with any precision to your question.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Madam Minister, but as you've indicated the department is certainly going through the report to come back with some recommendations based on what they see coming out of that report.

In 1990 the state of California passed legislation stating that along with other methods of sex education, abstinence had to be taught as well. This was adopted because abstinence is the only method of sex education which 100 per cent guarantees the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies. Would you, Madam Minister, support similar legislation here in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well you're asking, your asking that

the government bring in legislation that, where specifically abstinence would be part of the legislative health education in the province, and that it be taught. And what we have done and it was — the policy was there long before we came to government — is that it's a locally determined option.

I don't think it wise for any Minister of Education to tell Landis, Saskatchewan — which is where I come from — or Biggar, Saskatchewan, or Perdue, or Asquith, or any rural part of the province or city, what their value or standard should be. And once you get into the idea of legislating a value on a particular perspective, you can get into legislating all kinds of things that I would find unacceptable as a principle.

And so I guess I take the view that the policy as it's presently constructed allows local people to determine local standards, what their values are for their community, and they determine what form of sex education is taught in their school.

And I would feel much more comfortable with that notion than the possibility of a legislated viewpoint, because once you legislate viewpoints, other people can lobby and have their viewpoint legislated as well. And I don't think that that is what a free and democratic society is all about.

Mr. Toth: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Certainly, to legislate changes, really, I'm not exactly sure that legislating changes values. And I'll be very frank and very candid. It's something that has to come from within. Although certainly your government has shown in the past that they have no problem in retroactive legislation, but that doesn't necessarily quite deal with where we're sitting today, so we won't get totally into that.

However, Madam Minister, I've appreciated the discussion that has taken place. And if, as you have indicated this afternoon, that this is a policy whereby local boards really do have the ability to administer the type of family planning program that they would like to have instituted in their units, then it would seem to me that appearance and . . . I would think just from the comments I'm getting from different individuals, there are lots of parents out there that really have some strong views on some of these issues; that they should be able to, if there are enough concerned parents in the school and they feel a certain portion of their family planning or sex education program is offensive to their way of life, should be able to then sit down with that local board, that unit board, plus the teachers and educational director to bring their wishes forward.

And I guess at the end of the day, if I could make one suggestion to anyone — it's not just coming with an opposing view, but bringing something as an alternative along as well — I think in our society it's easy for us to stand up and complain and always oppose without bringing something constructive forward. And any time I've chatted with parents on certain issues, whether it's family planning or sex education or whether it's on justice issues — I think even the whole gun law debate that's taking place in Canada right now — I don't think we should be just looking at opposing; we should be looking at

alternatives that at the end of the day will meet the needs of our society.

And so I want to thank you for the time we've had to address this issue and a number of questions that have been raised this afternoon. Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, as I look through the budget book dealing with Education, Training and Employment, I see a number of changes, most of which are down but a few of which are up.

And in particular the one I want to deal with at the present time is the K to 12 system. That's the system that most of the people across the province have the most familiarity with because their kids are either in the system or are going into the system or have just come out of that system. And, Madam Minister, you have dropped that down by \$15 million. Now in a time of budgetary restraint, most people would say that's good, perhaps. But education is one of those very important areas, Madam Minister, that needs to be maintained, and you yourself, while you were in opposition, demanded that it be maintained and indeed increased on a continual basis without regard to the budget.

So, Madam Minister, this is your second time that you have been part of this budgetary process as a cabinet minister, and again we have seen a cut in education in total of \$8 million out of an \$880 million budget. That may not be a large percentage, Madam Minister, but depending on the areas it falls into, it can have a major impact.

So when you look at the K to 12 system, probably the most important portion of that would be the grants to schools, and those have been maintained at the current level. There has been no change. And I'm sure that the school boards out there are thankful, Madam Minister, that there have been no cuts.

But at the same time, while you haven't cut any of the funding going to their budgets, you have not provided any assistance to make up for the other changes within the whole infrastructure of this province that your government has brought forward such as gas rates, such as fuel taxes, such as higher costs for SaskPower, telephones, all of those costs that the school divisions can't get away with. They're trapped because they have to deal with the monopolies. They have no other source to go to for electricity; they have to buy it from SaskPower. So when you increase those costs to them and you correspondingly don't increase what they get in their grants, they have either two possible solutions: they can either cut programing, close schools, drop teachers, or they can raise their mill rates.

And people, no matter whether they live in rural Saskatchewan or urban Saskatchewan, are saying: we don't want to pay any more school taxes. In fact, Madam Minister, we've discussed this at other times — that there are certain people out there that are avoiding paying their taxes simply because they feel that those property taxes are too high for the services they receive.

So, Madam Minister, what assistance, what recommendations, what solutions do you have for the school boards who are facing these increased costs put on them by your government when you in turn do not provide them any extras?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well first of all what I want to tell you is that there were no cuts to school operating grants.

And you talk about a decrease in the education portion of the budget. And what I want to tell is this. That in 1994-95 we moved millions of dollars in K to 12 capital projects up into that budget year and out of the '95-96 year. So in fact with educational capital, we will be spending, in 1994-95, millions of dollars that we had originally planned on spending in '95-96. So in fact there's no cut.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, let's look back at where that capital spending that you are talking about . . . Look at the year before that and the year before that and the year before and you'll see that there was significant amount of monies being spent on capital funding because some of the schools across this province are not in very good shape and do need to be rebuilt. And I can think of a few in my own constituency that are in that position, where they're old schools that are overcrowded because some of the smaller surrounding schools are no longer in a position to remain viable and the school boards have closed them. That puts added pressure onto those schools.

So it's not a question of whether it's you're being generous in rebuilding those schools, Madam Minister; in a lot of cases it's a necessity. So when you say you're actually increasing the budget because you took some out of this year's budget to do it in last year's and so it doesn't show up in this year's, at the end of the day, Madam Minister, there's still a decrease.

You mention the capital funding. I believe there's a drop there from 36 million to 20 million, a \$16 million drop on the K to 12 system — 22 million, excuse me, is what you're spending this year. That's \$14 million, Madam Minister, decrease in capital funding.

But on the operating grants to schools, you did not make any changes, but they have less money with which to operate, Madam Minister. And that was the question I asked you about. What are you going to do about the added costs, the added expenses in operating the schools, the school boards, the school divisions, when you provided them no additional funding and they have a great deal of difficulty going back to their taxpayers and asking for more?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think it's fair to say that education and health have contributed greatly to the historic fact that Saskatchewan is the first government in all of Canada to balance its budget. And we hadn't had a balanced budget in this province since the last year we were in power in 1981.

And we were able to balance the budget in the three and a half year period, and we didn't do that without a great deal of help

from our education partners and health partners and municipal partners and everyone in the province.

We know, and I think school divisions know, that there have been funding — well they know — there have been funding reductions in the province in the last three years; minus two, minus two, and minus four.

But if you look to our neighbours across the country, they are — in the fiscal year '95-96 which is the year that we're talking about — they are cutting education spending and health spending. We're not, because we can now say with precision that we have a balanced budget plus a surplus. And we can tell our partners what's going to happen in '95-96, so we can tell them that there will be a 2 per cent funding increase.

And what I find somewhat difficult to understand is that we don't want tax increases. People feel as though they do not want tax increases, you just said that. We've had enough here. But if we are going to replace all of this funding that was reduced in order for us to balance the budget, we would in fact have to look at tax increases.

And I think if you look at our balanced budget, we took a balanced approach to that budget in that we put a little bit of money aside for the long-term debt — \$14 billion — put a little bit of money into program enhancements like health and education; and we put a little money into tax reduction. And I think that that is a balanced way to deal with our balanced budget.

(1600)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, it's interesting that you talk about the balanced approach, and that the school boards, the students, and the teachers, had to take a cut-back so that you could balance your budget.

And yet when I look at the staff utilizations for the Department of Education, Madam Minister, you didn't take a cut-back. You increased the number of staff people working within your department.

You talk to the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation); you can read in the news clippings that a thousand less teachers have jobs. Now they took a cut-back.

You can look at the school boards and how much less money they have; how many people are out of their systems; how many schools have closed; how many buses are no longer on the routes. Madam Minister, they took a cut-back.

Madam Minister, you look at the programs available to students. You look at the amount of time each student has available to him with the teacher because of the increased class sizes. Madam Minister, they have taken a cut-back.

But the Department of Education certainly didn't take a cut-back. You increased it by 16 people, Madam Minister. Now

when you start talking about cuts, what people want to see out there is you in your department taking a cut, cutting your administration, cutting your things that do not directly pertain to the teaching of students. That's what they want to see the cuts at, Madam Minister.

So, Madam Minister, since I have mentioned the 16 new people that you have in your department, I wonder if you'd mind explaining to the people of Saskatchewan just what they're there to do.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well if you look at the budget book you will note that in terms of administration, last year's estimate was 4.593 and this year's — and that's millions — and this year's estimate is 4.482. There is a reduction. In fact everybody who works in the department will know that the department over the last three and a half years has taken a major funding reduction in terms of the overall administration budget for our department — much more than 8 per cent.

This year we can say to our partners there is no funding reductions but there is a 4 per cent funding reduction for our department. So in fact I think your observation is incorrect.

Now what we do have is some new full-time equivalents. And the reason we have that is because we had some contracted positions that we have now converted to full-time positions. We are doing a new distance education strategy which is really important to rural and northern Saskatchewan, and so we will have two people in the whole area of the technologies. And they are going from a contract position to full-time equivalents, so it's up front for the public to see.

As well we have a new Private Vocational Schools Act which just received second reading this morning, or this afternoon. In order for private vocational schools to be properly regulated we need to have some people who can do that so that we won't continue to see what's happened to private vocational schools. And so there are two positions there. As well there are two people in student financial aid. More students are receiving student aid.

One person is part of regional services. One person at the Teachers' Superannuation Commission, and two people in evaluation and assessment because the province is involved in developing the testing for the national science test. And those two positions are being funded by the federal government.

As well we have seven positions for JobStart, and JobStart is the new program that we announced to assist young people between the ages of 17 to 25 get a job. Those aren't permanent positions, but nevertheless they are positions, and we wanted to be fully open with the public with regard to that.

The other thing that you should know is that we have people who come from school divisions on secondment, but those seconded positions are against a position that is in fact there.

So we're not hiding anything here, sir. We are doing this up

front. The world is rapidly changing. We do have some new initiatives in the area of distance ed for rural and northern Saskatchewan. We do have a new initiative for young people between the ages of 17 and 25 in order for those young people to have some hope that they will in fact get a job. And we have some people to assist us with our new private vocational school Act if we're going to have a properly regulated private vocational school industry.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I'm glad you brought up the number for administration, the 4.482 million. Now when you take that money as administrative costs and you say that, according to your book here, you've got 500 people working in the Department of Education, am I then to understand, Madam Minister, that they're all working for less than \$10,000 each . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You were arguing that you're only spending \$4.482 million on administration, and that you have 500 people working for the Department of Education. So I have to take that as meaning that that is their salaries, so then they're working, each one of them, for less than \$10,000, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Those are people involved in direct service, but there are people involved in various portions of the department. What I'm telling you is this year, as directed by the Department of Finance, we took \$1 million out of the administrative operations of the Department of Education, Training and Employment.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well that's interesting, Madam Minister. According to your estimates for the '94-95 year, you had 4.5, \$4.5 million in administration. You're estimating 4.4 this year which is \$100,000 less, and you said you took a million out?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — You're not hearing me. This is the support services for the department. But in the other summary of expenses, there are also departmental expenses that are the department. And what I'm telling you is that overall, we took \$1 million out of the Department of Education, Training and Employment — the bureaucracy. We took out \$1 million.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm glad you clarified that not all of your administrative costs then come under administration, that they're all lumped in, in a nebulous fashion within all of the other sectors of education.

So, Madam Minister, how much does it cost to run the department part of the Department of Education, as opposed to supplying education to students?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, the department's total budget is \$880.7 million. Program services are approximately 3 per cent of that overall figure or \$27.9 million. Cost breakdowns are this: \$15.9 million for wages, \$8.5 million for operating, \$3.5 million for rental space — for a total of \$27.9 million.

The department's administrative costs are 3 per cent or \$27.9 million out of a total budget of 880.7 million.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder why those figures aren't broke out in the budgetary documents themselves so that it's clear how much money is being spent on the department's operation and how much is being spent on supplying education for students.

What would the average salary be for a person within the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I guess what I will say is take 500.3 employees and divide it by \$15.9 million. My piece of paper has disappeared . . . Whatever my last answer was. But that will give you your average cost.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. The rental that is part of the Department of Education, what are you renting? Are you renting office space; are you renting movable equipment? Who do you pay this to?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, we rent facilities in the North because we have regional offices there. We rent facilities in Saskatoon, Regina, Swift Current, I believe Weyburn or Yorkton, North Battleford, Prince Albert . . . or not Prince Albert, Melfort. We rent facilities all across the province. And some of the rental would be paid to SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) and some of the rent would be paid to private landlords.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you give us a list of those accommodations and the fees for them?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, I will.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. Is there any change in that rental costs from the last budget?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — It went down slightly because we moved from leased space to government-owned space, and we'll get you that information.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, when you're dealing with accommodations and central services, again on this one you have taken a small decrease from the previous budget. What has changed in that area?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — That is the rent.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Under teachers' pensions and benefits, there has been a \$6 million drop in what you have awarded into that area. Madam Minister, I'd like to start off first with how much remains in the teachers' pension plan that is unfunded?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I am advised that it's \$1.87 billion.

Mr. D'Autremont: — And, Madam Minister, is that an increase or a decrease from last year?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We are waiting for a consulting actuarial by the name of William M. Mercer to tell us that. We don't yet have that information. But that is our latest information.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Your latest information, Madam Minister, is you don't know, I gather. Okay.

Madam Minister, how long has this unfunded liability been there?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think it's fair to say that the province of Saskatchewan isn't unlike every other government across the country. There are unfunded liabilities in every province and territory; so this is not new. It's always been thus. But what did change in 1978 . . . and if you happened to read the *Saskatoon Sun*, which is a Sunday morning newspaper, there's a big profile of the former minister of Finance, Wes Robbins, who's now 79 years old.

When he was the minister of Finance in the late 1970s, he went from an unfunded liability pension plan, not only for teachers and MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and Crown corporation-employed civil servants, to a funded pension, a money purchase plan. So this is not a new phenomena. It was a phenomena that existed under your administration, Liberal administrations, NDP administrations; so it's not new.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. You're saying that this unfunded liability to the province has been there for many years, decades in fact now. I'm glad to hear that because I was just reading in the paper on the weekend by one of our esteemed columnists that all of the debt of the province was attributable to the previous administration. So I find it enlightening for you to admit that some of it was there before 1982.

Madam Minister, there was a program put in place, I believe in the late '80s, to start paying down some of this unfunded liability, that the government would put some portion of the monies away to cover that off. Is that correct? And if so, has that program been carried on?

(1615)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that at one stage the government was putting in more than they were supposed to. The practice was criticized by the Provincial Auditor, so that was stopped.

And now what the government has agreed to do is allow the interest of the fund to remain in the fund, so that's how we've handled the Provincial Auditor's concern.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, if the fund is unfunded, how does it generate any interest, if it's a debt? If there's no money actually sitting there, how can it generate any interest?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There is an asset of a billion dollars and there is a liability of close to \$2 billion. So in fact when I say that there's an unfunded liability of 1.8, it's taking the debt and the assets, and so the assets do garner interest.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, are you sure that there is an unfunded portion of 1.87 sitting there and there's also a \$1 billion asset sitting there? Are those one and the same? Or are they two separate programs?

It was my understanding that at some point in time, perhaps 1978-79, the teachers started paying into a funded program where their money went into a separate package and it stayed there. And that's separate and distinct from the unfunded portion. Is that correct, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There is the annuity plan for teachers, I think, that came into teaching after 1978 or '79. They pay into a money purchase plan. That fund is now administered by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Then there's the group that comes before 1978-79, and they are in fact where the unfunded liability is.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So that unfunded liability in its section has no asset then to offset it?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There is a \$1 billion asset and there is nearly a \$3 billion liability, and that's how we get the \$1.87 billion unfunded liability.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Madam Minister. That wasn't what you had explained earlier. You had missed that 3 billion part. Well thank you very much.

I find it only reasonable, Madam Minister, that the annuity section of the pension plan should retain the interest off of that. I realize that the province does pay some of that money into that pension plan, but the teachers are also paying into it. So in that respect, it should be their money, Madam Minister.

So having said that, what changed in the program to drop the amount of money that the province is putting into it, by \$6 million? Is that the number of teachers that are no longer employed in the system?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The more teachers that retire, the less amount of money that's required from general revenue. So in fact the reason why it's gone down is because we expect more teachers to retire. If you look at the demographics, the teaching population is ageing.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. Indeed the teaching population is ageing but there's also less jobs out there for them, so more of the teachers are moving out of the system that would have perhaps stayed in.

Madam Minister, move on to the K to 12 system now. I wonder if you can give me a breakdown of all of the school divisions; what their increases or decreases will be in funding for this

year; what their student ratio . . . have they changed, gone up and down, Madam Minister?

I'll go on to another question then, Madam Minister, while you're looking for that. I wonder if you could give me a list of what schools will receive capital projects and the costs, and the determinations of why that school versus some other.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Okay, on capital, the K to 12 projects that will be accelerated into 1994-95 are the T.D. Michel School in Big River, of \$50,000; the Shaunavon High School, of \$325,000; the R.J. Humphrey School in Kinistino, of \$165,000; Esterhazy, they have an air quality problem there, 225,000; the Consul School, 100,000; the William Grayson, Moose Jaw, School, of 900,000; the Pleasantdale, Estevan school, of 1.4 million; Davidson Elementary, 570,000; Tisdale comprehensive, 3.4 million; William Mason School, 500,000; and the North Battleford Comprehensive High School, \$2 million; for a total of \$9.635 million.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I wonder if you could send us a copy of that, if you would please.

Madam Minister, that's nine-point-some million dollars you said in capital grants. But you have \$22 million listed in the budget. Where does the rest of it go to?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Sorry. I've been advised by my officials that I gave you the wrong information with regard to my staff's salary. And I just want to give you the correct information. I want to apologize for that.

And if someone could get a copy for the opposition . . . the Liberals, they're not here, but that would be helpful. Thanks.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I have another question for you, Madam Minister. The \$22 million that you have in the K to 12 education system for school capital, you listed off \$9.1 million. What happened to the other 13?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Eight million dollars is block funding, and \$14.1 million is interest on the previous year's capital debt for a total of 22.1 million. And I just talked about the \$9.6 million because we accelerated capital projects into '94-95.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, those projects that were moved forward, what was the reasons why those were moved forward and why other schools . . . and I know that there are a large number of schools that send in B-1's looking for financing and funding to upgrade their schools. So why were those particular two schools chosen over others that sent in B-1's?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have a process that is known to all school divisions in the province that shows very clearly how schools get put on a priority list, and everyone knows what they are. So it was quite natural that everyone knew that these are the schools that were going to get on the list, and so this isn't news for those people who are waiting for a capital project.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Madam Minister, do you have a current list of people who have applied with B1's for capital construction, and would you supply that?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, we'll send it to you. As well, we'll send you the school facilities funding guidelines, which show very clearly how projects are put on the priority list. There can be no political influence. This process is wide open; no one can interfere with the process. School divisions know what the process is, they see the list, and they know where they stand on that list.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I think we have, perhaps not with you, but with previous ministers of Education, gone through this discussion. And there does seem to be at some point in time a bit of leeway in there for making determinations that, while you might say that they're not political decisions, there is some ministerial discretion in there at times. But I'm not going to argue about that, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, I asked you if you would also supply the list of the schools that you had read off, and you hadn't agreed to that. Would you do so? I guess that's an agreement, Madam Minister. Thank you.

Madam Minister, on the education development fund, I see there's a drop there of \$300,000. Has that meant that there has been a decrease in programing in that area? Or what has happened within that area that would warrant it to take a \$300,000 decrease?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We advised our education partners last year that there would be a phase-out of the program, and this is simply carrying through with that advisory of last year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. So what is happening to the EDF (education development fund) funding? It's decreasing but nothing is going to take its place to carry on with those programs that were being administered by that. And I believe some of those things were like resources for special education within the schools, new programing for kindergarten, etc., all the way up. So those programs will now . . . what will happen to that programing, Madam Minister? Will they simply be ended in the schools?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Obviously that would be up to the individual school divisions, how they want to proceed. We did give ample warning that EDF would be phased out. We've now completed that process. We have, however, told our school divisions and teachers that there will be \$4.8 million in redirected funding for special education for young people with behaviour, social, and emotional disabilities. So some of that EDF that went to those kinds of programing will be available for those school divisions that have programs for special needs children or young people with emotional, social, and behavioural problems.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So will the process, Madam Minister,

have changed any to apply for some of that high cost funding for students that have those problems, those concerns within the system?

Most school divisions have some students within their system that are termed high cost. It may be they need wheelchair ramps and special hardware on doors. It may mean they need special teachers, individual instruction from teachers' aides, and those kinds of things. Has the method of supporting that changed at all?

(1630)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What we won't be doing is giving unconditional funding. The funding will be conditional. I think it's fair to say that I was not happy with the way we funded special education, and neither were a lot of parents because they weren't sure that in fact provincial dollars were going to special education programs.

So this will be conditional funding. School divisions will have to apply for the funding and it will be very specific to address some of the problems that you talk about.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, what direction is the department's policy moving on this? Are you moving in a direction of integration of people that have these types of concerns, or are you carrying on with the education of special needs students within their own milieu, within their own schools?

In my own division, we have a school that deals with the mentally retarded, with the handicapped, and they have their own school division even that they deal with. Yes, their own school division, the Glenn McGuire School. And the people that are attending that school are very happy with that. The parents are very happy and the students are happy and they don't want it to change. They don't want to be integrated into the regular system.

So, Madam Minister, will you be carrying on with funding of that type of a school, or will they all be mainstreamed?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think that we have some charter cases that are very clear that for those parents who want their children to be integrated, they're entitled to be integrated into a regular classroom. Now there will be parents — and there are many of them — that want a more isolated or segregated sheltered environment for their young person. And it's not our intention to force integration. It's also not our intention to force segregation.

What we have to try and do is ensure that we provide young people with educational programing that is appropriate to their individual circumstances and that we try as much as possible to be able to fund that educational program for that young person.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, I know that the people in my area who have children attending the Glenn

McGuire School are very concerned with the ongoing operation of their facility. They're afraid that their funding will be cut back and that they will be forced to go into the mainstream and to be integrated into the regular school system. And they would like to have some assurance, Madam Minister, that that will not happen, that they won't be forced into that situation. Because it's their belief that their student is being best served in that milieu rather than going into the mainstream system.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Obviously that will be a local decision. The local board will decide whether or not they want to continue with a segregated setting or an integrated setting. But I would hope that that board would work with the parents of the individuals that you talk about, the individual students, to ensure that we have an educational program that is appropriate to those individual students' circumstances.

Not all students do well in an integrated setting. Not all students do well in a segregated setting. I think what we have to do is be logical and have educational programing that is appropriate for each individual student's circumstances.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Indeed, Madam Minister, as you say, not each student is well suited to one particular style, and within the division not all students attend the Glenn McGuire School; a number of them are integrated in the regular system. But those that are in Glenn McGuire would like to stay there.

But their concern is, Madam Minister, with the decreasing funding for the K to 12 system, with the added costs as I pointed out earlier with SaskPower, etc., the utility costs, there is more and more pressure on the system, so it's more and more difficult to maintain a separate school like that for a small number of students, a good number of whom need one-to-one instruction. And so it puts a great deal of pressure on the system, whereas if they were into the regular stream, some of them perhaps would not be as . . . have as much personal contact with their instructors as they do have with Glenn McGuire. And so those parents are very concerned about that and they would like to know that their system could carry on. And so I'm just bringing forward those concerns on their behalf.

Madam Minister, in the curriculum and instruction budget you have \$4.6 million, which is again a decrease of 300,000. Is core curriculum still being implemented at the same rate, Madam Minister, and nothing has changed on that?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Much of the curriculum renewal process has been accomplished in the last nine or so years. What we have listened to is the fact that teachers are saying there's a lot of curricula change coming; can you slow this down a bit? And so we have. One of the things that we will be doing, and we're going to speed it up, is the curriculum renewal process for high schools.

Most of the work from K to 9 has now been completed. Not all of it has been implemented but most of the curriculum renewal has been completed. We are now in the process of renewing all of the high school curriculum, particularly the core subjects.

And it's our intention to have all of that work done by 1996 and then we will have to pilot that curricula and implement it.

So I guess it's fair to say on the one hand we've sort of slowed down the elementary curriculum renewal process, but we're speeding up the high school renewal process because things are changing in the world, and we have to have curriculum that is able to be constantly updated. And so with our curriculum renewal process, I think you'll see more computer technology so that we can constantly update the curriculum so, we don't wait every 25 or 30 years to renew our curriculum.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, thank you, Madam Minister. Since you got onto computers, I will pick up that idea. As a member of the safe driving committee we have toured quite a number of schools across the province, and at one of the schools the question of the Internet came up. And the person who brought that up thought it was a great idea, liked the availability of the information, but was very concerned about the costs associated with it.

Not the cost of hardware, but the ongoing operating costs, Madam Minister, because there was a difference in that operating cost between rural and urban. For the same fee, I believe, of \$20, in an urban setting you received a six-hour connection to the Internet; whereas in the rural settings for that same money, you received a two-hour connection for your \$20. And Madam Minister, the people at this particular school were concerned that their students were either going to be deprived of that extra four hours or that they were going to have to pay a substantially higher cost. And across the whole division, that would amount up to a fair amount of money on a monthly basis, Madam Minister.

So is there any avenues available through the Department of Education that would assist, or could you put some more pressure on the minister of Telephones to perhaps give education a break?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, I don't think it's Education that deals with the whole issue of differences between telephone rates. I think that there is a difference, if I recall, between rates for people living in rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan, and part of that has to do with geography and the cost of maintaining and building that infrastructure.

But I do acknowledge your point. It is fundamentally key in order to have equity in education, that regardless of where you live and work, you should have access to a minimum level of service. And that's one of the reasons why it's our intention to wire in cable at 100 sites in rural and northern Saskatchewan so that our students living in rural and northern Saskatchewan can have access to school net Internet so that they are on the same footing as their urban counterparts.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. When you talk about the changes in curriculum to high schools, I've received a number of letters dealing with that particular issue. And as you probably remember from the last session, we dealt

with the English courses in the schools.

I wonder if you would mind telling the Assembly what was decided. I believe the High School Review Committee recommended four credits, and it was currently six in the system at the time, and there was an argument going back and forth as to what it should be.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think it was last May or June. I can't quite recall the exact date. We released our response to the high school review. And what the policy of the provincial government is, is that beginning I believe in 1996 — well, as soon as the curriculum is developed — we will have five English language credits in the province of Saskatchewan. We're presently renewing that curriculum, and we will incorporate reading, writing, speaking skills, along with literature.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Madam Minister. I see you have taken the typical Liberal stand on this issue and straddled the fence on it; one foot on four and one foot on six, so you took five.

Madam Minister, one of the other issues on the high school curriculum that has been brought forward to me is the social studies program and that it should be reinforced and carried on. These people believed that it was going to be decreased. What is happening with social studies within the high school curriculum?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Social studies is not being decreased. In fact we have now made it compulsory to take Canadian studies, Canadian social studies, or Canadian native studies if you want to graduate from grade 12. We found it a bit difficult to rationalize the notion that a student could go through high school and never learn anything about his or her country, and we have now made Canadian studies, Canadian social studies, and Canadian native studies compulsory subjects.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay thank you, Madam Minister. We'll perhaps get on a pet subject of mine here now, and that's dealing with Canadian history prior to Wolfe. Is that part of the curriculum now?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — My understanding — I'm advised by the officials — is that it is.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister, because it's a very interesting part of Canadian history that has been missed out in the regular public system, I believe, over the years, and I would like to see that included as part of it.

Madam Minister, aboriginal and northern education takes 1.9 million. What kind of services do you provide for that?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We deliver services in northern Saskatchewan through our regional office in La Ronge. Those services, I understand, include the K to 12 system, and they also include some support services to post-secondary education

services in northern Saskatchewan. We don't have the precise detail here with the officials, but we'll get you that information.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'd appreciate it if you could supply that.

Planning and priorities, Madam Minister, just what do they do? I see they've had . . . most of the other areas have taken a decrease, but planning and priorities for some reason has taken an increase.

So if I look across the province, most people would look at that and say, Madam Minister, there's some more bureaucrats. As the bureaucrat on our safe driving committee refers to himself as . . . is nameless and faceless, so people would wonder just what planning and evaluation is all about and why they would deserve an increase when most everybody else took a cut.

(1645)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As you may know, Saskatchewan is the only province or territory that is not into national testing. We do not participate in the Council of Ministers National Testing Program called SAIP (school achievement indicators program).

Because we have renewed all of our science curricula in elementary school, we were invited and we are participating in the design of the national testing instrument for science which will come in the spring of 1996. This money is being paid for by the federal government, but it's showing up in our budget as an increase. And it's an increase because we have two people who are involved in designing the test instrument for the science tests that will come through the national testing program in the spring of 1996.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, since you're participating in the national science test development, does that mean that you will also be participating in the national science tests when they become available?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have not made that decision at all. What we wanted to do was be involved in designing the test instrument. It's my view that he who controls the test instrument often controls the test result. And if you look at the other testing that has gone on in the country, Saskatchewan had not participated in the design of the test. Because we're now participating, we're in a better position to know whether there are multicultural biases, whether there are problems with the test instrument that would impact upon our students' ability to do well. So we will assess whether or not we want to participate in the national testing once it becomes clear what the test design is going to look like.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Madam Minister, that sounds a little bit like, if I don't get to be the pitcher I'm going to take my bat and ball home.

You're going to participate in developing the national science tests, but at the end of the day you're not going to say whether

or not you're going to be part of it. So you're going to tell the other people who will be using this, this is what we want in it. This is the way we want it done, but we're not going to be a part of it because we don't want to know what the results are going to be that our students may or may not show up on this program.

So, Madam Minister, in my mind, you either have to participate in developing, fine, but then you participate in the program afterwards because you've set the criteria that's in there . . . you and the other departments of Education across the country. Or else you stay out of it and say, no, we want nothing to do with national testing. You can develop your own program and do what you want, but we're not going to participate in it. And that's what you've said up until now. So if you're in the development of the national science tests, then you should also be in as far as implementing the tests in the province.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well if you look at our participation, we're not the only province participating in the design of the tests. Certainly two of our seconded teachers are participating in the design of the test. This is a new participation on the part of the province.

We don't know what the final test instrument is going to look like. We don't know if there are going to be biases. We don't know a lot of things. We're just in the test design stage now. We've not yet had a trial run as to the test, whether it works or it doesn't work. It's not fully designed, and once it is designed, it will be tested to see if it works, and then it'll be redesigned. And that's what you do with test instruments.

Saskatchewan is not going to make a decision on whether or not we're in or out until we know whether this test design is a valid test design. I don't know if you know anything about testing, but the way you design the test can often influence the outcome of the test, and that can be a good thing, or it can be a bad thing, but mostly it's bad. And I know that we're dealing with something that you may have no knowledge of, but I do have a little bit of knowledge of evaluations and test design. So that's number one.

Number two, it is not cheap to participate in national testing; in fact, it's expensive. And our province made a decision not to participate in national testing, particularly when we were going through funding reduction exercise for school division boards.

We didn't like the idea of paying half a million or 600,000 or 700,000 on testing when we know that there were funding reductions in the province and that teachers and others were seeing a decline in their numbers and seeing other impacts upon our school system.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, thank you, Madam Minister. I realize that how the tests are written and how they're implemented will have a great deal of impact on the results you get. It's no different than polling; how you structure the question determines on what kind of an answer you get. And so it's very important that, depending on what kind of a result you

want to get out of the test . . . determines how the program is written.

I find it very interesting, Madam Minister, that you comment that on . . . while reducing funding you didn't want to be running national tests because of the costs of the tests themselves. I would suspect, Madam Minister, that perhaps the reason why you didn't want to run national testing while cutting funding is because you didn't want to see what the results might be from less teachers out in the field teaching. That was perhaps as big a factor as the funding cost of it itself. When you talk about funding, you're providing funding to participate in the structuring of this national science test, but at the end of the day you don't know whether you're going to take it.

If all you want to do at the end of the day is provide an evaluation of it, you can wait until it's done and then evaluate it to see whether it suits your needs or not. But if you're going to be in there designing the program, Madam Minister, you should be prepared to participate in it because what you want into that testing structure may not be what somebody from Newfoundland wants in it. But they're going to have to put up with what you put into it, and then you're going to turn around and say, we're not interested any more, Madam Minister.

I don't think that's good enough. I think if you're going to be a part of the process to develop the test, you need to be part of the process when it comes to applying it to the students.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well what we decided to do was go to our own provincial indicators report, and we released that report last year. We have participated in national and international testing.

If you look at our participation in English language skills, our indicators report shows that our students do very well in comparison to their national counterparts. In fact we have outstanding English language skills in this province. And I think that's borne out by some interesting statistics.

Saskatchewan people, along with British Columbia, have the highest literacy rate in the country. Our two big libraries in the province, the Saskatoon Public and the Regina Public, are number one and four in library usage in all of North America. We do very well. So it's not a matter of being afraid of what test results will show us. That's not the issue at all. What the issue has been is whether or not national testing is going to really tell us some things. And I note with some interest — and I've talked to my national counterparts about this — that now that they have the test results, are they changing the curriculum? Are they changing their style of teaching? What are they doing with the test results? Is it only to tell us how our kids stack up in comparison to the rest of the country?

I think not. We have our indicator's report, and we found that our students in grade 5, when we did the testing with science, have problems problem solving. We just did some other testing that will soon be released. Our kids have difficulty solving problems, going through that process. So it's not good enough

to say, oh well we have difficulty solving problems. What we now have to do is determine what do we need to change in terms of that curriculum and what do we need to do to address teacher strategies, teaching strategies in the classroom?

So I guess my point is that I guess we could pander to those people who want us to participate in national testing, but I am following with great interest what my counterparts are doing in other provinces because I haven't seen them change their curriculum yet. I haven't seen them change their teaching styles yet. And when we do see those changes, I will then be convinced that national testing is about improving the quality of the curriculum, improving the quality of the teaching, and not simply to talk and get into a little competition about who can outdo whom in this country.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.