

EVENING SITTING
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

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Health
Vote 32

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

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. With me, immediately to my left, is Mr. Duane Adams who is the deputy minister of Finance, and . . . of Health, actually. And I'm the Minister of Health. Beside him is Kathy Langlois who is the executive director, finance and management services, and right behind me is Glenda Yeates who's the associate deputy minister of Health, not Finance. And joining us in a few minutes will be Lois Borden who is the executive director of the district support branch of the Department of Health.

Item 1

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I want to welcome your officials that are with you this evening. I believe there will be several meetings that they'll be enjoying some debate between yourself and I given some of the cuts in your department and some of the things that have happened especially in the rural areas. And of course we've got days that I think, Mr. Minister, that we'll be dealing with some of these questions. But we'll just start off easy tonight.

I'd like to ask you how it is that the districts are funded. And I raise it in this context because it was your department and you, Mr. Minister, and the previous ministers that talked about how the funding in health care would be based on need. So I'd like to hear what you have to say about this.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to tell the hon. member that funding to the health districts is based upon a population-needs-based approach.

What that means first of all, of course, is that we look at the population of each district. There are 30 districts in the province, and we try to base funding, the amount of funding, on the population of each district. But we, within each population, we have to look at the demographic characteristics of the population. That is, if the district has more elderly people, senior people, they require more money for health care, so that there's an adjustment in favour of the district. The district would receive more money because it has a higher proportion of seniors, or perhaps there might be a higher proportion of very young children who require more health care and the district might get more money because of that.

But generally speaking, the funds are allocated, 80 per cent of the funds are allocated, to the districts using the population-needs-based approach. In other words, on the basis of how many people the district has and the characteristics of the district population.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, so does it go beyond . . . are there circumstances where it would go beyond dealing with population, getting into geography?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Strictly speaking, Mr. Chairman, generally the funding formula does not take geography into account except with respect to home-based services; the distance required to travel to see the person is taken into account in allocating the funding.

The other aspect where geography is indirectly taken into account is that the population-needs-based funding is adjusted to recognize that certain districts have more costly infrastructure than others. So that you might have larger districts with a large number of smaller institutions, and the formula takes that into account.

So in those two ways geography is a factor. Beyond those two ways, geography is not a factor.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Mr. Minister. So what I hear from you is that in fact if there's any deviance on this funding . . . or what the formula takes into consideration would be costs to provide the service, costs to the Department of Health or to the district health board, but there's no extra funding given a geographical situation where there is a lot more cost to the residents or people that would be using the service, right?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I think generally speaking that's right. If the district is large and it costs more to provide home-based services, it's taken account for home-based services. And if the district has more costs to the infrastructure than other districts, that is also taken into account. But generally I think what the member says is true.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, so there's no extra costs . . . I'll use the community of Climax for an example where in fact there's a geographical divide. And you recall the court cases there, your deputy would recall the court cases or the proposed court case that you could have been facing because of the Frenchman River valley, and so that community or communities that would have geographical concerns like this, they would receive no extra consideration at all?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No, as I said, the funding would be based upon the population of the districts and the demographics of the population.

Mr. McPherson: — The funding formula that you're using, is it consistent right throughout the province, whatever the formula be?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes.

Mr. McPherson: — Is it easily explained?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I'm not going to say it is because then I'll get into trying to explain it and I'll probably have a rough time. I think that it's a fairly complex matter actually.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, could you . . . without being I guess too precise — I'm going to have to give you some latitude here — but could you give us . . . get as close as you can, say how you would fund one district versus another, with a larger centre versus a smaller centre.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I'll start with this explanation, Mr. Chairman. The funding starts with the district's population. This is based on the people that have health cards.

For acute care services, we know that children, elderly, and women in childbearing years need and use more hospital services. And therefore districts with a higher proportion of these people receive an upward age and gender adjustment. The needs adjustment for acute care services recognizes districts that have a high number of births, a high number of premature deaths, and a high number of low birth weight babies.

The service flow adjustment recognizes districts that have an inflow of residents from other districts; that is, the district is providing services to residents of other districts.

So in other words, I think there's two factors here. The first is, as I said a few minutes ago, you take the pool of money available to the districts across the province, and you divide it up between them based on their population, but you adjust that depending upon other factors such as the number of women, seniors, babies' births, and so on. The other adjustment you make is that if people move from one district to another to access services, then there would be an adjustment with respect to that as well.

The member says what was the last line. The first part of it is based on population and the characteristics of the population. So you do that. Then there is a service flow adjustment which recognizes that districts have an inflow of residents from other districts; that is, a district is providing services to residents of other districts.

In other words, if you took the district of Swift Current and the district of Rolling Hills as an example, the Swift Current district would provide a lot of acute care services for people that live in Rolling Hills, which is, you know, is the district surrounding the city of Swift Current. So the Swift Current Health District would receive compensation for providing acute care services to people that live in Rolling Hills but access their services in Swift Current.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, is there any additional funding for any districts or any communities where there are facilities that have larger industry involved?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — The answer to that question, Mr. Chairman, is no. A district would not get more funding because it had large industry. Although generally speaking you would probably find, other than some of the mines in the North, that the larger industries would exist where the population was higher. They would tend to be in urban areas. So coincidentally, if there was large industry, the district where the industry was located probably would get more funding, but that would be by way of coincidence rather than design.

(1915)

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, the needs-based funding, has that been consistent since health reform began, or has the . . . oh, I guess the definition of a needs of a district, has that changed?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — The framework for needs-based funding was implemented, Mr. Chairman, in 1994-95, but we've made adjustments to it since then and will continue to make adjustments to it in consultation with the districts.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, so are you telling me that up to that '94-95 year, in fact the needs was based on the needs of the residents of the district and not necessarily the population?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No, I would say that the reverse is true. That under needs-based funding that we have now and since 1994-95, the funding is more likely to be allocated based upon the needs of the residents in the district in the sense that the funding takes into account the number of people that live in the district, and the services accessed there. Prior to that time, as the member knows, there used to be approximately 410 separate boards, and the funding was simply allocated on the basis of the historical relationship between each individual board and the province. So that the province would be funding, you know, St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon directly, and Royal University Hospital directly, and the hospital in Hafford directly, and so on.

But there wasn't really planning in terms of the population of the district. It was more a matter of just looking at what the institution got the previous year and then making an adjustment based on that.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, then who determines the need of a district board, of a health district?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — The need of a health district would be determined by looking at the population of the district; and also by looking at any special characteristics within that population, i.e., are there more elderly people within that district; are there more births; low-weight babies; women of child-bearing age and so on.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, if in fact . . . you keep coming back to having it based on almost solely on population. So then, can you tell what the role of these needs assessments and acuity studies — acuity studies, I guess, in particular — how this would play into it?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, the needs studies that the member is referring to have more to do with allocating the money within the district itself, not the amount of money that the district receives from government.

In other words, say that we have a billion dollars that we're giving to the districts, which is not quite the exact number but approximately the number this year. Then we would divide that amongst the 30 districts based upon their population. But we

would take into account different population characteristics to determine exactly how much money each should get.

Once they are allocated their money, the district itself has to take its pool of money and decide how to spend it, and they would carry out further studies to determine levels of acuity and also need within the district so that they could then take their pool of money and allocate their money between the various institutions and services within their district.

Mr. McPherson: — So, Mr. Minister, what role does your department play once the money is allocated to the district board or to the health district? What role does your department play in, in fact, deciding where within that district the funding gets spent?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Chairman, the districts have to meet certain provincial standards set out in The Public Health Act and The Health Districts Act. But generally speaking, once they receive their money, they come up with a plan as to how to spend their money.

There is one rule; they cannot take money from what is allocated for community-based care and put it into institutional care. But they can take money out of institutional care and put it into community care, or they can shift money as between several institutions. So they could make a decision to close an institution, convert an institution, establish a new institution, consolidate institutions and so on. But within those parameters they would be free to spend their money how they wish.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, then your department, when you're going to fund a district, your department then must be setting out how much money can be spent in that district on acute care, long-term care, home-based care. It's already set out there, and they can't deviate from that.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — There are three pools of money: acute care, supportive care, and home-based care. And the department and the legislature decide how much money, with respect to each of those three pools, the districts should get. But once they get the money, they can do with the money what they like. They don't have to keep the same amount in the acute care pool or the supportive care pool. But they cannot take money out of community-based care and put it into institutional care, but they can take money out of institutional care and put it into community-based care, or they can adjust the configuration as between acute care and long-term care. So even though they receive the money based upon what the department perceives their needs to be, they can do what they like with their money within those parameters.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, then given that answer it's clearly your department that sets out how many acute care beds are allowable in any one district, right?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No. Given my answer, that would not be the case.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, if in fact your department controls the funding, if the district board doesn't

have the ability to shift funds into acute care, only take monies out of acute care, the only latitude they would have is if they want to have less acute care beds. So perhaps you would like to revisit your answer.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well there would be some examples where the districts could, if they wanted to, move money for example from long-term care to acute care. That would be within their decision-making power. So I just say to the member that to say that they can't increase the number of acute care beds if they wanted to would not be true. But they cannot take money from community-based care and put it into acute care beds.

As between long-term care and acute care, they can make whatever decisions they like. And as between various institutions, on the institutional care side, they can come up with the configuration that they feel best meets their population needs.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, on February 28 of this year the rural municipality of Hart Butte No. 11 wrote a letter to yourself, and in this letter . . . well in fact they refer to several letters that they have been writing to you and your department, and seemingly never getting any response. But I'll deal with this particular one. And the question is: is it district health boards or the Minister of Health that has the authority to establish acute care beds in a facility? To date we have no response from your office.

So, Mr. Minister, could you stand in the House this evening and give a response to that question.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That would be a decision for the district to make, but of course the district would have to meet provincial standards such as the type of standards in The Hospital Standards Act for an acute care facility.

Mr. McPherson: — Then, Mr. Minister, perhaps you could step us through the process that they would have to go through to have this happen and explain in lay language; tell us what the process is.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — To answer the member's question . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . although I do appreciate the assistance of my colleagues, Mr. Chairman, let's say that a district had three acute care facilities, each with 20 acute care beds. And they decided that they wanted to reduce the number of acute care beds in two of the facilities and increase the number of acute care beds in the third facility. They would just go ahead and make a board decision to do that.

(1930)

Mr. McPherson: — So, Mr. Minister, let's look at it in another way. Let's say the former minister of Health made an error in closing . . . Mr. Chair, it's so noisy over there; I'm glad they're your colleagues.

In fact, Mr. Minister, if the former minister of Health had made an error in closing too many beds, would the district health board have the ability, have the latitude, to open more beds?

You keep referring as though they all wished to close and turn some of the beds and the funding of those beds into long-term care or supportive or home-based. View it from the other side of that stick, Mr. Minister, and tell me if in fact they could increase, without your department's influence, the number of acute care beds in their health district.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well if the district wished to designate a facility as an acute care facility and to allocate some of its funding to that facility, they would so decide. And then they would apply to myself to designate the institution that they wanted to turn into an acute care facility as a hospital, and I would have to make a decision under The Hospital Standards Act whether to designate that facility or not.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, what would be the criteria that you would then sit down . . . as a lawyer and not a health professional, what would you sit down and decide what was appropriate criteria that you would want to see before you would allow these beds to be reopened after the former minister of Health cut and slashed and destroyed the health care in rural Saskatchewan. So what would your criteria be?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well the member mentioned that I might answer the question as a lawyer, not a health professional. I suppose I could ask the member if he's asking the question as a rancher or a farmer, not a health professional.

But I think we all have an interest in health care, Mr. Speaker. But let me say that if a health district desired to open an acute care facility in a particular location and that met the needs of their population and they were within their budget — because admittedly it is always within the budget — but they decided that was the best way to spend money within their district, and they were making other changes to accommodate their desire to do that, then I think that if it was sustainable and it met the needs of the population, that that would be something that the health district should be able to accomplish.

Mr. McPherson: — So then, Mr. Minister, I guess . . . that was a good question that you had, whether I was asking it as a farmer and a rancher, because really that is the case. I'm looking at this through the eyes of the people that I represent, and that's what I was hoping, that you would also come back as a minister and think along those same lines as to people that actually need this service and not just to satisfy the Finance minister's needs.

So, Mr. Minister, then if . . . can you give me any examples of where in fact any communities or health district boards put a request for additional acute care beds and you granted their wish?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chairman, there have been no specific requests to me in that regard.

Mr. McPherson: — Well I find that hard to believe. Not that I'm feeling that you're not being truthful with the answers, but in fact there were 52 communities that were affected by your government. And through the health care coalition I know several of them were trying to hold onto some acute care status.

And are you telling me that none of those affected facilities have requested to have some acute care funding and acute care beds?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well if the member is asking if the districts have asked, through their boards, to reopen any of these facilities, we're not aware of any such requests.

Mr. McPherson: — So then, Mr. Minister, you would allow this, I guess though, if the request came to you by way of the district board because you believe these boards are autonomous, right? You've said that on many occasions. So we'll take that for granted for a moment.

You had mentioned a while ago that in fact it's the . . . that is, the districts have the authority . . . you see I'm looking at a letter here from the rural municipality of Hart Butte, again December 4 to yourself, where in fact they are stating that, from you and your department, they've been advised that they have no authority to open acute care beds in the district; they only have the authority to close beds. The decision to open acute care beds rests with the Department of Health and the minister. So is this the case or isn't it the case?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I think it would be helpful, Mr. Chairman, if I could see a copy of the letter for clarification. But while the member is sending me a copy, let me say that, in answer to the first part of his question, if the district had an appropriate plan to open an acute care facility which was within its budget and they could pay for it, then the answer is as I told the member.

Yes. The member asks that I repeat that, Mr. Chairman.

I said to the member in response to the first part of his last question that if the district wished to open an acute care facility and they could do so within their budget, and they deemed that to be appropriate, and it didn't involve transferring money from their community-based funding to acute care, but it was a reconfiguration of their institutional side, then I believe the district should be permitted to do that.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Mr. Minister. That tells me that what you're doing is controlling the amount of acute care beds in the district because you're under-funding these districts now.

In fact, how many times during this session alone and the last session have we found that there's been deficits that are uncontrollable and are in fact further cut-backs. So you know full well, you and your department know full well, that you would never grant any more acute care beds because you're not funding health care the way it needs to be funded in rural Saskatchewan. Am I right?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well in fact, Mr. Chairman, there haven't been any cut-backs in the amount of money paid to the districts. As the member knows, notwithstanding the fact that we receive less money for health care from Ottawa, we have put the money that they have cut back in, and we haven't reduced the amount of money we're giving to the districts for health care. So there really haven't been any cut-backs.

But I'll be the first to admit to the member that yes, each district must live within its budget. If you're suggesting that the districts should have an unlimited amount of money or a blank cheque, it's true that they don't. They have a finite amount of money, just as government does and universities do and municipalities do, and so also it is the case with health districts. That's an unfortunate fact of life and reality that we all have to live with.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, as a Health minister then are you telling me — and I'd like to hear it from your words — that in fact coming in on budget, on target or below, is more important than the health needs of the people of this province?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No, certainly not. In fact I would say to the member that even though the amount of money we spend on health care today is just slightly more than what we spent in 1991, the same number of services are provided to the people in terms of the number of surgeries provided. And the total acute care services used by residents of the 30 health districts has remained very constant.

So it's very important to meet the health care needs of people in the province, and I think actually we're doing a very good job of it. The services have not gone down. But it is a fact of life that there is not an unlimited budget. And I simply say to the member that if he's asking me if the districts have to live within a set budget, yes they most certainly do.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, then perhaps you could tell me, if in fact they have the constraints of budget . . . and your department and you, Mr. Minister, you already said that . . . told us here in the House tonight that in fact this has to be run by you, even if in fact they had the . . . you know, if it was affordable to have more acute care beds.

Tell me, with these constraints, why then your department and you, Mr. Minister, would have these districts do acuity studies and needs assessment within the district. What was the point? Could you tell us that?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well in answer to the member's first point, Mr. Chairman, I would say that the designation as a hospital by the minister is not something that came along in the last few years under health reform. This is something that has existed in legislation for a long time — not just in this province but in every province — that you can't just call a facility a hospital. It has to be so designated by the Minister of Health, whether it's Saskatchewan or some other province. This is nothing new.

So the idea that somebody who wants to start a hospital up has to get approval of the Minister of Health, is really neither here nor there. Nor is it any kind of an attempt to undermine the authority of health boards.

In terms of the acuity studies and needs-based studies, it only makes sense that each district should look at the characteristics of its population and the services they require in determining how to deliver their health services. But at the end of the day, the decision will be the health district's in terms of what services they feel that they should offer within the parameters

that we've already discussed this evening.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, if you're saying that they should do needs assessments and acuity studies . . . but at the end of the day, they would base it on what? These aren't people that are, you know, professional actuaries and such. What would they base this on if in fact you don't feel that they have to live by the needs assessment and acuity studies? I mean what do they base it on?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well the people on the boards may not be accountants and actuaries, but they're people with common sense. They would look at the evidence in their jurisdiction and they would make a decision based upon the evidence, as people with common sense, as most people in the province do possess.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, can you tell me what the role of advisory committees within a district play?

(1945)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chairman, each district would have a medical advisory committee, the purpose of which would be to have the district board get some advice from the, mainly the physicians within the district; and then beyond that, they would set up committees to advise them in accordance with the wishes of the district, and usually in relation to some population group or another.

For example, a district might want to have a committee of seniors, or people representing mentally challenged people, or the particular needs of women in the health care system. And they would set up advisory committees of seniors or representatives of the mentally challenged or women in order to give them advice as to how to best meet the needs of those particular groups within their communities. And if they wished to do that, then they would go ahead and do that according to what they thought was appropriate.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, are you familiar with the advisory committees that were set up within a district dealing . . . I know that some of them had dealt with, you know, the acuity studies and the needs where, in fact, they should have some acute care beds within a district, and they were to advise the district boards. Now are you saying that these advisory committees are under the medical advisory committee or is this separate and apart?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well as I indicated to the member, Mr. Chairman, these would be advisory committees that the board would decide to set up in order to get advice. And it would be within the discretion of the board of the district to set up such a committee and to get advice.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, as Health minister of the province, it is your role to ensure that people have a safe and reliable health care system. And in fact if communities . . . And I'm going to take the community of Coronach as one example because that just happens to be the community . . . or well Hart Butte I believe surrounds that community. And I got so many letters from Hart Butte that . . . and in fact I think you, Mr.

Minister, should be giving them some clear answers.

When you look at the community of Coronach with two major industries, a power plant, a coal mine, and the distance from other services, being right along the border and being on the very edge of a health district, how then can you as a Health minister — because the buck stops with you — how can you sit by and watch a community like that with a brand-new facility not being utilized when you know full well the need is there?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chairman, I want to advise the member that the facility in Coronach is used. It's used as a health centre. And in fact they do have the capacity to perform a variety of services, including emergency stabilization and assessment, so that if someone was in the position that the member's referring to, that facility would in fact be used to attend to the needs of that person.

Mr. McPherson: — But, Mr. Minister, you and I both know that these facilities that are out there . . . And you can blame the Conservative government all you want; I guess they shouldn't have built some of the facilities. But the fact of the matter is they're there. Why on earth would we not utilize them to their fullest and in fact make them an efficient centre?

By under-utilizing them or to say that all you're going to do is perform stabilizing services, people don't view that as any acute service. Now it's all in the definition of acute, because I recall when your government was bringing in health care reform and the argument was, well people aren't having these major surgeries out there, and so we must cut back. Well nobody expected some major surgeries to occur out there. But to say we're going to take it all away from them and provide stabilization services, well that's just as ridiculous.

Mr. Minister, do you not see that perhaps in utilizing this institution, that is so far removed from other communities, would not be a lot better use of funds from your department?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well to carry the member's argument to its logical extreme, you could have hospitals every 10 miles within the province if you wanted to, but would that be a good way to meet the health needs of the population? I would argue, no.

The reality is that up until 1993, Saskatchewan had 130 hospitals, which was almost as many as they have in the province of Ontario, which is a very large province with 11 times the population. Today we have some 70 hospitals, approximately, which is much higher per capita than elsewhere in the country. And we have as high a number of acute care beds to take care of the population per capita as most jurisdictions do.

So unless there's something very strange and unique about the Saskatchewan population, we actually have more hospitals per capita than elsewhere, and most people do live within a reasonable distance of a hospital and certainly, as well, they live within a reasonable distance of an ambulance service. And in fact the hospital and emergency needs of people in Saskatchewan are very well taken care of compared to other jurisdictions.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, I know that for political reasons you're trying to, in fact, take it to your extreme by saying there was hospitals every 10 miles apart. Well Coronach is an hour's drive from other communities. So we're not going to buy into that.

Can you tell the House tonight whether or not you feel that communities such as Coronach . . . I'll keep using that as the example because it's right along the Montana border. People can't go south. There's nothing to either sides of them; really the direction is north. And what do you feel is a reasonable time frame to get to a hospital or, in fact, a more major . . . you know, surgery or emergency service could be performed?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I'd like to tell the member, Mr. Chairman, that Saskatchewan currently has 77 hospitals, and approximately 99 per cent of people in our 30 health districts live within 30 miles of a hospital, health centre, or ambulance service. And approximately 99 per cent of the population is actually within 50 miles of a hospital; 70 per cent of the people have a travel plan of less than 10 minutes to a hospital; and fewer than 3 per cent have to travel more than 40 minutes to reach a hospital. Seventy per cent of the population within 10 minutes, I think is a pretty good indication.

The member should realize, and I think he does, that if you live in northern Saskatchewan, you are very distant from a hospital. And it's nice to think that in the South where we have better highways and hospitals are more accessible, that they should be very close together and we should have a hospital every 10 miles, Mr. Chairman. But actually most people do live within 10 minutes of the hospital, which is pretty commendable.

And I think, Mr. Chairman, the member referred to the lawsuit surrounding Climax. And I think if the member reads the judgement of the judge in that case, the judge does point out that it's very unreasonable to expect that distances are going to be much, much shorter in the South with no regard to what may go in the North, for example.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, I think that the court case that you're referring to is the Ponteix court case, not Climax. And I recall going over that judgement. And in fact there are some other notable things in there that the justice had to say in regards to funding of that facility, and it had to with the Department of Health and the minister controlling all the decisions in that community regarding health care. Because it wasn't really up to the district board to in fact come good on any of the health care coalition agreements because the government controlled the purse-strings. And thus the government controlled the decisions of health care in the community.

Now I see a grin come to your face and I think that you recall . . . and it's probably best that you don't get too deep into the Ponteix court case because I don't think you'll win that one at the end of the day.

The fact that you feel that most of the people in Saskatchewan are within 10 miles from health care — surely you're talking about just in the two major centres where the cabinet ministers

live. But in fact if you get out in rural Saskatchewan . . . I dare say, you know, even when you're flying from Saskatoon to Regina, just have the pilot just come down a little closer to the ground and see what's out there because you are so out of touch, Mr. Minister.

What I would like to ask because, Mr. Minister, you asked me . . . Mr. Deputy Chair, could you bring them to order? Mr. Minister, as soon as your colleagues stop heckling we'll get on with it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well you're not very bright. Mr. Minister . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well take care of him.

The Chair: — I simply wish to relate to all members that the Chair needs no help in, or advice in, how to run this session. Order. Order. Order, order. Now members of both sides have engaged in some jocular banter. I have chosen to allow that for a while with the desire that that would dissipate and we could get on with the estimates. I think it is the desire of members of the opposition and of the government to in fact proceed with these estimates.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, a while ago I was quoting from some documents from the rural municipality of Hart Butte. You asked for copies; I sent them. I'm asking you if you would send a copy of the documents that you're quoting from over to myself.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes I would, in answer to the member's question. These documents the member sent over, as I understood it, the member was trying to say that I had said something to the RM (rural municipality) of Hart Butte. But these are letters from the RM of Hart Butte to myself.

I want to say to the member that fewer than 3 per cent of the population of Saskatchewan lives more than 40 minutes from a hospital. Now the members can sit there and say it's not true, whatever. We've done research and this is the case; more than 70 per cent of the people have a travel time of less than 10 minutes to hospital. The members can say it's not true.

But I say to the members, they should do their own research if they dispute the research of the Department of Health, and come forward with their own facts, Mr. Chairman.

But I would be most happy to provide the member with a copy of the document that I'm reading from.

(2000)

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, the Department of Health, of which you're the minister of now, several of the employees of your department in fact were there during the years when several of these health facilities, as you call them now, the integrated facilities, were . . . I mean there were needs assessments done at that time. There must have been a need; the Department of Health okayed it and went ahead with the construction of several of these integrated facilities, such as Rocklén or Coronach or Mankota.

And could you tell me why in fact 10 years ago there was a

justified need but today there isn't?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I think the difference, Mr. Chairman, is that 10 years ago a lot of decisions were made in this province, not just in the health care field but in other departments of government, that were based more on politics than need. And hospitals were built in communities in order to try to ensure the re-election of MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly). Other government buildings were built in communities to try to ensure the re-election of MLAs.

These decisions were largely political decisions, partisan decisions, not necessarily rational decisions made by the officials. At the end of the day, the politicians, whether it's myself at the present time or the government that was in power in the '80s, the politicians are responsible for the decisions that we make. And that's true of me. I don't consider the officials to be responsible for the decisions that government makes. They give us advice; we can choose to take that advice or not take that advice.

In our case, we try to make decisions on a non-partisan, non-political basis, on a rational basis. I don't think that was true in the '80s, for which I would not blame the civil service. I would put the responsibility with Mr. Devine and the people that were in power in the '80s and who actually made these decisions for their own political purposes.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, then you don't feel that any of these facilities were built based on need; it was strictly politics?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I think, Mr. Chairman, that some of them would be needed and some of them would not be needed. I would not give a blanket answer one way or the other. One would have to look at each single institution and various factors surrounding that institution.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, looking at some of these individual institutions then, are you saying that the community of Coronach had their facility built based on politics?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I don't have the files with me in connection with that institution, Mr. Chairman, but I think that overall the decisions that were made in the 1980s were too influenced by politics.

Mr. McPherson: — Well I'll help you along since you don't have your file, but I'm sure that the next Health estimates you would bring the file on this particular community, not that we want to single out any community, but it is the example that I think we're going to be using. So bring your file along and we'll sort of step through to see, in fact, if that community was unjustly dealt with either by Devine, by getting the facility, or by your government, by closing the facility. And then we could base this on fact.

But, Mr. Minister, I think given just the facts as we know them, and you know there's a rather large SaskPower generating station in the community; there is . . . Prairie Coal has a very large coal mine at Coronach; they have a labour force of some

1,000 people based, you know, in the community. They don't have the luxury of heading south because they're up against the United States border. And are you saying to me that this community, given its geographics, its demographics, its industry, had their facility based on politics and not need?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well in the context of Coronach, as I said to the member, it was decided not to close that facility. It was decided that they should have some acute care services within the context of a health centre, and that's what was done in fact.

Mr. McPherson: — But, Mr. Minister, then acute care as far as a health centre goes, you were in enough problems before, or your government was, with referring to some of these health centres as providing some sort of acute care services, when in fact it was bolting a SaskTel pay phone on the outside of the building, as they did in different communities. I know Ponteix, for sure. I brought the pictures to this House in the last session, and I think it shocked many members to find out health care in rural Saskatchewan came down to having a quarter for the phone.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well obviously, Mr. Chairman, the proof of the pudding is always in the eating. And within any facility, whether or not there are acute care services depends upon the services that are actually being provided. And there may be IV (intravenous) services in a facility which are acute care services. There may be emergency intervention and stabilization in an acute care manner, and that may be done in an institution called a hospital or a health centre. I agree with the member that it doesn't matter what you call a facility. The question is, what services are provided. And you may have 24-hour nursing care in a special care home which is not a hospital at all.

But the important question is whether the right services are provided to people at the right time and whether the health care needs of the particular community are met. And that's the decision that the Department of Health tries to look at, or formerly I should say, before the formation of the districts and converting the 52 facilities. That's now the decision that each individual health board is responsible to look at, as the member and I discussed earlier.

And certainly the district health boards have some flexibility in terms of taking their acute care budget and changing the configuration of their facilities if they so desire. And if the health district in that area decides that the Coronach location could replace some other location and it's within their budget, then they would analyse the utilization of the facility or the needs that there might be and make the appropriate decision.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, if it comes back to your office — and you said earlier this evening, it does in fact, come back to your office — whether or not they have acute care beds opening or changes to acute care services in the district, you will be the final judge on such services. So hypothetically speaking, if in fact another or more than one other community within the health district . . . I believe that's the South Central Health District, going from Weyburn to the east, Coronach to the west. Now if another community were to ask for acute care

services, would you in fact grant them any acute care services, even though we have brand-new facilities? Would your department step in and say, let's put a little common sense to all of this? Or in fact, would you too play politics?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well you can never get too much common sense, Mr. Chairman.

I want to make it clear to the member that what I tried to say earlier — and if I didn't say this correctly, then I'll correct myself now — is if you want to designate a centre as a hospital, then you must get the approval of the minister under The Hospital Standards Act. That is not a new development; that's a development that has existed for a long time.

An Hon. Member: — How long?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well decades, I'm sure. This isn't something that would have come in in the '90s or is connected with health reform.

If you want to have some acute care services in a facility, that doesn't necessarily mean that you have an institution designated as a hospital. If you want to provide some acute care services, you may do so without having the institution designated as a hospital. The question, I think, is whether there are in-patient beds. But there are acute care services that go, you know, far beyond the question of whether or not you have in-patient beds.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, I'm not sure if in fact your deputy minister was in full agreement with everything you said there. Looking at his face, I was trying to read into the fact that perhaps he would like to have given you some advice but . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Once the heckling stops. But in fact the question was whether or not you would permit other communities to have any acute care designation added to them or facilities or more beds.

And I raise this for this reason, Mr. Minister. The former minister of Health from Moose Jaw in fact, and before he leaves the House, I would like to raise this . . .

An Hon. Member: — Order, order.

Mr. McPherson: — I didn't say he was gone; I said before he does.

In fact we had a conversation. I was there representing the community of Coronach and the RM of Hart Butte, posing those questions that they wanted posed. And in fact when I asked that particular question, the former minister of Health made the statement that in fact this may well happen that some other community could be designated as having acute care services and not a facility that is sitting brand-new. Clearly the need, the industry, the population, the geography, really plays into the need. And so I mean was the former minister of Health playing politics or in fact are you at this point?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the member could indicate what is the question.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, I think it was clear, had you followed along and not had your colleagues heckling so much. But the question clearly is whether or not you would support a community such as Coronach with its new integrated facility and a clear need versus one of the other communities that does not have that same need that, firstly in geography and population, but in fact even having a newer facility.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What the member confuses, Mr. Chairman, is the distinction between the community itself and the district. I tried to say to the member earlier that the district could make its plan with respect to the services it wanted to deliver. That would be a decision of the district board. So that when the member says, well could the community, such as the RM, or the town of Coronach, decide to start up a hospital, in effect, I would say to the member that that RM or town would go to the health district and say, we think the services should be organized in a slightly different way. We think that the acute care services at Coronach should be expanded, or we think it should be designated as a hospital under The Hospital Standards Act.

But the town or the RM would go to the health district board. They wouldn't make that decision on their own. And the health district board would include representatives duly elected from that area. And together the elected members in the community itself would make that decision.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, on more than one occasion the RM of Hart Butte, the community of Coronach, the residents in that area, have asked for a meeting with yourself and your department officials, but you clearly being there. Would you offer your time to meet with the residents of this community so that they may have a chance to ask you questions and have you give them some very clear answers so that they know the direction of health care in their community?

(2015)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I would encourage the people in the community to meet with their district board representatives. It is the decision of the district and the district board whether or not to have a hospital in a particular community. So I would say that if the RM or the town feel that the district board should change the configuration of hospitals, or start a hospital in Coronach. I would encourage them to meet with their district board. That's what the district boards are set up to do. This is not a decision that would be made by me in Regina, this is a decision that would be made at the community level.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, then this gets confusing for anyone watching this, of course, on TV this evening because we started off the evening with a few simple questions as who controls acute care. You, Mr. Minister, said that the decision lies with you. At the end of the day it is you — it is you, Mr. Minister, that sits in cabinet, and perhaps you're on the Treasury Board, are you? Well I mean you should be there, I guess, fighting for your department, the funding of it. But it is you that clearly is in control of the funding of health care, which controls the decisions of acute care beds. You said that. You said it is you that makes the decision as to if in fact there

are more acute beds.

And if communities such as Coronach . . . and maybe I shouldn't just always use one example because I'm sure there's many out there. But in fact if they're not having . . . you know, if they're not convincing the district board to look at them at all, and in a situation at Coronach where in fact they're right in the very corner of a huge district, and yet the population is at Weyburn, well people from Coronach are not going to go to Weyburn for health care services. You see, there is the problem.

But in fact if the dollars are being spent in Weyburn, then what options do they have? It lies with you. You're the one. So why won't you agree, Mr. Minister, to come out and meet with these people?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Ultimately, Mr. Chairman, as the member knows, the amount of money that goes to Health is set by the legislature, not by myself, in the budget. And this is part of that process, to look at the estimates of the Department of Health. And it's very much a function of the legislature to allocate money to the Department of Health and to the districts in the budget.

But I say to the member that his confusion is that . . . perhaps I'm not making it as clear as I should. The districts make the decision as to the number of hospitals they want to have in the district or whether to open up a hospital. It's not a decision that is made by the Minister of Health or by the Legislative Assembly or by the RM he's referred to, or by the town.

So I'm trying to explain to the member that it's the district board that makes that decision. And the people in the area, if they don't agree with the decisions of the district board, should be referred to their elected district board members and the district board to make appropriate representations to them. But I will not be making a decision whether to open up a hospital at Coronach. That's not within my jurisdiction. That's within the jurisdiction of the district boards.

So that's why I say to the member that it would be most helpful if he would refer anyone with that question to the district boards so that the question could be addressed to the people that will actually be making the decision.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, you and your department must have a full list of each district in the province — their total funding; their shortfalls or surpluses for, well I guess, for '94-95, '95-96, and '96-97 — and would you be prepared to bring that document at the next session of estimates so that we can have a complete picture of the funding of each health district, where it was when you changed the funding formula and where it's going in the future? Would you be prepared to bring that?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I think we could give the member a list of the deficits or surpluses for the districts for 1993-94 and 1994-95. The ones for 1995-96 would have to await the audit of the statements which I understand is still ongoing and wouldn't be completed until some time later this year. And then the member asked about '96-97 deficits. Those,

of course, would not become clear until . . . for some considerable time. I don't know if that would be . . . maybe late '97, I suppose.

But just to repeat, we'll get the member lists of the deficits or surpluses for '93-94 and '94-95; '95-96 we'll have to await the audit so that those numbers can be confirmed. And then '96-97 of course would be in the future.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, for '95-96, can you give the projected deficit or surplus? We have about half of them now as you know. I've used them in question period to in fact . . . I would like to think of it as bringing you in line; you may view it differently. But surely those projections are out there, and I would hope that you would bring those also.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I would say to the member, Mr. Chairman, that the principle of releasing unaudited financial information to the legislature is not a correct principle. If the member wishes to get information from the districts or elsewhere, he's free to do so, and I have no objection. But in terms of my presenting information to the member or the legislature, I will not be doing so unless it's audited financial information.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, would there be a concern, is there a problem in fact, if you have the consent of the district board, in bringing forward that projected surplus or deficits?

You see the problem that I had a year ago when we were getting into some of the budget problems that district health boards were facing is that I believe once the Health minister of the day found out that I was requesting such information, we found out we then had to go through freedom of information for everything we wanted to know. And I was hoping we could avoid that because perhaps there is no politics in this at all, and it would just make a lot of sense to do it. But I think it would be best coming from you and through you as minister to ourselves.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I repeat my answer to the member. The financial statements of the districts for 1995-96 don't have to be prepared until three months after the end of the fiscal year which takes you into June or even July if they're a bit late. As a matter of principle, mistakes can be made; that's why you audit financial statements. And I don't believe that I, as Minister of Health, should be offering unaudited financial information to the member or to the House. I would like to have it audited and certified as correct before I present it. The member may wish to rely on other sorts of information, and undoubtedly he will. But I would choose to rely on accurate and audited information, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister of Health, I'm just wondering if you could give me a list of the hospitals that were originally closed, of the 52 hospitals that were originally closed, that went from hospital status to 24-hour wellness centre or health centre, and have now gone down to just . . . to your wellness centre. And I'm using Spalding as an example. It started as a hospital, then it had 24-hour service, and now it is down to just daily, daytime service. I'm wondering if you have a list of those facilities that have changed the designation.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes. I would say to the member, Mr. Chair, I can't give her the list right at the moment. The information is actually available on a map that is included in the material I sent over to the member from Wood River.

But why don't we undertake to provide you with a written list next time we're in estimates, and we'll table that response for you.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one question for the minister with respect to the capital funding projects, particularly . . . in particular, the hospital in Fort Qu'Appelle. And I wonder if the minister could give us the assurance that that project will be funded equally or at some percentage, as was discussed previously, with the federal government's input into that project.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Yes, I can say to the member, Mr. Chair, that we do have an agreement with the federal government whereby the federal government will pay 30 per cent of the cost of the facility, but the plan for the facility is not yet developed. So the federal government will be paying 30 per cent of the cost, but we don't know what the total cost will be because the plan for the facility is not yet complete.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. When the plan is put together, will the government here, the Government of Saskatchewan, cooperate with the federal government in ensuring that that facility is in fact built?

(2030)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well the answer is yes. We intend to proceed at some point and put in our share. And if we don't do that, if the plan changes for some reason, we would have to repay to the federal government the money that we have received from them to put toward the project.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just in regards to the Fort Qu'Appelle Hospital, I noticed there was an order in council that I think I've had for a week or 10 days, and I think there was a funding commitment — was it by the federal government for 11.3 million? — is that right? Do you have that document, and is that 30 per cent of the facility cost?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — No, that would not be correct, Mr. Chairman. The 11.3 million or thereabouts from the federal government is for the new Athabasca Basin hospital, the La Ronge hospital and the Fort Qu'Appelle hospital, and we estimate that that amount of money would be approximately one-third or 30 per cent of the total cost of those three facilities together. But I couldn't tell you what the cost of each of those facilities would be at the present time because the plans aren't worked out.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move we report progress.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Before they leave, I just want to thank all my officials for their cooperation. And I don't think I ever did get a chance to introduce Carol Klassen, who's sitting behind Kathy Langlois. So thank you very much to the officials.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too would like to thank the minister having the officials here this evening answering the questions, and welcome them back some 12 or 13 times more.

**General Revenue Fund
Highways and Transportation
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The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my right is Bernie Churko, executive director, logistics planning and compliance division. Behind him is Barry Martin, executive director, engineering service division. And behind me is Lynn Tulloch, executive director of corporate information services division, Department of Highways.

Item 1

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I too would like to welcome the Minister of Highways and Transportation and his staff here tonight and thank them for coming out and helping the minister answer the questions that we have for him.

Mr. Minister, if we could just start and maybe just an overall view of your department, if you would. Could you just maybe tell us a bit about the mandate of your department.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the department — and there are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 — 8 statements. And I would read them: recognize the importance of transportation for the social and economic well-being of Saskatchewan and especially rural Saskatchewan. Number two, minimize the pressures on the province's road infrastructure by promoting the continued use of alternate transportation modes. Three, develop more cost-effective ways of delivering highway services to the public to maximize the dollars to actual road improvements. Shift emphasis away from expanding a road network and onto preserving the network that already exists.

In consultation with RMs and municipalities, develop a core network of rural roads that have the quality and capacity to deal with the stresses of increased truck traffic. Partnershiping in the most effective use of funds. Investigate and promote the use of new technology to reduce road infrastructure damage. And last but not least, recognize the close link between transportation efficiency and economic development.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I understand that there has been a major reorganization within the department in the last year and a half. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — That is correct.

Mr. McLane: — If that has happened, can you relate to us then, Mr. Minister, a change in your mandate, if there has been

one since that reorganization?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — To the member opposite, Mr. Chairman, there's no change in the mandate. I guess the streamlining and reorganization of Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation is made because . . . It's going to happen over the next two years, primarily to take money from administration and operations and put that money directly into roads.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Then maybe could you tell me, or tell us, if there really hasn't been a change in the mandate, what was the reasoning for the reorganization and restructuring?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well as I mentioned earlier, the main reason was to take as much savings from administration and operations and put directly into roads.

One of the things I guess that people told us in our pre-budget consultation was to find internal efficiencies within departments and to use that money for front-line services, and that's what the Department of Highways did. In fact this year there is \$5.6 million in savings and administration and operations that will be turned into road preservation, maintenance and reconstruction. And in future years that of course will be more than this year because it will be implemented completely. We expect about \$38 million over the next five years to be transferred from administration operations directly into roads.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You mentioned that there really hasn't been a change in mandate. I'm just wondering if you can tell me how that relates to the changing times that we're seeing. We're seeing changes, major changes, in the way goods are transported across this province, especially agricultural goods — the changes in transportation rates, all those things.

Do you not think possibly, given the lack of support of your government to rural Saskatchewan, there should have been a mandate change then to address some of these needs in rural Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I would say probably the lack of support comes from the federal government. It, of course, hasn't really got a transportation policy anymore. It kind of . . . whatever it had for a transportation policy, it sort of deregulated a little, section by section by section, letting the chips fall where they may and expecting each province to pick up those pieces and try and put some kind of a program together.

Certainly we're doing that now. We're working very closely with rural municipalities. We have the south-west transportation policy council for an example of 107 municipalities involved in looking at planning roads in rural Saskatchewan because in fact you are right; there's a great deal of changes.

The federal government is allowing rail abandonment to take place a lot faster than what we had hoped. Certainly the grain elevator companies are moving to cement structures rather than the old wooden elevators, and this all means added truck

pressure on our roads. And not only that, but I think the member opposite would know that our economy is improving greatly in the oil sector, in the mining sector, in the forestry sector, and this of course puts added pressure on our roads.

So the department is working very closely with the stakeholders, with municipalities, on planning, with companies on partnershiping so that we in fact can address as best as possible the shift — the federal government change, I guess — from having a transportation policy to having no policy and deregulating all facets of transportation. And I think we're succeeding quite well under the circumstances.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I would just remind the minister that we are dealing with provincial matters here. And regardless of how the problems come about, it's up to the provincial government to look after these.

I appreciate him for the little history lesson as to what's happened in rural Saskatchewan. We're fully aware of that. I would ask him again if he doesn't think it's appropriate that the department should have changed its mandate in trying to address some of these needs, and given the fact that you've had some five years now to start working on these problems, that you're once again late in recognizing the changes out there.

(2045)

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We have restructured the department, and we have now a deputy minister. We do not have any assistant deputy ministers any longer.

But we have eight branches of the department: the engineering service division, the preservation and operation of region 1 — we now have three regions rather than six districts — preservation and operation of region 2, and preservation and operation of region 3.

Then we have the logistics planning and compliance division primarily to look at savings within the system, that producers can actually benefit from these savings. We have also partnerships that can be formed. And that area, that division, will look at partnerships so that monies saved by . . . Companies can actually partnership with Highways, and we can in fact put some of this money directly into roads. There's the corporate information services division, the human resources branch, and communications and public relations branch.

Now the engineering services division previously had six districts, as I mentioned earlier, and the Weyburn municipal office. It had two technical branches in head office, and six lab locations. Under the new engineering services division, it will be managed as one project-based organization. Consolidate all field and head office units into Regina and Saskatoon over a two-year period with a North Battleford satellite office; consolidate to two lab locations. And there's an elimination of a grading crew.

If we look at logistics planning and compliance division,

previously we had six branches and one project unit. Under the new, we're going to have three branches; less emphasis on policy development; continued emphasis on transportation compliance, on grain transportation efficiencies; increased emphasis on regional transportation planning and trucking partnerships. And vehicle registration and traffic safety is of course transferred to SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance).

And in human resources there's no significant changes. Communications and public relations branch has no significant changes. Under the corporate information services division, previously finance and administration and information services, two separate head office branches: property service branch in the old TSAP (technical standards and policies) branch, and the GIS (geographic information systems) service in the old PAC (planning and coordination). Now under the new it will be consolidated into the new corporate information services division to bring all corporate information management together.

So certainly we've restructured the department in a way that can look after the problems or the concerns that the member opposite has.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You talked a lot about emphasis on this, emphasis on many different things. I guess what I'm asking is when are we going to see something concrete; when are we going to see a plan as to what's going to happen in this province in regards to transportation?

As you mentioned, you talk about the grain companies. Really they're the ones today that are dictating where a rail line is going to be able to survive. They're haphazardly going about moving, as you talked about, to cement elevators, which will force the grain companies of course into consolidating and closing because of low volumes. Therefore we see no plan as to where we're going to have a railroad, where we're going to need some heavy roads to handle the traffic.

We talk about all these things. Again over the last four or five years since your government's been in power, we haven't seen anything happening. I'm wondering when will there be a plan. It's nice to talk about emphasis on, and talking about things. When are we going to see something happen?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I would recommend to the member opposite that he talk to the member from Wood River who likely will be aware of the south-west regional planning committee that's been in place for two years, coming up with a strategic plan for the south-west dealing with rail line abandonment, dealing with the transfer of wood elevators into fewer concrete elevators, and the use by oil companies in that particular area. So certainly the department has been working very closely with rural and urban municipalities in that area.

The north-central area, the Rosetown-Biggar area, has a group together as well working on the same kinds of things. The department have great expertise and great technology to help plan. It shouldn't just be done in Regina. It should actually be done using the local expertise, the farmers, and the RM

councillors, and the urban-municipal councillors, and people that are in charge of grain elevators in rural Saskatchewan and, in fact, hopefully some point in time we could get the railways to sit down on these committees as well.

So we are addressing that. Certainly there is no great bundle of money when the federal government pulls \$110 million out of health care and social programs and education and we as a government have to back-fill that; certainly puts other pressures on other departments to come up with as much savings as they can in order to preserve the funding that they have. But we were able to do that this year by the reorganization. We will see \$5.6 million this year and we will see of course \$38 million over the next five years that we will be able to put back into roads because of internal efficiencies.

We see the federal government with Bill C-14 for an example, giving all power to railways. We are trying to address that — not only myself as Minister of Highways for the province of Saskatchewan but also the Minister of highways and transportation for Alberta, also the Highways and Transportation minister for Manitoba.

Now we have a federal government that does not want to listen and continues to allow the railways to have all these kinds of power. It would be perfectly logical in my mind to promote short-line railways for an example, to allow short-line railways to be a part of our transportation system; certainly might be benefits to the farmers and also benefits to road authorities like municipal road authorities and provincial road authorities. But we don't have that support. So what we have to try and do is work as closely as we can with local municipalities, with other stakeholder groups, in fact to have a policy and a system that we can best address the needs of Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm glad that you are taking to heart my suggestion of last summer and bringing the rail lines and the elevator companies and the municipalities and the people of the province together to discuss these issues. It's a little overdue.

You talk about plans in the south-west and a little bit on the west side of the province. You're talking about two little pockets within the province of Saskatchewan. We're talking about a plan for Saskatchewan. You start developing little pockets across the province and you'll end up with a patchwork system again. What we need is a plan for the whole province, something that'll fit where one road and one rail line rolls into another. When will we see a plan like that and when will you start these discussions with all these groups on a provincial basis?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I guess I'd like to tell the member opposite that you've got to start somewhere. And I would remind the member that we did start a few years ago. I would encourage him to talk to SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) because SARM is very aware of the work that's being done. They're very supportive. And I would think, if the member opposite took some time to check with SARM members, that he would be . . . he may not continue with this line of questioning.

But I want to say that, in the south-west for instance, there's 107 municipalities. There's probably 20 to 25 per cent, could even be as much as 30 per cent, that are involved already in regional planning to some degree. And other areas are expressing interest in the process and we believe it's the right way to go because it involves local people that know local concerns — hopefully would include the elevator companies, the railways, so we would know what lines might be abandoned and where the next location for the next high throughput elevator or terminal would be. So we believe it's the right way to go and we will continue in that direction.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Maybe just a little history, if you would, for me. Can you possibly tell me, in the history of the province, when the most activity occurred within the department in construction of infrastructure in the province?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I will go back to 1986-87 and I will give you the capital budgets and then I will give you also maintenance because, as you will be aware, two years ago we moved our capital construction budget more into preservation and maintenance. It was a policy change because we believe that our road infrastructure was mature, but what needed to be done is more preservation and maintenance rather than new construction.

In 1986-87 there was \$107 million in capital. Then it went to 101; '88-89 was 109; '89-90 was 116. And you have to remember in those years were the years of the Tories where we were spending a lot more than what we were taking in. They did not have a balanced budget. In 1990-91 there was 106; in 1991-92, 77; '92-93, 64; '93-94, 70 million; '94-95, 64 million; and in '95-96, 33 million; and 1996-97, there was 37 million.

But then we'll go to maintenance. It was 87 million in '86-87; 84 million in '87-88; 82 million in '88-89; 87 million in '89-90; 86 million in '90-91; 83 million in '91-92; 71 million in '92-93; 77 million in '93-94; 78 million in '94-95; 102 million in '95-96; and this year is a little over 103 million.

Mr. McLane: — Then, Mr. Minister, could you tell us perhaps in 1986 how many kilometres of highway did we have in Saskatchewan; how many do we have in 1991; how many do we have now?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — To the member opposite, in 1980 we had no more earth highways, I want to tell the member now. We had about 4,600 kilometres of gravel; we had about 8 of non-structural pavement — 8,000 kilometres; and probably about 10,000 kilometres of full-structured pavement. Now we have about 25,600 in total — about 6,000 gravel; about 8,000 thin-membrane surface or non-structural pavements; and about 12,000 kilometres of full-structure pavement. Now those figures are approximate.

(2100)

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, while you have your book handy there, do you have the figures then for 1992?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Virtually unchanged from 1992.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, can you tell how many — that your best guess and the way we're headed — how many kilometres of highway will go back to gravel in the next two years?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well to the member opposite, my hope is none. You know, and I guess that depends on the regional transportation committees and joint decisions with the Department of Highways. If in some cases they feel a gravel structure would better handle grain transportation, for an example into a high throughput elevator, it may be their wish that that happen. But it won't be me making a decision. I don't think that we should be gravelling a particular road unless that's the desire of the region.

Mr. McLane: — Could you tell me then — and I'm glad to hear that you don't want the highways to go back to gravel — can you tell me how many kilometres of highway returned to gravel over the last two years?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Last year, because of the wet conditions, there are probably about 200 kilometres of highway that had the top removed, in fact either by equipment and/or by just breaking up. And we allowed those roads to dry out. We replaced about half of that, about 100 kilometres, with surface, and we expect that we'll be able to do the other half as we can fund them and as the roads are ready for them.

Mr. McLane: — Well if that extra . . . Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well if that next 100 kilometres is ready to do next year, do you commit to resurfacing those 100 kilometres as well as breaking up a similar amount of kilometres over the next year?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Of course, to the member opposite, that depends on a lot of things. It depends on weather again. The rural roads for instance, this year, were holding . . . and highways were holding up reasonably well. We don't know what's going to happen after this last snow in parts of the province. And I guess it's all based on priority and the budget limits that we have and how much we can do. So we will prioritize the work that has to be done, but those certainly will be considered.

Mr. McLane: — Once again, given favourable weather conditions and all those things put aside, will you be trying to resurface those 100 kilometres of highway? Will it get done next year?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I can't say for sure — and the member knows that — whether it can be done this coming year or not. It'll certainly depend on a lot of factors, but it will certainly be considered.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Turning to the *Estimates* and some figures on page 71. For '95-96 you have to your best estimate there, 168.059. Also in *Supplementary Estimates* you have another \$5.8 million there in Highways and Transportation. Is that 5.8 included in that 168 or is that over and above that?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I believe the amount was 5.8. Is that . . . Yes, that was in the supplementary budget that was under '95-96. That was an over-expenditure primarily because of the flooding last year and the work that was done, and is not included in the 168.

Mr. McLane: — Okay, thank you. So then the estimated budget then for '95-96 would have been about 173,909 or thereabouts. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — That is correct.

Mr. McLane: — So then in actuality what we have then is about a \$5 million decrease in budget from this year?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well it's actually an increase in budget and we, of course, always hope to live within budget. The problem last year was unforeseen and it was monies that really needed to be used, and Finance did give us approval, of course, for the over-expenditure.

Hopefully that doesn't have to happen again. A lot of it was work to do with the floods so it was either culverts or those kinds of things and hopefully that won't happen again.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I realize that some of these expenses are unforeseen certainly. But still you would have to admit that this year's budget is down considerably from last year.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I mentioned earlier that because of internal efficiencies, we will be spending an additional \$5.6 million on roads this year rather than on administration. So, you know, I guess if you look at that then you would know that it's not less.

Mr. McLane: — Sorry, Mr. Minister, I have trouble following that. If the bottom line is 173 for last year and it's 168 for this year, the total budget is less.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — If you take . . . I don't know how to use an example here, but on your farm for instance, if you were spending \$100 to put your crop in and you decided that you would maybe use your smaller tractor and save \$5 from the operation of the smaller tractor and take that and put it into your crop, you would be actually spending more money than on other areas. Now that might be a poor example but what I'm trying to say is that if you take money from administration and put it directly into roads, you will get the same amount of work done on roads as you did the year before, in fact more.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess I'd like to ask you if you think that this budget . . . if there's enough money in this budget to . . . and you and your government keep talking about moving into the new century. Do you think there's sufficient funds in this budget to start the process toward that, to look after the changing needs that we're seeing in transportation in this province?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — It would always be nice to have more money in our budgets, but we have to live within reality. And

we can't sort of bury heads in the sand, I guess. We know that we had to back-fill in health care, \$50 million. We had to back-fill in health care and in social programs, another several, several million dollars. And so I guess it would be nice, but we know that we have to face reality, we have to face the federal decisions.

So what we are doing now with our limited amount of funds is looking at partnerships with the private sector. We're hoping that at some point in time the federal government agrees to a national highways program, for an example.

We also are working, like I mentioned, with rural municipalities and urban municipalities, elevator companies, to better plan the limited funds that we do have. Is it adequate? I think we can, if we do it right. But it's going to take a lot of cooperation, I guess, not only from municipalities and other stakeholders, but from the opposition benches too.

When we do write to the federal government to tell them of our concerns with some of the decisions, we would hope that we would get that support from the opposition as well, because certainly it's going to have an effect. We in Saskatchewan have 25 per cent of all the roads in Canada. If you joined every road, tip to tip, you would circle the equator, according to the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), four times.

But we have a million people. The population is growing. But, you know, we're 1.018 million now. And of course not everybody pays taxes, so there's not a large group of people that have to pay for the infrastructure that we do have. So certainly it's important to work very closely with the cooperation of municipalities, and in fact all political parties.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You continue to talk about back-filling for the federal government. I guess there's other factors that come in this equation as well regarding funding. And there's certainly one regarding Crown tendering that eats up a fair amount of the provincial budget, and certainly could transfer some of that into Highways. And I'd be more than happy if you would lobby your counterparts in doing that.

You talked earlier about your mandate, and I guess a little bit about some objectives and goals that your department probably has.

I guess . . . can you tell me just briefly what kind of a process does the department use, along with yourself, in determining those goals and objectives, in trying to meet the changing needs of transportation in this province. And at the end of the day, how do you measure those? How do you determine at the end, when you sat down and finalized this budget, that that was going to meet the needs of the transportation for this year and leading into the year 2000?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Of course the department, in preparing its budget, sets its goals in partnership and cooperation with stakeholders. We have an asset management program within the department that looks at the age of the infrastructure and when is most appropriate and most efficient to in fact repair and/or restructure a particular road. We have the cost analysis program

that determines the need for road improvements based on traffic, safety, on accidents, on the cost of maintenance per kilometre, on economic development and tourism within an area.

And I want to tell the member opposite that we just did a poll that was just released not too long ago. It dealt with what people thought of many issues in the Department of Highways, like the conditions of roads, like maintenance, and all those things. And generally the poll indicated that people were more satisfied than not satisfied with all aspects of the Department of Highways. And I was very pleased to note that they were very pleased with the communications with the Department of Highways.

And so all in all I think under the circumstances of still having to pay \$850 million of interest each year and having to back-fill in health care, social programs, and education, we're still able, through better planning with the stakeholders, better use of our limited funds, to do as best a job as we can under those circumstances.

(2115)

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would just mention to you that if you would spend half as much time back-filling the potholes in the roads out there as you do talking about the federal funding, I think our road structure would improve quite a bit.

You talked earlier about downsizing in administration. I'm wondering what your views are on that as it relates to the services out there; in particular, road maintenance in terms of snow and ice removal in the wintertime on the provincial highways.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you very much for those comments. Of course, administration will not affect winter maintenance or summer maintenance. Administration deals primarily with head office and the restructuring of six districts into three regions.

For an example, do we need the amount of engineering services that we had in the department now that we're moving to preservation and maintenance from construction of new roads? So there's a lot of things that maybe we didn't need as much of now within administration and can actually move that funding into roads. And I'm very pleased that of course, as I mentioned earlier, that this year \$5.6 million will be spent, instead of administration and operations, but directly into roads.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Are you saying then that the . . . such as the closure of some of the depots across the province is not included in that 5.8 million and is not classified as administration? That's cuts from elsewhere.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — As I mentioned earlier, administration and operations; this would be considered operations. And we were able to, by reorganizing the department, in fact eliminate 29 depots. In some areas, for an example, some crews were looking after 100 kilometres. Other crews were looking after

300 kilometres. We balanced that workload as much as we could.

We have to also remember, I think, that the equipment has changed dramatically. We haven't restructured the Department of Highways basically since the '60s, and certainly the equipment has changed since then. We have different types of snowploughs, different types of equipment, and certainly we believe that we can provide adequate . . . and the service that we have been providing with this reorganization.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. However, in the reorganization I see by what has happened, especially now in the South — I saw it in the North last fall when I was up there — a tremendous amount of the operating budget is being eaten up in travelling time. The more and more we have of that, the less time is spent on road maintenance, and in particular, in the wintertime and road conditions, in snow removal.

I don't see that as an advantage, as a cost-saving measure; I see that as time being eaten up in the budget by travelling time. And I see it as unnecessary wear and tear on the equipment. No matter how modern it is, it still has to travel over those hole-ridden roads. So I don't see that as being an advantage, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I want to tell the member opposite that we are still located in 107 communities across the province of Saskatchewan. We have over 90 crews. When you're travelling, you know, winter maintenance, you have your blade down. So if you start from here and you go this way and then you come back, or if you start from here and go here and come back, you still have your blade down and you're still working.

And so when we took all this into consideration, when we did the reorganization, and we believe that we will have a good, efficient service to all parts of Saskatchewan with this reorganization.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, I think some of the members opposite haven't been in rural Saskatchewan for a while either or they wouldn't be too fussy about agreeing on that one . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's nice you could make it back safe and sound.

Mr. Minister, I can't say that I agree with your logic. It makes sense on paper, going one way with your blade down and coming back. I'll use an example in the North where the graders are travelling many miles on pavement to reach a gravelled highway to maintain, and then travelling the same distance back after they're through. Can you tell me how that's economical?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well what the member doesn't realize, Mr. Chairman, is that not necessary do you have to have the grader over here. I mean the grader can be located over here. And in some cases we have it located in a community where the gravel starts or at a farmer's home or at a service station so that in fact the grader is ready to go.

I agree with you that you have to look for every efficiencies you can so that you can in fact put as much of that savings into

roads . . . And that's exactly what we're doing. And so you have to understand that the grader does not necessarily have to be located exactly where that particular crew is. The crew in fact doesn't have to live in that community. In fact they maybe live in different areas around, in different communities close to the centre.

So what we're trying to do here, and what we have been able to accomplish, is over the next five years, save \$38 million and put \$38 million back into roads.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess we could discuss the logic of this for some time and I'm not sure we'd ever to come to agreement unless of course you want to agree to our point, and we'll continue a different line of questioning.

I just have a question, as I notice our time is running out, I wanted to ask a couple of questions about bridges, if I could. And the first question would be on the Outlook bridge and I'm just wondering if you could tell me when the construction of that bridge will start; when it will be completed; and the amount of money that's budgeted in this year's budget to start the project?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you to the member opposite for that question. We're happy that we're moving forward with Outlook bridge. The grading . . . all that will be done this year is the grading and the abutments. And the budget amount is \$500,000. And the construction will be set over the next two years, you know, as much finished in '97-98 . . . and completed of course in '98-99.

Mr. McLane: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. You talked about, as much as you can in the next year; what determines that? Is it budget related or is it time or . . .

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The reason the abutment work is being done this year; because you need time to let that stabilize. In '97-98 of course we haven't budgeted an amount. We expect the total cost to run — and of course it has not been tendered or anything yet — but between 5 and \$6 million. It will depend of course on budget, number one, and how much we are able to do next year, but also on weather and a whole lot of other things. So our intentions are, is to complete it over a two-year time frame.

Mr. McLane: — In regards to that bridge and the unstable condition of it right now, I'm wondering if you have taken that into consideration. I've seen some of the reports and the work that's been done on the bridge, and it gives rise to major concerns for people using the bridge.

It would seem to me that when safety is a factor, that you might want to look at trying to get it done as quick as we can. And I would ask you again if . . . what you would expect to have done on it next year and then get it into use as quickly as possible. If budget is part of the problems, then that's one thing; if time constraints because of construction is the problem, that's another — two different scenarios. And I don't think budget should enter into the picture on that one.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — To the member opposite, safety is always a factor. And we continue to monitor the bridge and certainly safety is a factor always considered.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, your officials.

Mr. Minister, your department produced a prioritized list of the highways and roads throughout the province, and we had one of those prioritized lists — when was it? — last January, December, before that. I guess it was well before that, sometime last fall. And that was a draft list that your department gave us.

(2130)

I was wondering if you had an up-to-date list, a priority list of the highways. And also if you would provide us with the winter's project list, what was tendered, and what was let, the dollars involved. The projects, the details of the projects, and all of the summer projects. Has that also been prepared? It's probably prepared by this time — the summer projects. And so all the details, dollars, pavement, everything that we would need to know on the two projects, winter and summer. If the next time that you would come to estimates, if you would bring those detailed lists and also the new prioritized list. Is that possible, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you to the member opposite for his question. We were very pleased last year that the member from Humboldt requested some information, and we set up a meeting with that member and the deputy minister at the Department of Highways. And I think it was very useful because, as the member opposite will know, is that that prioritized list changes from day to day.

I mean if all of a sudden there's going to be an elevator built in a certain place, the list will almost automatically change for whatever reason. And so what I would suggest is, to the member from Wood River, that I certainly can help arrange a meeting with the deputy minister at the department, and he can explain firsthand exactly how the roads are prioritized under the new BCA (benefit/cost analysis) program and in fact show you the list as it sits on that particular day.

Do we have the . . . and I will send over the '96-97 construction projects for the member's information.

An Hon. Member: — Is that winter or winter and summer?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — This is the '96-97 construction projects and the . . .

An Hon. Member: — The whole ball of wax.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The whole ball of wax, yes.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Minister, I'm not sure what the problem would be with you sharing a prioritized list today. If in fact there's some rationale that you would like to provide with the prioritized highway list

as to how you arrive at your prioritization, that would be great.

But I see no need for you to hold this back. I mean they're public highways. And if your department has prioritized them, I think it's only fair that the public knows how they're prioritized and where they are on the prioritized list.

Now will you commit in the House today, before we have to make this part of a lengthy debate, in bringing a prioritized list forward?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — To the member opposite, as I mentioned earlier, that this list changes almost day to day. And if I brought you a . . . I haven't got a list with me, first of all. Second . . .

An Hon. Member: — Okay. Do you have it . . . (inaudible) . . . tonight?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I don't know when . . . if there's one ready. But one is being worked on now, as it is each and every day, and it's updated each and every day. But I certainly can send you one within the next day or two. . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Pardon?

An Hon. Member: — Could we get a cut-off for today or yesterday or . . .

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I can't answer that. I don't know. The department's working on the updated one right now. So . . .

An Hon. Member: — Will you provide that to us?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Yes. We'll provide that as soon as it's complete, which hopefully will be . . . We should be able to have a list to you by Friday.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move we report progress.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I would like to thank my officials for coming out tonight. And I would like to thank the oppositions for all their very good questions.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I too, as the staff is running out, thank them for coming in tonight, and the minister for letting them come. And I'm sure this is . . . be the first of many, many evenings that we'll spend together.

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The Chair: — I'll invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to introduce my deputy minister, Brent Cotter; Doug Moen, who's the executive director of public law and policy; and Tammy Pryzyk, who is the executive assistant to the deputy minister. And Elizabeth Smith, who is the director of the administrative services branch.

Item 1

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And I welcome the minister and all his officials. I'm overwhelmed by the support you've arrived with this evening, and I welcome each and every one of your officials.

Could I ask just as an overview from yourself, Mr. Minister, as to perhaps, you might just give the House an idea of how you can see your department changing over the coming year, seeing as you're the new minister. And how do you foresee changes to your department, and your department operating over the coming year, please?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm pleased to answer that question. I've actually prepared some notes and I'll be pleased to give you a whole review.

I've been serving the people of this province as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for about five months now. This has been, without doubt, one of the most intense and exciting periods of immersion that I've ever experienced.

As a scan of almost any day's headlines or newscasts will tell you, it sometimes seems that almost every issue of public interest or concern has a Justice connection. When you think about it, that is not really surprising. Our laws and system of justice help us to live together peacefully and harmoniously. They're a focal point of our lives as citizens of this province and this country.

Over these past few months I've gained a real appreciation for the tremendous variety of programs and services provided by the Department of Justice. I've also come to know and to respect the many dedicated and professional staff who work on behalf of the public.

I'm pleased to have this opportunity to talk about the vision of Saskatchewan Justice and the work that is being done to make that vision a reality. To develop a vision is to carry it into the next century. The department took a very critical, future-oriented look at its operation and mandate. The views and concerns of all interested parties were considered. Staff across the province were involved in articulating the vision.

The Department of Justice has a vision of a fair, equitable, and safe society, supported by a justice system that is trusted and understood; a justice system that is respectful of and responsive to diversity, individual and collective rights, and changing public expectations and community needs, including the needs of aboriginal people.

Six core strategies have been identified as central to achieving this vision. Three of these strategies have an external focus. First, promoting the most constructive and accessible ways of resolving disputes; second, defining our role in social justice and implementing specific actions that are consistent with that role; and third, fostering a justice system that is relevant to, respectful of, and respected by, aboriginal people.

The remaining three strategies have an internal focus. They are, first, delivering our programs and fulfilling our responsibilities in the most effective and efficient way; second, enhancing and

maintaining the quality of work life for our employees; and thirdly, developing and implementing a communications plan that fosters respect, understanding, and trust in the justice system.

I believe this vision and these core strategies identify a department that recognizes and is prepared to meet the challenges of providing effective, efficient, and relevant justice services in a changing environment. We are working in several key areas to make our vision a reality.

We know there is a need for fundamental change in our current criminal justice system. People are concerned that the system has lost touch with the victims and communities it's supposed to protect. They believe it is too focused on upholding offenders' rights instead of holding them accountable for their actions.

Aboriginal people continue to be disproportionately involved in crime as victims and as offenders. Even though we charge and jail a high proportion of offenders at great cost, people are feeling less safe and secure. Some people believe that we are too soft on offenders. They believe that we must get tough with stiffer penalties and harsher penalties. I agree that we have to get tough, but we have to be smart about how we get tough. We must deal with offenders more effectively, and we must get tough on the causes of crime.

An important part of the answer is restoring community commitment and involvement in ensuring the well-being and safety of our neighbourhoods. We must also recognize the societal problems contributing to the causes of crime and attempt to better address those issues.

On the criminal justice side, we must work to do more justice and less law. Throughout the Department of Justice, we are working to develop a new relationship between government, community, victim, and offender. Justice and Social Services officials are working with communities to identify and develop an alternatives response to crime, a response that increases offender responsibility, enhances victim satisfaction, and restores community responsibility and family responsibility in solutions that have meaningful consequences for offenders.

Working with offenders in the community, involving the community and victim, is based on the philosophy of integrated shaming. It condemns the behaviour, but preserves the dignity of the offender.

This change in the criminal justice system ties in closely with many of our core strategies. It is more effective and efficient because it enables us to rely on community-based measures to deal with low-risk offenders and to focus the heavy mechanisms of the criminal justice system where they need to be — dealing with high-risk, dangerous offenders.

A community-based focus on criminal justice will facilitate the development of alternatives that are respectful of, and respected by, aboriginal people. It is the response based on the aboriginal concept of justice as healing, and the biblical concept of justice as the restoration of harmony and community. In that way it

also relates to our work in identifying and defining our role in social justice.

Our work to change the criminal justice system also ties in with our core strategy of promoting constructive and accessible ways of resolving disputes. The department has actually been working to broaden the options for dispute resolution for the past couple of years.

We have built upon the successful use of mediation in the farm debt area and are actively encouraging its use in a broad range of civil disputes. In pilot projects in Regina and Swift Current, parties in civil disputes must examine the option of mediation before the matter proceeds to court.

In establishing the family law division of the Court of Queen's Bench to ensure the most effective and supportive environment possible for resolving family law matters, we have also implemented a range of support services for families. If it is appropriate, parties in family law disputes are told about mediation and are able to determine whether mediation might be an option in constructively resolving their differences.

Our work in developing alternatives in the criminal justice system is also likely to result in the development of alternative methods of making things right between victims, offenders, and the community. Many other initiatives support our efforts in social justice in providing services effectively and efficiently, and ensuring that our system is trusted and understood.

(2145)

The victims services program of the department has developed a range of services for victims of crime during their involvement with the criminal justice process. Through networks of trained volunteers and the guidance of professionals, victims are receiving information, support through the criminal justice process, and referral to necessary services.

Our work to foster a justice system respectful of, and respected by, aboriginal people is also broader than our work in the criminal justice area. Key to our efforts is the development of a process to work with aboriginal people in addressing the serious issues of their disproportionate involvement both as victims and as offenders.

We are working to build bridges between aboriginal communities and the justice system by supporting and facilitating initiatives in community-based justice development; through first nations policing agreements, such as the one that we were at today at Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation. First nations communities are contracting with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) for policing services. Police management boards ensure that first nations communities have direct input into policing priorities, and elders are available to provide assistance to the police as required.

To be responsive and respectful of diversity and the individual and collective rights of members in our society, we are also working to ensure that the protections and services of the

justice system are provided to the most vulnerable members of our society. The consumer protection legislation introduced during this session is particularly focused on providing protections for vulnerable consumers.

The Victims of Domestic Violence Act, which has been in place for just over a year now, focuses on facilitating the safety of some of the most vulnerable members of our society, those who are victims of violence within their own homes.

There are many other initiatives that I do not have time to touch on today, but I hope I've given you a flavour of the dedication the staff, the Department of Justice, have to achieving our vision of a fair, equitable, and safe society here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend the minister for his sincere dissertation in an area that the people of this province surely do expect and appreciate the kind of sincerity with respect to involving communities in this very important issue of justice — justice for all, not for any particular individual groups. And I thank you for that, Mr. Minister. I would very much appreciate if you would share with me a copy of your dissertation. I thank you so much for these rather ambitious objectives and goals, again for which I commend you.

There is a need for financial support as well, and there are some areas that I would like to have some assurances that the finances will be in place, finances that will be available in those areas that you have touched on.

I would like to, first of all, start off by referring to your full-time staff which in the *Estimates* appear to have been cut by some 10 for this coming year. I was wondering if you could share with us where these cuts were made, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — That's not exactly a simple question to answer, but if I was going to look at the greatest number of reductions, would be approximately 25.8 full-time equivalents in corrections efficiencies. And actually the total number of reductions is 43.5 full-time equivalents. And then the total number of increases is 34.6. And so it's sort of a net difference of about nine or ten, like you say.

So the greatest number of efficiencies, if you can use that word, are in corrections. But then also there are 13 new jobs in corrections as well. So I think it's a shifting of some of the jobs.

So I'm not sure if you want me to go through the whole list. I can tell you each area and where there's reductions and where there's additions.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Minister, my question was more to those 10 positions that were eliminated or people that were released. Were they in fact released totally, or were they moved to another department? I appreciate what you're saying and it might be a little complex and perhaps you can supply me with a more detailed report.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Okay, there are approximately 40 employees that'll be impacted by the budget decisions. Thirty-one of these employees are eligible for early retirement, seven employees will be given the opportunity to transfer to other locations, and one permanent employee and one non-permanent employee received lay-off notices on budget day. And of the new full-time equivalent positions, approximately 19 will be permanent positions, with the balance being non-permanent. So there are approximately 34 new jobs; 19 of those are permanent jobs.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Minister, does this then affect front-line staffers, the ones that the public generally deal with on an ongoing basis, or are these people that are not necessarily dealing with the public on a day-to-day basis?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Of the people, for example, who are eligible for early retirement — it's kind of hard to answer your question directly — but of the 31 who are eligible for early retirement, 18 of those come from the in-scope positions and 13 from out of scope. Of the people that were not eligible for early retirement, the two people that were laid off, one of them was a non-permanent, in-scope employee; and the other was a permanent, in-scope employee.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. If you wouldn't mind sharing that information, the detailed information that you have, rather than go through it all individually here, Mr. Minister, I'd appreciate that. And then I would also at this time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the minister if we could obtain, perhaps, a personnel list for your department as well, accompanied with the job titles and salaries, if that would be available, for the current year, the upcoming year, and for the past year.

Also maybe I could just lump two or three of these requests into one here. I'd like to also ask the minister how much the department has spent on consultants during the last year, and this year up to this point as well, and a list of these consultants and perhaps how much they were paid and what their responsibilities were as far as the department is concerned. Also if on that same list you could please supply us with a list of law firms used by the government this past year and the terms of payment and the amounts that were paid, over and above your department officials.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Just for further clarity, do I understand that you want basically, in advance, the report that usually comes when the financial statements are filed? Is that correct?

Mr. Osika: — If you have those available, it would be appreciated.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Basically, those lists we can. And then I have a further question about the information on employees. Could you clarify what that . . . the first item that you mentioned.

Mr. Osika: — The personnel list for your department, basically, if you could supply that to us.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — You want a list for the 2,000 employees,

plus then the 600 RCMP officers?

Mr. Osika: — No, not quite to that extent. Your department within Justice here in Regina, within your Justice department here in the city — within your immediate department, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well that is within my immediate department. That's the number of employees. So what do you want? Management, or do you want in scope, out of scope?

Mr. Osika: — Your management staff, please.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — So I will provide you then, a list of the out-of-scope employees. Okay?

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Minister, and welcome, officials. I would just like to present some questions to you in regards to the North Battleford Youth Centre. Could you . . . or do you have on hand the annual cost of running that centre?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — That is actually not administered by the Department of Justice. That's part of the Department of Social Services, so I would suggest you save up those questions for the Minister of Social Services.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I have a question regarding the Jackson report. Is that also something you would like me to refer to the Social Service minister?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Just for clarification, is the name the Jackson report?

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, due to, I guess some problems within the North Battleford Youth Centre and controversy surrounding those problems, there was . . . Marion Jackson was commissioned to do a report on the workings of the North Battleford Youth Centre. I was wondering whether or not I would be able to address questions surrounding that report to your department or if I should refer those to the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — It's that the whole area of the young offenders facilities is within the jurisdiction of the Minister of Social Services and his department so I don't have any information on that.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I shall refer them then to the Minister of Social Services. While I'm here though, I would like to ask you some . . . is legal aid under your department?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I can say that legal aid has been under my department since April 1, 1996 so I can answer some questions about the last month, and the future, but . . . and I can try to answer questions about last year.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I've had a good number of people phoning me and certainly commenting on their dissatisfaction with some of the legal aid procedures and also with the representation that they have been getting

through legal aid.

I'm just wondering whether or not there's any option for these people or if your department has considered any option for those people to access their own choice of lawyer. Or has there been any discussion on this in your department? I know that in other provinces, in some other provinces in fact, that people can access their own lawyer, and it is paid for under legal aid.

(2200)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — In Saskatchewan we're very proud of our clinic-based program of legal aid, and so that on first instance you always will work with a staff lawyer in one of the clinics. But there is an appeal procedure whereby a person who is dissatisfied with the kind of advice or assistance that they're getting, they can go and appeal to the Chair of the Legal Aid Commission, and then there's further appeal from that if necessary to take a case to a lawyer of their choice.

And I have the figures for the year 1994-95 — that there were, of 22,668 approved applications from legal aid, 226 federal criminal matters, adult and youth; and 106 family matters were assigned to the private bar

So the total of 332 was about 1.46 per cent of the total approved applications. About \$534,000 . . . or \$534,458 were expended to the private bar case, about 6.2 per cent of the total expenditures for the year.

I'm not sure if you have any more questions about that, but I think also there's 112 members of the bar in Saskatchewan were involved in the year 1994-95 as providing assigned cases from the Legal Aid Commission.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, if it is so that people do have access to a lawyer of their choice, I have had no knowledge of that from the people that have consulted with me or talked with me. They have indicated that in fact they are given another legal aid lawyer not of their choice, but that is certainly selected by the department as I understand it, and that's one of the grievances, that they would like to be able to select their own lawyer.

So I'm wondering where is the discrepancy here in whether or not a person has the choice of accessing their own lawyer or not, and how is that determined by your department?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Section 29 of The Legal Aid Act describes the circumstances when the commission — which is independent from our department; it reports through me — when this commission can appoint members of the private bar to act for people.

And the cases that are authorized to the private bar may be authorized to the private bar where, number one, a person is charged with murder or high treason; two, a young person charged under the Young Offenders Act may become the subject of a transfer hearing to adult court and may be charged with murder; or if there's a professional or legal conflict of interest within the law firm, there's some difficulty that way. Or

the legal aid lawyer or clinic people, it may be impossible or improper for them to act for a client.

There are other circumstances as well where an appropriate level of expertise of a staff member is unavailable, where the assigned commitments of a staff lawyer make attendance upon a matter at short notice impossible, or where as a result of the failure of a client to cooperate with or to instruct counsel, a staff lawyer feels unable to act, with resulting consequences if a client were to be convicted.

And in some situations where it is more economical in terms of travel time and cost, they would hire somebody in the private bar. And then there are some other exceptional circumstances. All of these decisions usually are made by the director of the Legal Aid Commission.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So that if a person wanted to make an appeal for a private lawyer they would go to the director, as such, and appeal through that person for a private lawyer. Who would determine whether or not their appeal was justified, I guess?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well practically it would go to, you know, the overall Chair and director of the Legal Aid Commission. There also is an appeal process from her decision if you don't agree with her decision. And so there are two levels of appeal.

I think, you know, practically if you have specific examples or concerns, that you may want to just advise them that it's appropriate to appeal from the clinic director, if they're in a community in your area, to Ms. Jane Lancaster who is located in Saskatoon, and she's the person that handles these appeals.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In all due respect, I have had a couple of people phone me that have said that they have gone through Ms. Lancaster and they have been given different legal aid lawyers actually to the point of about four or five legal aid lawyers, even though they had asked for a private lawyer, and they get the same response that, this is the lawyer appointed to you and if you're not satisfied then we can't do much about it.

So I'm just wondering what kind of avenues those people could take if they feel that they're not being represented well and that they have exhausted their talks with Ms. Lancaster. I guess that's the final question in this regard.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well all I can say is that, in Saskatchewan we have developed a very effective and efficient clinical legal aid system. And for many years we've been shown to be the system that operates the most efficiently.

Ontario, as you may have recently noticed in the number of the media reports, has had a great deal of difficulty funding their system which was almost exclusively transferring cases out to the private bar. They are seriously examining the way we run our system here as a method of providing affordable legal services right across the whole community.

And even though there are some instances where there are some difficulties, I think we do have the appeal procedures available. And I would suggest that you encourage these people to use those appeal procedures, and if there are still difficulties then we can go on to the next level of appeal.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could I just ask you a direct question on how many legal aid lawyers — you may have mentioned this but I missed it if you did — how many legal aid lawyers do you have commissioned right at this time?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The Legal Aid Commission employs 60 lawyers, 22 paralegals, and 49 administrative and support staff; it's a total of 131 employees. But there are some that job share, so it's actually 127.5 full-time equivalent jobs. And they're located in 14 area offices throughout the province.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I'm just wondering, say within the last year, how many clients have these 60 lawyers in fact had in total?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The case-load per year has plateaued. In other words, the last number of years it's been approximately 23,000 full-service applicants every year.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, it seems to me the ratio of applicants to lawyers is really . . . the applicants are . . . it's very high. I have had, in fact, one legal aid lawyer tell me that they're overwhelmed with cases and feel that they cannot represent their clients well enough because of the case-load. Is there anything in the budget to address this problem?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. This year we are increasing the budget for legal aid by \$275,000 which is approximately 3.2 per cent. And that's one of the few areas where we've actually increased our budget.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I would be really very appreciative of you maybe passing that document on to me so that I may use it for reference. I'm wondering what the total cost of legal aid for the past year has been for the province.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — For the 1995-96, the approved budget was \$8.675 million, and the budget we're hoping to have approved for this year, '96-97, is \$8.950 million.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. One last question. Was that eight-million-and-some dollars, was that over the budget for last year, or in fact did it meet the budget and did it stay on an even keel?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The information is that we were just slightly under that budget figure of \$8.675 million. So in other words, we almost spent exactly what we had budgeted.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'd like to welcome the minister's officials as well as the minister.

Just a couple of questions on northern Saskatchewan. As you

probably know, the strain on the justice system really is, you know, a reflection of the economic situation of various regions and of the people. When it comes to northern Saskatchewan, we know that the justice system is under siege, I guess you could say. There is a lot of use of the justice system; there's a lot of problems with the justice system.

Is your department doing anything innovative or exciting in reference to the problems of justice and its delivery in northern Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I'm very pleased, actually, to answer that question. The Leader of the Opposition and I were at the Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation today to celebrate the signing of a tripartite policing agreement. That's not too far from Regina. But there have been quite a number of the aboriginal policing agreements signed in the North in Saskatchewan. And we are actually at a point where we've signed 16 out of, I think, about 33 that we anticipate signing, with many of those to be signed in the North.

Also we have developed victim services programs which provide assistance to victims when they are required to testify and be part of criminal proceedings. I, my first week as Justice minister, visited La Loche and saw the system that they have set up there. They also have a similar system in La Ronge and a number of the communities in the North.

We're also working with community justice workers in northern communities, and that's become a very important, valuable program.

Also just this last week we announced that we're doing . . . we're now in a position to negotiate the funding for the Prince Albert Grand Council healing lodge, which we hope will provide another option in some of the correctional side and do something that's specifically catering to the northern communities.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for your response. A couple of other points. In my particular constituency of Athabasca we've got approximately 18, I guess you could phrase them as Métis communities, which are non-treaty settlements. And the first nations probably consist of about seven communities in the whole region. So in essence, dealing with the first nations communities and the reserves, I sincerely applaud your efforts and I think we have to do more of that.

The second, flip part of the question is of course the Métis community side. I think it's very key, Mr. Minister, that we don't forget about the Métis communities because they're very much similar to the reserve communities in northern Saskatchewan. The stats are similar, the use of the justice system is similar; however, there seems to be a different treatment when you come to the Métis communities. Could you elaborate on the Métis perspective as well, please.

(2215)

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — The Métis services that are provided in the North, and I didn't mention before, one of the main . . .

another main program we have is the courtworkers' program. And many of those are in Métis communities or the carrier agency is a Métis agency. Also the community justice workers, we have those programs in Métis communities. We've also provided grants to the Metis family and community justice committee, \$30,000; into the Métis Nation — some of their research — of 6,500 to help them in looking at some of the definition of their area in north-west Saskatchewan.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, if we could just go back to perhaps the departmental review which you had announced will be undertaken. Would this be appropriate? Could you share with the House at this point what the mandate of that particular review of your department will be?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Just for clarification, are you talking about the review of the department of prosecutions?

Mr. Osika: — Yes, Mr. Minister. The review that will be undertaken by a couple of attorneys from Calgary.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. As I explained when this was announced, over the last number of years we've gone through and reviewed different parts of the Department of Justice; looked at some of the registry areas; looked at the, I think, civil law area. This year we're doing it with special focus on the department of public prosecutions.

And the terms of reference for the operational audit are as follows. Number one, analyse the organization of the public prosecutions division of the Saskatchewan Department of Justice.

Number two, analyse the division's management practices and procedures and internal and external communications.

Number three, evaluate the conduct of prosecutions, including the role of the Crown prosecutor, resources, accountability, independence, and the process followed in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion.

And then number four, recommend improvements to the organization, management, practices and procedures of public prosecutions.

Number five, consult and interview, as required, to address the above terms of reference, individuals within and outside the criminal justice system.

And six, report the results of the evaluation to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. The review is said to cost, or will cost, in the vicinity of about a hundred thousand dollars. Is this in fact a firm amount, or could it be more than that?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — It's possible that it could be slightly more than that, but we're hoping that it will be right around that figure.

Mr. Osika: — Are then the two attorneys who will be involved, will they be paid on an hourly basis then? And with all due respect, in this day and age the costs for attorneys' fees are rather, I guess, given with the times, considered by some, substantial. Is that in fact six months, that it will take that long to do the review, or will it in fact be less? Again, given the cost of attorneys' times, preparation.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the answer to your question is yes, that we will be paying them in the normal way that one would pay lawyers. We were quite concerned that we would get top quality people to do a careful job and we will be paying market rates for these lawyers. The other thing that I would remind you is that they will also be doing some other things. This isn't going to be absolutely a full-time job. It will be full-time when they're here in Saskatchewan, but they have a number of cases scheduled that they will be handling at the same time as they're doing the work for us.

Mr. Osika: — Have you any indication or idea of how many hours that \$100,000 would work out to or could be worked out to?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Not exactly, no, because included in that would be some of their travel costs and interview costs as they . . . I think they will be going around to a number of places within Saskatchewan. But I will be able to provide more information, probably, after we are into this process a little bit.

Mr. Osika: — I appreciate that, Mr. Minister, and I'm sure you would have probably negotiated a good deal with your counterparts from Alberta. Do you feel comfortable that that length of time is adequate or sufficient to do the in-depth review that you have intended to carry out?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes. We consulted with them before we retained them to handle this for us, and it was their recommendation as to the time lines that we have reported. So they appear to be very professional and capable people and were able to say that this is the amount of time that they anticipated it would take.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. In earlier interviews, Mr. Minister, it's been stated that individual cases, such as Martensville and the Latimer case, won't be specifically looked at. And I was just wondering if you do not feel that perhaps these cases may be the cornerstones of such type of a review, and it is these such cases, after all, that have kind of shaken the confidence, the faith of the people in our justice system. Do you not feel that perhaps part of the mandate should include . . . or should have those cases looked at as well?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I think the clear focus of the review is the whole system. And there may be things to be learned from some of these individual cases, and I'm sure those pieces of information will be part of the total review. But the whole emphasis is not to focus on a couple of cases and especially ones that have been dealt with in the courts or are still in the courts, but more to look at the whole system and learn from the process of how a whole array of cases have been handled.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Minister, as far as I understand, the two Calgary lawyers hired to conduct this review have both been career-long prosecutors. Does the minister agree that perhaps that when one does studies of a department critically, it might therefore have some input from other sides, from people that have had some management . . . perhaps efficiency experts as well?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — I take your suggestion as a positive one and in fact we discussed that with the people that we have hired, and if it is deemed necessary, then they will retain appropriate people to help them on some of these systems issues.

I think one of the important things to remember about these people is that they were in the prosecution side for many years, and then for the last year, year and half, have been working in private practice and doing much defence work. And they then have a perspective on sort of both sides of the situation.

The other thing is that Mr. Martland was the president of the Law Society of Alberta and very much involved in many of the discussions around legal ethics and the appropriate behaviour of lawyers in some very difficult situations. And I was personally quite impressed with his knowledge in this area, and I think that he will provide us with some valuable insights into how our system in Saskatchewan is working.

Mr. Osika: — I appreciate that. I would just take it for granted that the costs that are being paid to the two attorneys, any extraordinary costs that they may incur by hiring outside consultants, will be part of their fee.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — In the normal course that's how lawyers work, that they would bill for their professional services and ancillary services, and so I assume that that's how it would go as well.

Mr. Osika: — Just sort of a final note in this particular area. Mr. Minister, how do you see the Department of Justice compared with other provinces? And are you aware of any other provinces that may have found themselves in a similar situation requiring a similar type of review? Are you aware of any in other provinces, and how has that been conducted in other jurisdictions?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, I'm aware of at least two provinces that have conducted similar reviews — Nova Scotia and British Columbia.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have two more questions. I was noticing, Mr. Minister, that when I figured out the ratio for legal aid lawyers to the clients, it indicates that there is about one lawyer for 378 clients. I can't understand really how it's possible to take care of these clients, especially considering that these lawyers also have other duties. And I see that you have put a little more money into this, which I commend you for, because there was a lot of people in distress out there. Is this ratio correct as far as you're concerned?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Well I think that is the ratio, and the

explanation would lie in a couple of areas. There are paralegals that work with the lawyers. There are also the other staff that work with the lawyers, and so those people will often be involved in cases at various points in the case.

The other thing is that many of the cases involve people who would seek advice, get approved, and then would go to court, and there maybe would be a guilty plea. And that wouldn't take very long. So you might end up having a whole case dealt with within two, three, or four weeks. And here you're talking about case-load for a full year. And so I don't think the figures are way out of line as far as the traditional comparisons that we've made.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I don't know. In the way I see it, it looks to me as though there would have to be a case per day if in fact the lawyers worked seven days a week. And then that wouldn't be enough, so I think it's quite a load that these lawyers have, and I can commend them. But I can also see how they're having a difficult time.

One more question, if I could. Has there ever been any consideration under legal aid for a lawyer for children in fact, because we hear of so many cases where children are falling through the cracks and haven't got proper representation. I believe Saskatchewan is the only province who does not have representation for children. Is there any consideration being given to that from your department?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Legal aid lawyers do represent children in young offenders matters. There are also situations where the Public Trustee will step in and appoint a lawyer if it's appropriate that children need to be protected. And that's often in a situation where there may be a car accident or an estate or something where a child has an interest and the Public Trustee wants to protect that interest.

Also there's the Children's Advocate office which doesn't provide legal advice but they provide some advice. But we don't have a system of appointing lawyers for children in custody and access disputes, if that's where your question is rooted.

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Minister, it's something I hope we'll soon give consideration to. Thank you.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Chair, I want to thank the minister and all his staff for being here this evening and assisting in clarifying some of the points and issues that we've addressed. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank all of my staff for coming at this late time in the evening, and also thank you to the members opposite for their careful and thoughtful questions. Thank you.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:31 p.m.

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