

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions of names from throughout Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

This petition is signed by people from far south Saskatchewan, and some from the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to express concerns of people throughout Saskatchewan regarding the closure of the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed the petition are from Regina, Fort Qu'Appelle, and throughout Saskatchewan.

I so present.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also rise to present petitions of names from people in Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Indian Head, Odessa, Qu'Appelle, and Wolseley.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on behalf of people concerned about the future of the Plains Health Centre. The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

People that have signed this petition are primarily from Wawota, Wapella, and Carlyle.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again too to present a petition of names from people in southern Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by many concerned citizens of Regina, and as well, Pilot Butte.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present petitions of names from within Saskatchewan regarding the Plains Health Centre. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

And those who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are, the vast majority of them, are from Grenfell. There's also some from Melville and Regina.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise to present a petition:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

People that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Regina; they're from Gainsborough; they're from Estevan, from Carnduff, Glen Ewen, Frobisher, and all throughout Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, the 35th day, with my colleagues and the people of Saskatchewan on presenting petitions regarding the Plains Health Centre in Regina. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, a number of the people that have signed the petition are from the Grenfell area and, of course, many from the Regina area, Regina Dewdney in particular, and Regina Northeast, Regina Victoria, and Regina Coronation Park, and as always, Regina Albert South, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order, a petition protesting portions of the gun control Act as it pertains to hunting and sporting firearms, presented on April 19, '96 has been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) is found to be irregular and therefore cannot be read and received.

The following petitions have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received:

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to pass legislation to protect the rights of firearms owners;

and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reconsider closure of the Plains Health Centre.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Wednesday next ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance regarding order in council 243/96, please provide the following information: (1) were the assurances given to the Johnsons regarding their eligibility for Saskatchewan tax credits given verbally or in writing; (2) what was the name and/or position of the government official who gave the erroneous assurances; (3) which Saskatchewan venture capital corporation was involved in the investment from the Johnsons; (4) were there any other investors given erroneous assurances with reference to investing in the Saskatchewan venture capital corporation; (5) were there any investors given erroneous assurances with regard to any other Saskatchewan venture capital corporation or any other tax credit-eligible investment; and (6) has similar compensation been paid to other investors, and if so, what is the total amount of such payments over the past five years?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce students today that are in your west gallery — and the overflow goes into the Speaker's gallery — 110 students from Sister O'Brien School. They are grade 5 and 6 students. They are accompanied today by their teachers: Mme. Bundgaard, Ms. Bolen, Mr. Gantner, Mme. Korol, and eight parent chaperons.

I want to welcome them here today and I would like the legislature also to welcome this group of very enthusiastic children today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our caucus is very, very pleased to see the previous Speaker of the House with us today in the Speaker's gallery — Mr. Herman Rolfes.

We are especially happy to have him here with us and we thank him so much for assisting our caucus with the new orientation seminars. You have been a great help to us and we welcome you here today.

Please join me in welcoming Mr. Rolfes.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly I'd like to introduce 13 grade 12's in your gallery. Accompanying the grade 12's from their Wawota High School are their teacher and principal, Harold

Laich, and chaperon, Vicki Beauchesne.

I would ask the Assembly to welcome them here today. We look forward to meeting them right after question period. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with my colleague in welcoming the students and Mr. Laich and Ms. Beauchesne from Wawota.

Wawota basically is right on the edge of my riding as well as Mr. D'Autremont's so we share students at the high school. And we'd like to welcome them. It's been a pleasure to work with Mr. Laich and the students through the years and I look forward to meeting them.

As well, a special welcome to the former Speaker of this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

National Volunteers Week

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week of April 22 to 27 is National Volunteers Week, a week during which we officially recognize the crucial role volunteers play in the daily life of our community, our province, our nation, and our world.

The people of Saskatchewan in particular know the value of volunteers and the necessity of their work. According to Statistics Canada, nationally 24 per cent of the people involve themselves in some kind of volunteer work. In Saskatchewan that figure is 37 per cent.

A report released last year by the Saskatoon City Council stated that formal volunteer efforts are worth \$650,000 yearly to the city and its taxpayers. And similar numbers, if not more, apply to all our communities.

This week I will be present at a ceremony honouring exceptional volunteers in my town as well as will many other members in their towns. In paying tribute to the few, we are recognizing how all our lives are enriched in every sense of the word by the work of all volunteers. We appreciate their efforts, and we thank them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Earth Day

Mr. Bjonerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize today's designation as Earth Day. Despite continued campaigns for environmental awareness, our water, air, and land become more and more polluted. Many people refuse to heed warnings, while others may think the environmental crisis is over.

The United Nations environment program released some startling statistics on Friday in a new report. It says the overall quality of the world's environment is falling in every category. It estimates that between 150 and 200 species of life become extinct every day. There are an estimated 280 species currently at risk in Canada.

We can do more to protect the environment and reverse the destructive trend. One of the keys to solving the problem is careful waste management. In recent years, many Saskatchewan communities have developed and implemented environmentally friendly waste management plans. Blue boxes are a common sight on city roadside curbs, and some people try to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Newspapers, cardboard boxes, bottles, cans, and now oil find their way to the recycling depot.

Hopefully over time, more and more households will join these programs, and governments will look for ways to develop more efficient and cost-effective waste management programs. The fight is only beginning. By recognizing Earth Day, I hope that we all can become a bit more environmentally conscious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

National Volunteers Week

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to join the member from P.A. (Prince Albert) Carlton in recognizing the work of volunteers in this special week across this country and certainly in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we're quite well aware of what volunteers do in our communities. I take a look at sport, culture, and recreation, and certainly vocal duets like Donna and Leroy would not have been possible were it not for volunteers through the local arts councils or Sask Express or the minor ball days and the hockey and the major curling bonspiels that take place, Mr. Speaker.

These are all because there are individuals in our communities, whether they be young or old, who are willing to give of their time and efforts to provide these activities. And I want to recognize them on behalf of my caucus. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Northlands College Student Residence

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to attend the opening of an expanded and updated educational facility in northern Saskatchewan last week. Northlands College student residence in Buffalo Narrows will be well prepared and equipped as we move into the new century with our educational and skills training programs in Saskatchewan.

The original residence was built in 1980. The new centre will include cafeteria, recreation centre, three classrooms, and residence serving the needs of the North. Funding for 1,065,000 was provided by the province and Northlands board while the federal government provided 185,000 through the infrastructure program.

This project demonstrates a tremendous partnership between the province and the Northlands board. The partnership and the multi-party training program means that training will focus on apprenticeship skills geared for employment in the northern mines — training for northern people for jobs in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to congratulate all of the instructors, staff, and residents of Buffalo Narrows and area while participating in the bringing of the project to completion. Students who attend Northlands will get the training they'll need to get the jobs in the new economy which will add to the prosperity and growth in the North. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Volunteers Week

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to recognize National Volunteer Week. A widespread volunteer effort is traditional in Saskatchewan. When the first settlers began arriving in this province, it was the volunteer spirit and the sense of community that helped people survive. If one homesteader was building a barn, or beginning harvest, everyone in the surrounding area would pitch in and help out.

These days, volunteer efforts are highly organized. Volunteer organizations thrive in nearly every Saskatchewan community. People donate their time to help others with a wide range of activities, ranging from visits to people who are housebound, to teaching adults to read.

Many groups specialize in raising money for people in need. Other people donate their time to provide services to the sick and elderly. And we must not forget the volunteer spirit that always shines through when people are suffering in times of crisis. For example, the past few weeks thousands of people filled sandbags and helped build temporary dikes to fend off rising flood waters.

I would like to extend my gratitude, on behalf of the opposition members, to the thousands of volunteers in Saskatchewan and across Canada who selflessly give their time and energy to help make the world a little bit better for others.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association Mock Parliament

Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report on an event that took place right here in this room last Saturday. About 40 of our province's finest young debaters turned back the hands of time to when Douglas was in government, and debated Bills and legislation relevant to that era.

All of this was a part of the Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association's mock parliament. Along with the member from Regina Wascana Plains and the Leader of the Official Opposition, we took turns assuming the role of Mr. Speaker. Now you will know that I have always held you and your

position in the highest regard, but let me say that after this weekend's experience in your chair, I've been able to elevate that just a bit more.

As a major sponsor of the event, Saskatchewan Lotteries needs to be acknowledged and thanked. So too does Doug Chase, executive director and, I suspect, key organizer. Participants were asked to attire themselves in garb suitable to the times. Kirsten Deane of Thom Collegiate here in Regina came in first in the best costume voting. Lisa Ockochinski of Yorkton was second, and Jason Court of Wesmor High in Prince Albert was third. The student voted top parliamentarian by his peers at the 1996 SEDA (Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association) model legislature was Nolan Berg of Yorkton Regional High School. His schoolmates Alan Chicoine and Scott Yemen came second and third respectively.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that a number of these young people will be back in this Assembly in the not-too-distant future, but in an elected capacity. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Claybank Brick Plant Historical Society

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the honour to attend the annual general meeting of the Brick Plant Historical Society in the hamlet of Claybank in my constituency. Mr. Speaker, the volunteers and members of this society are seeking to preserve and develop the brick plant site which is just south of this hamlet.

Started in 1914, the brick plant remains one of the most intact industrial sites in the country. Original machinery, kilns, warehouses, and residences are all mostly still intact. Also at this site is a rare piece of woodland along the Dirt Hills as well as a first nations archaeological site.

With the help and support of both the provincial and federal levels of government, it is hoped that by the time of this province's centennial, this site will be fully preserved and developed as a major attraction in southern Saskatchewan. Within an hour's drive from Regina or Moose Jaw and just minutes from Long Creek golf course, this site does hold great promise.

Over the summer months, the brick plant will be open for tours on weekends, and I would welcome all members of this House to take the time to see and enjoy this fascinating part of Saskatchewan history. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Earth Day

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago today a group of friends got together to talk about the precarious state of the earth. They called their local gathering Earth Day and agreed to meet each year thereafter for a general discussion on the condition of what one church's prayer book calls, this fragile planet, our island home.

Importantly, this handful of people committed themselves to expanding their Earth Day concerns across the earth. Now on this the 25th anniversary of Earth Day, we continue to celebrate our planet with its remarkable geological, biological, and climatological diversity and we remind ourselves once again that our very survival as a species depends on a healthy environment.

Earth Day Canada is a charter member of Earth Day International which represents 91 nations. Our national organization each year coordinates over 9,000 environmental projects and activities, including clean-ups, tree plantings, and educational programs.

In our province today, the minister responsible for Environment and the Regina Public School Board sign an agreement which will promote environmental stewardship through educational programs, partnerships, and information materials — good example of cooperation.

The message of Earth Day is that keeping our nest clean, our water pure, and air fresh, is everybody's business. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Seniors' Health Services

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this House a tragedy involving a Moose Jaw family. This case began when 84-year-old Jack Nicholson was left in the hands of home care for the first time last September. After a fall which the family alleges was a result of negligence on the part of a home care worker, family members returned to find Mr. Nicholson with a bruise from the top of his head to his collar-bone.

His family phoned the Moose Jaw Union Hospital but were told there wasn't enough beds to admit Mr. Nicholson. He did not see a doctor until three days later, and shortly after being admitted, he suffered a stroke. His condition deteriorated until he died on October 3.

Mr. Speaker, the official cause of death is subdural hematoma on the left side of the skull. How does the minister explain what appears to be a total breakdown of the system, one which resulted in the death of Mr. Nicholson?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What I would say to the member, Mr. Speaker, is that obviously allegations are being made against a health care worker in Moose Jaw concerning the treatment of Mr. Nicholson. And with all due respect to the member, I believe that the Legislative Assembly ought not to be used as a forum for making allegations against workers in a forum where the member enjoys immunity from civil lawsuit.

I think if there's an allegation that this person did something wrong, that that should be investigated by the appropriate authorities at the appropriate time. I do not believe that those allegations should be discussed in this Chamber and I don't

think the member should take that approach.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health attempted to make a point last week by showing this House a newspaper article containing a photo of a man kicking a door. I also wish to show the minister an article, and this one is from the Moose Jaw *Times-Herald* dated April 17, and it's aptly titled: "Daughter wants answers about death of her dad."

It also contains a photo, a photo of 84-year-old Jack Nicholson just days before he died. And I'd like to send copies of this article over to the members of the cabinet.

Will the minister explain what he intends to do to correct what is an obvious problem in our health care system, one which cheated this family out of more time with their father?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that in my opinion this is not a form of high politics; this is a form of low politics. Because what the member is doing is trying to take advantage of the unfortunate circumstances that have affected a family in Moose Jaw and to unfairly malign a worker in Moose Jaw when the member has not talked to both sides.

The member does not know what the facts are. If something wrong was done, this should be properly investigated. The worker in Moose Jaw is entitled to the benefit of the doubt. The member is trying to make politics out of a very unfortunate situation, Mr. Speaker. I am not going to engage in that kind of debate with the member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, the article I refer to details the tragic circumstances that led to the death of Mr. Nicholson. His daughter states in this article and I quote, "If that's the kind of care they have for our seniors, it would better to not have any at all."

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that support services are clearly not at an appropriate level and will only deteriorate because of further funding cuts. Will the minister make a commitment in this House today to ensure the situation leading up to the death of Mr. Nicholson is thoroughly and properly examined?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — All I can do, Mr. Speaker, is say that I think it's a sad day in the legislature when people like that member get up repeatedly to make cheap political points out of the death of somebody in their community. I think that that's a sad example of leadership, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a tragic story to bring to the attention of this House. And although it's not as severe as

the one noted by my colleague from Wood River, it is one that clearly demonstrates the problems this NDP (New Democratic Party) government has in its health care plan, if in fact they have a plan.

Mr. Speaker, an article in April 4 edition of the *Humboldt Journal* describes how residents of the Leroy lodge recently bid farewell to Leroy — a community that these seniors called home for decades.

One of the saddest stories relating to the closure of this facility is the fact that a couple, Joe and Magdelina Just, who have been married for 66 years and raised a family together, will no longer be sharing the same room after being moved to another facility.

Will the minister explain why our seniors, people like Joe and Magdelina Just, the very people who built this province, are being treated with so little respect and absolutely no consideration?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well I think the member knows, Mr. Speaker, that people are assessed at the district level with respect to the level of care that they need. And I would just say to the member that the member was up in the House a few weeks ago talking about how her example of commitment to health care would be an American style of health care, Mr. Speaker. And I have to say that that member's idea of health care is that 35 million people go without medical care coverage, 100,000 people join the ranks of the uninsured every month, people go without health care because they're not covered at all.

What we did in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, was to pioneer a medicare system, a single-payer system, so that everybody could have medical care regardless of how much money they had in their wallet. It was opposed by that party.

I was somewhat shocked to hear that member advocating American-style health care a few weeks ago. We have a good system, notwithstanding the opposition of that party, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sad that I can't really give an answer back to the family. That wasn't an answer.

Mr. Speaker, Leroy's town administrator, Mark Fedak, said that the Leroy lodge should have been maintained. He stated that, and I quote: "We believe there should be some type of long-term care here in our town."

Mr. Fedak indicates that without some form of seniors' facility in Leroy, the elderly will have no reason to remain in the community where their families and loved ones are.

Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of decisions this government is forcing on district health boards; decisions that are not in the best interest of our seniors or of the affected towns.

Will the minister explain at what point his government will

realize what they're doing and begin to address the anxiety and pain they are creating among seniors, their families, and our rural communities?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — You know, I don't know if I've mentioned in the House before, Mr. Speaker, that recently the federal Liberals took out about \$50 million from our health care budget in Saskatchewan. And you know, Mr. Speaker, the member talks about properly funding the health care system and they would do this and they would do that, but the reality is, what the Liberals have done is as of April 1 taken \$50 million out of health care.

And what did we do? For every dollar that the Liberals took out of health care, we put a dollar back in in our recent budget. What did they do, Mr. Speaker? They opposed that in this legislature. We even had a motion to express concern over what the federal Liberals were doing to health care. Those members refused to vote in favour of it. So I think the member's words ring rather hollow, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to an issue that I believe the minister really hasn't answered, for the sake of individuals who are concerned and raised the question with our caucus as well. And it's a question to the Minister of Health.

Lorraine Michon of Moose Jaw reluctantly agreed to have home care come in and help take care of her father who was in need of palliative care. And we've already heard the story of how this gentleman unfortunately died very tragically just about a week ago.

Mr. Minister, Lorraine and her family have come to your department because they have been unable to get any information as to the tragedy, how it happened, and why it happened, specifically when they had given specific instructions to the home care worker as to how to take care of their father who was in his home. Even though he was in need of very heavy and extensive palliative care, he was there because of your government, your cut-backs, and a policy that forces . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The member has been fairly lengthy with his preamble and I'll ask him to proceed directly to his question.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, where do people like Lorraine Michon turn to get the answers to their questions?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — What I say to the member, Mr. Speaker, is what I said to the other member, and that is that he is raising hearsay in this House that he's heard from family members with respect to what happened. And I say that before he says that the home care worker did something wrong or was to blame for this man's death, the matter should be properly investigated. And the member should not get up in this House and make those kinds of allegations with the immunity he has in this House.

If something wrong was done, then that should be resolved in some proper forum. But it is not proper for me to get up in the

House and discuss somebody's personal medical condition. And it isn't proper for that member to get up in the House and make allegations against a worker in Moose Jaw when that worker isn't represented here and doesn't have a chance to defend herself. That is not a proper way to do things, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll have to go directly to the head of this government, and that's the Premier. Quite obviously the Minister of Health is not prepared to meet with or to even discuss the concerns that individuals have.

Why would Ms. Michon have come to us if his department would have been doing their job? She went to the department. She went to the district health board. Unfortunately no one's willing to answer the questions and the concerns — concerns that arise because of the cut-backs that are coming from this government.

Mr. Premier, will you respond and let Lorraine know . . . Lorraine Michon know who she turns to have questions answered that everyone else that she's supposed to turn to will not answer? Will you do that, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I didn't say that I wouldn't have a meeting with anybody. I didn't say that this family's questions shouldn't be answered.

What I said is that it is unfair for that party and that party to come into this legislature and adopt one person's version of the facts and make allegations against somebody without having the matter properly investigated. And the place for a matter to be investigated is not in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker; it is in the proper forums where people investigate allegations of this sort.

That's what I said, Mr. Speaker. And I hope that both of those parties don't persist in simply trying to score cheap political points over what is obviously a very tragic circumstance.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gross Revenue Insurance Program Overpayments

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question this afternoon is for the back-up Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, the other day I asked you whether your government was threatening to cut off crop insurance coverage to farmers with outstanding GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) bills, and you completely failed to answer that question.

We have now learned that there are still over 4,000 farmers who have not yet paid their GRIP bills. In fact less than half of the \$12 million worth of bills you sent out have been paid. Clearly, many farmers are unable to pay this bill, this unfair bill, a bill you promised they'd never receive in the first place.

Mr. Minister, will you give us a clear answer and the farmers of

this province a clear answer? Will these 4,000-plus farmers be denied crop insurance coverage if their GRIP bills are not paid by April 30?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, there were 39,000 farmers in this province sent cheques with the GRIP surplus. There were some farmers, about 11,000, that were sent bills because they had an overpayment in 1993, Mr. Speaker, and for their 1994 premium.

The majority of those farmers have now sent in their money on bills that they owe. I expect that to continue. Farmers are very responsible in this province, Mr. Speaker, and if they owe a bill they will pay it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agriculture Trade Mission

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, your Agriculture minister's 17-day trip to the Pacific Rim was supposed to cost Saskatchewan taxpayers \$55,000. And now we've learned that the minister has decided to extend his visit by an additional six days to April 29.

Mr. Premier, why has the minister's trip been extended? Are you trying to keep him out of the Assembly? And how much more is this extended visit going to cost Saskatchewan taxpayers?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, I find it . . . I don't even know what to call it. You know we've got an agriculture community in the province of Saskatchewan that wants to diversify, that wants to market their products overseas. We're trying to attempt to facilitate that, and they argue that. They would sooner support the old GRIP — that's their agricultural program for the people of Saskatchewan. We believe in value added, we believe in diversification, and we believe in trade with foreign nations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fill-in for the Minister of Agriculture says the minister is offshore to facilitate agriculture in this province. It seems the only ones getting any assistance are the wood producers in this province for paper sales because he's certainly been releasing a lot of news releases. The fact is I looked them all over this morning and there's one thing absent in there and that is there are no new sales made; there are no new agreements signed at all. And that's a pretty sad record, Mr. Premier, for \$55,000 for a three-week Asia trip and not to sign one single agreement.

Mr. Premier, specifically what has the minister accomplished on this trip? What specific agreements have been reached that are going to result in new economic activities and jobs for the people of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well again, it's just astonishing, I think, Mr. Speaker, to listen to the member opposite criticize trade and the export of what we produce, our strength — agriculture, Mr. Speaker. Ag biotech, for an example, Mr. Speaker, we're known worldwide because of the ag biotech that's happening right . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now I was able to hear the question being put but I'm not able to hear the answer being provided. Order. And I will ask all hon. members to allow the minister to be heard during the answer.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems very strange that the member should ask those kinds of questions. He should talk to the people like Thomson Meats from Melfort who are with the trade delegation, and what's happening.

We would sooner trade with nations like that, Mr. Speaker, based on our strengths of agriculture, not have to go to the post office to look to see if there's a cheque from the government in the box.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Emergency Health Services

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this House another example to demonstrate the ever-widening cracks in our health care system. This case involves Pearl Fitzpatrick of Eatonia, who after having surgery on a broken ankle was transported to St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, in the Premier's own constituency, so that a specialist could examine her.

This is where Pearl's problems went from bad to worse, as it was five days before a doctor could arrange time to see Pearl Fitzpatrick, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Health explain how, under his government's so-called new and improved health care system, such an ordeal could take place?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well of course the sad news, Mr. Speaker, is that every time somebody has an unfortunate situation with the health care system, or somebody dies, the Liberal Party is happy about it because it gives them an opportunity to try to score political points in the House. And I think that is sad.

I want to tell the members of the Liberal Party that if the member would get in touch with me and discuss this case, which I haven't heard anything about, I'd be happy to sit down with the member and discuss it and look into it and talk to the health board about it.

That isn't what the member wants to do, Mr. Speaker. He wants to get up in this House and raise these cases so that he can score cheap political points about somebody's misfortune. And it is shameful. But I want to say to the member and to the House, that of the people that use the health care system, 89 per cent of the people that actually use the system are very satisfied with the care that they get.

Mr. Speaker, that doesn't make the member happy because he

can't get up and make some sad tale of woe in the House. But that's the way it is, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, when Pearl Fitzpatrick was examined by a specialist on a Friday, she was informed that she would be released from the hospital the following Monday due to a bed shortage. Because of Pearl's condition, the family protested but to no avail. The only facility available for her to recover in was a personal care home.

However, upon being examined in this facility, it was discovered that Pearl Fitzpatrick's wounds had developed gangrene. The family lodged an official complaint with St. Paul's and Ms. Fitzpatrick was immediately allowed back into the hospital.

Will the minister explain why people in need of medical treatment need to take such action to ensure their proper health care?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well the difference between the member and I, Mr. Speaker, is that the member is probably happy that Ms. Fitzpatrick developed gangrene so that he could get up in the House and make some point. I'm sorry to hear that, I really am.

But I want to say to the member that the federal Liberal polling which recently came out confirms what our polling shows, and that is that people do get good service in the hospitals. Sometimes people develop complications. The system is not perfect. It never has been perfect, probably never will be.

But I say, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to be treated to this every day, that every time somebody has some unfortunate incident these members are going to get up and pretend that they're the friends of these people, I think it's a sad form of politics.

And I want to say to that member that if he cared one little bit about the medicare system, he wouldn't belong to a party that opposed the introduction of medicare and he wouldn't be supporting the reduction — \$50 million this year — of medicare payments from Ottawa to Regina.

But he doesn't care about that, Mr. Speaker. He just wants to make cheap political points.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, you shouldn't be too proud about your government's polling on what the questions were regarding rural health care. They weren't good.

Mr. Speaker, Pearl Fitzpatrick's second visit to the hospital lasted about a month because doctors were uncertain if Pearl would lose her leg or perhaps her life. Pearl can only wonder what may have happened to her if the special care home and her family had not taken the action to have her placed back in the hospital.

While in the hospital, Pearl also had to pay about \$1,000 per month to keep a bed at the special care home for fear the hospital would once again send her out on her own. If Pearl was a family member of one of your cabinet colleagues, I don't believe for a moment this would've happened.

Will the minister now assure the people like Pearl Fitzpatrick that they will receive the same health services as your government colleagues, the same services every Saskatchewan resident should have?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I want to say to that member, Mr. Speaker, that he can get up in this House and he can sink just as low as he wants to in this question period. But you know when my wife had to get surgery and had to get arthroscopic surgery, she had to wait six or seven months because it was elective surgery. But she had to wait just like everybody else, Mr. Speaker, because that's the way our system is. Everybody's treated equally.

The only other comment I can make to that member, Mr. Speaker, is that he should get down on his hands and knees and beg the member from Saskatoon Greystone to come back and improve the quality of questions in question period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Rental Damage Deposits

Ms. Julé: — Thank you for the standing ovation.

Mr. Speaker, a controversy involving the Saskatchewan Landlords Association and this government is one that has been going on for far too long. The last meeting held between the association and the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Social Services took place on March 7.

It has been brought to my attention that at this meeting the Minister of Justice suggested to representatives of the association to simply raise the price of rent to solve their problems. This of course would be no solution because it would simply mean every renter in Saskatchewan would be punished because of this government's refusal to take appropriate action on this issue.

Can either the Minister of Justice or Social Services confirm that this is in fact what was stated at the March 7 meeting?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, again we have another example of the Liberal tactics in this House, which is to introduce misinformation or information they have not confirmed with others, into the course of the debate.

I will say again, Mr. Speaker, as I have said to this member before, that we are considering this issue and all of the implications surrounding this issue, and in due course we'll have announcements to make.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, an article in the March 16 edition of the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* contained an article in which the Minister of Justice indicated that landlords would know the future of the security deposit controversy by April 1. Twenty-two days later and another in a series of deadlines has been passed with no indication from this government that it plans on any immediate announcement, or even a meeting with the association to further discuss the issue.

The time has come for this government to work with the landlords and tenants to replace the existing outdated and troubling legislation and come up with a solution that works in the best interests of both landlords and tenants in this province.

Will the minister announce in this House today when an official decision will be made on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the announcement will be made in due course. And the issue is not assisted either by antics of certain landlords beyond this building or by the antics of the Liberal Party opposition within this building. And there are days I wonder if this isn't the same thing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I may, just to close today's question period, remind members of what's being said in the press. A quote from a recent editorial: "Will we ever be blessed", says the editorial, "by a day when our provincial Liberal Party, Saskatchewan's official opposition, doesn't crank up the whine metre one more decibel?"

Mr. Speaker, I will save the member who's asking the question, from Humboldt, the embarrassment of reading the rest of this editorial.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the security deposit, we will have consideration and there will be, there will be an announcement in due course.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Nipawin Awarded Saskatchewan Winter Games

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, and members of the Assembly. Even though a heavy fog in Saskatoon prevented me from being there in person this morning, it was my pleasure to be part of an announcement that was made earlier today in Nipawin.

My colleague, Andy Renaud, Minister of Highways and . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Order. I'm going to have to call the minister to order for using the proper name of a currently sitting member, and I'll ask the minister to simply withdraw the unparliamentary remark and proceed. Order.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — It was my pleasure to be part of an announcement that was made earlier today in Nipawin by the Minister of Highways and Transportation and the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Carrot River Valley,

who had the privilege to announce that Nipawin had been chosen as the site for the 1998 Saskatchewan Winter Games.

Nipawin has hosted numerous provincial, national, and international sporting events. This is the first time in the 24-year history of the Winter Games that Nipawin, a community of almost 5,000 people in north-east Saskatchewan, was chosen by the site selection committee to host the event. This is a credit to the people of Nipawin and surrounding districts who pulled together to present a successful bid for the culmination of a lot of hard work and commitment on the part of a dedicated, enthusiastic group of volunteers.

The Saskatchewan games program began in 1972 with the first Saskatchewan Summer Games in Moose Jaw. Since then the program has realized one success after another. So far six Summer Games and six Winter Games have been held. This summer the 1996 Summer Games will again take place in Moose Jaw, from August 4 to 10. The Winter Games in Nipawin will be no. 7, and one of the major sporting events in the province, with approximately 2,000 athletes, coaches, managers, officials, and staff participating.

Nipawin will indeed be the winter sporting showcase of the province in 1998. I know, based on previous successes, that Nipawin will again be the home of good old Saskatchewan hospitality.

The provincial government is pleased to work in partnership with the Saskatchewan Games Council, Sask Sport, and Saskatchewan Lotteries in supporting and promoting Saskatchewan games.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the members of the Assembly join with me in wishing Nipawin and surrounding districts good luck as they prepare to host the 1998 Saskatchewan Winter Games. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I very much am pleased to join into the congratulations for the community of Nipawin in regard to the 1998 Winter Games. I'm particularly pleased because, as you know, Nipawin was one of the communities bidding for these games, as was Melfort and Tisdale and the city of Prince Albert. And it's always good to know that no matter what happened, north-east Saskatchewan was going to be the recipient of these games.

One of the other very positive things that happened through this bid process is that the communities of Melfort, Tisdale, and of Nipawin have made the commitment to each other to support each other in these games, and it's really terrific to see the communities in the north-east working together.

And so I'm very pleased to see that these games are going to be in the north-east. It's very pleasing to see that three communities can work together without having amalgamation rammed down their throats by this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Madam Minister may have been in a big fog this morning . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Thank you, I was just repeating that the Madam Minister may have been in a fog this morning and not know where she was going. However this idea still has a lot of light to it, and I think having Nipawin as a site for the 1998 Winter Games is going to be very appropriate.

It's a beautiful community with a lot of very good people there, and I think part of these kinds of functions needs a lot of volunteers. This part of Saskatchewan is strong on volunteerism, and I'm sure there'll be a great Winter Games there. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 76 — An Act to amend The Health Districts Act, to repeal The Union Hospital Act and The Lloydminster Hospital Act, 1948 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Health Districts Act, to repeal The Union Hospital Act and The Lloydminster Hospital Act, 1948 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 77 — An Act to amend The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill to amend The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

The Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Before orders of the day, with leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I failed to glance in your gallery before introduction of guests. I missed the presence of a former distinguished member of this Assembly, Adolf Matsalla, who represented Canora for many years. I think he was first elected in '67 and was there until the '80s. And he was also . . . he was not only a colleague in caucus, he was a colleague in cabinet during those years as well.

I would ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming the return of a distinguished member to this Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member on her feet?

Ms. Lorje: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, and as the representative for Saskatoon Southeast, I would like to join with the House Leader in welcoming a very distinguished constituent from Saskatoon Southeast to this House. Mr. Matsalla, welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — Written question no. 75 is converted to motions for return (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 49 — An Act to amend The Natural Resources Act

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After my remarks, I will be moving the second reading of The Natural Resources Amendment Act, 1996. Mr. Speaker, these amendments will ease the administrative burden on rural municipality administrators.

The Speaker: — Order. Order! Now I'm having difficulty, because of noise coming from both sides of the House, hearing the remarks being made by the minister in introducing second reading of the Bill — order, order — and I will ask all members to show their cooperation in the House and allow the minister to make his remarks on Bill 49.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fish and wildlife development fund is used to secure and improve fish and wildlife habitat throughout Saskatchewan. In its land management role, the fish and wildlife development fund provides grants to approximately 110 rural municipalities in Saskatchewan. These grants are instead of taxes that might otherwise be collected on the land.

Right now rural municipalities levy taxes on lands that are leased back to vendors or permanent farmers for haying and grazing purposes. Some of these activities take place on fish and wildlife development fund land. When this occurs, the assessment on the land must be split. Permit holders pay the taxes on portions they use, and the fund pays grants in lieu of taxes on the balances.

Splitting the assessments is a difficult exercise that creates additional administrative burden for the rural municipal administrators. Sometimes appropriate taxes are not levied, therefore creating significant administrative confusion. This

amendment will allow for the payment of taxes by the fish and wildlife development fund on lands under permit and will allow for the recovery of the grant payment by adjusting the individual permit fee to reflect municipal taxes. The administration of taxes on these lands will be consistent with the system used by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food in which municipal taxes are collected on provincial community pastures.

Rural municipality administrators have asked the Department of Environment and Resource Management for this change. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities strongly supports the amendment. Passage of this Act will show that the Government of Saskatchewan listened to the concerns and amended the Act to ensure that all permittees are treated equally and fairly.

This Act also recognizes the importance of a strong partnership between provincial and local governments. This will help to ensure financial accountability and contribute to effective and efficient government operations.

Mr. Speaker, I now move second reading of The Natural Resources Amendment Act, 1996. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand before the Assembly today to speak on the proposed Natural Resources Amendment Act, 1996.

Natural resources are the cornerstone of our economy here in Saskatchewan. Without the vast amount of resources that we are so lucky to have here, many of the industries that bring tax dollars and tourism money into our province would just simply not be here. It is of utmost importance that we, as members of this Legislative Assembly, do all that we can to ensure the protection and fostering of these important resources.

At a time when our environment and the ecosystems within it are facing increasing dangers each and every day, we should all be working to ensure that the beautiful and vast lands of this province maintain their pure qualities in order to be able to continue to foster the fish and wildlife that thrive in this province.

Through the fish and wildlife fund, our fisheries and wildlife are regulated and administered with the focus of sustainable management in mind. The fish and wildlife fund was created under the authority of The Game Act and has subsequently been continued under The Renewable Resources, Recreation and Culture Act. Since this Act was repealed in 1993, the fish and wildlife fund now continues under section 20 of The Natural Resources Act.

This fund was originally established to prevent the continual reduction of wildlife habitat and wildlife population in the agricultural areas of our province. Fish enhancement projects that have been and continue to be financed through this fund

are intended to prevent the loss of fish and fish habitat.

The annual revenue that comes from the General Revenue Fund has been set at 30 per cent of habitat certificates and certain hunting, trapping, and fishing licence fees collected by the Department of Environment and Resource Management. For the year ended March 31, 1995, the fish and wildlife fund had total revenues of almost three and a half million dollars.

The fish and wildlife fund deals with three major expenditure components each year. Last year, one of these expenditures was to the wildlife fund which spent \$1.6 million, or just better than that, on maintaining bio-diversity in Saskatchewan — this by enhancing the wildlife habitat in this province.

The next major expenditure was to fish enhancement; \$964,000 was spent to rehabilitate fisheries habitat to conserve and enhance fish populations and to provide educational opportunities for those interested.

The municipal habitat conservation fund was the third source of major expenditure on the part of this fund last year.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management has set aside \$1 million of the fish and wildlife fund's assets. The interest earned on this money is used to pay rural municipality grants in lieu of taxes on the fish and wildlife development fund land located within the boundaries of those RMs (rural municipality). This is the focus of the amendments proposed in the Bill before us today.

The fish and wildlife fund also spent over \$2 million last year to administer and protect over 380 species of wildlife known to live in this province, as well as to preserve the many species of fish that need appropriate habitats in our province's rivers, lakes, and streams. As we understand it, Mr. Speaker, the money is credited to the fish and wildlife fund in order to meet the needs of not only the fish and wildlife in this province, but to protect them for the present and future use and enjoyment of all people who live in Saskatchewan and the thousands who come here to travel each and every year.

This Act, though fairly brief, makes some significant changes and also some additions to the way that money is credited to the fish and wildlife fund. This Bill also attempts to change the ways in which the minister responsible for the Environment and Resource Management is to administer the assets of this fund.

The system of municipal taxation proposed in this Bill will shadow the system used by the Department of Agriculture and Food with regards to their community pastures. The new Bill proposes ways in which the minister will be able to use the fish and wildlife fund's assets for payment to rural municipalities in lieu of taxes. This is only with regard to provincial lands within that municipality that were acquired through assets of the fund.

On top of this, the minister will be able to recover the cost of these payments to the rural municipalities by adjusting permit fees to reflect the amount of municipal taxes that have been paid or have not been paid by certain permit holders. The amendments to this Bill are supposed to streamline current

process for allocation and payment of taxes between permit holders, rural municipalities, and the Department of Environment and Resource Management — this with respect to haying or grazing land.

I question the proposed simplicity of this system. There are a couple of aspects of this Bill that have caused some concern and confusion. The areas that do cause concern for us and for the people that will be affected by this Bill are with respect to the ways in which the minister will be able to change permit fees to reflect municipal taxes owed in certain situations. We are also concerned with how these changes will affect people involved in wildlife and the fisheries, not only for sport and recreation but for their way of life.

It's for these reasons that we would like to spend some more time talking to some stakeholders and gaining some legal insight into the possible repercussions that may arise with the passing of this Bill into law.

I therefore would move that debate on this Bill be adjourned. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 54 — An Act respecting Conservation Easements and to make consequential amendments to other Acts

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Speaker, after my remarks I will be moving the second reading of The Conservation Easements Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Act will allow governments, private conservation agencies, and landowners to use conservation easements to conserve a full range of space we in Saskatchewan value for their natural, historic, heritage, cultural, and scenic qualities.

In the past, with the exception of some projects narrowly defined under The Heritage Property Act, the sale of land meant the end of any conservation agreement made by the previous landowner, no matter how conservation oriented he or she might have been.

This Act will enable landowners to donate or sell easements on parcels of land for conservation purposes to government or private conservation agencies, thus giving them the opportunity to leave a conservation legacy either for the designated term or in perpetuity for future generations in Saskatchewan.

The Act will be administratively simple and flexible enough to meet the needs of both government agencies, private conservation groups, and landowners. In addition to assisting recognized non-government conservation groups to accomplish their conservation objectives, Mr. Speaker, this Act will assist the province in achieving its goal to protect representative areas in each of our 11 ecoregions.

The representative areas network initiative which the Department of Environment and Resource Management is developing will be a coordinated system of areas across

Saskatchewan managed to help represent and conserve important landscapes and biological diversity.

You will note I said managed, not protected, because under this concept represented areas may be accessible to some resource users. The representative areas will be areas managed to preserve the natural habitat as much as possible. Used as benchmarks and compared to adjacent areas, they will allow us to find out how well we are doing in managing our lands and resources.

The Wildlife Habitat Protection Act lands, park lands, and parts of the provincial forest, will be extremely important pieces of this network of representative areas. Conservation easements offered by landowners on land strategically located for our native flora and fauna values will provide another important tool for preserving and conserving representative areas.

Mr. Speaker, this Act was developed through extensive consultations with municipal governments, private conservation groups, landowners, and lending institutions, to name a few. A landowner wishing to place an easement on a parcel of land can approach government or a conservation organization to see if they would be interested in holding such an easement. If there was interest, the landowner and organization would jointly determine what types of agriculture or habitat-related activities would be allowed in the area and then the easement would be registered.

This Act will enable landowners to receive financial benefit from conservation easements. The easements can either be sold or donated to recognized conservation groups. If donated, the value of the donated easement may be eligible for a proposed federal tax credit. This provides landowners with an increased incentive to employ conservation easements.

The conservation easements envisioned by this Act will be voluntary on the part of the landowner and of great potential benefit to the wide range of conservation values it is designed to protect.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure I now move the second reading of The Conservation Easements Act, 1996. Thank you.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to address this legislation, especially on today's designation as Earth Day. In fact just last Friday the United Nations released a report that warns of unprecedented destruction of earth's environment. The United Nations environment program says that between 150 and 200 species of life become extinct every 24 hours. I find that figure to be extremely disturbing. There's no question that we must raise environmental consciousness and take more steps to encourage sustainability of our most precious resource — earth.

I believe that Bill 54, The Conservation Easements Act, aims to accomplish some positive goals. The amendments proposed in this legislation encompass changes to three Acts, which are: The Planning and Development Act, 1983, The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act, and The Tax Enforcement Act. The changes outlined are to coordinate the three Acts I just mentioned in

order to encourage more donation or easement of land for conservation purposes.

I am pleased that the amendments will allow landowners to receive some financial benefits from granting their land to conservation agencies. This could be a valuable incentive. It is also encouraging to see that this new legislation proposes that, if the land is donated to conservation charities, that it may be eligible for a federal tax credit.

The Saskatchewan government recently got a poor review concerning establishing protected areas in the 1994-95 endangered spaces progress report. Therefore it is important that this new legislation entices more landowners to consider conservation easements.

But I also have some concerns about Bill 54. Although the amendments outline the notice that must be given concerning conservation easements, I would like to know what mechanism is in place for neighbouring landowners to give their input on the conservation plans for land bordering their property. With the winter we have just experienced, many farmers would not welcome any more encouragement for wildlife. Dozens of farmers are still fighting for compensation for the thousands of acres of crops the deer, elk and geese ate over the winter.

Once again, this Act refers to the regulations that will be set out later for conservation easements, but why not have them before us now to discuss?

I would also like to know what measures the government has in place to ensure that there's a balance of conservation easements among the 11 ecoregions in Saskatchewan.

Because this legislation could have a profound impact on many Saskatchewan landowners, we would like more time to consult with stakeholders. I therefore move adjournment of debate on Bill 54.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Atkinson that **Bill No. 5 — An Act to amend The Education Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to be able to take part in the debate surrounding the changes to The Education Act.

While on the surface The Education Act doesn't seem like it will be affected to any great degree, when you take a much closer look at it though you realize that there are two or three sections of the Act that will be amended or repealed. And as a result, I think that it will have a far-reaching effect, not only on employers, the boards of education, the teachers, but in fact the

students. And I'd like to bring to the attention of the members opposite a number of concerns that I have regarding some of the points.

The Education Act amendments address a number of issues. One of the less controversial issues of course is the changes to the banking procedures that will be allowed for both school boards and conseils scolaires.

There are three sections that will deal with the setting up of bank accounts in terms of the actual placement of funds of school divisions and the French boards; and the fact now that as we've moved through technological changes, boards of education will not only be able to pay their employees by direct deposit, but they are looking forward to being able to pay bills; that is, vendors that they have money owed to. And the amendments that are suggested by banking procedures, I think, will be okay.

The second change is around a name change. And when we look at that, the name change I think further addresses some of the concerns around the Saskatchewan Book Bureau.

The repeal of an Act is also contained in The Education Act amendment, and that is taking out a specific section of the Act — section 146. And there are some implications around actually taking that entire section out of the Act.

One of the smallest sections, or at least the least words are altered regarding a section, is involving the termination of a contract. Section 208 is actually going to deal with the termination of an employee's contract, and I think it looks . . . it needs some specific adjustments.

(1445)

The final point of course in this Act is around short-term contracts. Short-term contracts have been an item of contention between boards of education, the teachers' federation, individual teachers, and of course directors of education and the LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents) group who represents all of the directors and superintendents within the province.

Short-term contracts have always been referred to as temporary contracts. They may range in differences in lengths, and those need to be clarified. And I think we have a serious problem in that area, and that definitely needs to be resolved.

To understand all of those issues, I think you have to be aware of some of the definitions of the different items. And I'd like to bring to the attention of the members, certain definitions, because if we understand the definitions, I think we can see the picture as to why there is a slight problem and some of the things that can be done to correct these problems.

And I'd like to begin by looking at the definition of school year. Currently, The Education Act states that the definition of the school year means the period commencing on July 1 in one calendar year and ending on June 30 in the next calendar year, both dates inclusive. Now that covers the entire 365 days of the

year. Well we know that in Saskatchewan there are no schools that will be operating for 365 days of the year.

So what we're looking at then is what is the definition of the actual teaching portion of that full year. And for clarity, the Act proposes that an academic year be described. An academic year being the first day upon which we will start school and the last day upon which school will end. They will be, of course, in different calendar years.

So when we take a look at that under section 164 — and we have to make reference to 164 as well, and it does so in the Act — section 164 lays out the procedures that a board of education along with the Minister of Education have in establishing the school year. And then of course, the board of education establishes the academic year.

The Act states that of course, school year must be a minimum of . . . I mean — sorry — must be 200 days or less and the Minister of Education may prescribe something less than 200. The board of education then, with some guidelines, determines when they will start school and when they will end, and of course there are specific holidays for Christmas and the Easter break, etc.

What is suggested here of course is that this academic period be used to describe the contract. And I think it's much more meaningful to the teacher that will be employed to know that if a particular division . . . And we know that there are some instances where they are trying what is referred to as the alternate school year, where the alternate school year may not start on the traditional end of August or the first part of September. It will start at a different time, and of course end in June, not the traditional June 30.

So to look at those two definitions in the Act is very important to understand how this mechanism has been put in place.

The other definition that must be addressed is the definition of temporary teacher. Currently, we look at a temporary teacher as a person who has been employed for a period of 20 or more consecutive school days but less than a full school year. That's the current clause in the Act. And what we're looking at then is that the school year is now going to be re-described as being the academic year and the academic year will be the one that will be used.

The difficulty of course, in terms of temporary contracts — and these are the definitions that we must look at — is that a temporary contract can be used over and over again and that is probably some of the reasons why we are in the dilemma that we are in in the province.

The next definition that I bring to the attention of members is the definition of prescribed forms. To date, education contracts, education offers of acceptance for employment, there have been no prescribed forms. Each school division follows a pattern and of course the hiring takes place.

What is suggested in this Act is that there be a prescribed form that will be developed and it's indicated that the regulations

will be developed when the prescribed forms are ready. What I see happening here, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to be looking at another form — we have no idea what it is. And we're going to be developing a situation where the people in charge — the directors, the superintendents, the principals who are involved in the hiring process — will have to be looking at another set of forms to fill out.

The final definition that we have to look at takes us outside The Education Act and that is the local authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That's a whole new Act. And when I referred to section 146 of The Education Act and indicated that that is the section that is being repealed, what we are doing is replacing Section 146 of the Act, which is in The Education Act, with an Act that was introduced previously.

So one has to be aware of what that Act is saying to understand the conditions by which records — student records — will be released and whether or not there is ambiguity or whether or not there is indeed privacy maintained.

I'd like to begin by just taking a quick look at the items that I have highlighted regarding the definition and how it will fit into the amendments that are proposed.

The first one, of course . . . and I think I'll start with the one that I see the least controversial and that is the name change. The Saskatchewan Book Bureau has been around and, as suggested by its name, it refers to books and we know full well that that agency does more than just take care of books. And when we look at its scope and its nature, of the definitions that it now encompasses, the fact that the suggested name be the Learning Resources Distribution Centre, I know it falls much better into the actual definition of what the bureau is really doing.

So when we look at that particular section it falls into place with what is really happening, other than, as I suggested . . . as my colleagues previously suggested, we're a little concerned as to what the cost element might be. If we're doing a name change and there are letterheads and there are envelopes, etc., that have already been produced, we wonder at what cost will all of these things take place. We would hope that the implementation of this new name can be done at minimal expenses and to the betterment of everyone.

Second situation is around the banking procedures. As I've indicated, many school divisions currently are relying on electronic transfer of funds. Most of them are doing it around their payroll, where they have had payment of employees done through electronic transfer. What we're looking at here is that not only will we be talking about the transfer of funds to employees, we're also looking at the automatic payroll deposits, where we can have that take place.

And as I've indicated, the payment to vendors, the bills that are proposed to a school division, and if an automatic debit system can be established with that vendor, then the school division will have the ability . . . not only the school division, but the conseils scolaires of course, because this is a revision to a number of sections for both the current boards of education,

public boards, separate boards, as well as the French boards. The current procedure of paper cheques is outdated, and I think moving into the 21st century is an example of what will occur here.

Third item of course is around the release of records, student records. The Education Act, section 146, has relied on this procedure for a number of years. And school boards, principals, directors, superintendents, have been very familiar with that Act and they have been working accordingly.

I understand that about a year and a half ago the privacy Act, — and I'll just refer to it as the privacy Act rather than the long, full name of it — was introduced. The two are in conflict with one another. The Education Act and the privacy Act are not following the same pattern. So therefore The Education Act, being more restrictive, has been the Act that has had to have been followed over the last year and a half, even though the privacy Act was in place.

What we see of course in the amendment is that section 146 is totally deleted and it's replaced by the privacy Act. Our concern here is that, I think we have to look at sort of the education process of the people involved. We need to be aware that parents, that students, principals, teachers, all the stakeholders involved in education, understand all of the ramifications of the new privacy Act.

I'm sure that if we ask people right now in the school system as to what the privacy Act is and how it would be replacing The Education Act, section 146, there'd be, I'm sure, very short answers — the kind that we would not be happy with. So my concern of course, there, is that an education process be developed by the minister and the department to ensure that this new Act is also on the shelves of the different directors and superintendents so that they know that that is the Act that will be followed.

As far as the privacy Act, as far as the conditions within it, it is my understanding from talking with various people who have far further knowledge of that Act than I do, they indicate that there will be better things for the students. It removes some restrictions; it will allow release of information to more people that could be of assistance. And I'm referring to people involved in social services, people involved in health, and I see that this will be better for students in the province.

The shortest little Act amendment involves section 208 of this Act. Section 208 talks about the termination of a contract of a teacher. And it refers to . . . currently, I think, the words that are used in the existing Act say that an employment of a teacher's contract . . . sorry, that a teacher's contract of employment can be terminated by mutual agreement only after the contract actually exists. Right now it says, at any time.

Now the situation that develops . . . and I always have to refer to an example first, and if I look at an example then I can visualize whether or not this might cause some problems. Where this has effects — and I know that there are teachers who are MLAs now and former teachers — is when a teacher is in the last few years of their teaching career and they decide

that at Christmas time they would like to superannuate; when they decide to superannuate they will make that decision, but they do not want to leave the classroom right at that moment. They would like to continue to finish the school year or the academic year running until June 30.

What has had to happen in terms of directors and superintendents of education, they've had to take a look at that and say yes, we know that your superannuation will help us, especially in a situation where there are declining enrolments and there are staff cut-backs and teachers who are willing to help staffing reductions by indicating that they will be leaving as the teaching career, those kinds of things are good for the board.

However what the directors of education tried to do is to ensure that there is a resignation and that that is upfront. So what this section is saying is that you can't have a signed letter of termination until you have actually made the job offer. And I think there is some room for conflict there because we're going to have directors of education and possible superannuates looking at this slightly different.

The last issue, on replacement of teachers. Temporary contracts, as I indicated before, have been practices of the past. Temporary contracts have been extended by boards of education to the same individual four or five or six years in a row. And that is not what is the real intent of a temporary contract when especially the person is doing the same job.

And I think that those are the kinds of things that have brought about concern from the teachers' federation, and rightly so, because they have to be addressed.

(1500)

When we start looking at ongoing temporary contract, we see that there is abuse to this; we see that there is uncertainty, but because of course a temporary contract is for a very defined period of time — one year, year and a half, whatever the case may be — so we see that the teacher has that degree of uncertainty as to whether or not he or she will be back in the classroom, and if indeed what he or she will be doing.

When we talk about now the replacement teacher — that is the term that is being described now instead of temporary teacher — we need to look at the scenarios that the school divisions will be facing. And I'd like to take a quick look at two different situations, one involving a very large school division. We have a number in the province where we're talking about number of teachers in excess of a thousand. And the other situation where there will be somewhat less than that — a school division with 60 teachers, 50 teachers, whatever.

When we look at a school division with a large number of teachers, there are in any given year, a number of teachers on leave. They may be on a sabbatical leave, they may be on a special leave, any board-approved leave, or they may even be seconded by the Department of Education.

So let's look at the scenario where there is at least three

teachers that are on leave. Currently those three teachers would be offered a temporary teaching contract. Now the situation that I'd like to look at, Mr. Speaker, is let's refer to the three teachers as A, B, and C, hypothetical situation. All three have been granted one-year leaves for the full, and I'll use the term, academic contract.

Three replacement teachers are now hired to be placed in those three spots. Because the leaves of course are of one-year duration — it's not known whether there will be a second year — the replacement contract is for one full academic year and fits the definition of academic year.

Now let's look at the scenario that says at the end of one year — prior to May 31, by the way; it must be prior to that date — the third teacher, teacher C, applies to the board for . . . and I'll use the example that that teacher was on a secondment and the Department of Education, the Department of Education has indicated they want the teacher for a second year. And the board and the teacher agree that that person can leave for a second year.

What this Act is proposing is that automatically the three replacement teachers that were hired in the first year, because the first and second teachers who were granted the leave have returned to their job, the third person is automatically hired to be the replacement for the teacher on a permanent contract basis.

So the scenario that we're looking at here is that teacher A, who has had a replacement for one year, teacher B, who has had a replacement for one year, neither of those two teachers have the ability to try to get the position for teacher C, because this is an automatic. After one full year in a position, if there is an extension into a second year, the replacement contract becomes a permanent contract.

So the difficulty here that I am hearing, from especially boards of education and directors and superintendents, is around the word "automatic"; there's an automatic hiring.

Now what this says of course is that normally teachers are hired by the division. They're hired to teach in a division, they're hired to teach at different schools in the division, and they may be moved accordingly. This is against the philosophy of that intent, in that now we are actually hiring a teacher for a specific position, the position of a teacher who is on leave, and that position may be granted to him just because an extension has been allowed. So that poses a bit of a difficulty when we look at a larger school division.

An Hon. Member: — Explain that part again.

Mr. Krawetz: — We'll try one with a smaller school division, which I'm sure the hon. members will have a much easier time understanding — a school division where leaves are not granted very often. Occasionally there's someone that applies for a year of sabbatical, and that occurs, and it's usually a one-year term.

The most difficult situation for smaller school divisions, from my contacts with them, is for a secondment. And I'll use a

secondment as the reason. Secondments by the Department of Education are on a one-year term, and they're just for one year. So we have a board of education that will make a decision to allow a teacher to go on secondment for one year. A replacement teacher is hired.

Now there's some contention of course, that if you are advertising in the paper in a rural school division many, many miles from Saskatoon or Regina, is that of course it's a term position. It's a one-year because you know that the secondment has only been authorized for one year. What will be the number of applicants; will there be a fair job type of analysis in terms of the number of people; and what will be the quality of the applicant. Okay.

If indeed that is still no problem and a teacher is hired, what will occur at the end of the first year is that if the Department of Education says, we require that teacher that we have seconded for a second year, now you have an automatic — the teacher that you chose back at the beginning of the first year on the replacement contract is now automatically the teacher that is hired, and is hired permanently for the second year. What does that do for the school division?

Well number one, when the teacher comes back, the teacher who is on secondment, and he's rural school division — and over the last number of years I'm sure the members will understand when we know that there are declining enrolments, and there are reductions in numbers of teachers — we now have a situation where we have an overstaffing because we have a permanent teacher who has returned from the secondment, and we have a replacement teacher who became a permanent teacher.

So the net result for a school division is that after two years when both people are vying for the job, someone will have to be released. Someone will have to be released at a cost, Mr. Speaker, because the redundancy clause will kick in. And I'm assuming of course that both teachers are adequate and have done an outstanding job.

What will occur then in many school divisions of course, is that the provisions around seniority will kick in. So some teacher will be declared redundant and it will be a cost to the school division. Minimum cost of course, is for at least the two years that the person was employed. So this will definitely pose a cost factor to the board.

The second concern, of course, is that in a rural school division, sometimes applicants for these temporary positions are usually from the substitute teachers list. And good teachers in terms of the substitute teachers list, but when you start to look at the permanent situation of saying that they want to carry forward for a number of years, these teachers also who have been hired for that short period of time, only want to be short-period-of-time teachers.

Now they have the right of first refusal. The teacher that will be hired in that position has the right of first refusal, but they also will be the teacher that will be granted a permanent contract after only one year. And I know that in terms of discussions

with boards of education and the LEADS group, they see this as a very significant problem. And I think that we have to look at an amendment as to that situation.

As I've indicated, the main concern that we see is around the fact that a teacher owns a certain position, and that is contrary to any of the hiring that has been done. All the positions that are hired within a board of education are for the school division. Boards of education then, I see having to deal with this problem by May 31. By May 31, they will have to know then if there is a second year of leave granted for the teacher that has been away from their teaching duties for the first year.

If there is a leave granted by May 31, the board of education will have to make some very, very stern and complex decisions on the substitute — or I shouldn't say substitute; I would say the replacement teacher. Do they really want the teacher to be on a permanent contract?

And I think that we'll have a situation here where the careers of some teachers may be affected, not because they're necessarily doing a negative job but because the board of education knows that at the end of the second year, the teacher who is on secondment is coming back. They know that they will be overstaffed. So the decision is going to be made about the replacement teacher to say, you know, we're going to let you go; you didn't meet our qualifications. That is damaging to the teacher who is trying to build up experience and trying to move to a job of course where there will be a permanent situation involved.

And I think that we have to be very careful with this one, and I suggest that much discussion, much discussion, has to take place between the teachers' federation and the LEADS group as well as the trustees' association regarding the implementation of that concern.

As I've indicated before, redundancy automatically is a cost factor to boards of education. As soon as you have a position that has to be reduced and there are no retirements, there are no teachers who have moved away, some person has to be declared redundant; or I should say, the job has to be declared redundant, and the person who is fulfilling that job will be released. There is a cost factor, and my concern is of course, that is, if this cost factor is being absorbed by boards of education, we're now looking at further expenditure for boards who are already very cash strapped.

My final comment about the regulations — as I've indicated before, the prescribed forms that will be implemented if this amendment takes place indicates that people that are in the education process, the directors and superintendents and the principals, will have a further set of bookkeeping to do.

And I'm not so sure that when we start to look at the reasons for implementing prescribed forms, whether there is the problem. I have tried to find out from looking at the Act itself, the current Education Act, the proposed amendments, as to what problem is trying to be resolved by the situation of implementing a prescribed form. And I do not see a value for the prescribed form, and I would like to of course share that

with the minister so that we can maybe get some clarification as to the necessity of a prescribed form and that additional time, etc., that would have to be spent.

Mr. Speaker, I've raised several issues in this Bill that are of concern to myself and to our caucus. The practice of hiring teachers for four or five or more years on temporary contracts for a full academic year has to be stopped. There's no question about that. And I think boards of education have recognized that, and directors especially have recognized that. Teachers need to have a sense of security and certainty about their positions.

Boards of education must be in complete control of their staffing strategy and long-term staffing picture. That's a board's responsibility. The SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association), the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation), and LEADS, must all reach agreement on any proposed legislative changes. They are the parties that will have to operate under any new or changed laws and regulations.

At this point, these three parties are not in agreement and have suggested their own changes to the proposed amendment. As a result, our caucus may be proposing amendments at a later stage, in committee, as I have indicated.

Our caucus believes that education must be a priority in this province. We encourage the current government to re-evaluate their priorities and join with us to ensure our education system remains one of the best in the world.

We also encourage the Minister of Education to continue consulting with the concerned parties prior to making any decisions, to ensure their voice will receive strong consideration.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that this NDP government realizes the impact that these amendments will have. I also hope that the concerns I have raised will be dealt with in a satisfactory way during the committee stage. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to address this Bill today on behalf of the third party caucus.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the majority of this Bill deals with purely housekeeping matters. There are a number of changes such as updating the names of the Saskatchewan Book Bureau and allowing schools to make better use of technology with regards to electronic transfer of funds and payroll. Obviously we do not have any objections to this sort of thing and I am sure that the schools and school boards around the province appreciate the additional flexibility that these changes will give them.

(1515)

Likewise we have no strong objections to the amendments of section 146 which bring in to line The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Essentially this amendment

recognizes the sad fact that many students do not live at home and do not maintain a relationship with their parents.

Whatever the reasons for these circumstances, it is clearly ridiculous for schools to demand, as the previous legislation required, that parents be present in order for the student to see his school records. Ideally of course, we would prefer that all children remain at home and maintain a positive and healthy relationship with their parents. However this is not a perfect world and this change recognizes the variety of situations that students do find themselves in.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, these changes are all well and good and we support them. There are, however, other aspects of the Bill that are not quite as innocuous, and I wish to address those particular issues.

In consultation with the SSTA and other representatives of the education sector, I have become aware of objections to a couple of major sections of the Bill. The foremost concern of the SSTA is in regards to the new provisions for the replacement of teachers. Essentially these amendments would tie the replacement of teachers to the position of particular permanent teachers. If a permanent teacher were to take a second year of leave, the replacement teacher filling that position would automatically become the permanent teacher for that position.

This takes us back to the '40s and the '50s when teachers were hired for a position with a school board provided they could either play hockey or play ball in a particular situation. I think with the changes in the educational scene, boards need to be able to move teachers in situations where they can effect the best education for the students. And to have a teacher for a particular position does not do that.

As the SSTA has pointed out, this policy runs contrary to the long-held position, philosophy, in our schools that teachers do not own a particular position. They are part of a staff, part of a team, which the school division administration can deploy or redeploy as best suits the interest of the students and the school as a whole.

When a school hires a replacement teacher, two things generally happen. First, the pool of talent from which the school can recruit a replacement teacher is usually poorer both in terms of quality and quantity than the pool of talent for permanent positions. Most of the best teachers, after all, are looking for permanent positions. Consequently, a replacement teacher may well not be the best teacher who could have been recruited if the objective of the school was to replace a permanent position.

The second thing that happens is that teacher is put in the position of the teacher on leave, purely as a matter of convenience, as a stopgap measure. In the situation where the permanent teacher is on extended leave, the school would want to have the freedom to deploy staff as they normally do.

They may well want to keep the replacement teacher but his or her talents may lie in some other area. So the school administration would want the freedom to take them out of their

previous position and place them into something where they are best suited for the educational needs of the students.

Likewise, there may be another member of the permanent staff who is qualified to take over the position of the teacher who is on leave and it only makes sense that this teacher, who has a longer background in that particular school, should be fairly considered for that position.

These fairly normal and logical administrative freedoms which schools have always enjoyed in the past are taken away by this legislation. The amendments give the replacement teacher first dibs on a particular position, regardless of the judgement of the administration and regardless of the collective interests of the staff and school.

Basically this happens to be catering to the grubby individualism of the replacement teachers. This forces school boards into a situation where the only way they can work around this restriction and treat the permanent staff fairly is to fire the replacement teacher so they can put a permanent teacher of their choice in that position.

This is obviously a drastic action and one which may well be unfair to the replacement whose work record will be marred by this dismissal. All in all, this section of the legislation creates unnecessary red tape that ties the hands of school boards and the school administrations in trying to make our children's education the best that it can be.

The topic of unnecessary red tape leads me to a further objection which the SSTA has with this Bill — the requirement that offers of employment, acceptances and confirmations all be in prescribed forms. Basically this forces further regulation and bureaucratization of the hiring process in the schools. As the SSTA points out in a briefing note:

Other public sector employees, like the Government of Saskatchewan, urban and rural municipalities, the health districts, Crown agencies and corporations, have no regulations requiring that offers of employment be on a prescribed form. The time and energy of government officials, as well as the other education partners, is better spent on real issues rather than creating more regulations and attendant administrative procedures.

And I say amen to that last sentence, Mr. Speaker.

Our caucus has been trying to convince the government for the last five years of the strangling effect of bureaucracy, not only on business but on all aspects of Saskatchewan life. Sadly, this advice seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, speaking in general terms, I want to emphasize the view of our caucus that the goal of all legislation should be to make life easier and make life better for people. While this Bill does some commendable things, the substantive portions of it fail in this test. Rather than making the administration of schools easier, it makes it more difficult and makes it more complicated.

The Bill in its current form does not have the support of the SSTA, which the minister must acknowledge — or at least I hope she acknowledges — is a crucial partner to any of the government's education policies.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, barring any amendment by the government to the objectionable aspects of the Bill, I would urge the members of this Assembly to defeat this particular piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bill No. 73

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mrs. Teichrob that **Bill No. 73 — An Act to amend The Planning and Development Act, 1983** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since we adjourned debate on this Bill last week, we have had some more time to look at the specific amendments proposed by the NDP government.

We still believe that the majority of changes outlined in Bill 73 are housekeeping details. Although we have a few suggestions on the wording and some questions on these incidentals, we can wait until the Bill reaches the Committee of the Whole.

But, Mr. Speaker, after talking with some stakeholders and discussing the ramifications of these amendments, we do have some serious concerns. It is these concerns we would like to present to the Assembly today.

Mr. Speaker, The Planning and Development Act has a significant impact on so many areas of Saskatchewan life. It reaches people from all corners of the province and has a very substantial effect and impact on people living in the North.

The laws outlined, in both the original Act and in the proposed amendments, can affect the livelihoods of individuals, of families, and of communities. Brushing it off as a simple housekeeping Bill would be cheating the thousands of residents who could be affected by these changes.

Mr. Speaker, I understand the mandate behind the Bill. In 1983, when the Bill was originally introduced, the government of the day said The Planning and Development Act and its procedures will ensure that entrepreneurs are able to give physical form to their plans with a minimum of red tape while still protecting public interests.

Perfect, or so it sounds. Any time we can cut down on bureaucratic red tape, we're doing something right. And any time we can encourage entrepreneurs to expand and to develop the economy, it's a good sign. But let's face it — the present NDP government may applaud these words but their actions in the past five years have shown their true goal.

The people of this province are afraid that this government wants control over society. They think government wants to run the province because they know better. Well we believe that the government doesn't know better than the ordinary people of the province. We firmly believe that the power to make the decisions should be in the hands of the people.

We as elected officials, and particularly the members opposite as government, should be a vehicle of support for the people of Saskatchewan. When we stand up in this House to introduce legislation or to make amendments to old Bills we should be doing it on behalf of our constituents. I am particularly concerned that this Bill transfers even more power to the Minister of Municipal Government. It seems like this is a government pattern that is emerging in every new piece of legislation, and a pattern that sounds a signal of alarm to residents of this province.

Already the minister is flexing her muscles. Look at the issue of rural amalgamation. She is on a see-saw of power. One day she gives indications she will force municipalities to amalgamate; the next day she claims they will be free to make their own decisions. But then she and the Premier agree that amalgamation will be done.

These threats are part of this government's power-playing, political games. People of this province do not deserve to live under the minister's threats. They deserve to have a say in the issues affecting them. And it is the NDP government's responsibility to make sure they have a say. And it is our responsibility as official opposition to hold the government accountable to the people of this province.

If with this Bill we let the minister assume more power, we are saying that the provincial government should run things completely, that they do know what's best for our community completely, and we don't believe that's true.

As the legislation stands now, any decisions the minister makes have to be published in the *Gazette* within 15 days. Bill 73 repeals this section. That means the onus will be on individuals and municipalities to find out what these decisions are. And the minister can apparently make these decisions without consulting with the people involved. As far as I can tell, she can overrule decisions. For example, in the section regarding buffer strips, the amendment apparently gives the minister the right to authorize the sale of Crown property without consulting the affected municipality.

This government seems to think it doesn't have to be accountable to the people whatsoever. I think it should be accountable to the people, and if the members opposite took the time to ask their constituents, I'm sure those constituents would wholeheartedly agree with me.

Mr. Speaker, I also have some concerns about the appeal process. For example, let's say a person gets a permit to build a hog barn. He has his specifications approved and starts work. Halfway through the building, though, he makes some constructive changes. How restrictive is this Bill going to be? Is there any room for latitude? Or is it going to be strictly

enforced? Are projects going to be constantly entangled in red tape, because if they are, the whole reason for this Act becomes obsolete.

Mr. Speaker, I know this Act introduces another level of appeal called the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, and I think this is a positive thing. But I still worry that even slight deviations to a plan could get caught in the bureaucracy.

I would like the Minister of Municipal Government to explain the restrictions on building and how strict the parameters will be. If this Bill creates a more effective process for appeal, then we will support it. However if it just creates another level of bureaucracy, then we will oppose it and try to offer some positive options.

Unlike the members opposite, we don't believe more government is synonymous with good government. We want to create an atmosphere that encourages economic development. We want to see more businesses expanding, and we want to provide a simple, straightforward path for the entrepreneurs in our communities.

It is these people who will build on our progress. It is these people who will create jobs. This government certainly can't, no matter what numbers the Minister of Economic Development tries to pass off as true. In fact if the NDP government stepped back and gave business more freedom, maybe some of these optimistic projections would bear some fruit. Not only would the province be better off; this government wouldn't have to cover up a poor job-creation record with weak excuses.

Mr. Speaker, we aren't suggesting that environmental concerns be ignored for the sake of economic development. We are fully aware that a healthy environment is an essential part of a healthy community. We know that environmental considerations and the public good must be included in any plans. But we do worry that this legislation may be worded in a manner that environmental zealots could use it to prevent viable operation from being established.

(1530)

For example, in those same hog barns I mentioned earlier, what if someone was violently opposed to them being built for his or her own personal reasons? Could that person then use this law to come back and prevent an economically responsible project from being shut down? And if this happens, would the owner of the hog barns be forced to swallow the costs? These are questions worth addressing before this legislation is allowed to go through.

Mr. Speaker, as I have just emphasised, our main concern with this Bill is to ensure that the people of this province are not stifled by unnecessary over-government.

I must admit, Mr. Speaker, that we have still not had an adequate amount of time to fully explore the problems with the original Act and the potential problems of Bill 73. We have not yet had input from northern stakeholders, particularly regarding

Crown lands. I think this is essential if we plan to pass legislation that could affect them.

Mr. Speaker, we would like more time to talk to people, to examine the legal ramifications of these amendments, and to make sure that any changes are truly in the best interests of Saskatchewan people. I move that this debate be now adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 43 — An Act respecting the Development, Implementation and Operation of an Emergency 911 System and to make consequential amendments to other Acts

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

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On my right is Ron Davis, assistant deputy minister in the Department of Municipal Government. Right behind him is Jim Brickwell, a senior policy analyst in the department. And seated directly behind me is Diana Milenkovic, who is the vice-president of SaskTel Mobility, Mr. Chairman.

Clause 1

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just take a minute and welcome Ron and Jim and Diana, the officials with the minister, welcome you here today.

Madam Minister, as I think we have previously talked, that you know we have many concerns with the basic 911. I think I feel myself that when people out in the public realize that the 911 system that we are presenting here today is not enhanced and it is just a basic 911 system, they're going to be very disappointed.

My feeling is that basic 911 is really only a number of convenience, and then that is all it is. It doesn't include trained professionals at the end of the line when someone answers. It cannot run you through a problem such as a heart attack or a person choking. I think these are some of the things that are the best part of the enhanced 911, especially for people that are out in our areas in rural Saskatchewan that don't have access at close range to the health care facilities now. And I think this is a very important part to this Bill that is missing.

I think we must really insist that trained professionals be at the end of these phone lines to initiate the calls when they come in, but also to follow these calls through from the beginning of the call to the very end to see that these calls are received and handled in a professional manner to the benefit of the person on the other end.

I think out in rural Saskatchewan, the basic 911 concept may actually, in one way, create more problems than it helps. As I have said earlier, it is a convenient number. As we all know, it's

much simpler to dial 911 than it is that we have now.

But what I am worried about in our smaller communities, especially with volunteer fire brigades and the like, is that if the one call goes out from central to our fire brigades — and as you know, Madam Minister, they're not always the most organized people out there because they are volunteers and they have other jobs that have to come first — and what I'm worried about, that if a call gets lost, by the time the people at the end that initiated the call realize this, there could be a complete catastrophe at the other end, whether it's fire, police, or ambulance or whatever it is that they were calling for.

I think also where it's lacking by not being enhanced and only being a basic 911 system is the coordination between services. And I realize through the mapping system that's being set up, yes it will map to the specific people that are being called, whether it's police or who it is, but the coordination that I'm talking about, in the case of a bigger problem out there where we need both ambulance, police, possibly fire, the whole works, that . . . and I'm going by the example that in the south-west of the Swift Current area that have set one up and I think this is a model that we could all follow.

They have done a tremendous and an excellent job out there, these people, but the feedback we get on this enhanced system that they have, no matter what the call comes in the person at the end of the line answering that call can handle it, all hours of the day, and they're trained. And no matter what the problem is that comes in, they will guide you through it one way or another to the best of their ability. And I believe in many cases, as they can prove, have possibly saved a number of lives. Where I believe the basic 911 definitely would fall short in this area.

Again I think, Madam Minister, that this, especially in rural Saskatchewan, falls short. I would think I touched on this before, but I think many people out in the outskirts of the cities are going to realize . . . once they realize what 911 really is as it's presented here, and it's not enhanced, will be very disappointed and not really be willing to support in the funding of this project when they realize what they're receiving.

Madam Minister, I believe when it comes to urban and rural municipal governments also, when they're asked to fund 911, and I believe from the feedback that I have and I'm sure you will have had this too, that I don't think there's too much hesitation with them agreeing to take part in the funding if the program we are going to be providing is adequate to serve the people's needs. And again I'm suggesting that possibly the basic 911 is definitely short on this.

I talked of the amendments we will be presenting later, Madam Minister. Our second amendment, and we would like to make sure that all municipalities will also have input as this program is initiated, and I think what the second amendment, what we are talking here, is that the minister may set up a consultation process and we would hope that "shall" would be added there to make sure that this comes to fruition and that this really happens.

We have others that are going to speak to this, Madam Minister, and we have a number of questions, so I will be making the four amendments later on as the clauses come up. So I believe there's others that will speak to this and then we'll have questions, Madam Minister. Thank you.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Madam Minister, and officials, particularly Ron. I think it's been a number of years since the store hours committee was part of your responsibility and so I remember that quite fondly.

Madam Minister, I would like to start off really asking you to describe the level of service and the concept in detail of what you envisage the 911 system that you're proposing. What it will look like; how it will operate; what will its mandate be?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I thank the members opposite for sharing their concerns with respect to the legislation that is before us for discussion. And there are some elements of it that I would like to clarify.

First of all, the intent is to move toward a fully enhanced system, province-wide. There are two parts, obviously, to the 911 system. One is the hardware and the software that's required to make it physically possible. The second and most important part, and probably the most costly part in the end, is the operating end where you have those trained people in the enhanced model on a 24-hour-a-day basis, able to be at the other end of the line when someone calls 911. And the last thing that anyone would want to do — and I hear that reflected in your concerns and we agree — is to create any kind of false expectations about the level of service that you would get. There's nothing magical about 911; it's what response you get after you've dialled it that is critical. So that's why we do want to move to a fully enhanced system.

But because the whole province is not in the same state of readiness . . . as you know, we now have three centres who already have a fully enhanced 911 — Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert — where when a caller calls the 911 number, they're responded to by a 24-hour, manned call centre of trained people, who are able to muster very timely responses, because these are areas of concentrated population, concentrated services.

What we see is the . . . oh, I should have mentioned the south-west 911 as well. So there's really four; that one will be up and running. Then we've got North Battleford, Weyburn, Estevan, and Moose Jaw, who now provide a basic service and we expect that that will move to fully enhanced. We also have a number of projects, some of them within health districts right now, being organized by the health districts and ambulance companies that are using the 310-5000 number. These will be ready to be flipped over into the 911 as we make progress.

The problem with providing in the legislation for mandatory fully enhanced is that there will be more sparsely populated areas of the province that simply don't have the resources to make a sufficient contribution to have locally a call centre of trained people available 24 hours a day. That's the part of the cost that they can't afford. And so we need to make sure that as

the system develops — and we've talked about a three- to five-year time frame — that communities, health districts, groups of people, have the ability to come onto the provincial wide system in a coordinated way at whatever level of service or whatever level of participation that they'll be able to muster.

And of course our goal at the end of the day is a fully enhanced system province-wide, but we're not all of equal capability, in terms of municipal units or health districts, across the province to do that at the moment.

(1545)

And in terms of the volunteer responses in some of the smaller communities, my very first personal experience with first responders, for example, was the Warman Fire Department, which is fairly close to Saskatoon, and people would think of it, with three base hospitals there, as not being remote. Yet if you're 35 or 40 miles away from a base hospital sometimes that first responder being there in the instance of a heart attack or a choking incident, or something like that, makes all the difference.

And rather than being uncoordinated and so forth, I found that there has been a very concentrated effort in recent years to improve the qualifications and the training of those volunteers. They certainly need a lot of credit in that they've taken that to a large degree into their own hands, to develop the training courses for themselves to increase their qualifications. And with the help of the municipalities that support them with funding, to equip themselves to be able to respond to emergencies in a very professional way.

So that is . . . in a nutshell, the intent is that it should be fully enhanced when it's fully developed. But at the same time, we have to recognize there is some areas of the province that don't have the population or the resources to have manned, 24-hour-manned, professional call centres, you know, really close together. So we have to use the resources of the health districts and the municipalities that are able to so that people can come onto the system when they reach a state of readiness.

And that's the objective. But we don't want to put it in the legislation that you can't be part of the system unless you're fully enhanced, because that way we would be shutting out the opportunity for some parts of the province to take part at all.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. If I gathered what you're speaking of here, you envisage these call centres to be locally based. Surely, with the technology we have of digital telephone systems now and in light of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) announcing that they're moving to centralized call centres, that we could look at a centralized call centre, which would completely make your argument about the small, local . . . small population bases needing to support a call centre irrelevant.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, we must have a misunderstanding here because now the members opposite are saying that they don't have vision for local call centres, that the technology obviously doesn't require this, and that's the same

thing as I'm saying.

I'm saying we don't envisage a call centre in every town, for example. But also we don't want to preclude the participation of large parts of the province that might be sparsely populated because they can't meet whatever conditions we might put in the legislation for the definition of enhanced. But our goal is to have as fully enhanced a system as practical. And we will take our advice, as we move along, from the advisory committee that we plan to appoint pursuant to the legislation as soon as it is passed.

Mr. Gantefer: — I still think we're misconnecting, Madam Minister, because as I understand this system or any system, is that with technology the way we have it now, there could virtually be one call centre for the whole of the province of Saskatchewan. The only consideration would be is perhaps staffing and how many people you'd need to answer the volume of calls coming in to that one call centre.

And I don't understand that if a call came from Podunk, Saskatchewan, population 1, if that call comes in to that call centre, would be routed through the SaskTel digital system, that that person wouldn't have equal access to a fully enhanced EMT (emergency medical technician) technician to keep that communication open while appropriate emergency responses are dispatched, recognizing that in some of the more isolated areas of the province that those responses may be a little longer coming because of the distances and sparsity. But surely the two-way communication could happen anywhere in the province from as few a number as one call centre.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well I think, Mr. Chairman, we're saying exactly the same thing. I'm saying that's possible, with the technology, to have one call centre for the whole province. However, we're recognizing that we already have three centres that have fully enhanced and some that are, you know, the basic 911, and we're not proposing by this legislation to do away with those. We hope that at some point we'll all be part of one system.

But we're saying the same thing in different ways. We know that that technology is possible. It's possible to have one call centre for the whole province; I don't think that's particularly desirable in terms of response time. But our objective is to have a fully enhanced system throughout the province.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you. We've been joined by a number of former members of this House, one of whom is seated behind the government benches. It's Wes Robbins, a member from Saskatoon. Wes was — thank you, Wes — Wes was a member of the caucus and a member of cabinet renowned for his ability with figures. He had quite a memory for figures and amounts and would often astound the House by knowing the precise amount of something. I'm delighted to see you back,

Wes, and hope you enjoy your day.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to join with my colleague in welcoming Wes Robbins to the floor of the legislature today. As has been stated, Wes Robbins represented the constituency of Saskatoon Nutana — which I now represent — for many years in the 1970s and early 1980s. And I can attest to the fact that he is well-known for his gift with numbers, and he certainly would make an excellent Minister of Finance if he were running in an election today. So I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming him here once again.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 43 (continued)

Clause 1

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A minute ago we were having a hard time agreeing on what we were discussing there, Madam Minister. I would suggest possibly we had a broken line.

Madam Minister, the Melville area — they have a group out there that are also, as I'm sure you are aware of, are trying to set up an enhanced 911, and they've done a lot of work on it. Can you tell me where these people would come in now? They're not set up as of now, but they're definitely almost to that point. Can you tell me how they would fit it with this new program now? How would you class them, not as enhanced, or enhanced?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the procedure would be that, in various parts of the province that do not have 911, that they would send in a proposal which would be considered by the advisory committee and others, and the objective being that, as quickly as possible, as many areas as possible would be able to become part of the new system.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Okay, that brings me then to the south-west area who already organized, are up and running great, and . . . talks about in the Bill when they're grandfathered out or when they're brought on board here — how can they be brought on board when they're already enhanced? Like how would they fit in with this program? Will they not be brought on until the whole system eventually . . . if I understand you, Madam Minister, I hope what you're saying is that eventually everyone will be under an enhanced system in time. Will they not be brought on board until that time?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the south-west region is not yet fully enhanced. Fully enhanced means that the complete locator ingredients are there so that every caller who

calls 911, their location comes up on the screen. And the precursor to that is complete mapping with complete addresses.

I could just add here to that, the way it works on cellular is that the locator system would show the tower, but the cell phone operator would have to verbally identify the exact location of where they were.

So they're not quite fully enhanced yet; they're moving that way. And it's the same as these areas in some of the health districts that have organized themselves using the 310 -5000. At some point they will be able to become part of the system. They're still in the development phase. And that's the same situation that exists in the south-west right now.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. One more question. I'm having a hard time understanding though how they would become a part of the new 911 system that we're having proposed here when they are enhanced. Like are they going to lose that enhancement or how are they going to fit in with this program? Because I'm very sure those people are not going to be happy coming in and losing what they've already been used to, with a professional on the end of the line, joining up with what we're seeing proposed here, with having actually a non-professional on the end of the telephone, at least to start with.

So I'm trying to understand how we're discussing them being brought on board. And I'm sure they're not going to go along with this plan.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I think what we're having here is a problem with the definition of enhanced. And let me put it this way from our point of view. That with enhanced 911, the location of the caller's phone is displayed, along with the phone number, at the 911 centre. With basic 911, the location is not sent, just the call line identification, which may not be the actual phone number.

So the province-wide 911 service offers a single button transfer to the appropriate emergency response agency. So there's a choice of three buttons. There'd be three; there's ambulance, fire, police. And that's versus the over 600 buttons or the speed call numbers. So that's the important part of any wide area 911 system that has a number of different emergency response vehicles. So I think maybe we could understand each other if we appreciate what the definition of enhanced is.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. First of all I want to deal with the fact that I think there's two key promises that relate to 911 in one way or another that I'd like to have some clarification on.

First of all, the promise that was made to provide VLT (video lottery terminal) revenue to municipalities, which is part of this whole debate and discussion . . . and now we're providing a service which had already been committed previously as a partial fulfilment of the VLT revenues.

Out of that, three questions. What would the estimated revenues to municipalities have been from VLT revenues? How does the cost of this service compare with those revenues? And wouldn't

you agree there's quite a difference between the promised VLT revenues and the provision of this service?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I did not see because he was sitting directly behind me . . .

The Chair: — Does the Government House Leader wish to have leave?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I indeed wish for leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much. I did not see the former Speaker because he's sitting directly behind the member from Estevan. But we are joined today by the former Speaker. I'd ask Mr. Rolfes to rise and be recognized again.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1600)

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I don't know how nostalgic the former Speaker is feeling these days about his days here. Some days it goes relatively smoothly, and some days you're probably going to be just as happy you're not back as Speaker. But we certainly welcome Mr. Rolfes.

He was here during a difficult period actually. We had such things as the GRIP debate, and Mr. Rolfes was here during a difficult period. I always thought he discharged those duties very well. I never actually had an opportunity to say it because we never had an opportunity when he was in the House to sort of say goodbye. So I want to take the opportunity now to thank Herman for four years of, I think, very good work as a Speaker, and I think he was Speaker during some very difficult times.

Thanks, Herman.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — I ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Our caucus would like to join with the Government House Leader in welcoming Wes Robbins to the House today and also the former Speaker. And I fully agree with the Government House Leader that in fact that government did create a lot of problems, not only for the Speaker but for the people of the province.

But we do realize that Mr. Rolfes had some very interesting times, and we welcome him here today to join with a more relaxed period now that they've calmed themselves somewhat.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 43
(continued)

Clause 1

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — To go back to the exchange that we were having in the Committee of the Whole on the 911, Mr. Speaker, and the questions that the member from Rosthern had posed is that the VLT revenues were never, ever promised or committed for this particular purpose. The municipal organizations, SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), and SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) were asked to make recommendations on how the money could be returned to . . . some money, 9.5 million in last year's budget, could be returned to communities — not municipalities, but communities.

In many months of deliberation, the only consensus that this group was able to arrive at was the need for the provincial 911 emergency response service. So from the \$9.5 million, \$2.4 million was devoted to the GIS (geographic information systems), the provincial mapping exercise which is required for the location function of the 911, particularly in rural areas.

Then \$3 million was dedicated, through an order in council some weeks ago, for the enhancement to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) police radio system which enables them to act as the call centre. Then there will be a commitment over the time frame of approximately \$5.6 million; that's in terms of the investment that SaskTel will have to make. So this comes to a total so far of 11.3 million which is greater than the percentage of the VLT revenues that was originally in the budget last year.

So that money, as I said, was never specifically earmarked for that purpose. But being the only consensus that the groups could come to, those amounts were taken out and dedicated for this use.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I now see we are joined by the former member from . . . I think the riding was called Pelly when Mr. Lusney was there. We've been joined by Mr. Lusney.

Mr. Lusney was first elected in a by-election; I think, it was 1977. It was a by-election that we were thankful to win. We went on a few months later to win the general election in '78, and I tell you, we were concerned about it when it came.

Mr. Lusney served ably for some years, including the years in opposition. From 1982 to 1986, the opposition consisted of the so-called gang of eight. There will always be a special bond, I think, between the eight of us who served during that difficult period. I never see any one of them but what a flood of

memories don't come back.

I welcome Norm Lusney warmly today. Norm.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 43 (continued)

Clause 1

Mr. Heppner: — The previous two people asking questions comment on the fact that there was a problem of communication and cut lines. I think there must have been a similar problem between SUMA, SARM, and the minister because they were fully in belief that they were getting that money. So it's a rather interesting cut there.

Madam Minister, do you think that you've damaged the credibility of your department and government by renegeing on those VLT promises? And what reasons would you give the municipalities to trust your promises in the future?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure how germane this particular question is to the issue of 911 emergency service in the province, but I will say this: that in these times of fiscal restraint and in these times of offloading by senior levels of government where we back-fill dollar for dollar the federal cuts in health care for example, that's it's unreasonable to think that we would leave a sum of money just sitting in a fund somewhere where people couldn't make a decision on how they wanted it to be spent.

The opportunity was given from early 1995 for almost a year, until early 1996, to come up with some tangible way of returning this money to communities. The only consensus that was able to be reached was this one: that 911 was a priority for all of those groups. We acted on what they identified as their priority. The results are here before you today in terms of this Bill and in terms of the financial commitments that we've already . . . not only commitments made but money expended in terms of that.

So I don't think it's a matter of credibility at all, Mr. Chairman. We have asked them for their views. We have responded to what they have identified as the most important initiative that they had agreed on, and the result is what is before us today.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. The comment of back-filling is an interesting one. We had offloading, and you take credit for back-filling. Now you've offloaded on SUMA and SARM, and I guess they'll have to back-fill out of the back pockets of the people down there.

Something which is fairly close to the constituency that I'm from . . . If we're doing some work with 911 and looking at service districts, telephone exchanges, and these sorts of things, are we also prepared to review the size of telephone exchanges as well while we're sort of looking at this whole issue?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the size of telephone exchanges is under review. There are approximately 345 telephone exchanges. Some of them are very small. And as the member probably knows, it's because of the way that our telephone system evolved, where there were small cooperatives and local associations who built the lines and operated their local telephone companies.

When they eventually became part of the SaskTel network or the provincial network, some of them were . . . I'm sure of the exact date, but I think it's not more than about 15 years ago that the last ones actually became part of the provincial network. I can remember being the secretary of our local telephone company, the Moon Lake Telephone Company, until I believe about 1976 or thereabouts.

We recognize this as a problem, and work is being done on it; however, it isn't simple, and it is not inexpensive. But we are making progress on it, and we hope to have some announcements on some realignment of at least some of the boundaries, the very smallest exchanges, in the fairly near future.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I think this is one of those places where amalgamation is working from the grass roots up, and you'll probably get a whole lot more support than you had on some of the other ideas.

A question regarding display of addresses on 911 service, this was supposed to happen this term. It seems to have been put off till some unspecified time. I'm wondering if there is a time line in place to have that all in place.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, if I understand the question correctly, the geographic information services that are required to provide the complete enhanced service, including the location which will be indicated when a caller calls 911, is going to be an evolutionary thing.

And of course those urban areas that already have complete addresses and so on are already enhanced, and work will continue.

That's what we mean by saying that it is a three- to five-year time frame. And in order to make the fully enhanced service available, the full addressing or the mapping service is a precursor to that.

Mr. Heppner: — I'm glad it's in the works. And I just feel that it's unfortunate that this time rural Saskatchewan is left out, being in second place for a substantial period of time.

Dealing with the operation and administration of this particular system, how much . . . if a board will be established to supervise policies and implementation, will municipalities be able to select representatives to that administrative board, and how will those representatives be chosen?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, we're just having some discussion here about the future advisory committee. But the advice that we took from the Emergency Services Advisory

Committee that was in place previous to the drafting had representation from SUMA and SARM. And they have both indicated a desire to participate in the development of this as it moves forward.

We had representation from SAHO, the health organizations; the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations); the existing enhanced 911 areas, being Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and the developing south-west region. There were senior government officials from Municipal Government, Health, SaskTel, Justice. And we would want . . . Nothing is cast in stone. We would want to make sure that some emergency service providers and other relevant personnel whose advice would be valuable would be included in the advisory committee.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I would just like to ask you, if in the event that SaskTel is privatized, how would this affect your plans for this 911 service?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, this is not to be a subsidized service. There has to be a cost recovery of the 911 service as SaskTel is moving in that direction, not on the basis of any privatization initiative but because of the competitive aspect of the business environment that they're now operating in which represents, as you know, a departure from the past.

So as this is developed, it's always borne in mind that there is no subsidy to this service, that it would at least be at cost recovery. So it shouldn't make any difference what the mandate of the company is, that surely any corporate citizen in the form of a telephone company operating in the province of Saskatchewan would realize the value that this initiative has to the people of the province, and that as long as there was full cost recovery for the service, it shouldn't make any difference.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I would further like to ask that if in fact SaskTel is privatized, what would happen to the appropriation of the VLT 10 per cent funding that you have promised towards 911? And would the appropriation of these monies then be disbursed to the telephone companies involved?

(1615)

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, there is absolutely no tie in the future to any revenue from VLTs and the 911 system or its development.

And I hasten to add that I wouldn't want to presume what the outcome of the Crown review will be, but we're certainly not proceeding on the basis that there will be a privatization of SaskTel. The role of SaskTel in the business economy of Saskatchewan and Canada and the social role that it may have to play will all be considered by the terms of the Crown review that everyone is aware of and that will be taking place over the months in 1996. And I see no reason why the activities of the review will have any effect in any way upon the development of the 911 system.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, then if telephone companies would not be subsidized in any way or form in the event of privatization, can we get some assurance from the minister and the present government that the 10 per cent funding that was promised to municipalities would then be reinstated to those municipalities in some way or form for their benefit?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, it was announced that there would not be an appropriation from the VLTs for that, the purpose that was thought of or the notion in 1995 when the original allocation was made. The organizations were not able to agree on a tangible way that they all could find consensus on for how the money could be used.

Now the money is going into the General Revenue Fund which is being . . . and so from there it's being used to back-fill the federal cuts in health, in education, in social services. If that money wasn't being used for those purpose out of the General Revenue Fund, then the tax bill, the property tax bill, the education bill, at the local level, would be higher; there's no doubt about it. And so in that sense that money is being returned to all the people of the province, but independent completely of the 911 initiative.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, in view of the cutting to municipalities, the funding cuts to municipalities, I am positive that should the 10 per cent be reinstated for the use of municipalities, that you can be sure that they would find some very even-handed ways of distributing this money in order to help municipalities run efficiently. Thank you.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — I just want to state again that around the language of how the VLT money could be spent with the advice of the municipal and health organizations of the province, the word municipality was never used. It was to be returned to the community, the larger community, in some way that they could identify. And frankly I can't think of a better initiative than this, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Heppner: — With this process being sort of a made in Saskatchewan process, my question is how will the effectiveness of this service be assessed? Like who is going to make judgement calls on it as to how well it is working and where it needs improvements?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I would assume there'd be a couple of levels of this. The members of the advisory committee which would include I would think, service providers, would measure the effectiveness from their point of view, but at the end of the day the true effectiveness of the system has to be judged by the public, by the user of the system. And if they feel comfortable and secure and well served by it, then it would be deemed a success.

Mr. Heppner: — What further technical requirements, Madam Minister, will be made of local ambulance and police departments to enable them to work in conjunction with this particular system? Do you have any idea how much those technical requirements would cost and who's going to be

responsible for those costs?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, one of the positive aspects of this initiative is that it will provide a consistent provincial framework for all emergency service providers and their communication needs. And they will be able to . . . well just the same as they are now.

Some of these systems are funded by health districts; some of them are funded by municipalities; some communities have fund-raising events. There's just a whole range of ways that money is raised for these purposes. And some, the new one in the south-west, there will be a service fee on the telephone bill. So there's just . . . as many systems as there are out there right now, there are different ways of funding them and different ways of enhancing them.

But, for instance, on the matrix that I've seen a demonstration of, or on the system, my rural legal location was punched in in this case, because it was a hands-on demonstration where there wasn't a call line to call in. And a map of the province was scrolled up and a light came on right where my rural residence is.

And then it's framed and moves up closer and it says . . . a matrix comes up for this location saying, for this location the fire number is this, the police number is this, and the ambulance number is this. Or in this case the operator, say an RCMP officer in his car, would just press the appropriate button to put it through to the response that has been identified as the need.

So the next step, I'm told, is that there could be mobile units in all emergency vehicles that would indicate . . . When I called in, the operator at the call centre or in the car would see not only where my location is and what the appropriate responses are, but there would be an indication that there might already be an emergency vehicle of some type in very close proximity to my location.

And the technology is unfolding and changing as we speak, and of course it gets more and more affordable all the time as well.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, you partially answered the question in the direction that I was going to head in in questions, in terms of describing the system as you envisage it.

And I understand that you're saying that the first step in this process, or an important initial step in this process is the mapping of the locations. Can you tell me, please, what the time line is on this part of the program and what its approximate cost will be?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the entire GIS, the \$2.4 million that was allocated for the mapping, has not been completely expended yet, and so, I mean, it's a system that is being built. So when a community or a health district or a region indicates that they're ready to put together all of the elements that are required to bring their area into the provincial 911 system, then the mapping will be part of that. There's addressing, mapping, the communications system — all the

parts. And that's why we're saying that there's a three- to five-year timetable to put all the pieces together.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, if I understand that right, then until . . . let's use Melfort as an example. If Melfort has not indicated, or the Melfort health district or whatever the appropriate authority is representing the community of Melfort, using that as an example, if they have not indicated to this process that they are ready to join the 911 system, then the mapping does not take place; will they then, in that time, be excluded from any 911 service?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, there are a number of components that have to go together in order for an area, whether it's like the town of Melfort, city of Melfort, or whether it's a rural area like the south-west, that all have to be brought together including, you know, the . . . And it's not enough to just have the addressing. Like it has to be entered into the database that is compatible with the computer hardware and software in the telephone system.

So there's a lot of work to be done to bring all of the elements together. And when communities indicate that they're ready and they need advice to make sure that they've got everything that they need in place to be part of the province-wide system, then they would so indicate to the advisory board. And the timing of bringing areas into the provincial system, and the staging of it, would be determined at that level.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. Well let's again, using Melfort as the example because it's familiar, let's assume then that the community has indicated to the 911 system that they're interested and that this mapping process of that community . . . and I recognize that that could be any community in rural areas or whatever, and we recognize that that community is now included into the 911 system. And if I as a person having a residence in that community then dial 911, will you tell me, step by step, what happens?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well the vision is that — and it's a big technical job to do this — but the vision would be that, just say that there's going to be one . . . there's no call centre right now that would be available in Melfort. So there would be the one that's going to be established, outside of the ones that there currently are, would be the RCMP call centre in Regina for example.

So first of all you would have to have Melfort all addressed. You would have to have all the SaskTel hardware in place. You would have to have the database of the information relative to Melfort. You'd have to have that all done. Then someone . . . you'd have to be aware of what all the emergency responses available in Melfort were and where they were and what the numbers were to access them and so forth. And then someone dialling 911 would get the call centre who would have the location. Then all these other things, having been in place, determine the appropriate response and would have the facility to stay on the line until the connection was made with the appropriate response.

(1630)

Mr. Gantefer: — Okay, Minister, I appreciate all these things that have to come together in order to make any 911 system effective and functioning.

When that call goes into the call centre, I would think that it really is irrelevant if that call centre is in Melfort or in Regina. With the technology, that would be transparent. It really doesn't matter where that call is directed, isn't that correct?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — That is correct, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Gantefer: — Well I recognize that you say that like, for example, Prince Albert, who has a fully enhanced 911 system existing and has their own call centre, that it may be appropriate for the calls in that existing 911, fully enhanced 911 system to continue to go to that call centre. What you're providing here, as I understand it, is a call centre system that would cover all the rest of us in the province.

Using Melfort as an example again, when that call goes into this call centre — Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, wherever it's feasibly determined that that should be — as I understood from an answer you gave to a previous member, that the computer screen would come on and would indicate that it is a location in Melfort. The screen would expand and show that button A is the fire number, button B is the ambulance number, button C is the police number, button D is whatever — that might be . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . There's only the three? Health, police and fire? Okay.

So then what you do . . . the operator then would determine from the nature of the call if they push A, B, C, or any combinations, is that correct?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, that's correct. And the reason . . . It's a good example that you raise — the Melfort, Prince Albert, for example. Like it would be, I suppose, reasonably practical, given the distance between those two centres to, for example, include Melfort in Prince Albert's area. Melfort might contribute something towards the cost of operating the call centre in Prince Albert. You know, some arrangement could be made.

The danger in that is that in other communities that are farther away from where there already is a service, or where it's simply not practical for them to join up with somebody else, that there is a possibility by letting these things develop, these kind of alliances develop, that we would end up with a number of systems in the province that were not compatible with each other in terms of the kind of hardware . . . computer hardware and software they use.

And there might also be great gaps in service to the rest of rural and northern Saskatchewan, which would be really unfortunate.

Mr. Gantefer: — I'm less impressed than the hon. member is. If for example that same call came from Zenon Park, further out and more remote, I fail to understand why there is any difference because of the technology, where the call comes from or where the call centre is located. Is that not all totally transparent with the digital network that SaskTel now has in

place?

I don't follow the argument about . . . it shouldn't matter on the call, if it comes from the most remote community in Saskatchewan. Where the call centre is answered at should be totally irrelevant. It's much more important is where the nearest emergency respondent service is, not anything to do with the call centres.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, that is the important thing. And again, we're talking about the same thing. All I'm saying is that, in the absence of this legislation which provides the framework and establishes that there'll be one call centre for those that are not served now, you might have areas of population that are large enough to provide an enhanced service for themselves. And then there might not be enough population or enough cohesion among the people that were left out of those arrangements, to make a provincial service affordable. So that's basically the reason for this legislation.

You're right, like it doesn't matter where the call comes from. But if you have too many systems develop on their own, covering just a local area and leaving out fringe areas, you could foresee a scenario where those fringe areas didn't have enough population or were too far apart to support a self-financing, at least, participation in the 911.

Mr. Gantefer: — Except that . . . I mean if we're in agreement that it doesn't matter where the call comes from and it doesn't matter where the call is received at or answered at, then why would that make any difference if the call comes from 2 miles outside of Saskatoon or 2 miles from the Manitoba border? Because once the connection is made, once you make the digital linkages through SaskTel's network, there's no cost differential between where that cost originates from on the cost side. Like from the 911 call going to a 911 responder operator, surely there's no cost difference on that instance.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — No, Mr. Chairman, and that's not the point. The point is just that in order to justify a call centre that can be comprehensive for the province, if a number of independent call centres were allowed to develop all over the province wherever there was sufficient population to support it, then a call centre that could serve those who were left out of that process might not be viable. That's what I'm saying.

Mr. Gantefer: — Well then surely that's the responsibility of the provincial government to make sure a call centre system is all comprehensive to all citizens of this province, not just to the ones that happen to be sitting next to Prince Albert or Saskatoon or Regina. And surely, that that's the whole motivation of a 911 system, is first of all that it is something that all residents of the province have equal access to. And that's why I'm trying to make the point. It doesn't matter where that call originates from if you exercise your responsibility for establishing call centres. If the call centre . . . if there was only one here in Regina, and in order to look after that one citizen out in the most remote corner of the province . . . that it'd just be one more call in comparison to the thousand or 500 or whatever each operator would handle in a day.

So I'm trying to make the point that surely the cost of the system coming from the originator of the 911 emergency call to the call centre is not a critical factor with the technology that SaskTel now has.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Yes. Well, Mr. Chairman, again we're agreeing. That's exactly the purpose of this legislation, is to make sure that every person in Saskatchewan has access to a response, a qualified response, when he or she dials 911. And so we're completely on the same page in this.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Not quite. What you've indicated to me so far is that a major component of the cost of this is (1) the cost of mapping and identifying all the locations throughout the province; (2) the technological side of it which is the hardware, the database, the software and things of that nature that you have to put into place; (3) the establishment of call centres with the equipment that shows the location of the call, and then, I guess, where we say okay, now the matrix comes up and what the numbers are of the three main areas. And you have an individual sitting there, at the other end of that screen in whatever call centre it is, to answer that call.

Would you say that the things that I've outlined are the critical components of the system as you're outlining it and that that represents the very greatest cost of the whole system?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, basically we would agree with that. The part that is missing is — what we're taking for granted — is the communications infrastructure, and that's where, you know, a lot of technical work has to be done. And that's why some of the Maritime provinces are — they have a much smaller area than we do — are working at this initiative at the same time. It's technically quite complicated and it takes some time.

Mr. Gantefoer: — I appreciate the difficulty that you have here. And I guess where I'm heading in this, is that where I have a great deal of concern between what you're proposing, where you end up with all of this effort, all of this work, all of the technology being brought to bear and all you end up with is a call-forwarding station in essence, where the very next step to get to what you defined as the fully enhanced system is to have, instead of a telephone operator at the other end of the line, is a fully trained emergency measures technician who can provide on-line counselling to the individual that's initiated that 911 call. That's a critical component of it.

And while that is happening, then that person has the technology that indicates — as you said, is technically possible by putting the locators in emergency vehicles — that on that same screen that you discussed earlier, that they know that if it's coming from my residence and an ambulance or a police car happens to be two blocks away, that they know that that's the most appropriate person to direct to that emergency situation as indicated.

I recognize that if you're in Zenon Park or out in remote areas of the province, that the likelihood of that response time is going to be much greater because of the scarcity of population and the availability of services. I recognize that. But that makes

it even more important that there is the live, on-line advice in order for that person to try to deal with the emergency.

And surely we're still talking to people and surely we're now talking to get that last step, to a fully enhanced 911 system being not the most significant part of the overall cost of this project.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, this is exactly the reason that we're providing for the advisory committee. People that are working in the emergency service area will be members of that committee, will give us advice on that.

But what you're describing is my vision of an enhanced service. So I think that we're agreeing on that.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I want to, with leave, make an introduction.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much. I would like the House to recognize a former member from Regina for many years, former colleague in cabinet and a Finance minister. Those are the good old days, Walter, when we had lots of money. I want Walter Smishek to rise and be acknowledged.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Walter Smishek came out of a trade union background and worked with the RWDSU (Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union), went on to serve in a number of portfolios and indeed was minister of Finance for some years. Walter proved himself to be a person of many skills and many talents before he finally left.

Thanks, Walter, for coming.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 43 (continued)

Clause 1

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I recognize that what you're saying is that you're making a commitment to us today in terms of where you're heading. But that is not anywhere in this legislation, in terms of where you're heading.

All what we're getting is a description of this sort of matrix 911 system, and that isn't what people are going to expect when they dial 911. Because what we've ended up doing is short-changing people into believing that they're going to get a 911 system, not as you're describing it, but as they've come to believe it exists. And 911's top-of-mind awareness if you like, in people's mind, does not come from anything you or I say. It probably comes from television in terms of saying if they dial

911, and how many people wouldn't expect that there's going to be helicopters and everything else arriving?

But certainly they expect to have someone at the other end of the line that is more than a glorified telephone operator who has only the training to decide to punch one of three buttons. Surely we need an operator that has a lot more technical background in emergencies, and I don't understand why that is such a leap compared to what you're putting into place.

How much more would it cost to have fully trained EMT technicians on the other end of that 911 call?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I thank the member opposite for his advice. And it's exactly this kind of detail that we'll be looking to the members of the advisory committee, who are from the health organizations and people that are engaged in emergency response, to help us design exactly the kind of a system that he describes, because that's what comes within the definition of fully enhanced.

(1645)

Mr. Gantefoer: — Then I suspect, from your response, that you have no problem supporting the amendments that we're going to make that defines the answering point as a fully enhanced 911 answering point.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I think we already addressed this point in questioning by a member earlier, is that while it certainly is our goal to end up with, at the end of the development phase, a fully enhanced system responsive to the needs of all of the people in Saskatchewan, be they rural or urban, and the one thing that one must be very careful to do — which is why we keep on stressing that it's a three- to five-year implementation process, that it is very detailed and complicated — is that the worst thing we could do is to raise people's expectations of what kind of response they'd get when they dialled that emergency number and have that response be less than adequate. That would be very undesirable.

So that is why we will be looking to the members of the advisory committee for advice in how to design that. But again, that's why we can't incorporate that into the legislation because then we would be precluding parts of the province, who are not completely ready to take part at that level of service, from coming on the system until they've achieved that. And we think that with care and with listening to the advice of the advisory committee, that we will be able to have a system that meets the needs of all the people in Saskatchewan, rural as well as urban.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Well, Minister, I'm sorry but I think that by the very day that you proclaim this legislation in the form that you're proposing it, you are going to then build the expectations in people's minds that there is a 911 system in place, and there is not. There is no further 911 system with this legislation the day after it's proclaimed than what we have right now, and yet you'll have created the expectations that throughout this province that there's a 911 system. And the simple truth is there is not.

And that's why I do not understand why your government does not have the ability to make the commitment at this time to the fully enhanced service. I recognize that you can't snap your fingers or wiggle your nose and it's instantly going to happen. We recognize that. But surely it's an important commitment to the people of this province to embody in this legislation the commitment that what you're going to end up with is a fully enhanced 911 system and that that should be able to be embodied in the legislation so that there are no false expectations of what's happening.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, you know there are some things that you can't legislate, and part of what we need to build this system is partnerships. And like we have some three municipalities in the province already that have a fully enhanced system, one that's moving towards that, a number of people that have basic systems, a number of people who are not even close to having a system; some health districts that are going ahead on the basis of using another temporary number for the time being.

And so I think it's very important that first of all we establish the government's commitment to providing the framework that the legislation provides. We will then, having made that commitment, then work with members of the advisory committee, with the other partners that are necessary to make the system fully enhanced. And then we will incrementally move in that direction, providing resources where necessary, acting cooperatively with all the other people and elements that are necessary, in order to move towards the system that serves everybody at the highest level.

But we do keep stressing that it is a three- to five-year timetable in order to do this and that there are many other players in the system, and their needs and the investments that they've made so far and their advice as to the expectations and the mechanics of the system that will serve the people of Saskatchewan in the best possible way needs to be taken into account.

So we acknowledge that the legislation is a first step that indicates our commitment, and then the development of the system that will meet everyone's needs is a partnership that has to be developed over a three- to five-year time frame.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, I absolutely accept your commitment that you've given here today in terms of your government's intention of moving towards a fully enhanced 911 system. *Hansard* will show that in the record, but excuse me, I would rather have it in the legislation, because we've had an Agriculture minister in the past say that you wouldn't have to pay back the GRIP bills and we know what happened with that.

So despite the pronouncements of ministers, it's not necessarily that's what's going to end up being delivered to the people of this province. And if the commitment that you're making today is indeed there, and I am not questioning it, why are you not willing to put that commitment down in legislation? And if it requires a time limit extension in order to make that commitment reality, surely that that could be a commitment that you're prepared to make in the writing of the legislation.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the problem with the approach that the member opposite describes is that this is incremental; it is developmental; it needs to have a lot of working together of the partners in order to devise the best possible system.

You're not going to wave a magic wand and have a 911 system wall to wall in Saskatchewan. And so we need to provide a framework that's practical, that can be built on through those partnerships and with the incremental investment and incremental development work.

So if we pass the kind of legislation that contemplates an instant enhanced 911 across the province, that would be the biggest barrier towards getting there, because the whole province is not ready at this time for it. So this is why we're providing the framework and moving with our partners towards that goal.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, I appreciate what you're saying, but nowhere in the legislation does it make that kind of a commitment to moving even towards a fully enhanced 911 system. What it defines is what is the only obligation that you will have, is that you end up with a minimal answering point that is a glorified call forwarding or call despatching kind of a service, and that's the only commitment you're making.

I am again asking why your government is not prepared to make that commitment. I recognize that it can't happen instantaneously, but I don't understand why you're not, in the legislation, willing to make the commitment to the fully enhanced 911 system.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, it's quite simple actually — is that the government is not the only partner in building this system. And so what we need to do and what we are doing here is providing the framework. The people of Saskatchewan have spoken through the municipal organizations, and through SAHO, the health organizations, that they have identified this as a high priority for themselves.

A questionnaire was used somewhere about a year ago in soliciting the views of people as to what kind of a system they thought would serve them the best and how it could be funded and how it should be organized and so on. And we're responding to that. And as I said in response to another member's question, at the end of the day the people who will make the judgement as to whether this is a successful system or not will be the users, the people of Saskatchewan.

And so we have faith in them. We'll get feedback from them, we'll get the advice from the advisory committee, and within the framework that we're providing by the legislation we will move towards the best possible level of service for the people of Saskatchewan and they will be the judge of that.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Minister, I think that in parts of your legislation that you define that you can require certain partnerships or certain stakeholders to participate in the terms of this whole process of 911. And I accept that logic, because you can't have a patchwork thing where there could be

compliance or non-compliance, participation or non-participation. And any of the arguments that you've made so far to define the system that is going only part of the way are the same arguments that you would make if you were going to go to the full, enhanced system.

Your people have consulted with people. They've talked to the 911 committee in the north-east and they have said that this does not go far enough. What they need is a fully enhanced system. And my question is this again — why will you not commit to the fully enhanced system, recognizing it'll take time, recognizing all the partners have to be put into place. But why will you not exercise the leadership that you should have, and saying clearly within the legislation that this is where we're going?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well part of the reason, as I've said, is that the whole province is not ready all at the same time. Everybody is not in the same stage of readiness, be it a health district, a rural area, a city, one of the large cities, the small cities and towns; they're not all at the same state of readiness. And so we need to work with them and we are showing leadership in terms of saying, here's the framework; we're willing to work with partners to bring us all to the state that we want to be in at the end of the day, which is the best possible level of service.

The committee reported progress.

Committee of Finance

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

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