

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 92 — An Act respecting Elections

The committee reported progress.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Environment and Resource Management
Vote 26

Item 1

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, you were making some comments before the notification of supper brutally came in between our debate here and brought us to attention. But, Mr. Minister, a couple of things you commented about that I want to bring to your attention, just for your information, in case as a farmer you're not totally aware of these things.

You made comments about the fact that the reasons a lot of the wildlife people and why the Environment doesn't allow controlled grazing on wildlife land is because you want to protect the habitat. You don't want duck nests destroyed because of livestock walking through that land, or you don't want to destroy the few lady's slippers that happen to come up in the spring.

The facts are, Mr. Minister, we're not talking of grazing, say the first part of May; we're talking of maybe getting into grazing the middle to the end of June. By then if the ducks haven't hatched . . . those ducks nests and those ducks haven't hatched, they're not going to hatch. The lady's slippers have basically bloomed, and they've gone into hibernation for the rest of the year.

So I think, Mr. Minister, all those little, if you will, the animal lovers out there and that who feel that you've got to keep something in its total natural environment because of this duck nest out there, if they don't understand how nature works, I'm not exactly sure if we'll ever get them to understand this process. People in the city should recognize it just from walking around Wascana Centre here and all the goslings already and how large they are. And it's at this time of the year.

So I think, Mr. Minister, we recognize the fact that we want to protect habitats so ducks can have their nests and . . . or the waterfowl or all the birds of the air or all these flowers can bloom and people can enjoy it. But there comes a period when this process is through; we're not really damaging anything. And to help sustain even the land and farming community, I personally do see nothing wrong with allowing some grazing. I realize that we've got a problem with the so-called wildlifers, and I think many of these wildlifers are not hunters any more. Originally the wildlife federation was made up of a lot of people who enjoyed hunting and were building a natural habitat so they could protect these species so they could enjoy hunting in the fall and allow for the ongoing development of wildlife. I think as I see it, and just having attended the last few wildlife

meetings, it seems to me we've got a lot of people now that aren't necessarily involved in hunting involved in the wildlife federation, whose only motive is to say, we don't need any kind of land development. Let's leave it all to wildlife. And I think that's where the conflict arises between the farm community and some of these individuals.

And when I look at that, I look . . . I was just talking to a couple of first nations ladies yesterday who were doing a bit of a study on first nations and their role in society. And one of the things that came up out of our discussion is the fact that a lot of first nations people have hunted over the years. And they've hunted in a way that they sustained the animal kingdom around them because that's how they've lived and they treated that kingdom with respect.

They've hunted, and through their hunting it was a means of providing clothing for themselves, it was a means of providing food, it was means of providing shelter. It was also a means of providing some type of income. And unfortunately our first nations people have lost that ability as far as providing income for themselves because of the animal rights activists around this country, and in most cases, Mr. Minister, outside of this country, specifically Europe, where they have basically said we're not supposed to take the life of an animal, we're not supposed to make fur coats and whatever.

And I guess if you will, Mr. Minister, what I would suggest, maybe it's time the individuals, these groups and these animal rights activists, instead of the governments and the taxpayers of Canada having to try and maintain and help people continue to live, maybe it's time we took the funds out of their big bank accounts and sustained the livelihood of individuals in northern Saskatchewan who have lost their way of life and things like that. I firmly believe that it's time we started looking at some of these avenues, because I get little perturbed, as a taxpayer, and I think people who used to have an existence from wildlife are somewhat perturbed too, that they have to look to the government to sustain them.

So I throw out a few of these comments hopefully to provoke some thought. And maybe, Mr. Minister, as you're talking with groups that are interested in wildlife and interested in . . . involved in the wildlife lands, Ducks Unlimited, as they purchase more and more land around to build these marshes, that they will give some consideration to the agricultural sector in this province and the fact that through the years agriculture has worked very hard and very diligently to preserve wildlife.

I know in our area duck hunting was a big thing years ago. And you talked about the moisture and the potholes, and I guarantee that there's a lot of wildlife in our area again. And there will be hunters coming back into our area. They've been in fact the last couple of years because we've more and more ducks starting to survive. And they're surviving not because of everything the wildlife federations have done, they're surviving because nature has reversed the process and we're getting more and more moisture again versus what we had a few years ago.

So I think, Mr. Minister, these are a number of things, there's a number of food for thought, about what can be done to sustain the wildlife in our province, to work together with the farming community to help them build their farms, help them sustain themselves; as well as working with our first nations people and individuals who basically through the years have made . . . their livelihood has been totally dependent upon fur-bearing animals and the fur trade.

So there's some food for thought. Maybe you'd like to respond to it.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member raised a number of issues. I'll comment on a few of them.

Certainly to lump the wildlife federation in with groups like animal rights is not correct. The wildlife federation digs into its pocket, contributes money towards wildlife conservation through their hunting and other activities. And if the fact be known, that most of the wildlife federation members are farmers. So I think that we are well in tune with the balance between agriculture and wildlife.

And the fact is that the wildlife federation came to us 30 years ago almost, and said, look, we're losing habitat at the rate of a thousand acres a day during the 1970s. Let's preserve some of what's left. Charge us an extra \$10 on our licence and put that money towards a fund to buy habitat. We're not creating more habitat; we're preserving the remnants that do remain.

In actual fact we've lost 75 to 85 per cent of our natural landscape in southern Saskatchewan, which is the most modified landscape in North America. Twenty per cent of our plants are rare and endangered and disappearing. We have more endangered species in this region of Canada than any other region. So we have made a big impact in Saskatchewan. And I believe that we are working cooperatively with agriculture.

You indicated the lady's slippers bloom in June, which is true, while the lilies come in late June and July. Many duck species, like gadwall and blue-winged teal, don't nest until mid-July, and some of the grassland sparrows are late nesters too.

The fact is it's hunter dollars that's bought this land, and we certainly are open to discussions, and we'll certainly be considering this. But at the same time, we need to work cooperatively and work out a balance with agriculture and wildlife. And we intend to continue on that line. And the wildlife federation, like I say, has been a leader, and they're mostly farmers, and we figure we do have a good balance in that area.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, while you mentioned mostly farmers, it seems to me a lot of the wildlife members that I talked to in the last little while, a good portion of them are coming from some of our major centres and are not necessarily farmers. And I'm not sure if Mr. Begin's a farmer, but I do know that the wildlife federation down in that Wawota area and the Moosomin and Rocanville area put a recommendation forward regarding this grazing policy and a recommendation

forward a number of years ago — about five years ago — regarding some wildlife compensation.

And they put a resolution forward at their local — it passed. It passed in the south-east but when it got to provincial it was just basically defeated. And they put it forward because they were farmers dealing with neighbours who were having problems.

The reason I made the comment about the fact that it seems to me there's differences of opinion . . . And certainly I've had some wildlife members mention that they feel they're losing some of the control and ability to put forward their ideas because of the larger urban centres where there are more members coming out of urban settings versus the rural setting. So when I make the comment I made, it was based on what I'm hearing at the local level in working with many of the wildlife members that I know quite personally because of situations that they dealt with.

Another problem that I can see coming up, and I know a lot of the local wildlife members are quite concerned about, is there are more and more farmers, even though they're concerned about the compensation and they're concerned about the loss, are basically saying, unless we get some kind of a better understanding or working agreement we're going to start posting our land and we won't allow anybody on to the land.

So then we're going to be in a situation where SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) is going to be facing a problem if they decide they're going to post their land and allow, if you will . . . that's one of the easiest and best ways of preserving wildlife and allowing them to go, because they won't allow any hunting and the wildlife will find . . . It seems to me, Mr. Minister, wildlife are quite smart. I've watched the geese and if there's land that's posted it seems like they can be flying good and high and all of a sudden just dive down, they find that no hunting sign, and they know where they're protected. So wildlife aren't dumb neither.

So I think it's an understanding of knowing how everybody feels and working together with them to provide an environment where everybody can work together, and I think that's something we certainly need to work towards.

(1915)

Mr. Minister, in the Kenosee, or Moose Mountain Provincial Park, there's a facility called Camp 100 that used to be used for young offenders. That young offenders' facility has now been moved more to the centre of the park near a group of Bible camps. But the old facility has been, I believe . . . we've allowed a group of . . . a riding club to utilize the facility, to make use of it.

Received a call from them just recently that the centre road that they travelled on is certainly in need of grading. And as well, it's in definite need of gravelling. What they find is if they do drive in and have a weekend where they're trail riding within the park, they get to the Camp 100. But if it should happen to rain, their ability to drive back out is impossible because of the lack of gravel on that road.

What they asked me about was to contact your department about the possibility of gravelling, and they're not saying from the east end towards the west, because I think if you just come in from the west perimeter it's about — I'm not exactly sure — 4 or 5 miles that would need gravel. Whereas if you were to gravel from the park proper right through to the west end, you'd be looking at something in the neighbourhood of 20 miles, which isn't really necessary for the amount it's used.

Mr. Minister, I'm just wondering if your department could look into possibly supplying some gravel from the west end, that 4 or 5 kilometres, into the Camp 100 that would allow the Moose Mountain trail riders access to this camping area that they've been utilizing for the past three or four years.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — A couple of comments, Mr. Chairman, just to go back to the wildlife federation — the Wawota branch of the federation has more members than the Regina branch. And by far, the vast majority are rural members, so it is a rural organization with good rural roots.

With respect to your road, we will certainly be in communication with the park superintendent and see if we can assist the group in getting the road gravelled to their site.

Mr. Toth: — With that comment, Mr. Minister, when you talked about the park superintendent, is it the park superintendent that okays . . . or what's the process? Because this has been an ongoing concern and it seems that when they approach the park superintendent, the park superintendent talks about having to get approval from the department.

So while you're talking about putting some gravel into Camp 100, can you also bring to the attention of the park, and I'm bringing to the attention of your department, that the centre road east of the waterslides from No. 9, there's about 5 kilometres in there tends to be, on many occasions . . . And that's a very active road. Like the road west is travelled very minimally, but the centre road east of the waterslides, there's a lot of oil activity. There's a lot of activity off No. 9 south of Wawota. And that's a road that has had some construction on it but certainly is in dire need of gravel. And probably if it's gravelled earlier in the season, you'd get more benefit out of it.

And so while we're addressing that, Mr. Minister, will your department check and see what needs to be done to make sure that there's gravel both into Camp 100 and gravel on that centre road east of the waterslides.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — As I indicated, Mr. Chairman, we'll certainly look into both those issues, and of course our budgets are also under pressure, but we will do what we can to accommodate these groups.

Mr. Toth: — I'm just trying to think of some more questions until the Minister of Economic Development gets here.

Actually, Mr. Minister, as far as the young offenders camp in the Kenosee park area, has your department had any major concerns raised regarding the proximity of the camp to the Bible camps. I know that every year it seems to be an ongoing

problem that crops up about the fact . . . whether or not the individuals who may be at the camp are being looked after and supervised properly, and I'm just wondering, Mr. Minister, whether your department, or via the parks, certainly does hear about any concerns in regards to supervision at the young offenders' camp.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We're very pleased to report that there is a good working relationship between the park staff and the park . . . other park users and the juvenile camps. We appreciate the opportunity to get these young people out into the outdoors. And there have been no problems, no complaints. And we plan to continue dialogue with the work camps and the other park users.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, as you're a new minister, I'm wondering if you could elaborate for the public and for the House your top three priorities for your department — your own personal priorities.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Well thank you for the question, colleague. Some of the areas which I feel are really important, not only for today but for future generations, is to complete our representative areas network across the province. This is a goal of protecting a certain portion of natural lands. The World Wildlife Fund uses a figure of 12 per cent. We won't be able to achieve that in some areas because the habitat's already gone, but in other areas we do have that opportunity.

There's still conflicts in the forest with different users. We want to try to streamline that. And a lot of people have problems with clear-cutting. It's not very nice to look at but we need to deal with that. And so that's certainly a whole issue of forestry . . . is an area that we need to look at.

So those are certainly a couple of areas, and the future of our parks as well, again with reduced budgets. Over 2 million people use our parks every year so we need to make sure that our parks are still available for people, and so we're going to continue to work on that as well. So those are a couple of areas of interest that need attention now, sort of.

Mr. Koenker: — I would just like to encourage you, Mr. Minister, to attack those three areas with some energy and conviction, because I think you've rightly identified three areas of public concern that need attention to serve the interests of the public. Thank you.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I certainly appreciate the member from Saskatoon asking a few questions. It just shows every once in a while that although it would be a little more interesting if say the members would have something that would really quiz the minister . . . quiz their own minister on, but thank you.

We do have some questions though that were just handed to me that I didn't have in my position a minute ago — questions that have been coming to our office that we'd like to respond to, and we felt that one way of getting a response was certainly to raise these questions with you in estimates. And quite frankly there's some questions that I'd just as soon have you answer as me

answer anyway.

First question comes regarding the Fair Chase League. We've received a great deal of correspondence from the Saskatchewan Fair Chase League, and as you are probably aware, this organization is opposed to wild game baiting practices both among private hunters and outfitters. I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what is your department's position on this issue, and have you taken any steps to answer the Fair Chase League's concerns?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this. I can assure you we've had a number of opportunities to correspond with the Fair Chase League, who are opposed to baiting of big game animals. They're not opposed to baiting fish, baiting waterfowl with decoys, and baiting big game animals with calls, but they are opposed to food bait for big game and I guess particularly deer and bear.

We know that through the scientific studies, that baiting does not increase harvest of big game animals. Our wildlife populations are sustainable. Take bear for an example, baiting is certainly one of the easier ways to hunt these animals, and inasmuch as the hunter may become the bait if something goes wrong.

But certainly there is probably growing public perception that baiting of bears is not acceptable. But so far, scientifically our bear population is doing well and we will continue to have bear-baiting seasons and deer-baiting seasons. The outfitters usually bait deer, usually with the use of tree stands, for their clients.

But so far we will be continuing on that path.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I think I can certainly concur. One of my former colleagues, if you will, that was one of his great pleasures, was going out bear hunting. But the unfortunate part is sometimes the baiting never did work all that well and he'd be sitting out waiting for a bear to show up and they were never there.

So it's obvious, it's not something that is just 100 per cent fail proof or works 100 per cent of the time. And I think I concur with you, that baiting certainly isn't something that is just taking a lot of animals out of our resource.

While it is used in a small way — I'm not exactly sure even how much it's used in hunting deer — I think most people still like to kind of seek out and try and sneak up rather than just waiting for something to walk up within sight.

Mr. Minister, another call we had received and a request came from Mr. Les Hainstock, and I understand from your staff that your office is also familiar with this case. In brief, Mr. Hainstock suffers from a disability which he feels impaired his ability to attach a deer tag last winter, for which offence he lost his licence. Mr. Hainstock feels that your department has discriminated against him because of his disability. And I'm wondering if you could tell us what your department has done and intends to do with regards to Mr. Hainstock's case.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, we certainly are aware of this particular case. It's been in the courts and we are at the present time having an independent appraiser evaluate all the evidence around this issue. We have laws to enforce, and basically we do the best we can to achieve that.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, another question comes from the village of Lebret. I received a letter from the village of Lebret complaining about the fact that your department is requiring them to build expansion to their lagoon drainage system. These changes would cost the village between 150 and \$200,000. And in cases such as the small community of Lebret, this kind of money certainly creates a problem for them, as it's going to kill the community the size of Lebret, trying to find this type of money all at once.

Mr. Minister, will you look into this situation and either modify the requirements or offer the village some financial assistance or some way of helping to meet the problem they're facing in upgrading this drainage system?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Yes, we are aware of the situation at Lebret. Like many other small communities, their sewage system is working at capacity. And with the Qu'Appelle lakes in the close proximity, we are concerned about that, as are the residents of Lebret. We realize there's a problem and we need to see what we can do to fix it. We will be working and communicating with Sask Water, Municipal Affairs, and other government departments, to see if we can help the community out. And that's an ongoing discussion with the community.

Mr. Toth: — It would seem to me, Mr. Minister, that the problems here with lagoon systems is something almost along the lines of compensation for big deer and wildlife big game damage. And the fact that so many communities, especially small communities, have all of a sudden found themselves having to deal with systems that probably weren't large enough originally, and now they're having to upgrade them and in many cases they're finding themselves with a shrinking dollar because of cut-backs coming from your government, and a shrinking resource base — or revenue base — within the community as there are fewer and fewer people.

So I certainly hope that between your department and Municipal Government and — what was the other — Water Corporation, that they were able to come up with some sort of a program that helps these communities indeed manage and operate their lagoon systems properly so that they don't create a problem. They meet the needs of the community and at the same time do not put the community in great financial risk.

(1930)

Another question I have comes from the north versus . . . it says, north versus south outfitters, so there must be a bit of concern or a difference of opinion on something that . . . We received several letters from a Mr. D. W. Dunlop who complains that regulations for northern outfitters are different from southern ones, to the extent that southern outfitters are prohibited from guiding groups into the North, while northern outfitters can guide hunting parties into the South.

Can you confirm that this is how the regulations read? And if this is true, why is there a distinction? Do you not think this is unfair and what is your department prepared to do for southern outfitters who are losing money in this way.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — There are a lot of changes happening in the outfitting industry. In fact we have a discussion paper out and we've been working closely with Saskatchewan Outfitters Association as well. And we are . . . what we had is, in the 1980s was a mushroom effect of outfitting. We had territories overlapping and conflicts between outfitters. We're trying to sort that out.

And there are different qualifications for fishing outfitting operations, bird guiding, and of course big game. So we have this discussion paper out there now and we'll be getting feedback from the public and trying to sort out the conflicts. And if you care to give us a copy of that letter, we'd be pleased to provide a more detailed answer to the individual's questions.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'll get our staff to certainly get this information to you.

One more question that Mr. Dunlop brought to our attention is that Alberta requires all non-residents to use guides or outfitters, and he says this is not only beneficial to the province's tourist industry, it also keeps pressure off that province's game birds. Saskatchewan, we understand, is still studying this proposal and I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you can tell us what this proposal is, and where it's at today, and why you're taking so long to act on it.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — That proposal is also in the discussion paper, so we'll be dealing with that accordingly as well.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, one of the things that makes Saskatchewan an interesting place to visit and to live in is that in the summertime our towns and cities are absolutely beautiful, and I guess that lets you know that I'm into Dutch elm disease.

I'm wondering if you could sort of outline for us the status of Dutch elm disease problem in the province — what's the stage, what direction is it going.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Dutch elm disease is certainly a very big concern, especially to our urban communities, our cities and towns. Dutch elm disease is prevalent in the Qu'Appelle Valley and the Souris River system as well as the Assiniboine. And it has made inroads as far west as Regina.

And we have a Dutch elm disease committee to plan strategy on how to deal with the issue. We have good cooperation with urban communities. And we will continue to do everything within our power. We do fund some money towards the battle against Dutch elm disease, and I think people in Saskatchewan, in our towns and cities particularly, are going to do everything they can to beat this disease. So it's certainly a concern. We're working with the PFRA (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration) tree nursery station at Indian Head as well as urban municipalities to combat this disease.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I think most of us are aware that there are efforts going on by municipalities, urban ones in particular, to control this. I'm wondering how effective are they at the present time in controlling it. Like is the disease sort of on hold, or what's happening with it?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Unfortunately it's a disease which people have been combating for decades, beginning on the east coast, and it's gradually working its way west. We certainly will not save every elm tree, but we hope to minimize the loss of elm trees basically to a point where they can be replaced over a period of time.

So it's going to be a . . . we won't save every tree. But we're going to certainly try to do the best we can. And we're also at the point of salvaging some of the lumber for economic gains. This was present at the Cowessess Reserve north of Broadview. So we are doing everything we can in cooperation with people.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In a previous answer, you mentioned the term funding, which obviously is going to lead into this question. What is the level of funding that the provincial government is providing with this? Is there funding to municipalities that they can tap into? So what is the level of funding and how far short does it fall of what's being requested?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — I suppose we could always use more money. We have \$300,000 direct money into the program, but we also have a lot of manpower from our forestry branch. We provide office space for the Dutch elm committee to operate out of. So there's a number of donations in kind as well.

I guess if we see a need or new outbreak of the disease and we see a need for more money, we will certainly look at it at that time.

Mr. Heppner: — I'm going to interpret from that answer that when a community has a problem, there is some hope for them to go ahead and contact your department for some help in that area.

Moving over to The Environment Management and Protection Act, the main impact of that particular Bill passed last year was the requirement of mining companies to post bonds to guarantee the clean-up of closed mines. And I think that concept probably has a whole lot of public support, so when they go through the natural parts of Saskatchewan's environment they don't run into some pretty bizarre sights that are out there.

The question is, what has been the level of compliance with that particular piece of legislation?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We're very pleased to report that there has been good compliance and interest and support from the mining industry to this posting of bond. And we all know that there is mines that have been abandoned, and they are an eyesore, perhaps a danger to the public as well.

But we have good cooperation. In fact we are going back, and

some existing mining operations such as potash mines are in the process of developing a plan to get rid of spoils and spoil piles, and reclamation program, so that they can be decommissioned as well.

So the new operations which are coming into effect are complying. And we are also going back and working on existing operations.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Just to ask for a little bit of specific information on part of the answer that you gave, and I believe you referred to some of those spoil piles, as you called them, at the potash mines which tend to just get larger and never more beautiful. What sorts of things are there that are in place to sort of either beautify those or get rid of them?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We have a good working relationship with the potash industry and we are currently having research done to see what we can do to get rid of the piles. But the stuff came out of the ground; there's a good chance, and it makes sense, to go back into the ground.

We have several test projects and research projects looking at this. And our immediate concern is to make sure that the piles are contained. And we have continual monitoring with the industry on the existing piles. So I guess ideally a decade from now the material would be returned back underground.

Mr. Heppner: — Sometime ago I saw a short blurb on a television thing about using some of the mine shafts that had been excavated and were no longer being used, and those were being used as places to grow various kinds of crops and plants and actually do some development. Is that something that's being considered with the potash mines? I think this was happening in northern Saskatchewan with a different mine, at a different level and temperature probably.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — You are correct in citing an example in northern Saskatchewan, as Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting that is growing some plants underground in a mine. We haven't done that yet, but it's certainly something that could be considered.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Moving back to where this question started, and that was with the particular environmental posting of bonds by the mining companies. What is the value of those bonds collected this year under that particular Bill? And where does that money go? And what happens to any interest that accrues from that pot-full?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Because the posting of bonds legislation is fairly new, we only have one bond posted so far and that's from McArthur River. We're also looking at the best ways for the industry and government to have this money posted and in readiness, if needed, for decommissioning. So we're still fairly new in this process, and the one for McArthur River is just for an exploration process. So it's not that large yet, but the industry is accepting the idea. And we will be pursuing it and working out the best options for the industry as well as ourselves and the public.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. That leads me to two or three questions. I think I inferred from your answer that there's only one mine that has basically posted that bond to date. So my question . . . one of the questions that I have is, do existing mines then not have to post those bonds? And what is the size of . . . or how's the amount of the bond assessed, and are there any companies that might have been kept from doing the exploration or the mining because of the size of the bond? So there's three things there.

(1945)

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The insurance are insuring that there's enough money or ability to decommission the site. First of all, it may not just be a bond. We need just proof that the company has the money to do the decommissioning.

For existing mines, there's a two- to three-year time frame for them to develop a process and to see how they can best decommission the operation. And that has to be acceptable to us as well as the industry. And also the . . . as I say, the posting of the bond . . . it doesn't need to necessarily need to be a bond but just insurance that the company does have the money to do that. So because the process is all fairly new, we are still feeling our way along and again hand in hand with industry on this.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I would like your response to an objection voiced by Cameco that those bonds in many ways were unnecessary because what government could do is just seize the assets of the company if it failed to go ahead and live up to its clean-up objections. And that statement from Cameco is from the *Star-Phoenix*, March 17, 1994. I'm looking for a response to that kind of thinking.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The uranium industry has been very supportive. In fact McArthur River is Cameco, the only company that has posted a bond or a guarantee that there is decommissioning money available. And if we look back, we don't need to look very far, just need to look at Uranium City and the mess there. The company goes bankrupt. We still have a mess there which probably tax dollars will end up cleaning up at some point. And it's something that we just don't want to leave more sites like this for our children and grandchildren to have to deal with. So we think we're on the right track, and we want to make sure we do this right.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, and I think with the statement that you made about leaving the country in an acceptable form for our children and grandchildren, I think that's probably a very supportable direction to go, to ensure that that happens.

Moving into the Canadian-Saskatchewan infrastructure program parks project, I wonder if we could have an update on the progress of the approved projects in the following parks with reference to their adherence to timetable and budget. And I have about 9 or 10 parks listed here. They are Battleford, Duck Mountain, Douglas, Narrow Hills, Saskatchewan Landing, Cypress Hills, Greenwater Lake, and Meadow Lake.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Chairman, if the hon. member is in agreement, we would provide that information in writing

because there's a number of avenues. Some of the money is spent. Maybe there's some to come yet. We will give a detailed breakdown if the project's completed, if it's partly completed, and we will provide that to you in writing.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Could you also list any further projects approved under this particular program and detail what the projects involve and how much they cost.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — That's for all provincial parks?

Mr. Heppner: — Yes. Dealing with the same concept, the infrastructure programs, could you outline the criteria for approval of parks projects under this program and the process by which submissions are made.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We will also provide that information to you.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Moving over to what we'll classify as native co-management of Crown lands, could you update us on the status of any co-management projects you've entered into with native bands and the federal government in the last year?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The federal co-management project which was proposed has been completely withdrawn. But the province is very pleased to have several co-management agreements with first nations. And I don't have a list of all the agreements here, but I can certainly provide you with a list of co-management agreements we have with various first nations. I know there's a Peter Ballantyne Band, for example, a very successful agreement.

So we can provide that information for you.

Mr. Heppner: — So we do have, as you stated, a number of places. We've got quite a number of situations where these projects are in place. What's the process for one of these projects coming together? Like is it initiated from government? Is it initiated from the band? How does it work that that particular . . . what is the criteria for selecting a site as a project?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We have a number of co-management agreements. And they can operate both ways. Sometimes if the government sees an opportunity, we will initiate it and contact the local communities, first nations, northern communities, perhaps trappers in the area. And also sometimes the first nations or a community such as Green Lake would come to us with a proposal.

And we're finding co-management to be very successful. It's stakeholder involvement. And we see an expansion of this type of management, particularly in the northern part of the province.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. When these projects are put together — two questions, I guess — is the amount of authority or control by the various stakeholders fit into a set formula? And the second question that follows

through with that, what is the level of input afforded to the bands, and particularly, do they have a veto power on decisions that are made?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Unlike the federal model which was proposed a year or so ago around Montreal Lake, the province does retain the final word in our co-management agreements. But we certainly consider very seriously the input from the stakeholders, and in many cases the stakeholders have ideas which we can accommodate into the general operation of the resource user plan.

So it is a cooperative effort, and in fact Saskatchewan's co-management models have been picked up by other jurisdictions across the country as good examples to follow.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay, specifically then, the bands do not have a veto?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — You're correct — they do not have a veto.

Mr. Heppner: — Next question, dealing with the Bienfait waste disposal plant. Could you describe the status of the environmental review of hazardous waste plant proposed to be built near Bienfait?

And I think people in Saskatchewan have a definite interest in this, because hazardous waste disposal is a concern for all of us because no one wants it stored in their backyard. And so a proposal to sort of deal with the issue and deal with those sorts of products are obviously of concern and interest to everyone in Saskatchewan.

So what is the status of that review?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — That's certainly an issue which did show that people are concerned about the environment and what's happening in their backyard. The project did meet the requirements of the environmental assessment process. However, the environmental assessment process does not deal with the concerns of local people, in as much as them not wanting it in their backyard.

So because it met the requirements of the environmental assessment process, we approved the project. But we knew there was a lot of concern in the local area and we thought that the local people should have the ability to negotiate or say no to the development. So that was one of the conditions of the approval. And I understand that communication between the proponent and the local Bienfait people has been quite limited and the project has not proceeded at this time.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay, and probably each one of us can sort of sympathize with the concerns that were out there. However, all of us have the concerns about where that hazardous waste can be stored. I'd like to have comments coming from you as to your feelings, what the chances are of putting one of these projects together and what initiatives the province is taking to — if this doesn't work — to keep on working for a project some place. And probably a follow-up question: at what particular point will the province say we need this; it's critical

enough; we're just going to take the initiative and do it.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Certainly we are always developing technology and new products and so on and so forth, and with it unfortunately sometimes does come waste — whether it's used oil or whatever. So we need to deal with it but we also need the public behind us to proceed with a project. And we only need to look at Alberta, the Swan Hills community welcomed a waste disposal site there, and in fact Saskatchewan does ship some of its waste material there. I guess one of the advantages of being sparsely populated, we don't have a lot of waste compared to some of the more highly developed parts of the world. But certainly it is up to this generation to deal with this waste responsibly, and if we did not have an outlet of Swan Hills to deal with waste, we would need to find a way of dealing with it.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We've discussed tonight, and I think you and I on a limited amount discussed personally, some of the directions and possibly streamlining some of the regulations around Environment. And my question deals with federal-provincial environmental regulation streamlining. Can you update us on the status of the process of harmonizing and hopefully also simplifying environmental regulations.

And usually when you simplify things and you harmonize them, they're not just simpler and harmonized, they're usually also more efficient and effective. So I think we can accomplish a lot of things at the same time.

So my question is, where are we at with having provincial and federal regulations streamlined?

The Chair: — The member for Saskatoon Northwest?

Mr. Whitmore: — Yes, Mr. Deputy Deputy Chair. I would ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Deputy Chair. I would like, on behalf of the member from Rosetown-Biggart, who has the sad occasion of attending a funeral tomorrow in Edmonton, I would like to introduce his constituency assistant who is in the Speaker's gallery this evening, Ms. Brenda Slimmons. I would like the Chamber to please welcome her here this evening.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment and Resource Management Vote 26

Item 1

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The Environment ministers met a couple of

weeks ago in Toronto and we certainly agreed that there is lots of room of coordination. And basically what we have happening in some cases is a federal official and a provincial official goes to the same river to take water samples. We don't need that. We just don't have the money to do that.

So we are committed to working cooperatively together to get rid of some of this duplication and cooperate more. If the feds want to do some particular water testing, we'll provide the sample instead of them having to go out and get it. So we are working towards that, and there was good progress made at the meeting to continue in this direction.

(2000)

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. My next question gets its origin out of the *Leader-Post*, January 1995, dealing with used oil depots. And you'd announced that you would soon be requiring oil manufacturers selling in the province to provide for the recycling of oil filters and containers. Do you have any idea how much this system will cost?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We're very pleased to have the cooperation of industry. In fact industry is driving the used-oil recycling program. The government is basically just there to sort of see that things are going along okay and help out where we can. But it's industry driven.

And because the project is just getting up and running, we don't know the total cost, but there will be a bit of a levy on oil and filters to accommodate the disposal of them, and I'm sure that people don't mind paying a few cents to know that their oil is not going to end up in a slough or on a road somewhere, a gravel road. So we don't know the total cost.

But again it'll be good cooperation. If there's five garages and dealers in one town, perhaps they'll have one tank to contain the oil and the filters. Every business wouldn't have to do that. There'll be good cooperation, I'm sure. And we're looking for good things and we're here to help industry as much as we can on this.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I'm quite fully aware of the cooperation from industry on that. I was involved in some of the early stages of some of the planning that took place to organize this a number of years ago, and also have one of those funny-looking tanks on my business as well that we take oil in from the community. So I'm aware of some of that, also quite aware of some of the cost.

Do you have any idea about how many of those depots we feel we'll need across Saskatchewan to take care of the needs of all the used oil?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Again we expect the program to pay for itself, and I appreciate your insight into the issue. But because the program is just getting up and running we don't have costs or numbers of depots, but certainly this will be something that'll be worked out in a good balance. And again we're interested to see what the results will be.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Sort of in the same vein, and that's dealing with sites that are contaminated, and I believe you mention or refer to one in northern Saskatchewan that the province you know is obviously going to be caught with the tab to clean up. I'd like you to report on your department's progress on what sometimes been called the "dirty dozen of Saskatchewan" contaminated sites around the province. I believe there's been a commitment from your department to clean up those sites. What stage are we at with that? What's the progress?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We are making some progress on these sites. For an example, the worst site in the province or one of the worst-determined was the creosote plant at P.A. (Prince Albert), is all cleaned up now. Another one of the dirty dozen was the fertilizer plant site in Saskatoon; it's virtually cleaned up. Some of the other ones which we haven't quite got to yet, we'll certainly continue to monitor to make sure the contamination is under control and not getting into drinking water.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And it's good to see that some of those things are being taken care of. But I do have a question about a specific one that you could probably enlighten us on and see where we're at. I believe that there was an effort made to start cleaning up the northern petroleum refinery near Kamsack and there's been a change of plans there. Could you explain what's behind the change of plans and where we're at today?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The site you referred to at Kamsack, our original evaluation had indicated it was a bad site, one of the dirty dozen. However, subsequent testing indicated that the contamination was much reduced and not an immediate threat to groundwater or anything else. It is one of the orphan sites which we have to deal with. And again, hopefully this committee looking at environmental contamination liability will have some indication as to how we might fund this. So that's one of the sites that we can continue to monitor to make sure that the contamination is not going to cause some immediate problems too.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. It's interesting that there's a particular site that does have some problem; the province sees it fit and acceptable to sort of back out of that and put it on hold. My question is, why cannot individual farmers and business people who happen to have a storage tank that isn't doing much, back out of it as well and just say they'll look at it when they choose to?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — You make a very good point. And the legislation introduced by the previous government in 1988 did have strict deadlines and dates that had to be complied to. We've worked with industry on a number of occasions and we've changed the regulations a number of times, to the point now where a tank which is not leaking can simply have monitoring wells put in, for a cost of about \$250, and that operator can continue to operate until there's an indication the tank is leaking.

There are a few sites which are very close to perhaps municipal

water supplies. We still are requesting that those sites be cleaned up. And of course any site which is leaking, its use is terminated and we want it cleaned up as quickly as possible. And again the liability report will be eagerly looked forward to as to how we best deal with these.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. You made some reference to active sites that were still being used needing that monitoring equipment; however there is many sites around the province that have storage tanks that have not been in use for 10, 20, 30 years. They were pumped dry the last time they were used, and so obviously the amount of damage they could do has ceased to increase or even be there since they were pumped dry the first time, and so maybe they should be allowed that same option as the other site we mentioned.

Question about Interprovincial Cooperatives chemical plant in Saskatoon is leaking Agent Orange in the South Saskatchewan River. In your opinion, is this less important than a storage tank that might in the future leak just a small part per million gasoline into an aquifer, keeping in mind what Agent Orange actually is.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — As indicated earlier with the site in Saskatoon, the old fertilizer plant site, we are very close to having an agreement as to how this will be dealt with. And not to belittle that; all contamination is important, and we simply cannot say that once a tank has been empty there's no problem. We have a community near Regina where a credit union is built on a site and the house next door has contamination, gas fumes, in the basement of the house. The site has been empty for many years but it was never properly cleaned up. So we need to deal with these and they'll be around to haunt us for a long time to come.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Deputy Chair. Actually, Mr. Minister, a few more questions just finally came to my mind, some that I'm glad I had a chance to give some second thought with you to . . . number one, regarding the resource centres. Where are we at today? We were informed yesterday that there may be some more closures coming in, that communities like Moosomin may lose their resource centre. There may be a reduction of staffing as result of it. And, Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could bring us up to date as to the reductions that are coming in your department as a result of the downsizing and the cost-cutting measures you're taking.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We thank the member for the question, and again he talked about this yesterday and I apologize for not having the details. But we eliminated eight sites, conservation officer stations, this year — Dore Lake, Pelly, Carrot River, Mistatim, Sandy Bay, Weyakwin, Maple Creek, and Glaslyn. And as far as Moosomin, it's not on any list.

And these sites were with this year's budget. And in actual fact the budget, overall budget, for field operations, which includes conservation officers, went up \$600,000 to \$19.7 million. We are certainly committed to providing good law enforcement and resource management in Saskatchewan. And like everything else, we are streamlining and trying to do more with the dollars that we do have.

Mr. Toth: — So I have your assurances tonight then, Mr. Minister, that the resource centre in Moosomin will continue to operate as it currently is and that there certainly aren't any changes that would be taking place in the Moosomin office.

And of course that one I bring to your attention because of the fact it's in my constituency. But I know there is some other offices, I'm sure, have the same concerns as they were raised today. Is that true?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — You are correct. The Moosomin office operation will continue as is.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I'm just wondering as well, with the discussion we've had over the Alameda-Rafferty project over the past number of years, and I know you've had a very definite interest in the past, and I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what are the water levels that we're facing today in Alameda and Rafferty?

And I raise that as a result of the fact I understand there was a substantial stocking of pickerel in the Rafferty dam, and I believe Alameda has already has some good fishing available in it. So could you give us the levels of the water in those two reservoirs?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Probably the minister in charge of Sask Water could give more detail. I gather the Rafferty reservoir is just about half full. The Alameda reservoir has to be kept at a certain level to meet the agreement with Tetzlaff brothers, so it's not full but it certainly could have more water in if we didn't have to allow some of the water to be released. And undoubtedly when there is water in these reservoirs, they will provide fishing opportunities.

Mr. Toth: — So I take it from that, Mr. Minister, that we'd have to invest in scuba equipment and air tank for the Minister of Economic Development for him to walk across the bottom of the Rafferty project at the present time.

Mr. Minister . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . oh, he tells me he can walk on water. Well maybe we'll have to take him up on that. Any bets in here tonight?

Mr. Minister, a question that continually comes my way — and I think you gave a figure of some amount to my colleague earlier — but many individuals have been asking, and certainly people in the wildlife federation in my area at a couple of the wildlife banquets I attended this spring, the question came up: what is the revenue that is derived from big game licences and also bird licences? I'd like that specifically, the amount of dollars that's collected in licences for big game and the amount of dollars in licences for bird licences.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The revenue generated by fishing licences and game licences, which would be big game and birds, is about \$9 million . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . 9 million. Fisheries, 2.9 million and game just over 6 million.

(2015)

Mr. Toth: — So when you're saying 6 million, Mr. Minister, that's bird and big game? You don't have a breakdown split up between big game and bird licences, like split down for . . .

Hon. Mr. Scott: — We do not have it. We just have it listed as game, but if you would like a breakdown we could probably supply it.

Mr. Toth: — I'd appreciate that, Mr. Minister, because it's certainly something that comes up, and I think it comes up because of the individuals who are involved in hunting and as well individuals as a result of their farming backgrounds and dealing with neighbours and wildlife depredation. This question is something that they're asked. And I wondered why some of those funds aren't actually put into some kind of a compensation program.

Mr. Minister, could you just give us a bit of an update as to what park rates have done in '96 versus 1995, and also park usage for the year 1995? I know we're into a new season. It seems to me some of the numbers I saw for '95 and some of the parks, we had a substantial increase. I trust that we're not going to see a decrease as a result of the inability to get to the parks. We're going to be dealing with the Minister of Highways in a little bit regarding some of these problems, but maybe you could just bring us up to date on that, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The park users last year was about 2.2 million people; 2.2 million people used our parks last year. And the visitation is often coordinated with the weather. If you get a poor summer, you get fewer people that turn out.

The park fees, let's see, we've brought in a new fee, a three-day fee, of \$12 and a new weekly fee of \$18. To accommodate people using a park just maybe one weekend out of the year, we've decreased the daily park permit from 6 down to \$5. We have a decrease in park fees for a day.

We've decreased the cost of a transferable permit from \$32 down to 30. And this was popular because you can put it from one of your vehicles to the other instead of having it only in one vehicle.

Camping fees, electrified sites have gone up \$2, from 15 to 17. Non-electric sites have gone up from 9 to \$11 per night. Seasonal camping rates have gone from 560 to 650. This is for somebody parking a motor home in a park and using it throughout the summer.

So we've had some fees go up and some come down.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I sure appreciate how thorough you are in providing the information.

Mr. Minister, another concern that is an ongoing concern, and this concern is beyond this province, and it's regarding Bill C-68. Now where are you today in your dealings with the Minister of Justice in proposals to the federal government as to how we address the concerns regarding Bill C-68, and then certainly the opposition in Saskatchewan to that specific federal Bill?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The hon. member from Saskatoon Fairview might better answer this. Certainly the Justice minister will be able to provide a more detailed update, but we are committed to fighting this Bill. We are working cooperatively with the other jurisdictions — Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, the Territories — and certainly the feasibility of court action is being looked at.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, the reason I ask that is because it would seem to me, from your background and involved with the wildlife federation, that you should be one of the strongest allies that hunters in this province do have.

And I want an assurance from you tonight, Mr. Minister, that it's not just a vocal assurance but certainly you're going to get out and really do something to prod the Minister of Justice, if you will, if he needs a prod, to act to make sure that the concerns and the questions that have been raised regarding this Bill are brought to the federal Liberal government, because it appears they don't seem to be listening.

And I'm afraid what we have in Saskatchewan now is we've got a federal government that basically looks at Saskatchewan as a province that really doesn't count in the big picture, somewhat as we see rural Saskatchewan trying to live within the directions of this government and how it provides funding in relation to rural versus urban situations here in the province.

Mr. Minister, we've certainly raised a number of questions. And a question that just comes to mind has to do with legal action as a concern was raised regarding a situation in my area. And I'm not really going to get into the area. But maybe on a broad sense, Mr. Minister, I would like to know how many legal actions your department has been involved in either as plaintiff or as defendant.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Well first of all, the hon. member is discussing a number of items here. I want to assure you that, like the previous Justice minister, our current Justice minister needs no prodding on the gun control issue. He's doing a great job.

Secondly, legal actions, if you're meaning every time we issue a ticket for a fishing or hunting violation, there's hundreds, probably thousands, of actions that we are involved in. But if you mean court actions, we could perhaps get you more details on that. But certainly the job of enforcement officers is legal work and so we deal with a lot of it. Sometimes fines are paid voluntarily; sometimes we end up in court. And it can be everything from poaching to environmental protection violations and things like that.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I have four pages of about 20 questions here yet. That could take a fair bit of time in the Assembly here. Can I have your assurances that if I pass these across, that this time they will be answered? And that you will answer them? Because you did actually have these questions sent to you in our global questions.

And rather than bringing them all up, I just want a commitment from you that all the questions I send across to you, we'll get responses to promptly, if you don't mind, please.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — I assure the hon. member that we will respond to these questions.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 13 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 26 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1995-96
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Environment and Resource Management
Vote 26**

Items 1 to 7 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 26 agreed to.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to the minister and his officials for the time they've given us to address environmental issues. Certainly some of his officials I'm quite familiar with, having worked with them in the past, and it's certainly a pleasure to see them again and to have this debate and have the forthright answers that have come forward.

I think the reason we're getting more square answers is because we're dealing with someone from a background that represents honesty that comes by a handshake and where your handshake is your word of agreement. And so I thank the minister.

And I would also suggest, Mr. Chairman, that we certainly have no further questions and we're more than prepared to move to Committee of the Whole, debate of item no. 92.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the members opposite for the variety of questions. I'd also like to thank the officials and in fact all the staff of the Department of Environment and Resource Management for the fine work they are doing.

**General Revenue Fund
Highways and Transportation
Vote 16**

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

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my right, Don Metz, acting deputy minister, Department of Highways and Transportation; Barry Martin, executive director, engineering services division; Lynn Tulloch, executive director, corporate information services division. And to my left, Bernie Churko, executive director of logistics, planning, and compliance division, Department of Highways.

Item 1

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm afraid this is one department that we're going to have to raise a number of

questions before we get to voting very seriously on it. And in some regards the minister may find that he's got some support over here. If there's one department that has taken some massive hits and given up a lot, it seems to me it's the Department of Highways, probably the last department that should be giving up as much as it has over the past number of years in view of the conditions of the highways in the province of Saskatchewan.

And certainly it must have been somewhat disconcerting to the minister to have the tourism industry talk about how they're going to promote tourism and at the same time promote a 1-800 number so you can call and check and see which route you should take to get to your destination.

(2030)

I note, Mr. Minister, as I was driving into the community of Kipling on Sunday evening, I ran into a number of trailers on their way down Highway 48. Actually I was on my way to a grad in Windthorst, from the community of Kipling, and trailers coming through on Highway 48. And I thought to myself, if they aren't disgusted now, once they get past Kipling and travel the rest of the way from 40, Kipling, down Highway 48 to No. 9, they're going to be totally annoyed with the highway system, Mr. Minister.

And I say that partly because you're quite well aware of the fact that No. 48 from Kipling into White City and certainly Regina, was in excellent condition about two months ago until we diverted trucks off of No. 1 because of a highway flooding situation. And to be honest with you, I personally was amazed that in a matter of a few hours we had pounded that road into the condition . . . and put it in the condition it is today, which is a situation where there are many of the areas that were pounded open; although they've been filled, just continually work their way open again.

And I'm not exactly sure how you're going to address it or how the department is going to address it in view of the fact that we've been fortunate enough to have a fair bit of moisture in that area. But while you're talking about addressing the concern with regards to the areas that are pounded out, whether it's Highway 48, whether it's Highway No. 1, whether it's 16, or any of the highway system in this province, I'm also concerned about the fact, Mr. Minister, that there are situations in highways where we do have access to some of the nicest park systems in our province, and we're really limiting . . . or we're forcing people to go extra miles to gain access to that park system. As a result we have seen in the past, and the concern that people in the area have again, is that we may see it again this year.

But as people find they have to go out of the way and maybe add an extra 30 minutes or an hour to their drive one way out to a park network, that they may choose alternate tourism destinations. And so that is a concern.

And what I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, is what commitment can you make to the people of south-eastern Saskatchewan with regards to reconstruction of the short kilometres . . . there's

about 16 kilometres, Kipling to Highway No. 9, and from Wawota to the Manitoba border. And I think if you look at those two pieces of highway, Mr. Minister, if those sections of No. 48 Highway were reconstructed, there's a number of things that could happen.

Number one, it would certainly enhance tourism and the promotion of the tourism sites within the south-east corner of the province.

Number two, it also opens up the door, Mr. Minister, for No. 48 becoming an alternate route, and a much shorter and quicker route, from Brandon through to Regina, although we're not asking you to look at bringing it up to a road condition that would handle big highway truck traffic but certainly the tourism traffic that may move and the smaller traffic.

And, Mr. Minister, I'm wondering if you could respond and give us an idea of what could be done to address this condition. And especially 48, Kipling to Highway No. 9, is becoming a road that is . . . the road surface or the top surface of that road seems to be getting narrower every year as the Highways department tries to straighten it out and tries to clean the shoulders off and make them look much better. But it's, if you will, it's almost like going through . . . down one of these ski trails that these . . . I forget the . . .

An Hon. Member: — It's a black run.

Mr. Toth: — Black run, that's what I guess that's what we're calling it, Mr. Minister.

And it certainly, I think, has reached the point where if we could have run that heavy truck traffic down it just another six or eight hours, there'd have been nothing left of that road. And it might have put it in a position where we'd have finally got the construction that would be needed, that would create the tourism and the business for the area. Plus it would certainly get the people of the province that use that road or would desire to use that road off of your back and my back as far as the condition of that particular highway.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank the member for that question. The people of Saskatchewan are quite understanding. They know the amount of roads that we have in the province — 25 per cent of all the roads in Canada, 3.7 per cent of the Canadian population to try and upkeep that road network and to try and upgrade it as needed.

Then we look at the other side of it where we have extra economic development now with the oil industry booming in the last three years. The forestry industry. Certainly we look at mining industry improvements.

We also look at some changes in demographics in the province of Saskatchewan. We look at elevator consolidation for an example. And I know that you will know about that in your area.

We also look at rail-line abandonment and the new Liberal Bill C-14 which will allow the railways to abandon lines a lot

quicker than usual.

So we have some things to contend with there.

We also have to look at the last 2 years. We've had more moisture than we had in the previous probably 10 years. So we've had the moisture problems — wet falls, long, cold winters, and of course wet springs. So it's created certainly some pressure on our highways system. You know it's impossible to reconstruct every highway that perhaps we think needs reconstruction. You're looking at 100 to \$150,000 per kilometre. Thin membrane surfaced roads, we have 8,000 kilometres in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I know if you ask every MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) in this building, on your side, the Liberals, or on our side of the House, each of us would have a highway that we would like to see reconstructed. And I know in your case — you brought it to my attention more than once — Highway 48.

But we're just not able to do it all at once. So what we have been doing is spending the majority of our funding in the preservation and maintenance. This year of course we have been delayed by a couple of weeks because of the weather, and certainly our crews will be there to maintain the highway as best we can, until such a time that we can in fact afford reconstruction.

The other thing I want to say is that we have to look at new ways of doing things. If we look at our interest bill each year — \$851 million for example — that would for instance, twin Gull Lake . . . or all of No. 1 10 times a year each and every year. But we can't cry over spilt milk.

And then we take a look at what the Liberals are doing when they're cutting us in areas of health care, social programs, and education, and we as a government then have to back-fill that. Certainly each department has to share in that. In fact all the people of Saskatchewan have to share in that.

And so there is not a whole big pile of money at the end of the rainbow. So some of the new things that we're looking at is partnerships with the private sector. And we've had some success in that area. We're looking at tire inflation, new technologies like central tire inflation programs. We're looking at the possibility of designated roads for grain hauls. We're looking at regional transportation councils where the regions will decide the priorities of road construction.

And hopefully by doing — spending, I guess — our limited funds better or in partnership with the rural municipalities and the urban municipalities, that we can spend that limited amount of funds more wisely.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and as I indicated, I'm quite well aware of, and most people are quite well aware of, some of the complications that arise regarding the highways and trying to maintain highways. And certainly I think, as I indicated earlier, with your department taking the hit it has over the past number of years, it becomes a major concern.

And of course, Mr. Minister, the big concern out there is the fact that highways basically affect rural communities and rural Saskatchewan. It's the large urban centres who basically have our key highway networks between our large urban centres and it's our smaller rural and urban communities that basically carry the load of the poorer highway conditions. And so I think every effort has to be utilized in trying to maintain an infrastructure that certainly can provide for the future.

And as you say, as you indicated, the fact that we're going to see more grain moving down the highway network, it's going to mean awhile before we could probably build a highway and build a pretty good highway that would carry a lot of the lighter traffic and the tourism and small-business traffic.

As we get heavier units moving down, larger units moving down the roads because of the shift in the way grain is moved in to our system, it means that these highway networks and stretches of highway that could have been built for a lesser dollar, all of a sudden need the full load or the full expense to put that level of highway underneath or on the roadbed to maintain that heavier traffic.

And I think your department may have met with Sask Wheat Pool regarding the high through-put elevator going in at Fairlight and the problems that are going to arise fairly quickly regarding the 48 west . . . or east of Wawota, pardon me, and certainly No. 8 north and south from that elevator.

I guess the thing I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, I just noticed in the paper that the federal government is in the process of sending out cheques for compensation for the changes in rail traffic and rail handling and how much money is actually . . . I know it's . . . if I understand it correctly, some of that money is going to be passed on to the Department of Highways for upgrading of highways; a fair bit of that money is going to rural municipalities to . . . for them to maintain their road networking system. How much money will be coming into your department, and how do you see yourself utilizing that money?

And the reason I ask the question in that manner is, if you take that lump sum today and spend it on a few miles, you've got nothing for tomorrow. And I guess that's the biggest problem with the fact that the government, the federal government, is doing the one-time pay-out even for producers. If the idea was to help them supplement their transportation by taking the funds that would be put in their hands, if they use . . . all utilize it today to maybe cover today's expenses, they'll have nothing tomorrow to help them with regards to the cost of transporting their grain to market.

So I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you've got a program in place or in mind as to how you're going to utilize the funds that are coming from the federal government regarding the changes in the railway handling and how large those funds are.

(2045)

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well thanks to the member for that question. The federal government has announced a transition fund, I guess, to compensate the provinces for the loss of the

Crow. It's a bit strange to me that the loss of the Crow will cost the producers of our province about \$320 million a year — in fact more than that. That's not counting road damage to highways or rural municipalities. And so we're going to lose that — in compensation for that they're going to give the province 84.6 million, once. So we lose \$320 million per year, plus road damages to municipalities and highways, but we're going to get this \$84.6 million, once.

The \$84.6 million will come like this, it is my understanding at this point in time. This year in 1996 there will be \$20 million that will come to the province of Saskatchewan; \$10 million will go to the municipalities, unconditionally. There will be \$5 million that will go to municipalities for rural roads that will be determined by the board. And there will be \$5 million that will go to the Department of Highways that will be determined by a board.

The board composition is made up of three members appointed by the federal government. There will be two members appointed by the Saskatchewan government; there will two members appointed by SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities); and there will be one member appointed by SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association).

The applications will come into the Department of Highways in regards to the rural roads program. We will just pass those applications on to the committee and they will decide which will get priority.

In the case of Highways, we have made up a list of potential candidates. That comes to \$165 million. So we've got \$5 million and we've got projects worth \$165 million that would qualify. So you can see that it's not a large amount. And so what we hope, I guess with participation on the board, is to try and make sure that the money is used in fact for roads, and the roads that deserve the highest priority.

When you mentioned Highway 48 for an example, that would be one of the highways that would be on the list. But the board will of course determine which is the highest priority of candidates.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. As you were speaking, you mentioned that there's eventually going to be \$84.6 million come to the province to make up for the loss of the Crow and for rail transition. And I believe you mentioned that \$20 million is coming this year, but that's split — the 20 million is the total dollar coming in, which part of it goes to the rural municipalities and part of it comes to your department.

Mr. Minister, I guess there's a concern, and there's a number of questions come out of this. But number one, the first concern I want to raise, when it comes to . . . you talk about maintaining what we already have. My question is, how do we maintain what we already have when we continually see a reduction in the number of highway maintenance crews throughout the province? And the community of Rocanville just called the other day, and they're apparently losing the crew that they have — and I'm not even sure if it's just a one-man crew already — but my understanding is, things are going to be moved into the

Moosomin area.

And we've seen a substantial reduction. I just noticed by the, I believe it was the Regina *Leader-Post* about two weeks ago, that there was a major sell-off of highways equipment. And as we see this and we see the reduction in crews, one has to wonder how we can even just maintain what we already have with the amount of reductions that are taking place as far as maintenance crews and the amount of equipment, heavy equipment, that is available to be used to just meet the need of the highways and the highways maintenance as we notice it, just travelling across the province these days.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I want to thank the member for the question. Certainly we restructured the Department of Highways this year. I mentioned earlier that the federal government, the federal Liberals, were pulling from the Saskatchewan government over \$100 million — 110 or \$114 million in health care, education, and social programs. So we all went back to our departments and looked internally to find what efficiencies we could find internally so that we could hold our budgets as close to what we had before as possible.

We were able, because of reorganization, to find \$6.2 million. Now some of that was the reorganization of the crews, but I want to say to the member opposite that we still have 107 depots across the province. I believe it's 96 crews. We did close 29 depots across the province, and certainly there were some reductions in employees. One of the things that the larger crews will allow us to do in summertime . . . for instance, there will be larger crews so that the deep patching that we do now will be handled much more efficiently and effectively by larger crews.

Winter maintenance, of course, we look at more modern equipment now — and you mentioned the sale of the 20-year-old equipment and the smaller equipment that we had just recently. The newer equipment are faster, larger; and we also in the process centralized, or I guess evened out, the workload of the crews. It used to be where one crew would have about a hundred kilometres to look after; another may have 275; one might be over 300. What we're trying to do is have the workload about 300 to 350 kilometres per crew. We believe that the maintenance will be equal and perhaps better than it was in the past.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. You talked about a number of depots that were closed. I'm wondering if you could give us a list of those depots, and actually I'm not all that concerned if you just read them off; if you could pass us a list of the depots, it certainly would be appreciated. My shorthand isn't all that good trying to keep track of it all.

Also, Mr. Minister, you did send out a bit of a brochure, I think about a month and a half ago, with regards to a number of projects. How many new miles of construction . . . how many miles of construction of new road or highway construction is being . . . taken place this year? How many miles of just resurfacing is taking place?

And then of course the other will be a significant amount in maintenance. And maybe you can inform us today as to

whether or not the amount of maintenance is going to, as a result of weather conditions we face, since you originally let out that . . . or sent out that information, whether or not you're finding yourself in a position where you've got even a higher level of maintenance that is needed.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I can send to this . . . the member this information, but I would probably like to read it first.

The grading budget is \$9.8 million — \$9.88 million. It's 113.8 kilometres that would be the grading for new roads, 113.8. That would include, for instance the South Saskatchewan River crossing at Outlook, the approaches. It would include 2 kilometres west of Langham to North Saskatchewan River bridge; the widening from Meadow Lake to 2.2 kilometres east, and other projects like that.

Then the paving of that grading work is . . . we have a budget of \$10.2 million, 56 kilometres. The preservation, which would be resurfacing — we have resurfacing so that if you don't need to reconstruct the base of a highway but you resurface it — that budget is \$15.47 million and 209.4 kilometres. We're going to be spending 8.7 million on bridges. And we're going to be spending 9.2 million on airport servicing, and basically that would be . . . or, pardon me, 800,000 for airports.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to a lot of the maintenance that is going on or taking place right now, Mr. Minister, have you involved a number of private companies in the maintenance work that has taken place, and if so, how many? And also if you could give us a bit of a cost comparison as to the cost per kilometre for maintenance with private contractors versus department maintenance crews.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The majority of the maintenance is certainly done by the crews. We haven't got a percentage breakdown, but believe it's about 1 per cent that we may tender out to a private contractor. We could get you that list. We would prefer to do that after the maintenance season because we don't know how many we would, you know . . . that would apply to.

Normally where we get a private contractor is on a specific job that might need a lot of deep patching for instance, or a real bad piece of road.

Our budget in maintenance this year is about \$83 million.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, I appreciate that, and I think, Mr. Minister, I would suggest and certainly wouldn't discourage you from the fact of hiring some private contractors. Around the area I noticed a contractor in Kipling has received some work, work he hasn't had for a long time. In fact he basically had reduced his construction business to almost nothing, and then the son came back; and the fact that they're able to get some of this work, I think, has enhanced the possibility of his son continuing in the equipment business and the construction business.

The one thing I would like to note, Mr. Minister, is the fact that when I . . . three weeks ago coming in, I left home early, and I

was actually on my way in, by a project, at quarter to seven in the morning and this crew was already out working, whereas I didn't see any Highways crews out until a little later than that.

And so if there are private crews who are willing to work and there's work handy, and rather than having to send large Highways crew and they're busy on another end, and if you're able to at the end of the day show that you can stretch your dollars a little further and get some of the projects done, I certainly would encourage you, Mr. Minister, to take a look at some of the contractors out there who I'm sure right now are more than willing to look for some projects.

And my understanding is on many of the projects that are even coming up, that a lot of the projects are being bid so low you begin to ask yourself how some of these guys survive in the first place. But if they're willing to work, I guess we should give them the opportunity to work.

Mr. Minister, we were talking about rail transition funds and about the Crow benefit disappearing and the fact that this . . . even in this coming year, we may see a number of kilometres of rail bed in this province being totally abandoned. Something that's been raised by producers in my area, and I've heard it from producers outside of the area as well, is the possibility of going to the federal government and asking the federal government that they allow this rail bed to become just available to anyone who would like to utilize it.

It seems to me, Mr. Minister, that all the rail bed across this province, and certainly across this country, was built by the taxpayers of Saskatchewan and of Canada by funds from the federal government — by tax dollars.

(2100)

I remember not that long ago the rail bed just south of . . . on our area, the CN (Canadian National) line from Maryfield through to Regina, and it's on a . . . basically just used from Maryfield through to Kipling, and then they come in from the west right through to Glenavon and back. And there's a section that isn't being utilized. But there was a substantial dollar put into that rail bed, and to my knowledge none of that money came from CN. All of that was federal money if I recall even by the papers and by the billboards that were up about how the taxpayers' money was working for them.

So it would seem to me, Mr. Minister, that it would only be right and proper now, as the federal government walks away from the Crow benefit program, and as many of these rail companies are indicating that they want to walk away and abandon a lot of these rail beds, that these rail beds should just be left available to any producer or any group of individuals, such as we see Southern Rails, to have access to them. And that, Mr. Minister, would certainly alleviate some of the traffic on the highway system, the highway grids, if the rail bed was there and the business groups could put forward propositions and have access to that rail bed and begin continuing the transportation of rail down those road beds or rail beds that were there to the main line.

So I would certainly be interested in knowing your views on it. I think it would be certainly fair and proper to ask the federal government to take a serious look at that, because my understanding is the rail bed is going to be left to the railway, and whereas a few years ago they would just gladly walk away and pick it up and basically give away the material on the rail bed, there's some fairly good economic gain and value in reclaiming that rail bed as far as the ties and the steel on the beds.

So, Mr. Minister, I'm wondering what your views are on that and if you've approached the federal government with that idea, in view of the fact that it may be an alternate means of cutting down on some of that heavy truck traffic just by having it there and having small companies running units up and down and moving the grain off of these branch lines on to the main lines for the major companies to move to port.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I certainly . . . I do not disagree with you. I think it would be nice if the railways would allow the rail beds to stay with either the province or the municipalities or with producers. However if we look back at a Tory administration in Ottawa not too many years ago, who in fact helped upgrade the majority of the grain-dependent branch lines in the province of Saskatchewan, also stated very clearly to the railways that it's yours to do what you wish. And so there is a bit of a problem there.

The new legislation, Bill C-14, when a railway abandons a section of line, we'll have to offer it to the private sector or some interested party, and there is a five-month, I believe, window if I'm not mistaken. After that the federal government would have 30 days to show some interest in that abandoned line. The province would have 30 days, and then the municipality would have 30 days.

You mentioned approaching the federal government, and we have approached the federal government on Bill C-14. Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan — the Highways ministers of each province — went to the federal government and talked to the Transportation Committee, the Commons Transportation Committee, and asked for changes in Bill C-14. The answer of course was no. We went to the Senate committee and made the same appeal, and again the answer is no. Bill C-14, the Liberal government in Ottawa certainly favours the railways, and we are very disturbed and concerned about that. And we will continue to make our points.

One of the areas that may look at the rail beds would be the transportation councils. If the regional transportation committee in a certain region believes that the rail bed is a priority in their particular area, they may want to pursue that. So I agree with you. It's very disturbing. The federal government are not interested in participating, and so I guess we have to play the hand that we have been dealt.

Mr. Toth: — Well, Mr. Minister, I appreciate that, and I'm not sure I'm just totally in agreement with the fact, your last comment, about just playing the hand we've been dealt. I think the province of Saskatchewan is certainly sitting in a position where we are a fairly . . . have a fairly sound resource base.

And I think for too many years, too many other parts of the country have certainly taken advantage of our resource base and resource revenues. Alberta certainly showed the federal government a few years ago that it wasn't prepared to just continue to accept the fact that what it was dealt. And maybe it's time the prairie provinces certainly stood up. I think they are still seriously looking at a challenge to Bill C-68, the gun law.

And the other thing is, Mr. Minister, maybe we need to take a look even in this regard because of the fact that when it boils down to . . . and you mentioned some of the points and some of the areas where Saskatchewan has faced some fair reductions at the hands of the federal government . . . that it boils down to this fact — that the votes in this province don't mean a lot to a federal government any more.

And certainly there's more to be gained in eastern Canada because of the headquarters of the rail companies than there is out of a bit of rail bed in rural Saskatchewan. And yet at the same time the million population in this province are going to try and have to put up the resources, if you will, to maintain the road system and the road network, to address the concerns that are going to fall upon us as this rail bed is abandoned and as it's lifted up and more traffic, heavy traffic, is put on our road system.

So I think, Mr. Minister, there are grounds, and maybe that should have been part . . . maybe it's too bad we didn't have a bit of this debate prior to the Premier leaving last night to reinforce that and have him . . . Well I saw the Prime Minister on TV talking about this first ministers' conference isn't going to become a very political and open debate; it's going to be a cordial meeting.

Maybe it's time for the Premier to stand up and say listen, Mr. Prime Minister, people in Saskatchewan are residents of Canada. You expected the people of Saskatchewan to stand up and support you in your unity debate. Well it's time you listened to the population of the province of Saskatchewan with regards to transportation problems that they're facing.

I'm more than prepared, Mr. Minister, and I think my colleagues are, to give you all the support you need in addressing some of the offloading that's coming your way and certainly the fact that your budget is being cut to a bare minimum, and as a result we see some of the problems that are surfacing today with regards to our highways system.

So what I would suggest to you is, never say never; continue to stand up and represent the people of Saskatchewan as long as you have the authority as the Minister of Highways. And then if for some reason the Premier decides to either elevate or demote, encouraging the next minister of Highways to carry on — pass on the torch and say it's for you to carry now and we're hoping you continue what I've begun.

So, Mr. Minister, I would certainly encourage you to stand up firmly for the people of Saskatchewan with regards to the type of funding and the help that is needed to maintain our highway system.

Mr. Minister, I'm raising a question that may seem trivial, but it's certainly brought up, and the interesting thing is, Mr. Minister, it's brought up by some of the strongest NDP (New Democratic Party) supporters in my constituency. It's regarding this little spring in the valley, the Qu'Appelle Valley, and all they're asking for is for the Department of Highways to whip in with a truckload of gravel, or a couple of loads, and improve the site a little bit.

The site used to be . . . had been fixed up into a nice picnic area with washroom facilities, picnic tables, barbecues. In the last couple years they've been totally taken apart. The washroom facilities have been left, and it's got a spring where a lot of people do continue to gather, stop and get their drinking water.

However, Mr. Minister, because it hasn't been maintained, because there isn't gravel on the approach and down in around the spring area, if it happens to get wet, it's very difficult to get in and out of that. And certainly there are a number people quite concerned about that. And I'm asking, Mr. Minister, if indeed the Department of Highways could commit on an annual basis to at least making sure that that's maintained, that you quickly run through it, put a bit of gravel into it, whether it's one or two loads a year, for the benefit of the general public who would stop by there.

And maybe as well, Mr. Minister, something could be worked out to even provide bathroom facilities versus what we run into at the present time taking place down there. So I'm wondering if you could just respond to that, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank the member for the question. And certainly we will take a look at that particular site in regards to the gravel and the condition. Perhaps the member may want to check out in the community as well if there is an organization that might be interested in, you know, helping with looking after . . . I know in some cases, some roadside parks, for instance, have been taken over by local communities or the fish and wildlife federation for certain reasons.

The member knows that every single dollar that we have, we would like to spend it directly on the roads. And certainly if we have some partnership with local communities or local organizations in some of these projects, it certainly helps us spend our dollars on roads.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Unfortunately I'm not exactly sure of your comments about the fact that we need to spend all the money elsewhere rather than . . . I think you did indicate you'll look into it. But I hope it is more than just to look into it, because I know I can have a couple of constituents on the phone in a couple weeks time when they know that I've raised the question — and I promised I would — asking me what happened, where was the minister? Did he really respond or make a commitment?

So I'm asking you to specifically take the time to review this scenario. And for the sake of two loads of gravel and running a patrol up in there and making the site and access a little better, it certainly improves it for me and for you as well.

Mr. Minister, I'm wondering if you could give us an idea of the amount of individuals working in your department today versus 1995-94.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The number of full-time equivalents in 1995-96 were 1,422.3; in 1996-97 that number is 1,266.9.

Mr. Toth: — Excuse me, Mr. Minister. Did you say '92-93 for the 1,400? Is that what I heard? Or '94 . . . '95-96, I just don't . . .

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The '95-96 number was 1,422.3 and the 1996-97 number is 1,266.9.

Mr. Toth: — Do you have a number for '94-95?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — We do not have that number here but I certainly can get it for you.

Mr. Toth: — Well based on that number that you've just given to me, Mr. Minister, and I certainly appreciate . . . the reason I've asked for those numbers is I've been kind of wondering . . . as I acknowledged earlier on in our debate, I can see where the department was four years ago with funding and where it is today.

And I don't know if the cost of the projects has gone down. Certainly everything else has gone up so I can appreciate the difficulty in just trying to maintain a road infrastructure that we have at the present time, and that's why I've asked for the numbers. Because the numbers kind of bear out what we've been seeing as far as the reductions that your department is taking and I would almost suggest that your department is probably taking a more major hit than any of the other departments.

If indeed with the services that we've seen cut in the area of health care and if the Department of Health would be spending based on what they've reduced their services to individuals, then it would seem to me that there would be more money available to your department. Unfortunately while services are cut in Health, the expenditures continue to be at the same level. So you do have a legitimate argument as to why it's difficult to meet your commitments; I'm not sure if the Minister of Health has a legitimate argument in that manner.

Mr. Minister, another question that I would like to ask is based on . . . you mentioned about \$800,000 for airports. I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what does this involve. Does this involve small grants to some small rural airports or is most of it eaten up in our large airports system, Mr. Minister? I wonder if you could give us a bit of a breakdown and what is available for small rural airstrips?

(2115)

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — The \$800,000 is actually for construction . . . reconstruction of the Stony Rapids airport. The maintenance part of airports is separate from that. There is \$103,000 that's spent on small, local airports, in small maintenance grants.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, is there any funding available for communities that are looking at upgrading their current airstrips?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — No, not at this time.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Minister, and to your officials. They tell me that you're going to be here until about 10:30, so I'll have time to get in some of these questions that our constituents have been asking about. And it will of course probably keep me on the paper rather than into some of the general things that we talked about the last time we were here, and why your financing is in trouble.

So I do want to get specific on some of the issues though. Now as you will recall, Mr. Minister, the mayor from Gull Lake, Gerry Elmslie, has corresponded with you on different occasions, and he's of course been on my doorstep more than once, talking about Highway No. 37 and the road condition that Highway No. 37 has gotten into from the heavy commercial traffic that comes in off No. 1 Highway as well as of course the surrounding area.

In particular of course, this is a lot of live loads of oil, and these live loads of oil of course are very hard on roads but very welcome to our community. We're very happy to have the commercial enterprise in our community, but we do have to recognize that this heavy traffic seems to be breaking up our roads a little more than we would have expected.

I think possibly the problem is that the pavement wasn't heavy enough to start with to hold up that much heavy traffic. And specifically I think the mayor is concerned about the road as it passes through the town, between the No. 1 Highway and coming into the town.

There's about a mile of road sort of into the town there that I guess he has the feeling that Highways is responsible for, or at least partly responsible for. He doesn't feel that the town should pay all of the costs at least, because while the commercial enterprise is welcome in the community, obviously the town doesn't benefit directly from the oil that is being taken out to the dumping station south of town and put into the pipeline of course to serve that oil to the pipeline system that goes on into the rest of the world.

The reality of course is though that this traffic has been picking up with the increased activity.

The mayor makes the point, and I think a good point, that the reason that the oil activity is picking up is because there's an awful lot of new wells being drilled. And new wells, by their very nature, are pumped into tanks. And the oil pumped into tanks of course has to be delivered from those tanks to some dumping station in order to get it into the system so it can be sold. As time goes by, and wells that are good and productive are proven to be good and productive, pipelines are put in and that trucking necessity drops.

His point of course, is that in these initial stages an awful lot of money is taken in by the government through the sale of the

land leases to the oil companies before they drill. There's an awful lot of taxes on the vehicles and on the equipment and on everything involved with the industry. So the government benefits very greatly, while the town itself does not directly get any way to tax that extra heavier traffic that's coming through on that road.

So, Minister, you are aware of the problem, I think. And I think the mayor though is still looking for an answer to getting that part of the road fixed. Now there's no use me stopping there with No. 37, because obviously there are other people that have other concerns about other parts of the road. And the condition of the road north of Gull Lake, through the area that would head up towards Hazlet and up to Cabri, has been a serious concern of other people because they, unlike the mayor, have to travel on the rest of the road. I guess the mayor might be travelling up there as well, but his concern is with the town part. But the rural people and the rural municipality feel that there has to be some more work done on that road.

I remember Mr. Peterka, who used to work with the Department of Highways, told me that we had to get something done with that road somewhat urgently because his experience, having worked all of his life with Highways and having retired with Highways before he went into private business, and he is now a trucker and has a private business of his own that puts him onto the roads quite a bit, but he says his experience working with the Highways all those years tells him that if we don't do something with that road fairly soon, that the costs of repair will escalate dramatically.

He said there's a breaking point, in his experience, at which a road can still be repaired at a reasonable cost. And after that, if it gets wore out or broke down any more then you're into phenomenal costs because you have to go in and start ripping up and building road base and all that expensive stuff. And in that sandy soil north of Gull Lake, I think you will understand, if you think about the type of texture that we have in that soil, it's extremely hard to get a good road bed, so it will be expensive.

So for those people that are inquiring about those areas, Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could tell us what your plans are for improvements and repairs to those sections of road?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I thank the member for the question. Certainly No. 37 north of Gull Lake, you're aware that we have some concerns with that road. It's a thin membrane surface pavement and with the added traffic — the oil industry that you mentioned; certainly grain hauls — the thin membrane surface breaks, especially in the spring of the year and especially in the weather conditions that we've had this year.

We have no plans to upgrade at this point in time. We will continue to maintain it as best we can until such a time that we can maintain it.

We have put Highway 37 on the list in regards to the agricultural transition fund, but you have to remember that we have \$165 million worth of projects on that list, and we're going to receive \$5 million, at least in year one. So you know,

whether that will be the selection or not, we will have to wait and see.

You talked about communities that are over a thousand people. There is no urban assistance program at this time. We continue to review that and it is a priority with this government, and the community may be able to apply through the \$5 million of the transition fund that will go to the municipalities, because urban municipalities can also apply for that fund, depending if the grain transportation is a part of the problem in that community.

But I also want to say I know you're concerned about 37. I know the member from Moosomin is concerned about 48. And I'm sure the member from Cannington will have some other highway and the member from Rosthern will have another one. And we can't do everything at once, and certainly you will realize that.

One of the areas that I think will help — as we develop the transportation committees. The south-west of course is very important in this project because they are the pilot. They've been working together, 107 municipalities over the last two years, looking at the transportation needs in the south-west, prioritizing what the priorities might be. Certainly maybe the priority of the area might be 37, for example. I don't know that.

But certainly I think that will give direction to municipalities and to Highways in a system that we can maybe spend our limited funds more wisely.

Tire inflation may be a coming thing that may certainly help Highway 37 or highways like 37. Designated roads might be a possibility in that particular region where the truck traffic may be able to be diverted to another road and the expense of that road shared somehow. And that would save 37 maybe for lighter vehicle traffic.

Those are some of the new things that we're looking at now.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, it's good to see that you've got some thought on the future, although the way that you portray the future leaves out the present. And the reality is that there is an inland terminal being built just down the road from Gull Lake; 37 obviously will be a heavy traffic road to that terminal from the north and south.

We have been told that membership in that terminal ranges in the several of hundreds, and that their membership covers an area from the U.S. (United States) border on the south, from the Alberta border on the west, and north to the river; as far east, I guess — I'm not even sure — past Swift Current, I guess. Somebody mentioned the place and I can't quite remember it right offhand. But it's a very big area.

But obviously, a lot of that grain coming from the north and south will hit 37 Highway. And as you say, if that grain is diverted off of that road, where's it going to go? It'll go onto municipal roads. So very quickly then, you're going to have the municipalities with a bunch of broken-down roads as well. So we're not only going to have one road wrecked, we're going to have several.

Because the municipal roads, quite frankly, for the most part were not built to take this heavy traffic either, and they don't have any pavement on top of all.

Now south of Gull Lake, we do know that that road was built with some intention of heavy traffic, there was some extra work done there a few years ago. And that actually has been holding up quite well. And if you'll check back through the records you'll find that they did some very heavy packing of heavy amounts of gravel and sand into the road bed before the pavement was put on. That seems to be working quite well and you might want to consider that in your plans for how to construct some roads in that area that might last to these heavy traffic areas, without having to invest in a foot of pavement.

Obviously you can go that way. You can go to cement, I suppose, maybe, and that sort of thing too. But that seems to be a cheaper way to go because there are a lot of rocks and sand in the area and that does seem to be holding up. So you might want to look at that.

As far as your long-term plans, we believe that's good. My question though, when you said over a thousand, does that mean that towns under a thousand qualify for some other kinds of assistance? And if so, I think we'll have a quick census in Gull Lake. So maybe I'll let you answer that before we get into some other questions.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I want to thank you for the compliment on looking at the future. I think you would know Ron Gleim, from your area. And Ron is certainly a support of the future directions that the department is taking, hand in hand with SARM.

I know Ron — I believe — is a brother to Ted Gleim who certainly I believe was a Conservative candidate at one time in that area.

An Hon. Member: — A member.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — A member, pardon me, that's right.

Communities that are over a thousand people do not qualify for any assistance on highways that run through their communities. Communities that are under a thousand, certainly Highways are responsible.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, the new census probably will help you there, and our community as well. And I don't apologize for taking a special interest in this community because it is my home. And we have lived in the community and around the community all of our lives. And so as to know that there is a conflict of interest here, I'm telling you this.

But we do qualify because our population has dropped. Unfortunately we are now under the thousand, and I believe that it is about 956, or something like that, comes off the top of my head. I'll double check that for you, but I think, Minister, that we do qualify for that assistance now because we are under the thousand. And I think the census will confirm that, if we can get a hold of those figures. I don't know how long it takes

to do that. But there must be some up-to-date figures as well. So I just want to let you know that, and I'm sure the mayor's going to be letting you know that as well when I send him a copy of the transcript, so that he will become aware of the fact that there is that dividing line. So you can expect that kind of an approach. And we certainly are going to do everything we can to get our community the best possible roads because we do see a lot of traffic that will be starting to come when this terminal gets finished this coming fall.

(2130)

I want to just quickly get into some other areas — because now I've just been informed that I'm going to be reduced in my time a little bit because the other members have some questions to ask as well — in general, because I'm saddled with the responsibility of trying to critique the whole province, but there are roads much like Highway No. 18. Now I believe that you sent over a copy of a criteria list of how you determine which roads should be fixed and how often.

And maybe you can just run through that a little bit, what this criteria is. And while you're doing that, maybe you could talk about the list of projects that you came up with this year. Now I know I've read something some place, and I don't know if it's the one that you supplied or somebody else, but maybe you can run over that. And if you've got a copy, maybe you could send that over.

Now when talking about that, take into consideration that when I looked through that, I didn't seem to find highways like Highway No. 18. I don't think it was on the list either to be fixed or to be destroyed or to be rebuilt or anything. I couldn't find it. Now maybe I didn't have your list. So I'll let you clear this up.

And of course I do have to specifically ask you what your intentions are with that road because I did correspond with you. You did send me a letter saying you were going to send a couple of crews in. But I did have a call yesterday from one of the councillors at Frontier and he said he hasn't seen these crews. And I know the man will exaggerate a little, maybe even a lot. But when he tells me that you can park a Cadillac car in some of the holes, I suspect they must be getting fairly big.

And he does make comments about how the petroleum industry and heavy hauls there now are swinging out onto the municipal roads and they're starting to get beat up pretty bad. And the farmers are getting upset with the petroleum industry, and you know what kind of ill feelings that sort of thing can kind of build into.

So tell us about those things and then I'll get on to some other questions.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Okay, the components include . . . This is when we decide highways, and list the highways and in what order that we would like to see them repaired. We take the capital cost to construct or upgrade the roadway, the annual maintenance and long-term preservation costs of that roadway, the change in traffic, safety benefits to society, the change in

cost of operating a vehicle on the roadway, the change in level of services measured by improved traffic flow and reduced travel time, society's preference for travel on dust-free surface or on four-lane facilities, economic growth in the provincial economy arising from highway improvements.

Now you mentioned Highway 18 and that it's not on the list, and that's correct. At this point in time there are 96 highways on the list to upgrade. Those would be billions and billions of dollars. Highway 18, because of the components that I've listed, has not made it to the top 96 at this point in time.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Minister, how could a road make it to 96 if it's in such bad shape that you can't get enough vehicles on it to get the traffic count up. I mean the antelope run through that country but they don't count, and they're about the only ones that can get over this road any more.

Then again I have to bring to your attention the reality of rural life which I think you seem to have forgotten. And the reality of rural life is that sometimes you have to build a road for a few people if you want to have any people living in an area at all. And you know very well that in the deep south-west there aren't very many people, and at the best of times you'd never have a very heavy traffic count. You'd never have a very opportune way to meet the criteria that you've set.

So we have to then determine, is it worthwhile to spend money on a highway to serve a few people in order that there can still be some community left, or should we let that community disappear? Should we end up like North Dakota where we have 50-section farms, 40-section farms, and no people left. Should we allow that to happen? I'm asking you the question.

I don't think we should. I like big things. I really, truly do. I like bigger farms, but there's a limit. There's a limit to how big things should get in order that you can still preserve some social structure in a community. In the south-west I think we have reached that maximum goal in order to still have enough people left so that those that are there can still preserve their sanity by still having some people to have contact with.

Now you may not have seen this but I live in a fairly rural area, and I have seen people who have lived alone too long who have cracked under the strain. This is not a pretty thing to be involved with, Mr. Minister, but it happens to people who live a hermit-style life. The loneliness drives them crazy. And it will do that to individuals faster but it will do it to families as well. And we can't allow that to happen, Mr. Minister, without at least giving it some considered thought.

And in that area of the province, if we don't invest some money so that those people can have some security and some way of justifying why they would ever stay there at all, then we're going to find ourselves with a vast area of land that simply will be not populated any more.

We will have daytime crews coming in of course, for these oil wells, but they leave at night. If they're not going to be attached to those family groups that are there to run the ranches and the farms, once they're gone, then everybody that comes in there

will only be coming in in the daytime, and God help anybody that gets caught in there at night because they're going to be alone. There is going to be no help. There's going to be no traffic.

I have seen things on those highways happen that could very easily take five or seven hours before somebody else would come along. Now if you think of yourself rolled over in the ditch and no possibility of any population around, those kind of things really worry me. Because big is better in some areas, but there has to be a limit to it, and this is the only way you can limit it in the south-west corner of the province.

I know that's also true of northern Saskatchewan and I know that your problems are humongous. They're very big and very troublesome. But you have to give some consideration, I think, to some balance. You can't have all of the money going in to northern Saskatchewan. We also have to preserve some of the southern part of this province as well. And if we don't do it fairly soon those populations are going to be gone.

When I told you that the population of Gull Lake has dropped, I'm telling you about a town that has a good secondary industry base — that being the petroleum industry. And we have had aggressive people that are working hard to make it a central location, not only for the grain terminal business and the grain to come in from a large area, but also for the oil that is being put into these pipelines. I credit those people with an awful lot of gratitude from the community for having had the initiative to go out and do those things. But we also have to do it in some of the other communities.

And my point was that if the population is dropping in a community like Gull Lake in rural Saskatchewan where there is all of this activity that can possibly be mustered up, what possible chance is there for any community to be left in a town like Consul, Saskatchewan — in a town like Consul where Highway No. 21 runs through the U.S. border and Highway 13 has become so full of holes that people are afraid to let their families drive on it?

Now that community has seen itself depleted over the years to the point where most of the people there now have families and relatives living in Medicine Hat — to such an extent that they have a street in Medicine Hat that is fondly referred to as Little Consul, because everybody that has left there pretty well is living down a couple of streets over in Medicine Hat. I don't blame people for going there, but we have to somehow stem the flow or we won't have a community left in south-west Saskatchewan at all in some of those places.

I really think, Minister, that you've got to rethink your criteria in how we determine where roads will be built.

Because there's an old movie that I saw some time ago and it said: if you build it, they will come. Of course it had to do with a ball diamond. But in this case it's a road. If you don't build a road, they will leave — because they have no way of getting in and out of those communities, they have no safety, and they have no security. And without that, young families will not set up. If you don't have young blood and young families start up,

then that community and those communities will all die. They will disappear. People will gradually be gone.

I refer you to the town of Antelope, a thriving community of some 35 years ago. Today it's a flat, bald piece of prairie where now an elevator is being built. Other than that, nobody's there — it's gone. It disappeared.

I refer you to any number of towns like that. You know them as well as I do. Do we want them all to be like that? Do we want to have simply six or seven towns left in all of south-west Saskatchewan, because that, Minister, is the kind of load that we are putting on your conscience tonight.

It is the highways that it has to start with. Without highways, we can't save those communities. So, Minister, is there any plan or thought of changing or making exceptions to your criteria?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well I should maybe . . . What I will do to the member opposite is send you a traffic volume map. It shows all the highways in Saskatchewan and the traffic volumes.

And I noticed that you talked about Highway 18, and I note that the traffic — the daily average traffic count on Highway 18 — is around 50 vehicles per day. If you were a Highways minister, I guess I would have to ask you, with limited funds, would you . . . how much would you put into Highway 18 versus Highway 16, for instance, where you have 6 or 7,000 vehicles per day?

I think we have to be realistic here and we have to look at where the traffic goes, and look at the criteria that I mentioned earlier and take that into consideration. Does it mean that we can just let those highways like 18 deteriorate to nothing?

The crews apparently are on Highway 18 today. We are looking at new methods of maintenance so that the seal could perhaps last longer, but our priority would be to try and maintain and preserve that road as best we can.

But to go in there and spend a whole lot of money to reconstructing a highway, I can't justify that and I don't think you as a member of this legislature could do that neither. I mean what we have to try and do is the best we can with the limited funds. Certainly concern about areas like that, but we still have to be realistic in where we spend our money on roads.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Minister, I do want to disagree with you on one point. If I were the Highways minister, I would put money into those kind of roads and I would justify it this way. If you're going to have a petroleum industry that's going to come into the area and buy hundreds of millions of dollars worth of leases from the government, that the government gets all of that money, I as the Highways minister would go to my cabinet and say, those people that live in that area and those construction companies and those petroleum companies deserve to have some of that money spent on the roads so that they can get their work done. They don't deserve to be ploughing around out in those areas with caterpillar tractors on what we used to call highways.

And quite frankly I believe that you have let the people down when you don't go to your cabinet and make that argument and win it. It is a fact of life that the people down there know how many millions of dollars are going into general revenue so that you can buy everything else in this province for all of the other people, but you neglect the very people from where the money is coming in, from their area. And they know that.

They live alone and they may live in remote communities, but they're not stupid. They do know how to figure and they do know how to watch the newspapers and they know how to add up the billions of dollars that this province has to spend. And they know that you've got 5.2 billion, and they know that \$800 million of that is paid in interest because you people don't know how to manage money. And they figured that all out. They tell me. I didn't have to figure this out. They're coming to me and they're telling me, this is how you should be doing it. And I'm just passing this on to you and I know you don't like to hear it, but the truth of the matter is I am their messenger and I'm bringing you the message.

(2145)

And they say you're treating them badly, and this is coming from all over the province — all over the province in the rural areas — because you are neglecting the areas from which the wealth of this province comes.

What if all of that millions and millions of dollars dries up and those people don't buy these land leases any more. Then you'd be in a lot of trouble to provide the services like you say to the highly travelled Highway No. 16 that goes to the constituencies that you need for the next election. You wouldn't be able to do that. So you're going to have to learn to be a little bit fair about this, Mr. Minister, and you're going to have to argue harder for your department because you are underfunded.

I can't help but say that I don't sympathize with your position, with the amount of money you have, because quite frankly you're underfunded. Your department is underfunded. Your Premier and your cabinet are letting you down, and I'll fight along with you every day on that because obviously with the money you have, that's all you can do. But you're not getting enough money from your cabinet for the roads. It's not fair proportion. And you've got to take this argument to your cabinet and you've got to win this argument, that rural Saskatchewan is worth the investment because it will bring back the revenue that you can spend in the cities.

Now I know Bob Mitchell, or pardon me, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education — my apology, I'm not supposed to mention his name — but anyway, I know that he comes from a farm. And I know that if he thinks back to his roots, he will understand that rural people are important. And I know that he used to practise law in Maple Creek and he must have friends there yet, because sometimes people remind me of the days when he was there.

So, Minister, if you talk to the other colleagues in your cabinet and remind them of their childhood and their youth, most of them have some roots somewhere in rural Saskatchewan. One

thing about a province like Saskatchewan, we all have roots and most of them do go back to the farms and to rural parts of this province. And even though the populations are smaller, doesn't mean the value of those people and those areas has lessened to the whole scheme of things.

And it lies, first of all, at the Department of Highways because this is the place where you can provide transportation for people to be able to come and go. There's other things, of course — things like trying to get entertainment for people in remote areas. Those are important things too.

But roads become first and foremost, because we don't have an air ambulance service that goes out and helps folks. We depend on those highways for our safety and our security.

Minister, you know that as well as I do. You've been out in that country, and I know that there are a hundred communities in every corner of the province that will identify exactly to this comparison. And you've been out there yourself. I know the folks out there met with you last fall and I'm glad you were out there.

And just in passing, I think some of the folks might have neglected to give you credit for the fact that you do sometimes get out of the office and I do know for a fact that you were in Eastend, Saskatchewan, last fall. I do know you were out in quite a few of those areas and drove on all lot of those roads. And therefore I know that you know that the road conditions are not good.

And I give you credit for being out there, and I want people to recognize the fact that we know you were there and we acknowledge that. But it also then puts a responsibility on you to think harder about how you're going to convince your cabinet to give you some of the dollars to work with.

There are some other ideas, as a last-ditch effort, that I would pass on to you when you asked how I would do it. And I'm going to stand here and do that because we've said that we will offer alternatives where we can.

I don't particularly like the idea that you might steal my ideas and look good, but realistically I guess our first priority and our first job has to be to try to help the folks.

So here's the thing. In some of these desperate situations, you might consider going out and talking to the municipalities. You might actually want to meet with them and try to come up with some kind of an agreement where you would share responsibility for some of these secondary or lesser-used roads.

Now I know they will resist that at first because they don't want to accept the responsibility of putting money and equipment into Department of Highway roads. But in situations of extreme necessity, maybe they would. Maybe it's worth taking a look at. Maybe it is possible that if you spent a little time and went out and talked to some of these municipalities, they might be willing to strike a bargain with you.

Now they might not be willing to take up all of the

responsibility of cost, but they might be willing to invest some money in some equipment and share some costs with you. They might expand . . . For example, I understand that you've been invited out to the RM (rural municipality) of Frontier. Maybe they're thinking in terms of if they can get the minister out there, maybe they're already thinking in terms of well we'll try to nail his back to the wall, or some other part of him, and convince him that he should fix this road.

But if he doesn't go along with that, before he gets out of here maybe then we will try a secondary approach. I don't know this, but I'm suspecting — because I used to be a reeve — that they've got some sort of aces-in-the-hole kind of ideas that they're going to try to put past you. These are smart people.

They're going to try and get something out of this if they can get you to come out there. And they might be thinking along the lines of maybe he would go along with sharing the cost of a truck that they would run to go out and patch the road, or maybe put a stockpile beside that road where it's handy and the municipal crew would go out with their own truck, if they happen to have one already, and load some up and fix it and simply not charge for it or maybe charge you minimum wage or something like that.

And when your crews are tied up at Val Marie and can't get there, or if your Eastend crew . . . and I'm not even sure where the crews all are, but obviously they're not on that road often enough. But I'm glad to hear you say that they were there today. That really is good to hear because yesterday of course they weren't and if they're there today I congratulate you for fast action and we give you credit for that. But at those times when they can't be there maybe the RM crew wouldn't mind fixing it up. Maybe the council would go along with that.

So can we perhaps, Minister, explore some of these alternative possibilities. Are you open to those kind of suggestions at all?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well certainly we are. I mentioned the transportation committees and in the south-west we certainly have a pilot project. We are working very closely with the rural municipalities and the urban municipalities and the department. One of the areas that we look at is cooperation. So we're certainly interested in that.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, we need to discuss a few things about Highway 312. As you know, that project was partially completed and there was some reasonably good paving done from about the Hepburn corner through to about the Laird corner and that seems to have held up fairly well.

The rest of it, all the way from Laird corner across to the bridge and over to Wakaw, even though it was built up a couple of years ago, has turned itself into a disaster. And I think that particular area of rural Saskatchewan has some unique aspects to it that need to be looked at in a special way when we look at completing that highway and finishing it off in a reasonable sort of a fashion.

I think in many other rural areas limited population is always an

issue and this is one of those areas in rural Saskatchewan where population is growing. It has never decreased a whole lot and there's a lot of other things that are starting to happen there that I think we need to keep in mind when we look at 312 and maintaining the condition of it and finishing it off as well.

A lot of dairy work in that area, which means that you have the regular milk pick-up with heavy trucks going down 312 to all the dairy farms. We've just had two hog operations, one very close to 312 and one a little ways off. Those hog operations are of a large size, some of the bigger ones in Saskatchewan, and they also tend to put a lot of pressure on there.

The other thing that I think Highways may have been thinking and I'm not sure — you can explain this to me a little later on — but when the stretch was finished off decently from the Laird corner through to where it joins up with Highway 12, that I think may have been done because of the feeling of a lot of those grain trucks and the grain hauls would be going through close to Saskatoon to the high through-put. What seems to be happening though is, there is a lot of that grain that was going there is now coming into Rosthern and putting a lot of pressure on that particular stretch of roadway.

So we have a very vibrant rural population, a lot of use of those particular roads; added to that that Rosthern happens to be the centre for the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and a few other of those sorts of government services, all of the traffic from the surrounding communities filter through into Rosthern, down Highway 312.

There's another component that I think is critical here. And the problem is something that's brought up with all the highways in Saskatchewan. But I think I just need to underline the fact that that area is in no way isolated from that. And that is that that's a key tourist area in Saskatchewan.

The Heart of the old North-West has been one of the more vibrant tourism concepts that has taken place in Saskatchewan, and Highway 312 happens to be essentially the east-west link in that, taking people from the Batoche area, the Fish Creek area, and then across through to Seager Wheeler, Fort Carlton, and over to Redberry and the pelican situation over there. So this highway has many different components to it.

And if we look at what's been happening on it, that could have been finished the way it is, as I said, from the Laird corner through to 312. I think the deterioration that's now taken place probably wouldn't have taken place, because it is getting to be a bit of a sad stretch of road.

And so I'd like you to comment on those kinds of bits of information that should be taken into consideration when we look at Highway 312. And I'd also like to have you fill me in on exactly where the future lies with 312 and where it is in the plans to completing that section.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well we now want 312. And we have No. 18 and No. 37 and No. 48. And the member from Canora-Pelly, I think No. 5. And I think the member from Lloydminster is 303. And Meadow Lake is 21, I know for sure.

If you look at the traffic count on 312, it's about 350 vehicles per day and it certainly is, you know, a fairly busy road. And we also have to . . . if we remember back a few years, the rail line was abandoned in that area, and certainly you can now start to see the impact of rail line abandonment. That's a very good example.

312 is on the BCA (benefit/cost analysis) list, but it's not very high at this point in time. I believe a portion is 64th on the list and another portion is 87th on the list, so it's going to take some years to get to it, that's for sure. But we will certainly maintain and preserve it as best we can until such a time that we can in fact do some reconstruction.

But that's part of the challenge. I mean you know the Rosthern area. Now most of the people that phone me want No. 11 twinned. And so I don't know what your preference would be between twinning Highway 11 or reconstruction of 312. We certainly can't do all the roads in Saskatchewan, and so we have to prioritize it.

And that's why we have the list. That's why we have a reason or rules to get to that list or a set of principles so that we can determine which is first on the list, which is second on the list.

But we have to do it that way because, as I tried to demonstrate, every area of the province has a road that that's their, you know, is their priority. And in some cases, like in the Rosthern area, you have to juggle — I mean 312 or Highway 11.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And obviously, you know, you posed the question about which one of those two. And both of them have some very valid reasons for that. I guess if you're going to ask me which one, I would without hesitation say Highway 11 would probably come before that, and that's because the number of lives that have been lost there. And I think if we deal with those, we'll take the potholes second and save the lives first.

A question that came to mind coming back from British Columbia about a year ago and talking to someone that's working on Department of Highways there — they have an interesting piece of equipment there that apparently is up for rent from time to time to other jurisdictions across Canada. And it's a unit that basically does the reclaiming right at the start, picks it right off, runs it through its own system, reconditions it, and lays it back out. And that's just all one unit.

And I guess the interesting thing about that one is it seems to alleviate a lot of the construction and the traffic and all those sorts of things that happen around a repaving project. I just passed a repaving project in Saskatchewan here on the weekend and it basically was two, three miles of ongoing equipment, where at a certain part they were taking the old top off, and then there was some more equipment working and, you know, miles later down the road there was some paving going on.

And so you had literally quite a number of miles taken up with this particular operation. And on busy highways, that ends up posing some very serious problems, whereas this other piece of equipment basically takes up about a hundred yards of roadway

and then just keeps on going from beginning to end.

And I'm wondering if your department is aware of that piece of equipment, if they'd look into it. And is it prohibitive as far as the cost is concerned, or why aren't we looking at it?

(2200)

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you for the question. That's certainly an interesting process. And we have tried it. On Highway 55 we have a section that we did, I believe it was last year or the year before. And we are looking at the results of that. In the Dundurn area we did a section about two years ago.

We have some concerns with it. We don't believe there are much savings, at least at this point in time. Right now when we reuse the pavement, we take it to a plant and process it and then put it back, and it's not all in one process. But the costs of the machines, and if you look at total cost, it virtually seems to be the same.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I appreciate the fact that you've looked into that and that, you know, if it isn't cost-effective, then I guess there's no reason to use that in Saskatchewan.

Back to a concept that we sort of dealt with briefly when we were talking about Highway 11. What is the trend in Saskatchewan as far as deaths on the highway? Are those increasing, decreasing? And if there is a change, to what is it attributed — either an increase or a decrease?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Okay, I'm going to give you a couple of statistics, I guess. Accidents on all roads in Saskatchewan compared to the five-year trend, 1990 to '94, the total accidents are down by 11.6 per cent — 30,191 for a five-year average versus 26,677 in 1995; persons injured are down by 6.2 per cent — 7,920 versus 7,427 in '95; persons killed are up by 1 per cent — 154 versus 156; accidents involving alcohol are down by 15.7 per cent — 1,866 versus 1,572; accidents on provincial highway road system only — that's just the highway system — the total accidents are down by 2.3 per cent; persons injured are up by 9.2 per cent; persons killed are down by .7 per cent.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And I think I also asked if there was a rationale or reason for that trend and I would hope it's not because they have to go slower because of the conditions of the roadways.

Two questions sort of coming out of that, and I'm not sure if you have those statistics handy, and that is, is there any correlation between types of vehicles . . . and what I'm asking is, do we find that there is a decrease let's say in the number of large trucks involved in these accidents? Well then we have to sort of say, okay, why are large trucks not involved in as many accidents; something good must be happening there. Or the reverse.

And do you also have any breakdown on . . . as you mentioned, there is a change, and I detected a decrease sort of, that seemed to be in general. Is there an age category that we can make a

comment on and say, this is an age group that used to have a certain percentage of fatalities and now they don't. So is there a difference that way as well.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I certainly don't have those figures here tonight, but the general conclusion or principle . . . conclusion I guess, is that there are less trucks, large trucks involved in accidents, but those accidents are more serious than smaller vehicles — cars and half-ton trucks.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, a couple of questions that just were brought to my attention. One in particular comes from a young teacher who happens to travel up . . . has travelled over the highway by Craven. And he noticed that there's a sign up on that, I believe, it's Highway — I'm not exactly sure of the number — but it goes off No. 11 up to Craven. There's about 11 miles in there for resurfacing. And his question, coming from the Kennedy area where his parents live and the fact that Kenosee Lake has a much higher usage as far as tourism and promotion, he's wondering why No. 11 is getting resurfacing this year versus doing something really to No. 48. And I'm wondering if you could respond to that, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Well certainly preservation. We're trying to preserve Highway 11, the main link of course, between Saskatoon and Regina. And to preserve that road from falling into conditions like a thin membrane surface road, like 48, certainly deserves some attention before it falls into that state.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, are you talking about the one that goes off 11 through to Craven? I can understand No. 11 being a main access road between two large centres but there's . . . and I just don't know exactly what the number of the highway is that goes off through Craven, I believe it's along the valley there.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I guess maybe you should . . . I'd ask you to check that out because I don't believe there's any work being done on either Highway 99 or Highway 20. So you know, if you could check that out and get back to me, we'll certainly get back to you then.

Mr. Toth: — Certainly, Mr. Minister, I'd be more than pleased to do that. I'm basically just going by a quick conversation. I haven't had a chance to really check it out myself but going by a concern that was raised with me personally, and of course this individual is comparing . . . He comes from one area and sees the resurfacing in another area, and in his view, it seems to me that it would be more appropriate, one area over the other. And of course, that's an argument you've had all evening as to what's more important than the other.

Another question that comes up on an ongoing basis, Mr. Minister, is the amount of taxes that are collected from the sale of gasoline in the province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — To have the exact number, you would have to ask the Department of Finance, but it is very close to \$400 million, if you take the fuel tax and licence fees. I know you're going to likely ask, so what do you spend? We spend in

the neighbourhood of 200 million, about close to 50 per cent.

Mr. Toth: — You're exactly right, Mr. Minister, and a mind reader now. But what I was going to reiterate, Mr. Minister, you certainly would have the support of the travelling public if indeed the Minister of Finance just allowed you to utilize all the resources, or the revenues generated from the gas tax and didn't give you any other revenues. And it would certainly give you a fair amount of funds that could be used directly related to the highways in this province.

So I just wanted to assure you that the public of Saskatchewan certainly raises that on an ongoing basis and their question has always been, well why are we not putting at least as much into highway construction as we're spending and putting into the general treasury out of gas taxation.

I thank you, Mr. Minister, for your responses. I believe my colleague has a few more questions, he'd like to respond, and I certainly appreciate the comments you have made.

I just wanted to reiterate one thing. When I was talking about Highway 48, I must dare not forget about the fact that in the last little while I've had a number of individuals who are involved in driving ambulances or riding in ambulances. I've heard drivers and as well as nurses have basically said to me, we'd sure like it if the Minister of Highways would come down here and go with us on one of our emergency trips down 48; maybe the message would be passed on a lot quicker. Thank you.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Minister, I want you to know that I very much enjoyed being the Highway critic for our party over this past year, and I very much enjoyed following your work schedule and the things that you do. I sincerely wish that you had a bigger budget.

And I sincerely believe that you won't be able to do your job properly until your cabinet gives you the money that you will have to have, to work with. I know that won't be easy and I know it's going to be a difficult argument for you to make, but there is absolutely no way that you can do your job without money. We have to understand that.

But there is every opportunity, I think, for us to believe that there is money available now. The economy of this province is improving. The prices of grain have gone up. Prices of oil have ranged from 20 to \$25 when the oil industry of course has very easily made it known that they can survive at \$16.

All of those sectors are important to the economy. I know that there are shortcomings in some other areas but still, the economy seems to be going along well. There seems to be a general increase in what's happening, and so I say to you, you have to lobby harder with your cabinet.

We cannot let you off scot-free though. Because if you're to do your job right, you must win some of your arguments. And while there are probably another three hours of questions that I have on my desk, and I know very well that the people of Saskatchewan would want me to ask each and every one of them, there also comes a balancing act for us to do. And that

balancing act of course has to be recognized in terms of some day saying, enough, we have to quit and get on with other things.

You've got other jobs to do and so do I. And so I'm going to save these questions until next year. I don't know if my leader will allow me to be the critic for our party for Highways next year or not, but if I don't get any roads fixed, probably not. Well anyway, there you go. So my job is dependent on you, I suppose.

Well I guess I look forward to the opportunity to doing this again through the summer and on into next year, and hopefully that will be my job and we will be able to go nose to nose on some of the problems again then.

I challenge you, Minister, though, to go out to those communities that have asked you to come out. And I know it's tough to work into schedules, but if you do come to any place that I'm around, I offer you the hospitality, both of my four-wheel-drive truck and my office. And we certainly will try to get you wherever you have to go. I offer you the hospitality of our party in all other parts of the province. Every one of my colleagues would be quite happy to take time off to drive with you, or to provide transportation for you, or to make contacts for you so that you can get out to visit the folks.

So, Mr. Minister, having offered you everything that we have that we can possibly give to give you an opportunity to do your job better, I'm going to say that I do appreciate the work that you have done, and I hope that you can do better. Have a good year.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The TV audience has decided, Mr. Minister, that they would like to ask you a question. Just got a phone call from a gentleman out in the Kindersley area who says that there is some maintenance being done on Highway 21.

He believes that there is about 8 to 10 kilometres to be fixed and the flags are up ready for the work to start happening. But approximately 300 yards — I think it's yards, maybe it's feet I've got written here — about 300 units of measurement in front of where the repairs are supposed to start, there's a great big dip in the road. And obviously this great big dip isn't going to get fixed because the construction isn't designed to start until about 300 feet or yards afterwards.

So, Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could look into that and see to it that this big dip on Highway 21 about 10 kilometres north of Kindersley actually will be repaired while the rest of the road right in the area is fixed.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I would think that it would be a good idea that we look at it and we certainly will do that.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you for that commitment. I'm sure this gentleman who is probably still watching will be greatly pleased with your response and that the bump on his road will be repaired.

Now if we can just get the television audience to phone in and pinpoint every bump in the province, maybe we can get a commitment from the minister to get those fixed also.

An Hon. Member: — Just keep those phones ringing.

(2215)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Just keep those phones ringing, that's right.

Mr. Minister, railroads are a safety hazard in this province. We need the railroads. We need the rail system. But every year there are a number of people who are killed at level crossings, particularly at night time, Mr. Minister. I know that there was a report that was presented dealing with railroad safety.

Mr. Minister, the other day I was in Alameda at night and there was a train going past at the level crossing on No. 9 Highway. There was some light-coloured cars with reflectors on the sides of them. Those cars were easily spotted from a fair distance away because of the reflectors in the light. Right behind them came a set of black tank cars. You couldn't tell that those cars were there at all, Mr. Minister. It was simply a continuation of the highway in the night, but yet the flashing reflectors clearly lit up that there was something happening in front of you.

So, Mr. Minister, has any consideration been given to talking to the federal minister — because obviously railroads are a federal responsibility — of having reflectors placed on all cars. Now perhaps in Ontario where there are electronic lights, where there's flashing lights and bars that come down at the railroad crossings, people can see that the train is there because the flashing lights are there. But in rural Saskatchewan that doesn't happen, Mr. Minister.

And the simple X on the side of the road saying there's a railroad crossing doesn't indicate to you whether or not there's a train there. And if you happen to have cars in front of you on the train that are black and unmarked in any way, shape or form, you simply can't see them on a black night.

And we have too many of those, Mr. Minister, in this province. We have too many level crossings with no markings. So have you talked with the minister of transportation in the federal government with the idea of putting reflectors on all railroad cars?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Thank you very much. The member will know that as a result of the 14 fatalities in 1995 I set up a committee this last year to look at railway crossings safety, and the committee reported to me in April '96 with several recommendations. Some of the recommendations are, a public awareness campaign, changes to driver educational materials. The report also recommended immediate action with SARM and the Government of Saskatchewan and Transport Canada for funding of reflectors on passive railway crossings — that's the backside of the railway signs, so that as your lights hit the backside if a train is going by, you will see the reflection . . . you know the reflection will be . . .

An Hon. Member: — Flickering.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Exactly, flickering.

Some other recommendations were to also review some of the engineering standards at railway crossings. The report also recommended a zero tolerance and higher fines for persons who violate railway crossing safety laws. The report also asked the federal and provincial governments to look at . . . and railway companies, to provide annual grants to support railway crossing safety.

Copies of that report have been sent out to many, many stakeholders, and we're receiving reports back and other ideas back. I met with Mr. Harrison, the president of SARM, last week, and we did send in a joint submission to the federal government, Transport Canada, to help us with the reflectorization of the passive railway crossings.

Part of the problem with putting reflectors on the car itself is that in many cases we have American cars on our system. We have our cars on their system. Apparently dust and dirt will get on those reflectors and they will not maybe be as good as what we think they might be. However, and also the cost of putting reflectors on the cars is very costly because there's a process that has to be put onto the car itself before the reflectors are put on.

What we're requesting is that the railways look at that when they're repairing the cars, and not just pull every one off . . . or replacing a car, that in fact that can be done at that time and it would be less costly.

So we're acting on that concern. I think we've done a lot of good work in that area and we will continue to monitor progress on that report.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I wonder if you could indicate to us whether or not any of these reflectors have been put on the backside of the railroad crossing signs any place in the province. I don't remember seeing any of them. Have any of them been placed to test whether or not the driving public can see them flashing or them flickering as a train is going through a crossing?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — We have not put any up but I believe SARM have tried it in a few locations and are supportive of it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Something certainly needs to be done because we simply have too many level railroad crossing accidents. And I realize some of them occur in the daytime and not at night. But those that occur at night, if we can do something to prevent it then we should.

The government is more than prepared to impose new rules and regulations on drivers who consume alcohol because of the number of fatalities . . . that are injured in that, and I think this is another area of safety that the government should be reviewing.

I listened to my colleague bring up some of the concerns from

Highway 48. Highway 48 also runs through part of my constituency, although it isn't a large portion that is in disrepair. I just want to point out though, I'm not going to lobby too hard for Highway 48 at the present time, because there is a group in place that is prepared to do that for themselves. The Highway 48 Boosters have started up an organization and have contacted you, I know, Mr. Minister, because I have their faxes here. And they list all the good reasons why you should be doing some repairs on Highway 48.

I just wanted to mention that to you so that you could give them serious consideration when it comes time to allocating your highway budgets, Mr. Minister, along with every other highway in the province that is in equal difficulty, Mr. Minister.

Last winter there were some changes made to the winter maintenance programs, Mr. Minister. There seemed to be either some confusion or some difficulty with the program when it changed. As you will recollect, I ran into a bit of a problem, along with a number of other people, heading down Highway 33, the first storm of the season in late November or early December. It was mentioned a time or two in the newspaper that the road had not been cleaned on a Sunday afternoon, evening, just after a major storm.

I wonder if you can explain the changes that you made to the winter maintenance programs and the changes that you made after the complaints were received about Highway 33 and those other highways which were not cleaned on the weekends.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I recall the concern, and I believe it was just after we had changed the policy. I think it was the first storm after. And in fact, what we had said is that surveillance will be carried out seven days a week during periods of severe weather conditions and where there is uncertainty about road conditions. No surveillance will be performed on days when the weather conditions are good. That's our policy.

Well I believe some of the crews, when they received that, understood that there would be no surveillance on Sunday and in fact no ploughing on Sunday — if I can remember the concern — and of course the roads were not ploughed. But since that time certainly that has been corrected and we continue to move on.

Timing of ploughing, we've changed that a bit. We don't normally go out now until the storm quits or there is an excessive snow build-up because if you go out during a storm, first of all it's very dangerous. Second of all, economically it's not always that wise.

In the regards of removing snow pack, we will not for instance use salt until the temperature is a certain degree, like if it's minus 20 degrees, salt does not work very well so why are you putting it on the road. So we watch that a lot more closely now. And not only does it save winter maintenance dollars but it also is just smarter. We're spending our money more wisely. And so we believe that it's going to be quite effective.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Driving around this winter, particularly with my eldest son chasing the

various hockey rinks around the province with hockey, I ran into a number of roads . . . while there hadn't been a storm in the area there had been a significant amount of drifting and there were major snow drifts across the road, some of them 3 and 4 feet high, where there was one lane of traffic left to go through this drift. The rest of the road was perfectly clear.

You know I can certainly understand why the Highways department wouldn't be out clearing the rest of the road. But in about a six-mile stretch of highway on Highway 361 east of Lampman, there were about two or three of these drifts that were very significant drifts; they were probably 10 feet wide and stretched right across the highway up to 4 feet with one path through them.

In the daytime you could see it coming, you could see vehicles coming from the other side. But if you didn't know those drifts were there at night and you were travelling down the road and oncoming traffic and you happened to meet at that drift at the same time, somebody was going to be hopefully just simply stuck in the ditch and nothing more than that.

I wonder if you could explain why the crews were not out there clearing those drifts off. It wasn't just a situation where it had just happened that day; those drifts were there for three or four days.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — You probably have to give me some more information. Perhaps you can do that tomorrow and I can take a look at it, because I haven't heard of that complaint at this point in time. But we'll certainly check it out.

The drifts should not be on the road for that length of time, there's no question about that, and whether it was missed or whatever . . . But if you could give me the details, certainly I would check that out.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. One final issue here. Another highway that needs fixing. This time it's No. 8 Highway south from Carievale to the U.S. border and I have quite a number of letters which I'm sure you received the same letters.

An Hon. Member: — 48 north to Moosomin.

Mr. D'Autremont: — And not 48 north to Moosomin — 48 runs east and west.

But particularly the area from Carievale to the U.S. border. We're encouraging tourism in this province, Mr. Minister, and one of the things that we need to do to get tourism into this province is to allow them to have a road to drive on. That particular stretch of road takes a very severe beating from the heavy traffic that travels on it. I know that we discussed this particular stretch of road last year. We have the highway counts on it.

The highway counts — I'm wondering if you did a count here this past summer or within the last year — and if you did, and if you could give me the locations of where your count meters might have been placed, because I think it'd be particularly

important for that first stretch from the U.S. border north to the first corner which is about a mile, I believe.

Because a large amount of the traffic will turn at that corner and take the grid road into Carnduff and then some place further north where the oil traffic would be on it. Do you have that kind of a measurement, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — I can supply you with those details. In fact the department have very good details on the traffic counts in that area but we don't have the exact figures to the locations that you're talking about. But we will certainly supply them in the next day or two.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, because I have received a number of letters from the businesses in the area on both sides of the border concerned about that particular stretch of road. There is an attempt to get that particular stretch of road tied into the North American trade corridor to come up into Canada. The road on the U.S. side of the border is one of the better roads in north-western North Dakota, and unfortunately as soon as it hits the border, we can no longer say that.

So I think that's an area we need to take a very serious look at to encourage trade up and down through North America. I can see the member from Estevan is paying particular attention to this because he has a vested interest in seeing to it that perhaps the traffic goes through Estevan and up that highway there, but he's a little concerned about my figures here. I have in here, if I can find it in short order — and I may not be able to because I just saw. . . oh there it is — it shows the depth of the hard surfacing on the roads on the major highways in north-western North Dakota that come across the border. And on 83 Highway it's 4 inches; on 256 it's 2 inches; on 28 up to Sherwood is 5 inches; Northgate is four and a half; and Portal, for the member from Estevan, is 4 inches. So the major thickness is up to the Sherwood port.

And while the member may want to dispute this . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well we only wish, but it isn't, but this is information prepared by the North Dakota Department of Transport, Mr. Minister. So it is the best highway in north-west North Dakota coming into Canada, into Saskatchewan. And unfortunately when you cross the border you hit a road that you can barely drive. That's why everybody turns a mile north of the border and takes a good grid road into Carnduff.

So I think it's important that the measurements be made in the right places, Mr. Minister, to determine exactly how much traffic is there from the border itself, and how much traffic is there further up the road towards Carievale, and the oil traffic and traffic then moving into Carievale, to get a proper determination as to the traffic levels on that road. Thank you.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates 1995-96
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
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Vote 16

Item 1 agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's certainly a pleasure to stand here and thank the minister and his officials for coming and responding to the questions we raised. And while we're certainly just somewhat disappointed, we can appreciate the difficulty the minister is having. And in fact I would suggest between the department and the minister, they're working as well as they can in regards to the stringent strings or the tight strings that the Minister of Finance is placing on them.

So a thank-you to the minister, to his officials, and to the Department of Highways personnel for the efforts they are making in trying to maintain the current system we have in place.

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — First I want to thank the third party for the questions they had tonight. Certainly they were . . . they have a lot of highways that they would like fixed and maybe they have a liberal calculator that they could sometimes add the costs of all the roads that they would like fixed.

But I really do appreciate the cooperation and the questions. And I would also like to thank my staff for coming tonight and being a great deal of help.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:36 p.m.

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