

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of teachers, students, and parents right across the province regarding the external music credit that is currently under review. I will read the prayer, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to allow that the special credit policy effective September 1997 does not eliminate the present policy of Saskatchewan Education which awards credits earned to a maximum of three for external programs where time, effort, and achievement warrant. The examples are the Royal Conservatory of Music and Western Board.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, come from Swift Current, Regina, Lucky Lake, Beechy, Gull Lake, Kyle, numerous locations. I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned with the changes or proposed changes to the external music credits in the province and the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to allow that the special credit policy effective September 1997 does not eliminate the present policy of Saskatchewan Education which awards credits earned to a maximum of three for external programs where time, effort, and achievement warrant. And as example, the Royal Conservatory of Music and Western Board.

Mr. Speaker, those who have signed this petition are from communities, some of them being in my own riding, communities such as Pambrun, Herbert, and a number of other communities in south-west Saskatchewan. I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure again to present petitions on behalf of those concerned about the organization Working for Women in Saskatoon. I shall read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to continue the services of Working for Women, Saskatoon, who have a 16-year history of successfully providing cost-effective, accessible services to women in poverty by reducing their barriers to training and employment.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition represents many people, as it did yesterday. City councillors, those who are curators of galleries, counsellors, students, farmers, massage therapists, just about everything. And I do so with great pleasure, table this today on their behalf.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan people this afternoon as well. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reduce the PST by two points to 7 per cent in the 1997 budget, and table a long-term plan for further reductions in the PST in years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present petitions with respect to the people on these papers. They are from Saskatoon, Regina, and many other rural communities. And I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reduce the PST by two points to 7 per cent in the 1997 provincial budget, and table a long-term plan for further reductions in the PST in years ahead.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These come from the North Battleford, Saskatoon, Regina areas. Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege as well for me to present more petitions regarding the PST (provincial sales tax), and I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reduce the PST by two points to 7 per cent in the 1997 provincial budget, and table a long-term plan for further reductions in the PST in the years ahead.

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitions are signed by individuals from the communities of Scott, Wilkie, Birch Hills, Fox Valley, and other communities.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of the PST from the people of this province and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reduce the PST by two points to 7 per cent in the 1997 provincial budget, and table a long-term plan for further reductions in the PST in the years ahead.

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

These are signed by people from Saskatoon, Regina, Preeceville, Hepburn, Waldheim, Hague, Duck Lake, and Rosthern.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to present petitions on behalf of the Saskatchewan people:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reduce the PST by two points to 7 per cent in the 1997 provincial budget, and table a long-term plan for further reductions in the PST in the years ahead.

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

From the communities of Martensville, Rosthern, Saskatoon, Warman, and that general area of Davidson and south as well, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present petitions as well today along with the member from Saskatoon Greystone for Working for Women in Saskatoon. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to continue the services for Working for Women in Saskatoon who have a 16-year history of successfully providing cost-effective, accessible services to women in poverty by reducing their barriers to training and employment.

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

The people that have signed this petition are from Saskatoon and from Watrous.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of citizens who are concerned about the increasing youth crimes. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, including the charge of attempted murder of a police officer; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

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

The citizens that signed this petition are from Regina and Lumsden. I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present

petitions signed by citizens of Regina. I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan in light of the most recent wave of property crimes; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations, and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed, and pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby read and received.

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to assist women in poverty by continuing the services of Working for Women in Saskatoon;

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reform provincial legislation to help children who are being exploited for sexual purposes; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to reduce the PST by two points in the 1997 budget; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to make an exemption under The Labour Standards Act respecting agreements between Saskatchewan families and their care-givers; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to establish a task force to aid the fight against youth crime.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day 15 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Justice: what was the average food service budget per inmate per day for inmates in custody in Saskatchewan provincial correctional institutions in 1996? And a similar question for the year 1991.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the indulgence of the Assembly, I want to make an introduction which is not quite in the normal form. I think all members will recognize today that we are honoured to have in our midst quite a number of guests. As I look around the room it would be impossible to introduce them because I think I'd have to introduce practically everyone in the room.

What is assembled here today are many of the people who provide leadership to our communities and to organizations in Saskatchewan. They're here today to help us celebrate Volunteer Day, and that's probably appropriate because it is from the volunteer section that Saskatchewan's leadership has traditionally arose. So I think all members will want to join in giving to our guests today a particularly hearty welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus I too would like to extend greetings and a warm welcome to our guests. I know it's a very special day for seven individuals, but I think what makes it also very special is the fact that we have guests and friends and family here to help celebrate in this very significant day for them. So on behalf of the caucus we welcome you.

I would like to at this time, in order to save some time, indicate . . . on behalf of the member for North Battleford, I'd like to mention two individuals and they are Len Quiring, the recipient of the Governor General's concerned citizens' award, and Jack Amos, who is a dedicated volunteer in North Battleford in the area of the sheltered workshops. I'd like the Assembly to recognize those two gentlemen if you would, please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the PC caucus we would like to as well welcome all of the very special guests here this afternoon for the recipients of the volunteer medals as well as all other special guests.

Also, Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery are five other very special guests this afternoon. They are here today to bring attention to a very important petition that they have brought to the Assembly. The guests are as follows. They are four students from Miller High School in Regina: David Nameth, Mike Farmer, Davina Exner, Lindsay Williamson, and their adviser, Joan Rink. And we ask all members to please welcome them here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to introduce a group of young people who are here with us this afternoon, a group of students from the Grenfell elementary high. I believe we have 27 students here today. Unfortunately I understand a couple of students weren't well and weren't able to accompany the group, and they're probably feeling bad about that. But I'd like to welcome these students, their teacher Ms. Betty Parley.

The students represent grades 1 to 4 and are part of the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) choral group in the elementary school, and they're going to favour us with a number a little later on. We're looking forward to that.

Also a number of people from the community of Grenfell. I won't try to name them all other than a special welcome to His Worship Mayor Magnus Puffalt and his wife.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask everyone to join me in welcoming these guests.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the legislature, a group of students that are visiting today from Weyburn Junior High School that are seated in the west gallery.

These students are grades 7, 8, and 9 students who are part of the Weyburn Junior High Red Cross youth group, and they're here . . . (inaudible) . . . to see government, but they're also here because a very, very special day today on the volunteer presentations of an important person that's helped direct them in some of their activities.

I want to also welcome the principal that's accompanied them today, Mr. Warren Betker, and the parent, Ms. June Fletcher. And I just want to extend a warm welcome on behalf of everyone, and have everyone join me in a warm welcome to the students from Weyburn.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a group of young people to welcome to the Assembly today. They are, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, friends of ours from Moose Jaw. They are a group of folks who are now in their senior years for the most part, but very, very young in spirit. Thirty of them, Mr. Speaker, are seated in your gallery, and one of their members is seated on the floor with us today.

Mr. Speaker, these friends of ours from Moose Jaw meet regularly at the Salvation Army. They share food, fellowship, and faith. Once in a while they invite their local MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly), which is deeply appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to all members this afternoon the Salvation Army Keenagers from Moose Jaw.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Lakeland Citizens of the Year

Mr. Langford: — Mr. Speaker, last Saturday the RM (rural municipality) of Lakeland in the constituency of Saskatchewan Rivers had a pot luck supper to honour the Citizen of the Year.

Because this is Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, one of the winners pitched in beforehand and helped decorate the hall because she helps every year. This is Margaret Hay. The other winner is her husband, the mayor of the village of Christopher Lake, Vic Hay.

Margaret and Vic Hay are two outstanding citizens who have chosen to live in Christopher Lake. Also, they moved from B.C. (British Columbia), Kerrobert, Kyle, Saskatoon, and Prince

Albert — a wise choice for them and for their many friends they have made in their 14 years in Lakeland.

The Hays are very active in their community. They are active in the Legion, they sing in the St. Christopher church choir and in the Traveller's music group, and they belong to the Pine Tree Heritage Club. Vic and his wife both belong to the local snowmobile club.

Mr. Speaker, there isn't as many people in Lakeland as there might be in other places, but they are all a quality group. It was hard to select two people for Citizen of the Year, but Margaret and Vic Hay were good choices. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

High School Elective Credits

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during the past few months a serious lobbying effort on behalf of Saskatchewan high school students and Saskatchewan music teachers has been under way. They have been gravely concerned with this government's proposal to reduce the number of high school elective credits to which Royal Conservatory courses could be applied. The parents, students, and music teachers across the province began a letter-writing campaign. They circulated petitions and they phoned their local MLAs. I myself received hundreds of these letters and phone calls, and I am sure the minister received even more.

These people strongly believe that the government proposal to change the elective credit structure would not offer the recognition that these hard-working, dedicated music students deserve. It is my understanding that a compromise has now been reached on this issue with the minister agreeing to alter her proposal.

It is with great pleasure that I'm able to stand in this House today and congratulate the music students, teachers, and parents on their persistent efforts. I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to the Minister of Education for listening to the concerns of these groups and for acting accordingly. This is one great example of how a democratic government should function. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Bromhead Couple, Farmers of the Year

Mr. Ward: — Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I stand here today and honour two outstanding people from the community of Bromhead. Daryl and Judy Muirhead were selected by the Estevan Chamber of Commerce as the district's Farmers of the Year for 1997 at the annual Estevan Farmers' Day.

The award, Mr. Speaker, is given to the farmer or farm couple that demonstrates their skills as farmers, makes contributions to local agriculture, and participates in community events.

The Muirheads have excelled in all three areas, Mr. Speaker.

Their family farm is just that — a family operation with their entire family contributing to its success.

Daryl and Judy have continuously diversified their operation to meet the new challenges in agriculture. Taking advantage of new methods and new ideas have helped enable the Muirheads to succeed.

In addition, the farming . . . to the farming operation, Daryl and Judy have established and maintained a fabrication business, Muirhead Manufacturing Limited. Since 1973, the business contributes to the local economy by offering employment opportunities for local residents as well as supplying a wide range of agricultural-related items such as harrow-packer drawbars, trailers, and bins.

Daryl and Judy are truly deserving of the award bestowed upon them. They exemplify the hard work and determination required to succeed in the ever-revolving ag and food industry as well as the community spirit that our rural areas depend upon.

I ask all the members of this Assembly to congratulate the Muirheads on their achievements — achievements that for so many others go unrecognized. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Donovan Bailey in Saskatchewan

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Donovan Bailey, a renowned athlete, world and Olympic record holder in the 100 metre race, is in Regina for the next few days. He is here primarily because he cares about our youth and is showing his dedication by assisting them in choosing healthy lifestyles.

He has volunteered his time to speak at the fast track fund-raising luncheon at Queensbury Centre here in Regina. He will also be participating in the production of a video that will spell out the detriments of drug usage, and promote enhanced awareness of how to maintain a good sports body image without the use of drugs. The proceeds of Mr. Bailey's efforts will go to the Sport Medicine Council of Saskatchewan and KidSport Saskatchewan.

Welcome to Regina, Donovan Bailey, and thank you for doing your part in assisting our youth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial High School Debating Championships

Mr. Pringle: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was my pleasure this past weekend to attend the provincial debating championships. Participants were grade 9 to 12 students representing many cultures from all over Saskatchewan. And they represented themselves with passion and a very high quality, Mr. Speaker. They demonstrated their ability to work in teams, to research, to organize, to think critically, and to present their ideas and their views very persuasively.

I was proud of all participants. I know that Saskatchewan's young people will channel this passion into all that they do in their future lives.

Our future depends on the dreams and the vigour and the vitality of our young people. As my seat mate, the Minister of Social Services, said last week, our future is in very good hands.

I want to commend the SEDA (Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association) board, president Carol Jensen, executive director Doug Chase, all board members, all the judges, all the volunteers, and the parents who invested time and effort to help our young people with these great learning opportunities — these form our great leadership experiences.

I know I speak for you, Mr. Speaker, and all members in wishing the Saskatchewan winners well at the national championships. I have no doubt that our youth will do themselves and our province proud. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of Connie Wilson

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this day when we're here to recognize a number of distinguished volunteers in the province and across the province, I'd like to take an opportunity to make mention of an individual whose volunteer efforts in life went relatively unnoticed, an individual from my constituency.

But, Mr. Speaker, the political life in this province recently experienced a great loss with the passing of Connie Wilson of Morse. Connie's voice was well-known to many members and listeners to phone-in shows across the province. Connie described herself, Mr. Speaker, as a true socialist rather than a supporter of a particular party. She often phoned up talk shows and wrote politicians to voice her opinions and fight for rural Saskatchewan, proper health care, and the poor.

Mr. Speaker, Connie Wilson was an average citizen who deeply understood the importance of democratic freedoms. She used those freedoms to fight for what she believed was right, and by doing so forced people to listen. Above all, she cared for the public good. Without people like Connie, democracy would surely fall victim to apathy and this is certainly by far its worse enemy.

In her own way, Mr. Speaker, Connie showed us that one person can make a difference. In closing, I'm sure other members join me in offering condolences to her husband Harry and the rest of the Wilson family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Week in Weyburn

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and bring to the Assembly's attention, during Education Week, the many ambitious and worthwhile activities

occurring throughout Weyburn and Weyburn area.

Many events have been meticulously planned by teachers, students, and of course parents. These events include science and book fairs, guest speakers, music festivals, drama presentations, open house, and the geography challenge. Each school has an agenda of planned activities in order to celebrate this truly important week.

Commitment to education must come from everyone, Mr. Speaker. The activities planned for the many Weyburn schools illustrates that there is commitment from teachers, from parents, and from students. Committed, dedicated, and enthusiastic people like the many who have tirelessly planned and prepared projects and activities in order to celebrate Education Week are vital to the long-term health and viability of our world-class education system.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all members of this Assembly will join with me and acknowledge the many hard-working, committed individuals — the teachers, the parents, and the students — who help make our education system the best in the world. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Programs for the Learning Disabled

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as members of this House are aware, this is Education Week and the theme this government is using to promote the event is world-class education.

Well children with learning disabilities in the Prince Albert region are certainly not receiving a world-class education. In fact the board will soon be forced to discontinue an intervention program because of a lack of funding from the province.

Mr. Speaker, all children are entitled to an education that meets their needs, particularly those with special needs. This program is one which addresses the specific needs of these children and one which allows many to become independent students.

Will the minister explain why her government has forced parents of these children to take legal action in order to maintain such a valuable program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I would love to be able to respond to the member's question but as he indicated in the question, in his question to me, the Minister of Education is being sued. Therefore, I have received legal advice that I cannot respond or comment on this case.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll rephrase the question to maybe allow the minister to make a comment.

School boards across the province are finding it more and more difficult to run valuable programs because of this government's cuts to education funding. It has now reached a point where these cuts are affecting essential programs, like the one that I just mentioned in Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, the problems Saskatchewan people are now seeing in education bear a strong resemblance to those we have seen in health care. The government ties the hands of local boards by not providing them with sufficient funding, and the boards are then left to answer for and clean up the mess.

Will the minister explain what commitment she is willing to make to ensure education is properly funded so special needs children, and in fact all children in the province, receive a quality education?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing the last few days, from the Leader of the Opposition, a repeated but, if I may say so, totally inaccurate attack on the education system in the province of Saskatchewan. And a totally unwarranted attack on all those many teachers and trustees and volunteers who are involved in the provision of the best quality public education that the province of Saskatchewan can possibly afford.

Our students are graduates of K to 12, they're graduates of SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), they're graduates of the University of Saskatchewan, and they take their places in jobs in this province, outside of this province, outside of the country, in as good a qualified position as any student anywhere. And by any yardstick, by national standards or other standards, the children in this province, challenged or otherwise, get the very best of educational opportunities.

Should we be doing more? The answer is yes. Are we committed to doing more? The answer is yes, because we're committed to investing in the people of Saskatchewan. That is our agenda for the 21st century. And for the life of me, I wish the Liberal Party would stop this attack on education and the educators of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Youth Crime

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the students of Miller High School in Regina appear to recognize a problem that this government does not. Students are circulating petitions in hope that this government will be pressured to do what it can to address the growing problems associated with young offenders.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has minimized this issue. He has not yet indicated whether he would support our call and the call of the people of this province for the establishment of a special task force on youth crime.

Will the minister explain what he is prepared to do, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that question.

We in the government and all of the people in Saskatchewan are extremely concerned about those of our youth who are involved in crime. But we also want to emphasize that there are many, many youth in Saskatchewan, including some who are here today, who are very good examples of what democracy is all about and what community responsibility is all about.

And I think that one of the roles that we have in government and in opposition and in this legislature is to hold up all of our young people who are volunteers and who work really hard for many significant issues and encourage them and help them assist us in dealing with these problems.

We have many things that we are doing within the government to address a number of the issues relating to young people who are involved in various criminal activities and we seek the support of all members of the community to resolve this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his response, and I wonder if the House would indulge me in quoting from 1996 *Hansard*, the Speech from the Throne. I quote:

Our province's families have the right to live in safe communities. My government will propose reforms to the justice system designed to:

make offenders, including young offenders, more accountable for the impact of their actions on their victims and their community.

Not one mention — not one mention, Mr. Speaker — in this year's Speech from the Throne with respect to this serious problem.

And yes, we recognize that the Young Offenders Act is a federal Act, but it's the province that's responsible for the programs and administration of that Act to make sure that it teaches our young people right from wrong and to help them to become productive. Will the minister in this House today admit that he will in fact support the call of the citizens to employ a task force to review this entire situation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I wish to answer this question on behalf of the government. I'm interested that, on this question, the Liberal Party solution to a very serious problem is to set up yet another task force; I guess adopting the old motto, that no problem's so great that can't be referred to another committee or another task force.

Now the person who asked the question is the former leader of the opposition, the Liberal Party, who acknowledged in the question himself that one of the biggest difficulties was federal Liberal legislation called the Young Offenders Act. That's your party — that is your government in Ottawa that implemented the Young Offenders Act.

I want you to tell . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, don't answer from your seated position. You get up and ask the question; and in asking the question, tell me and table the documents that your caucus has done in protest and in opposition to the Young Offenders Act. What have you done?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Nations Taxation

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, as we all know aboriginal peoples are paying many taxes. However, there is confusion in this province as to exactly what the tax obligations of first nation peoples are. Mr. Speaker, the Premier says he would prefer to handle these issues by negotiation, and I agree with him, even if his government has tried to use threats by the Minister of Finance to resolve it.

Negotiations have little chance of success until both sides have a similar understanding of their respective rights and obligations. This can only be known, Mr. Speaker, through a constitutional reference to our Court of Appeal. A reference would then give us a framework within which negotiations could proceed.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, why won't the government agree to move this difficult issue along by a reference to our province's highest court? Or does the government believe that stalled negotiations and threats are a preferred course of action?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, well here we go again. Here's the same old Liberal solution: no problem so great that can't be referred to either a task force . . . no problem so great that can't either be referred to the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court of Canada. There is no problem that you dare touch and make any decision yourselves. You won't tell us where you stand on this issue. Oh, no. Set up a task force, refer it to the Supreme Court of Canada.

We say our position is to negotiate and to discuss. We say our solution is the democratic process of coming to a common resolution of issues. It may not be yours. You may want to adopt a confrontation approach, which is what a reference situation implies. That is not our approach.

I remind the hon. member opposite that if you refer to the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court a constitutional reference, somebody has to frame the question. Who's going to frame the question? Do you want the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to frame the question? Do you want the Government of Saskatchewan to frame the question?

And the Liberal member nods his head yes to both of those questions — typical Liberal. Like a Liberal, like every Liberal in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, he's sitting on the fence with one ear to the ground and only the Liberals can do that anatomically.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Premier. We do indeed have our ear to the ground. However, might I say that unlike the Minister of Finance, we happen to think that the issues of on-reserve taxation are a slight bit more complicated than simply a tax dispute with any corner store.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that a reference would delay the issue. In fact it would avoid pointless negotiations and lengthy litigation. My question then is, at what point will the government concede that its negotiations are going nowhere, that there is a stalemate, and obtain a constitutional opinion from our highest court in order to facilitate an amicable resolution? And, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier knows, it is the duty of the provincial cabinet to frame that question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Of course, that's exactly my point — it's the duty of the provincial cabinet to frame the question. But the preface of your question is that there's an irreconcilable difference between the provincial government's position and those of status treaty Indians.

And then he would have us believe that if we framed the question based on our particular point of view, somehow this is going to be a fairly put question to a court of reference. The very premiss of his question is that there are diametrically opposed positions which require some other solution.

Surely this is not the solution. There needs to be found a common ground. That is what I'm saying. That's what the Minister of Finance is saying. That's what the Minister of Justice is saying. And so far as I know, that is what the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations are saying.

They want to talk this out. They don't believe that judges, no matter how well-intentioned, how well educated, how well-meaning, are the body best suited to solve this very complicated social, economic and cultural and historic and constitutional issue. You must surely agree with that.

Therefore what we've got to do — all of us in society — is not to inflame this issue. We must pursue enforcement. Everybody in this province must follow the laws of the land. Everybody does. That's enforcement.

Finding subsequent solutions to taxation later, that is a question of dialogue, compromise, and democratic decision. And for once I wish you would tell us where the Liberal Party stands on that issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Young Offenders Act

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the last few weeks we have heard a lot about young offenders getting in trouble with the law. And I think it's important to remember that the vast majority of young citizens of this province are good, law-abiding citizens and they are just as outraged and disgusted as everyone else at those who choose to steal cars or break laws in other ways.

Four students at Miller High have decided to do something about it. They are circulating a petition calling for major changes to the Young Offenders Act. The changes include stricter sentences, mandatory restitution, community service work for young criminals, and trying 16-year-olds in adult court. They want to get at least 10,000 names on their petition and take it to Ottawa to present to the House of Commons later this spring.

Mr. Speaker, the PC caucus strongly supports these changes and that petition drive. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, will you support these young people and their petition drive?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice I believe has made an offer, perhaps even has had a meeting . . . Have you had a meeting with them? In any event, the Minister of Justice is prepared to meet with the students — who, by the way, I compliment on a democratic exercise — to take a look exactly at what the petition says.

There may be aspects of the petition that we support. There may be aspects of the petition that we don't support. We need to discuss this with the students and take a look at it. We know one thing — that we've laid our concerns about the Young Offenders Act before the Minister of Justice of Canada and we continue to do so.

So the answer is, at some appropriate time the minister . . . The answer is yes, maybe. We'll see what the petition says. And we'll meet with them, discuss, and then decide whether or not the government is going to lend its complete support or partial support or some other support to this particular initiative.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, the current Young Offenders Act assumes that a person under 18 years of age cannot be held responsible for his or her actions. These young people say that a 16-year-old can quit school, they can drive a car, they can leave home without permission of their parents, they can get a job and go to work; so why shouldn't a 16-year-old be considered an adult when they steal a car or commit a violent act? And I think that's a very good question, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier, would you support a change to the Young Offenders Act to have a 16-year-old tried in adult court?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party's question, first question, I think was a much more accurate, and if I may say so, a much more fair representation of the issue and the complexity of the issue. Because in the preface to that first question he identified a number of concerns, of which age is one. It is not a simple solution based on age or any of the other preceding aspects in that first question. It needs to be taken a look at as a total package.

But I say to the Leader of the Conservative Party, the Leader of the Third Party, this is not an issue for the provincial government. We did not draft, nor did this Legislative Assembly pass, the Young Offenders Act. That issue should be taken up directly with the Minister of Justice Canada, the Prime Minister of Canada, and if you will, your next-door neighbour cousins, the provincial Liberal Party, who's supported purportedly to have some influence on the Liberals in Ottawa — not with us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, immediately after question period the students from Miller High will be sitting at a table just outside the Assembly and asking MLAs to sign their petition. Every member of the PC caucus will be signing. I would like to invite every member of the NDP and every member of the Liberals and the independent member to do the same. This would send a strong message to Ottawa that the parties here in Saskatchewan support changes and a tougher Young Offenders Act.

Mr. Premier, the question is to you. The students of Miller High are asking for your help and your support. Will you and other members of your government sign this petition?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — My answer to the Leader of the Conservative Party is the one that I gave one or two questions back. The Minister of Justice will meet with this group to take a look at what the petition requests, examine it, and at some appropriate time advise the government and individual members as to what they should or shouldn't do.

I'm not going to commit myself or any other MLAs — other MLAs are free to do whatever they want to do — but I'm not going to commit myself to signing a petition that I have not seen, on an issue which is complex, which requires care and sensitivity in dealing with a very serious problem, and on an issue which is not the domain of this Legislative Assembly. We have enough on our plate in this Legislative Assembly in this province of Saskatchewan without taking on the responsibility and the chore of the federal Liberals in Ottawa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on another matter, my final two questions are for the Minister of Finance. Madam Minister, it's just one more sleep — in your

own words — until budget day. Then we finally get to find out whether it's you that's been sleeping or not, or whether you've been listening to the thousands of Saskatchewan people who are calling for tax relief.

Today we learned that the Department of Finance has completed its review of the taxation system and they came to this conclusion: a general lowering of taxes would be extremely positive for creating a stronger provincial economy. Where have we heard that before, Madam Minister? I think we've been saying that for some time.

Madam Minister, is it going to happen tomorrow? Are you going to cut the PST or have you been sleeping for the last few months?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I know the Leader of the Conservative Party can hardly contain himself until tomorrow, but I ask him, just hold on now with all the might and strength that you can muster in yourself — about 24 hours from now we and you'll be all the wiser.

But I do want to tell the Conservative Party and I want to tell all the people of Saskatchewan and this Legislative Assembly, this government's agenda is clear — we believe in investing in people.

That means creating jobs, providing the best possible public quality education, child poverty and welfare reform, health renewal, infrastructure and highways in particular, and maintaining fiscal responsibility all the while — investing in people, building for the 21st century.

And I can tell the Leader of the Conservative Party and all the people of Saskatchewan, thanks to their hard work — I mean the people of Saskatchewan — we have now turned the corner to be able to really start putting some meat and bones on that agenda of investing for the people of Saskatchewan. Wait till tomorrow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, your own Finance department is saying a general lowering of taxes would be extremely positive for creating a stronger economy here in Saskatchewan — not targeted tax relief, Mr. Premier, a general lowering of taxes. That means cutting the PST.

Mr. Premier, I know that budget has already been printed, but I don't think it's too late for Saskatchewan people; I don't think it's too late for you to make a change.

Mr. Premier, will we see a general lowering of the PST in your budget tomorrow, as your own Department of Finance is recommending, and the people of Saskatchewan are so desperately needing?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, again I say to the Leader of the Conservative Party, who just confirms my earlier comment, he's just not able to contain himself about tomorrow's budget. And you know I'm pretty excited about it

myself too. I'm anxiously awaiting to see what's in it. So just hang on for 24 hours and we'll all be the wiser for it, as I've said to you before.

But I want to say to the Leader of the Conservative Party that I think in almost every budget, despite some onerous fiscal circumstances which we inherited — thanks to your administration — there have been tax reductions. There have been tax reductions in almost every budget since 1992, that we introduced.

We have a debt of about \$14 billion. We pay \$850 million a year of tax dollars on interest charges on that debt. And that debt was created by you and your administration. That's what the people of Saskatchewan have faced.

So of course we think taxes should be lowered. We've said that right from day one, 1991. In fact the very first tax that we lowered when we got elected is we did away with your harmonization. Remember that tax increase that you and Mr. Devine had?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — That was the first tax that we lowered. Since 1991-92 we've been lowering taxes. Just hang on, please, for 24 hours. You'll . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Services for Victims of Abuse

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Social Services. Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House, I presented a private members' Bill in the hopes of combating the horrendous child prostitution problem in our province. But the issue doesn't end with legislation; it is just the beginning.

We need to look beyond dealing with the offenders, and we need to take a hard look at the support services we are providing for the victims of abuse. We need to look at our priorities and recognize the desperate need for more funding to help the many women and children break the cycle of abuse and victimization.

In Saskatoon, the family support service centre is struggling because of government cut-backs — this government's cut-backs. Over the last two years, this government has slashed its funding by over \$300,000. In fact as of April 1, it may have to drop its crisis intervention program, which will put more of a burden onto its mobile service.

So my question is, what kind of a message does this government think it's sending to the people of this province when its actions clearly show that the well-being of victims is not considered a high priority?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed that the

member in her question didn't entirely present all of the facts related to the situation in Saskatoon. Mr. Speaker, the member will know, or should know, that in addition to the family support centre, new monies — new monies, Mr. Speaker — were provided to the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the native community in Saskatoon to provide services to the people of Saskatoon.

She also knows full well that I have been in long discussion with the family support centre and have established a group of people who've been working over the past few months to look at the whole issue of family and child programing in the city of Saskatoon. They have reported to me, Mr. Speaker, and we continue in discussion.

The member may want to assist the people of Saskatoon this day by contacting her federal friends and ask the question of her colleagues in Ottawa — why it is that the federal government now is withdrawing significant funding from the Saskatoon Mobile Crisis centre in Saskatoon. That's the question that should be asked today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the minister has alluded to, there is another study going on to determine whether the support centre services are really needed. I believe it's about \$10,000 that he's spending on a study that has already been determined — for the need of the centre.

And, Mr. Minister, it's time for this government to stop offloading all of its problems onto the shoulders of the federal government. No one at the federal level made the decision to cut the funding for that centre. That decision was made by the minister's office. You made the decision, Mr. Minister.

The family support service centre is crucial to the survival of victims, as it offers a wide range of programs including counselling victims of domestic violence. The government has spent so much money on this study that simply reconfirms and reconfirms the demand for services that are there.

I ask today, Mr. Minister, if you will make a financial commitment to the family support centre; reinstate the centre's funding?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, today in the House the member again points out the contradiction of the Liberal position. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been taken from social programing from the provinces of Canada — billions of dollars. From this province, \$200 million taken by Liberal government. Then they come to the House and ask for more funding for social programs.

Mr. Speaker, what is even perhaps more tragic is the attempted politicization by that caucus of these very serious and significant issues that face the families and children of our province. Mr. Speaker, this is not truly an assist. I think we should be working together to find joint solutions — one of them being, let's get together and talk to Ottawa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Music Credits for High School Students

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased this afternoon to announce that the Government of Saskatchewan has reviewed the whole issue of music credits for our high school students. And as was stated during the member's statement, all of us have received literally hundreds of letters and phone calls from music educators, parents, and students across the province, expressing the concern that the Department of Education was no longer going to recognize three music credits towards a high school matriculation.

Mr. Speaker, the history of the situation is this. In 1994, the Government of Saskatchewan underwent a review of all of the high school curriculum in the province. We had stakeholders involved in that curriculum review process and they made a recommendation to the minister, and in that recommendation from the High School Review Advisory Committee came the recommendation students should be allowed a special, out-of-school credit of 100 hours.

Historically, only the Royal Conservatory of Music and cadets had had access to out-of-school activity towards a high school credit or matriculation. We reviewed the recommendation and determined that only 2 students out of 255 music students in the province had actually used their three credits towards their 24-credit high school matriculation. So we supported the high school review's recommendation to the government.

Now I met with the Registered Music Teachers' Association. I read all of the letters, as I'm sure you have, and we decided to reconsider our decision based on this. The Royal Conservatory of Music is a highly academic and rigorous exercise on the part of students and we determined that given that it not . . . that the activity not only included learning to play the piano, but it also included rigour and evaluation on music theory, that a good argument could be made that these students should be eligible for not only the special subject policy, i.e., 100 hours of out-of-school activity, but also the two additional credits.

So given that we were . . . we reconsidered our decision, given the rigorosity of the Royal Conservatory of Music and the activity of the students. We determined that it was important that these students continue to receive up to three credits for their high school matriculation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I've already indicated, I think, in the comments that I made this morning . . . or this afternoon earlier on, I'm very pleased that indeed the minister has taken into account some of the concerns raised by the parents, and indeed Royal Conservatory of Music fits into that special category.

I would like to hear from the minister very soon as far as how

she sees the actual credit policy fitting in. And I know that we have received, and schools have received, a new direction, new guidelines last fall that will be implemented and effective for the grade 10 students coming into the school system this fall.

And I believe that I've heard her say that the special credit policy, which is still there, that will be allowing students to take other programs under that special credit — that will still be there. But I'm now understanding that the recognition for up to three credits through the Royal Conservatory music program will also be included under electives. And I would like to compliment the minister and the department for recognizing those things, and I look forward to some discussion with her as far as the actual conditions that have been outlined this morning. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As one of 58 MLAs that has received innumerable phone calls and letters on that issue, I think the change in the policy to allow that other credit there was valid. And I would like to commend the minister and her department for listening to all the concerns that came from the province and to reinstate that policy of three credits for that music area. It's good to see that democracy still actually does work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 207 — The Saskatchewan Government Post-employment Code

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 207, The Saskatchewan Government Post-employment Code now be introduced and read for the first time.

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

(1430)

Bill No. 25 — The Gas Licensing Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 25, The Gas Licensing Amendment Act, 1997 now be introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 26 — The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 26, The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be

read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 27 — The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Amendment Act, 1977

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 27, The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 28 — The Family Maintenance Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 28, The Family Maintenance Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 29 — The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 29, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spirit of open and honest government, I hereby table a response to question 18; it's item 1. And by leave of the Assembly, I would also like to table a response for item 2 and question 19.

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — The answers to questions 18 and 19 are tabled.

MOTIONS

Distinguished Volunteer Medal Recipients

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly I move, and seconded by the member for Regina Northeast:

That this Assembly do now adjourn to honour the distinguished volunteer recipients.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly adjourned at 2:33 p.m.

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