

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of people from Abernethy, Balcarres, Dysart, Lemberg, Melville, and Regina. And 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 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.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of the many citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the social devastation caused by the NDP's (New Democratic Party) gaming policy.

The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take some responsibility for the ill effects of its gambling expansion policy, and immediately commission an independent study to review the social impact that its gambling policy has had on our province and the people who live here.

The petitioners are from Melville, Krydor, Yorkton, Goodeve, and throughout eastern Saskatchewan. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens in the community of Kamsack, and I'll read the prayer for relief:

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, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence, and 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.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the construction of a new hospital in La Loche that will provide adequate health care to its northern residents.

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are people like Keith Lemaigre, Ronny Montgrand, Michael Janvier, Jean Montgrand, Beth Clark, Trudy Sylvestre . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. It's not in order to be entering the names of the petitioners into the record, and I'll ask the hon. member to simply identify the location, the community from which the petitioners have signed and proceed to the conclusion.

Order.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize, and I so present the petition. Thank you.

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 petitioning the Assembly to change the big game damage compensation program; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to cause the construction of a new hospital in La Loche.

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING,
SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

Clerk: — Mr. Johnson, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills, presents the third report of the said committee which is as follows:

Your committee has duly examined the undermentioned petitions for private Bills and finds that the provisions of rules 64, 65 and 68 have been fully complied with. The petitions are:

Of the Lutheran Church Canada in the province of Saskatchewan praying for an Act to provide for the continuation of the Lutheran Church-Canada, Central District; and

Of The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company, Montreal Trust Company of Canada, and the Montreal Trust

Company; and

Of the TD Trust Company and the Central Guaranty Trust Company.

Mr. Johnson: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Cypress Hills, who is fully knowledgeable of this report because he asked about it:

That the third report of the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you a group of students from my constituency seated in your gallery this afternoon. They are 29 wonderful grade 12 students from Aberdeen School, and they are accompanied by their teachers, Donna Duriez and David Herron, and by their bus driver, Roy Page. I look forward to meeting with each of you later on after question period this afternoon, and I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in welcoming this group.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce a guest that's seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'm sure that this guest is familiar to all of us, but I'd like to welcome Stirling McDowell, the former general secretary to the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation who is able to join us this afternoon. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I'd like to introduce John Murney, the agricultural director from one of the best radio stations in Prince Albert or in Saskatchewan, 900 CKBI.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to join with the member to introduce John Murney from CKBI radio, and he's the agriculture director there. So I've been getting a chance to speak with him quite often, so everybody, I'd like to have you welcome him here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, it's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to other members of the House, a distinguished Saskatchewan citizen, Mr. Jim Mills, the mayor of Elrose, probably the longest-standing mayor in Saskatchewan. He'd take a break for a couple of years to get a rest but he couldn't stay away and he's again the mayor and I suspect the most well-known mayor in the region of west-central Saskatchewan; has served his time on the SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association)

executive and a distinguished citizen. Welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many of my colleagues who were at the Credit Union Central reception last night will have met these gentlemen that I am about to introduce and I would like to do that right now. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to rise as I introduce them.

Larry Herman is the general manager of the Shellbrook Credit Union. Seated beside him is Grant Nicklin, the manager of members' services at the Prince Albert Credit Union. And I might point out that he was, when I first started in the credit union system some number of years ago, was my district development manager and sort of guided me along the way. Seated beside him also is Karl Kajner, manager of the Spiritwood Credit Union.

They all were, and many more general managers in the system became, part of my family when I was involved with the credit union system and they still remain dear, dear friends, even though all of you here now are my family.

So if you would please join with me in welcoming these gentlemen to the legislature today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Flavel: — Mr. Speaker, I also want to add to the opposition and the member from Prince Albert in welcoming John Murney here. He was a former constituent of mine from the town of Semans. So he's . . . I've known him for quite awhile, debated with him, and agreed with him on a few things but not that many. So I also want to add my welcome, John, to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to join with the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) to welcome also Mr. Mills to the Assembly today. Not only is Mr. Mills the long-standing mayor in Saskatchewan but he has also been a long-serving broker for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) in this province and served very well that part of Saskatchewan.

I also want to say that over the last couple of weeks anyway, I have been asked about what the insurance rates in the auto fund are going to be in this province, Mr. Speaker. And I want to tell you that the person who will be responsible for any changes is Mr. Mills.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No doubt he is a very popular man, but on behalf of the Liberal caucus I also want to say hello and welcome to Mr. Mills. Mr. Mills and I had the pleasure of serving on the SUMA board together, and I

think there was several occasions where we did figure out the provincial problems and we did have the solutions but these took place till 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. Nobody recorded the minutes, but I certainly had a good time with Mr. Mills and I welcome him here on behalf of the Liberal opposition.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

New Library Service for Visually Impaired

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many times I've had the pleasure to stand before this Assembly and comment on numerous positive programs and events that occur throughout Saskatchewan.

Today I would like to mention a new program that has begun here in Regina. A partnership between the Regina Public Library and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind has been formed that will allow visually impaired and print-disabled individuals access to the information they want in the format that they need. The CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) library is the largest producer of alternative formatted material: Braille, tactile, audio, and electronic text.

Mr. Speaker, this new partnership will improve the accessibility and quality of service for visually challenged people. Users will now have the ability to choose materials from the Regina Public Library and gain information from the CNIB.

This new partnership also reinforces the role of Regina Public Library for residents of the city to provide access to information for all of the citizens of Regina.

I would like to congratulate the Regina Public Library and the CNIB for their partnership and their commitment to providing quality services to all their patrons. This agreement exemplifies the community focus of both organizations as an example of working and cooperating together in the best interests of everyone.

I would ask all members to applaud this new partnership and the benefits that will be enjoyed by the residents of Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Curling Rarity

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been watching very closely our Canadian curling team as they participate in the world championships, and of course I wish our very own Sandra Schmirler particular success.

Talking about success, Mr. Speaker, something happened recently for the very first time at the Dorintosh Curling Rink which is roughly comparable to the parting of the Red Sea, and which also happened only once, I'm told.

On March 3, the Dora Larson rink, consisting of Dora, Grace

Arnold, Myrt Irwin, and Bernie Sergent, scored an eight-ender. For those from another planet, this means that all eight rocks of the Larson rink were in the rings and none of the opponents rocks were counters. For this astounding feat of athleticism the rink was given sweatshirts, pins, and certificates, and as well now, Mr. Speaker, have immortality in *Hansard*.

Now members opposite may wonder how I'm going to tie this news into the federal Liberals. It's fairly easy actually. In Dorintosh they have eight rocks in the house, and thank goodness in Ottawa they only have one Rock in the House.

Now based on what he's done with gun legislation, it would be my guess that even . . . or that when the results of the next election come in, he may not be a counter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

50th Anniversary of Crown Investments Corporation

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, in 1947, the Douglas government decided there was a need for an organization to coordinate the activities of Crown corporations in Saskatchewan. The result of this piece of visionary bookkeeping was the forerunner of the Crown Investments Corporation. The name has changed over the years, but it's mandate, goals, and performance in the service of Saskatchewan people have remained the same.

This week we celebrate the first 50 years of CIC. I am quite confident that 50 years from now a new member from Saskatoon Southeast, still representing the New Democratic Party, will be touting CIC's first century.

The Crown Investments Corporation is a unique entity in a unique province. For its shareholders, the people of Saskatchewan, it manages assets of nearly \$8 billion. The corporations under its umbrella make up 17 per cent of our gross domestic product and provide 9 per cent of the jobs in Saskatchewan. Public investment under CIC has played an important role and continues to do so in the changing economic climate of the modern world. Among other things, we're celebrating 50 years of strong managerial ability and dedication to this province.

Significantly, the Crown structure ensures that head offices of major corporations stay here along with their jobs, expertise, and community involvement.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate CIC on its first 50 years of success and wish it continued success in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Comprehensive School Girls' Basketball Team

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to commend the community spirit and tradition that has been forged in the community of Weyburn.

The Weyburn Comprehensive high school girls' basketball

team recently won the small-cities four-A girls basketball championship for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this was an amazing story in itself, but it does get even better. The girls' basketball team, coached by Len Williams, has, since 1985, won six provincial championships and four small-city championships. This string of 10 combined championships over a 12-year period is truly remarkable.

Mr. Speaker, our rural communities are proving again and again that they can compete with larger centres. The Weyburn girls' basketball team is one of numerous examples. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the members of this year's team for their effort, determination and desire they demonstrated in capturing the championship this year.

I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate Len Williams for the countless years of teaching, coaching, and dedication he has given to the many players who have learned and gained immeasurably from his fine coaching skills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Darlene Hay, Saskatchewan Landscape Artist

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan landscapes are some of the most picturesque in all the world. Our wilderness areas not only provide a natural habitat for animal species, but also provide the opportunity to view wildlife and enjoy our natural surroundings.

And one of the individuals who is actively promoting the protection of our protected areas is Darlene Hay, a Saskatoon artist who has devoted much of her life to portraying the beauty and advocating the protection of Saskatchewan landscapes. Ms. Hay's new exhibition, appropriately called "Saskatchewan Hills of Endangered Spaces" is on display at the Assiniboia Gallery here in Regina until the 19th of this month.

Darlene's ability to embrace the experience of our diverse landscape and transmit this experience to us through her art is what distinguishes her work. And today I would like to commend Darlene for sharing this vision of Saskatchewan with the Saskatchewan public and urge members of the Assembly to view her work in the Assiniboia Gallery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Drake Dinner Theatre

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week there was a lot of talk about theatres and theatrical performances, but I want to talk about one in my constituency in the town of Drake that would match or rival anything in Regina or Hollywood.

The community of Drake held its third annual dinner theatre

last weekend. There was a matinee on Sunday and they had performances Friday and Saturday nights. And tickets went very well and I think there was even signs of scalpers on No. 20 Highway.

The actors are all local people waiting to be discovered, and the meal was prepared by volunteers in the community.

The first proceeds went to the new skating rink and the curling rink complex, now officially opened. From now on proceeds will go into a general fund that can be accessed by the community non-profit organizations.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the perfect marriage of art and business and another good example of the volunteer spirit that makes our province so exceptional.

This year the entertainment consisted of two one-act comedies: *A Thanksgiving Truce* and *The One That Got Away*. I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, but I think the second one is about the former leader, possibly of the Liberal Party — the one that got away. As well, there was a musical interlude between the plays.

So, Mr. Speaker, a good time was had by all in Drake, and I want to express the spirit of Saskatchewan is alive and well in my constituency. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Funding for Municipal Governments

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I hope Lily is near her phone because I have a very important issue I'd like to discuss with her today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I recently met with representatives from a number of rural municipal councils to hear their concerns about a variety of issues. At the top of the agenda of these councillors and reeves were funding cuts that are being brought down by this government.

As this House is aware, the government's latest act of offloading was to the tune of \$29 million. As a result of these cuts and not knowing what future cuts may be in store, municipal leaders say it is impossible to plan large-scale construction projects or even, for that matter, annual maintenance. RMs (rural municipality), at most, can build about a kilometre of road, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of those municipal governments, I ask the minister to explain what her government's future, overall plan is for revenue sharing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, Lily is still here. It's one ringy-dingy, two ringy-dingies, three ringy-dingies.

And the member opposite knows, as a former local government elected person himself, that municipalities are highly . . . the local councils are highly capable people who are very adept at making the most of the resources at hand and at planning ahead.

This year, Mr. Speaker, there is, in addition to the revenue sharing . . . they had a year's notice — a year's notice — on the 25 per cent reduction. So they had time to plan. Then they have this year \$20 million coming in from . . . for the Crow offset. They have the infrastructure money totally for municipal purposes, as well as the revenue sharing.

Mr. Speaker, they have adequate resources. And there is a plan announced by our Minister of Highways last week, transportation plan. They will be involved in that. And their future, Mr. Speaker, is secure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, those councils and municipalities out there were told they would have a 25 per cent reduction in funding. Now they find out in many cases it's as high as 55 per cent. So they are very capable people but they can only take so much.

Mr. Speaker, because of an enormous pressure from SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities), SUMA, community leaders, and the opposition, this government was forced to withdraw its service districts Act last year.

I believe the agenda of this government is that we're going to have a county system and forced amalgamation one way or another. And one way to do this is by starving RMs and towns by cutting the revenue-sharing grants to the bone.

Mr. Speaker, and, Madam Minister, I honestly believe that come hell or high water you intend to still force amalgamation. Will the minister confirm that this is indeed what is happening and does she realize the damage this apparent plan is doing to the infrastructure of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, this sounds a lot like it's another plank in the Liberals' conspiracy plan. We have no such conspiracy, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to assure the member opposite.

I want to also mention that the RMs have, on what they buy, a 2 per cent reduction in the PST (provincial sales tax) which will save them millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. And it is not true that any individual municipality got less than . . . more than 50 per cent in revenue-sharing cuts, because we put in a safety net at 50 per cent. So nobody got reduced more than 50 per cent — 50 per cent.

And you have to take into account the \$5 million that we picked up in social assistance levies, public health levies, and the hospital levy — that gives them the tax room to keep that money for themselves. That's \$12 million, Mr. Speaker — a

total of 17. And some municipalities have got an increase in their revenue-sharing grants this year, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for her honesty in admitting that the 25 per cent funding cut is actually 50. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat ironic that when the Tory government was downloading funding cuts to local governments in the '80s, the New Democratic Party called this back-door taxation. In fact I would like to quote from an NDP document entitled, *Tax Fairness for the '90s*, which reads:

Saskatchewan people are becoming increasingly concerned by the PC provincial government's pattern of shifting the tax burden onto local property taxpayers, a tax shift that amounts to back-door tax increases.

Mr. Speaker, our municipal governments would be in a much better position to plan their finances if they were provided a long-term funding plan by this government.

Will the minister make a commitment to provide a long-term funding plan to our local governments and at the same time stop their downloading?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, the communities of Saskatchewan and the municipalities of Saskatchewan are not institutions; they're made up of people. We know that. The people of Saskatchewan have told us that their priorities are health, education, social programs. We have responded to that. We have increased funding for health; we've increased funding for education; we've increased money for social programs; and we've substantially increased money for highways. And those services serve all the people in all the communities of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

So we do care about the people in Saskatchewan and we have responded to the priorities that they have identified as being theirs, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Reassessment

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, the problems created by reassessment and savage cut-backs don't just affect rural municipalities. Urban municipalities are also trying to cope. Now the problems of reassessment have been made infinitely worse than they need to have been by the bungling at the provincial level.

As late as this morning I was still getting phone calls from municipalities who say they're still getting figures from our Saskatchewan assessment; they still don't have the final assessment figures.

Recently the city council of the city of Swift Current voted unanimously to request the resignations of the leaders of SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) after they received their fourth set of assessment figures.

Mr. Speaker, this has made it all but impossible for urban councils to use the tax tools they were provided with last year and as late as . . . (inaudible) . . . What will you do to clean up this mess so that they can get assessment figures on a timely basis; so they can deal with the issues of reassessment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that SAMA is an independent agency owned by municipalities. Local governments have the majority of representation on the board of directors of the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency. It is their tool. They should make . . . municipalities should make representations to them.

But, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite also knows, or should know as a previous city council member, that assessment is and should be a mobile . . . it's a living thing. It never . . . You don't etch it in stone and it stays that way and you have a final figure. You're always having new construction, pick-ups, changes, renovations. There is no such thing as a time when every municipality had their assessment roll cast in stone in January for the upcoming year.

So it's a little more difficult this year, I'll grant, because we're making changes to catch up for 30 years. I think that municipalities should be given credit for having the fortitude, after 30 years, to finally deal with this problem and modernize our system, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Well that's the point. It would have been an awful lot easier for them to modernize it if they would have had the figures a year in advance, which they should have.

Mr. Speaker, the problems of reassessment have also been compounded because in the same year we're dealing with a reassessment that's been delayed 30 years, our municipalities are also having to deal with cuts in revenue sharing of an average of 42 per cent.

Now the speaker just told us that there's been a lot of long-range planning and warning. Why then did your long-range planning and warning have coinciding the reassessment and savage cuts to revenue sharing in the same year? Surely you realize that either one of these problems would have been very, very difficult for municipalities to deal with in one year. Why have you chosen to dump them both in the same year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, first of all, the year of reassessment was chosen by a vote of municipalities at an annual meeting of the Assessment Agency on September 29,

1995. They chose that date. They communicated that to us and we therefore responded by passing the legislation that gave them the date and the timing that they wanted and they asked for, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of having assessment a year in advance, get real. I mean what do you do about the houses that have been built? I mean in Saskatoon, in Saskatoon there were 1,200 new housing starts within the last year. Would they not be on the tax roll then for this year?

As I said before, it's a moving thing. It doesn't get etched in stone and stay there. You can't do it a year in advance. And in terms of savage cuts, Mr. Speaker, if you take the tax room that's left by the levies that were taken off, if you take the decrease in the provincial sales tax that municipalities heretofore paid, a lot of municipalities, a large number of municipalities, are net better off. So there is no such thing as savage cuts, Mr. Speaker, except in the member's imagination.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Future of Uranium City

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Uranium City are very concerned — are losing sleep. The fact is that they're looking at losing their hospital. They understand that and they accept that and they accept that a new facility will be opened in the very near future in Stony Rapids.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this community have not yet heard an official announcement from this government about the status of their current hospital. They do not know what health care services will remain in Uranium City if the facility is transferred to Stony Rapids.

Will the Minister of Northern Affairs be upfront with the people of Uranium City and explain what his government's plans are regarding to the health services for their community, the municipal funding that could be affected if the hospital moves, and the future of this very community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker; I've been waiting for not one week, two weeks . . . this is the sixth week and it's the first question about northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I haven't even had a . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Now the Chair is having a great deal of difficulty being able to hear the minister provide his response, and I'll ask the cooperation of all members of the House.

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I think, Mr. Speaker, the critic for Northern Affairs, the member from Battleford, must have flown through the hospital in La Ronge — the \$14 million hospital

that the provincial government built in northern Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — As well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member from Battleford must have again flown through another hospital. This hospital is now going to be in Stony Rapids — a \$10.8 million hospital. Again, that's thanks to the provincial government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Now, Mr. Speaker, there is concerted regards to phase out. There is no question that in dealing with this issue, as is in every community in northern Saskatchewan, with the 7 per cent increase in health spending in northern Saskatchewan, the issues in regards to Stony Rapids as well as in regards to Uranium City will be well taken care of.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A wise old owl once said if you have six weeks to prepare for an answer you should give a good answer, but I never heard an answer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, another problem that the people of Uranium City have is their Imperial Oil Esso bulk station is going to be leaving the community soon. A major factor in the oil company leaving that town is the regulations regarding underground storage tanks. Dean Classen, an official with Imperial Oil, says, and I quote:

The biggest hurdle we have in doing business in Uranium City is the government's environmental standards. The economic reality is that the financial costs of replacing these underground tanks far exceed the profits which are made from this particular tank farm.

The people of Uranium City are feeling abandoned, Mr. Speaker, and I urge the minister and I challenge the minister: will he make a commitment today in this House to undertake immediate public hearings with the people of Uranium City to develop a strategy to deal with the issue of their tank farm, their local hospital, and the very future of this community and the 200 people that they have?

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, we will doing follow-up work with the people of the Uranium City, as we do with all the communities of northern Saskatchewan.

Now it just shows, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberal opposition doesn't give a hoot about northern Saskatchewan. They don't give a hoot because it took them six weeks before they raised one question about northern Saskatchewan. They've raised a few hundred questions and they haven't raised one for the

North, and it was first one that I heard, Mr. Speaker, and I'm so happy about that. But let's not forget they don't give a hoot.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Local Telephone Service Competition

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the minister of SaskTel. Madam Minister, here you go again crying wolf. Before long-distance competition arrived you kept telling us that long-distance competition was going to cost SaskTel money and drive up local rates. And what happened, Madam Minister? Competition came in, SaskTel dropped its rates, call volumes went up, and SaskTel actually made more money.

So competition was good, Madam Minister. In fact it was good for customers. It was good for SaskTel. It was good for everyone. And now the minister is whining about competition, Mr. Speaker, again — this time from local phone services.

Madam Minister, instead of resisting competition and asking for another extension, why don't you start getting ready so you can ensure local rates for all customers, just like we have seen for long distance, will be lower.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just got the order of something wrong there, is that we lowered long-distance rates before the competition came in. The reductions started in 1991, Mr. Speaker, and competition didn't come in ... wasn't allowed by CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) until '94. It came in here in '96.

I'm glad to know that the member opposite finally realizes that Crown corporations are good. And he says, all these things are good. This is good; SaskTel is good; competition is good; the rates are good. So, Mr. Speaker, why isn't he happy if everything's so good.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the answer will be obvious. Madam Minister, you've had at least until October of 1998 to get ready for local phone call competition. We don't want to have to come back then and say, we told you so, again. That's a lot more time than you had put into the analysis that you gave to NST deal that cost the taxpayers \$16 million, so we expect better next time. Instead of asking for more extensions, you should be using the time to get ready, Madam Minister.

The CRTC says it will set up the ground rules for local phone service competition. So if you're worried about rural customers paying more, listen up, Madam Minister. Why don't you ask the CRTC to pass a regulation requiring that all phone customers be offered the same rate, regardless of where they live. Now we're going to say we told you so if you don't look at this.

Madam Minister, you have a year and a half to get ready for competition. If long-distance competition is any indication, it

will probably result in lower rates for everyone. Instead of resisting competition, Madam Minister, why don't you welcome it and start getting SaskTel ready for the competition by lowering rates today.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is saying that we are resisting competition. We wouldn't have had to have competition until 1998, in the fall. We invited the competition. We invited the rebillers who came in over a year ago. We invited the inter-connectors. They came in last fall. We wouldn't have had to have them. We're getting ready to invite in the local access competition. We've been competitive in Mobility since the outset and we're doing very well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite should stay tuned. He suggests — I think the line is going dead. There's static on it — the member opposite suggests the same telephone rates wherever you live in Canada? We have the lowest rates. Why would we want to go up? What is he suggesting, Mr. Speaker? Do your homework.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ban on Strippers in Bars

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister of Liquor and Gaming. Mr. Minister, another Saskatchewan community, Prince Albert this time, is now in a dispute over strippers. The city of Prince Albert has laid charges against a stripper bar, but because of the recent court ruling, it's doubtful that these charges will stand up in court.

Mr. Minister, your government says it's against strippers in bars, but you seem powerless to prevent it.

There is a simple solution, rather than taking it to another court case that you will probably lose. The ban on stripping was struck down in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. So why don't you simply invoke the notwithstanding clause to pass new legislation against this activity? Will you use the notwithstanding clause to ban strippers in bars?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first indicate to the member opposite that the government has taken a very serious position on the stripping issue across the province. I've received many, many letters from individuals across the province, both from hoteliers and the general public, suggesting that we should do something.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done is we have proceeded to the Court of Appeal. That has been now filed and we're expecting that early in April, I believe it's around April 7 or 8, this matter will be proceeding at the first level of the Court of Appeal.

In respect to what the member asks about us proceeding with, we've examined that, explored it in some detail, and do not . . . and the best legal opinion we get on it, Mr. Speaker, is that we do not have the ability to implement that particular piece of statute.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Minister, our office has been in contact with Mr. Mel Smith, who is a constitutional adviser to four consecutive British Columbia governments, under both the Social Credit Party and the NDP. I understand the Premier knows Mr. Smith quite well as he was involved in the 1982 constitutional talks.

Mr. Smith says that the ruling is a prime opportunity for the Saskatchewan government to invoke the notwithstanding clause; so that elected governments could make these kinds of decisions instead of the judges.

Mr. Minister, if you are truly opposed to stripping in bars, why don't you put an end to this controversy once and for all, save the province the extra court costs, use the notwithstanding clause to ban strippers in bars?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I want to again state to the member opposite that it isn't that we haven't looked at this particular issue with some broad interest and due diligence. In our review of this particular matter, Mr. Speaker, with the Department of Justice and our own . . . and private solicitors, they have told us that the notwithstanding piece would not, Mr. Speaker, stand up.

And we're not in a position to move on it at this particular point in time and have in fact provided both this House and the people of Saskatchewan with the kind of direction that we're going to be taking as it relates to this very difficult issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Fixed Legislative Session Dates

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's become abundantly clear that public cynicism has grown, and one only need examine the decrease in voter turnout in recent elections to realize that many citizens feel alienated from their democratic system.

Mr. Speaker, most Saskatchewan people can't even tell you when this legislature is in session. And this is hardly surprising given the unpredictability of session dates.

I would like to ask the Premier today to share his views. In fact I'd like to hear the Premier's views on this issue of predictable session dates.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well my view, Mr. Speaker, is one which, quite diametrically, is opposite to the view of the former leader of the Liberal Party.

I think most people in the province of Saskatchewan do know when the legislative session sits. I believe that most people in the province of Saskatchewan pay attention to what the Legislative Assembly does.

I have faith in the majority of the people of the province of Saskatchewan knowing what the budget said and did. I have

faith and confidence in the democratic process of this institution. I'm a member of the democratic process institution. I got elected by democracy.

I have faith in the people, and I'm surprised that the hon. member wouldn't share that faith in people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Later today, I'm going to be introducing a Bill that reflects what several other legislatures have already done to empower their citizens and hold government more accountable. And this Bill will not extend the number of sitting days, but will ensure that the people of our province can predict with certainty that their government cannot in the future go for almost nine months without being held accountable in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Premier is this: do you support in principle the intent of a Bill that will outline when sessions should begin, and will allow for controversial Bills to be put forward in the fall; so that the people of this province can in fact . . . affected parties can in fact look at them and peruse them, and then a shorter session again for the winter session where people in this province will know with some predictability what's going on by their government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the question which is put by the former Liberal leader and applauded by at least half or a third of the current Liberal caucus, presumably in support of that position, is one that I cannot endorse.

The argument for fixed session dates is the argument of predictability. In a democracy, governments and legislative assemblies must have the freedom to be able to call sessions when public policy and public interest so demands. This may involve an issue such as, for example, a medicare dispute which took place, as we know, in Saskatchewan in 1962 where legislation was at issue, and legislation might have been an issue at the time of the impasse of the KOD (Keep Our Doctors committee), and legislation might have been interested in post-circumstances. It might involve matters pertaining to the constitution that arise.

A government needs flexibility and a government would ask the members of the Legislative Assembly to do that. To have the fixed terms that the member talks about is what they have in the state legislatures of America. This is the Texas audit approach that the member advocated when she was the Liberal leader — having fixed legislative sessions — and our government doesn't support that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Government Releases Strategy Report on Job Training

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to

inform the Assembly that I have today released *The Saskatchewan Training Strategy*.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — The strategy consists of three public documents, copies of which have been or will be distributed to all members of the Assembly.

This strategy is the product of countless hours of discussion throughout the province over the last year. We spoke with anyone and everyone who wanted to express an opinion on education and training. They included communities, students, teachers, employers, training institutions, and aboriginal organizations.

We explained the situation our training system was facing in a document called *CHOICES*, which set the background against which the consultations took place, describing the problems that the training system was facing — problems which included the federal withdrawal from the policy with respect to training and the federal withdrawal of some of their money under the Unemployment Insurance fund.

We explained how the economy and the new technology and demographic shifts were also driving change. People understood the importance of developing a made-in-Saskatchewan training strategy to fill the vacuum left by the federal withdrawal, and they were ready to get involved in that process.

At each consultation, Mr. Speaker, people and organizations, no matter who they were representing, said the most important aspect of a training system is to link training to the job market.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that the programs and services outlined in *The Saskatchewan Training Strategy* do just that. They are made-in-Saskatchewan solutions. They provide people with the bridges they need to gain employment. The strategy is the first in Canada, Mr. Speaker, to link economic policies with social policies through training.

Our recent provincial budget, in combination with the training strategy, invests significantly in education and training for Saskatchewan people. In fact we will create 10 per cent more training and employment opportunities over the next three years than before the federal cuts were visited upon us.

That is at 10 per cent more, Mr. Speaker, rather than 27 per cent less that would have resulted from the cuts if we had done nothing. That is good news for Saskatchewan, good news for employers, good news for learners.

Our training strategy has mechanisms to build the critical partnerships we need at the grass roots level. This is a level where the decisions need to be made, Mr. Speaker, not in a room far away from the situation but out there where the jobs and opportunities are.

This is the level where employers and communities can work with training institutions to look at their future needs and

together plan relevant training for the needs of their specific local labour market. Together they can best decide how the training should be delivered to benefit all partners. Our strategy, Mr. Speaker, will give them the tools to make it all happen.

Bridges to Employment, one of the three documents, will . . . speaks of ensuring access and support so everyone has the opportunity to develop the skills they need and improve their chances of gaining employment. People with special needs will have the special help they need because everyone deserves a hand, and that is the Saskatchewan way.

To help people make informed decisions critical to planning their future, the strategy will provide timely, up-to-date career, employment, and labour market information. To guide the process and ensure we meet the objectives we have set out, the strategy ensures mechanisms to continually evaluate progress. There are mechanisms to ensure dialogue continues between all partners so that together we can continue to improve the training strategy as times change.

We must all learn to change with the changing times, Mr. Speaker. With this strategy, Mr. Speaker, we've charted a new direction for training in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first begin by thanking the minister for sharing the documents earlier on this morning, and indeed providing us with a briefing session. I also want to extend my appreciation to the deputy minister, Mr. Perrins, for trying to bring me up to date in terms of the latest strategy.

As the minister announced last May, I believe, that we were going to begin this public consultation process, I think in terms of talking with various people around the province, it was very evident that indeed we needed a new Saskatchewan-made strategy — those became very obvious. And as a result we've had great input from businesses. We have had concerns raised by corporations, by different educational institutions, to identify the very, very specific needs in different portions of the province.

What we've looked at of course is that the province has been lobbying for a long time to have control of a provincial training strategy. And I think what this does is allow the province of Saskatchewan to take the lead. We can blame the feds for their funding cuts and we can say that that has caught everyone by surprise, but it hasn't. This is something that has been in place. Other provinces have taken that to heart and have gone forward and developed a new strategy. Saskatchewan I believe, will do the same.

What I fear though and some of the concerns that have been expressed to me, Mr. Speaker, is that of course we have identified a time frame of about three years — the year 2000 — as to the full implementation of the strategy. There are many organizations and businesses who can't wait three years for some new training. And those concerns I think have been heard by the minister and I know that he will take those into account.

The other concern that we have is, because we're developing a regional model, the delivery of a system regionally, to be coordinated with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), I think there is a measure of concern and a measure of who will be held accountable to ensure that the program is delivering. And those are the kinds of things that people are raising; that they want to ensure that when there is a need in a particular community that indeed we don't have to go through a forum that takes years to plan a program. It needs to be done now. Businesses require particularly skilled individuals.

What we also are worried about and that the minister has identified and so has the Finance minister, that there is a budget for the delivery of skills training and apprenticeship programming. Looking at the budget — and those concerns I will address later on with the minister in terms of estimates — we don't see very much new money. And what we see is actually reallocation from Social Services to Post-Secondary.

So while I think on the whole it looks good, the documents look great, there are great objectives that have been put forward, my concern is that this doesn't just become a document that sits on the shelf and gathers dust. We need something done for the people of Saskatchewan and I think that this is a step forward as long as we can implement it. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to thank the minister for providing us with the information ahead of time and for the briefing we had. I'd also like to thank him for the opportunity to give us a chance to give him some personal input on where we thought some of these sorts of things were going.

And I think there's a few possibilities in where we're going here that I think are fairly good. One of the concerns that I've had is that we have job opportunities in Saskatchewan that we can't fill with our local people and yet on the other hand we seem to be turning out people that can't find jobs.

The direction we are going in here seems to be that it's job-needs appropriate. And I'd like to commend the minister on going . . . taking us in that direction. So that the people that we train in Saskatchewan will find work in Saskatchewan, and the employers that need employees will find those in Saskatchewan as well.

It's also good to see the increase of 10 per cent in the training and employment opportunities that are there. And if those do come to pass, I think that bodes well for Saskatchewan as well.

One of the concerns that has happened in the past is that the updating didn't take place. And that's why we ended up in the situation that we were in, where we were turning out people that didn't have jobs and jobs were being created that wasn't there.

There's apparently an intent here to maintain that updating on a

constant time line. And I think if that works out, and if that works out the way it's intended to, we shouldn't get ourselves into the difficulty that we find ourselves in presently.

The other aspect that I think is commendable is the fact that it's set up on a regional basis. It's not possible for every particular educational institution to know the needs that are out there, whether we're talking about the northern forest regions or the oil regions, if you're situated in Saskatoon or Regina. So by setting up on a regional basis, there's a better opportunity to provide the jobs and the opportunities that are out there.

The concern that was mentioned is one that I have as well. There's a three-year time line. We are behind at present where we ought to be and so I think there is an urgency in timing. And if the purpose and direction of this occurs, it'll be a good direction.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 216 — The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 1997 (Sessional Dates)

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move a Bill to amend The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act respecting the determination of sessional dates 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. 223 — The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 1997 (Duration of Assembly)

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, I move a Bill to amend The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act respecting the duration of the Assembly 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.

(1430)

Bill No. 224 — The Legislative Assembly Public Presentations Act

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move a Bill respecting public presentations to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan 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: — Mr. Speaker, I respectfully request that question no. 44 be converted to notice of motions for returns (debatable).

The Speaker: — Item no. 1 is converted to motions for returns (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 41 — The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to move second reading of Bill 41, The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 1997.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is essentially a housekeeping action. There's a contradiction that exists between the wording of The Crown Corporations Act, 1993 and The Power Corporation Act and The SaskEnergy Act. This issue being dealt with today, Mr. Speaker, is the legislative authority for Crown corporations to levy charges for their services.

By proposing these changes, Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that all subsidiary Crown corporations operate under the same authority when it comes to rates, fees, and service charges. CIC clearly has the authority to oversee the rates, fees, and service charges proposed by subsidiary Crown corporations and these changes enhance that role for CIC.

Presently, Mr. Speaker, the powers contained in The Power Corporation Act and The SaskEnergy Act are different from those that are granted to subsidiary Crown corporations in their originating statutes.

It is the government's intention, Mr. Speaker, that all subsidiary Crown corporations should have consistent approval processes which may include their board of directors, the board of directors of CIC, and cabinet. It is also essential that CIC ensures that these approval processes are followed for the setting of rates, fees, and charges.

The proposed legislation widens subsection 6(1)(j) of The Crown Corporations Act by including the words "charges and services" to provide CIC with the overall authority to review the issues it deems appropriate when it comes to setting rates and charges. At the same time, the obligations for the specific subsidiary Crown corporations, SaskPower and SaskEnergy, are changed so that they reflect provisions contained in The Crown Corporations Act.

It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the provisions in subsection 6(1)(j) of The Crown Corporations Act will apply to all subsidiary Crown corporations consistently when it comes to setting rates, fees, and service charges. Without this change in

wording there is a possibility that a subsidiary Crown corporation may comply with the provisions contained in their originating statute, but the compliance may be inconsistent with the provisions of The Crown Corporations Act.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are making these changes so that all of CIC's subsidiary Crown corporations operate within the same framework, and that there will not be any contradictions in the legislation that governs their operation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of this Bill. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak on the amendments put forward regarding The Crown Corporations Act, specifically the proposed changes to the 45-day review process. I think that the new amendments proposed by the government prove that they are finally realizing the lack of confidence the people of Saskatchewan have in the existing process.

I have read through the proposed changes to the Act, and from what I've seen I would say that the changes are much needed and a long time coming. I suspect that these changes include any and all charges, rates, prices, and fees that SaskTel, SaskEnergy, and SaskPower presently charge or may charge for any goods or services now or in the future. The changes to the Act will hopefully clear up some controversy over what the rate increases can and . . . what rate increases can and cannot be reviewed.

If I recall correctly, Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised in the 1995 election platform that any rate changes involving the Crown utilities would be subject to a 45-day review process. But when SaskTel decided to begin charging for directory assistance in 1996 he changed his tune, stating that the new charge was a fee and not a rate increase.

Considering that the new charge was estimated to raise an additional \$4 million in revenues for SaskTel, surely such an increase should have been held to public review. In comparison, SaskEnergy recently held a review for their residential rate increase which would raise \$3.7 million. These are not small sums of money, Mr. Speaker, where for some reason the two increases are not comparable from the government's point of view.

I was recently on SaskTel's Sympatico home page on the Internet when I came across Canada 411 service, an Internet version of directory assistance. I thought I would save 75 cents, the cost of calling SaskTel's directory assistance, and try to find a phone number for a friend in Saskatchewan. When I went to enter the location, I realized that SaskTel is one of only two provinces in Canada that are not included in this directory. I couldn't think of why SaskTel had not gotten around to putting their phone listing on this service, and then I realized it just hadn't figured out a way to charge for it yet.

A second concern I had regarding these amendments is simply that it will not stop the government of the Crowns from dipping into the pockets of the Saskatchewan taxpayers. They will likely continue to burden the people of Saskatchewan by raising utility rates to cover for a \$16 million mistake on investments

gone bad, or to pay for a 26 per cent increase for company vice-presidents, or maybe even to pay for high-price consulting fees for former SaskTel presidents. Or will future rate increases be used to pay for a \$3 million public review on privatization when once again this government's political ideology becomes threatened? Why should the people of Saskatchewan foot the bill for these costs?

What concerns me still though is the simple fact that any changes to rates or fees charged by the Crown corporations are still essentially at the government's whim.

I quote from *Hansard*, Tuesday, April 8, 1997, Mr. Speaker, where the member from Saskatoon Southeast spoke regarding the 45-day review process:

The public has considerable opportunity to complain; the Crowns have considerable opportunity to explain . . .

But that's where this government's review process ends. Once the Crowns give their explanation for the increases, they simply wait for the cabinet's rubber-stamp for the approval.

We realize that the whole process is a sham, and it's an expensive sham. The utility review process as it is becomes a farce when we consider that the final decision essentially comes down to a cabinet decision. And within the last year we have seen two examples of just how independent this review process really is.

I'm sure none of us on this side of the House were surprised to hear that the cabinet went along with the recommendations for the proposed increases on the two most recent occasions. And judging from the vocal concerns expressed throughout the province, none of the people of Saskatchewan were fooled either.

The government's 45-day review process of the utility rate increase is nothing more than another example of how this government attempts to deceive the people of Saskatchewan into believing they have a voice in the decision-making process of government. Obviously the people of Saskatchewan are not fools.

You simply to have to read a newspaper to realize that SaskEnergy wasn't fooling anyone with their public meetings and their 1 800 information lines. While I would like to commend those who took part in the review process, it was evident that most of those attending the public meetings were not fooled into thinking that whatever was said would have any effect on the officials that were present, and especially not government.

In fact there were those who came to the meetings, not to question SaskEnergy's utility rate increases, but instead they were there to question the government's review process itself.

A quote from the February 12 issue of the *Prince Albert Herald* basically tells the story of what many people throughout the province think of the review process. One man who attended the meeting in Prince Albert stated, and I quote:

I don't understand why you were here tonight (referring to vice-president Ken From). No one believes what they say will really make a difference.

These thoughts are not just those of a single individual. Moira Wright, director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, agrees with these remarks, calling it a farce and a sham, and compares the review process to letting the fox watch the hen-house. Barb Cram of the Consumers' Association of Canada agreed with these views and added the process should be scrapped altogether and replaced with an independent rate regulation.

The president of SaskPower states that the whole process is of no real value, Mr. Speaker. Even former NDP premier, Mr. Blakeney, agrees that there needs to be some form of independent review process, akin to the Public Utilities Review Commission, to ensure that Crown utilities are charging fair rates.

If this isn't enough evidence that the government needs to re-examine the review process, the lack of public participation only goes to further the point. The total number of people to participate in SaskEnergy's 6 public meetings totalled 70 people. At a meeting in Prince Albert, only 11 people showed up. At another meeting in Regina, 9 showed up. And in Swift Current, the room was empty. Mr. Speaker, this clearly demonstrates not only a lack of interest in the review process, but also a lack of confidence.

Last week the member from Regina South disagreed that there is a lack of confidence, Mr. Speaker. And I suspect this is a similar view of the entire caucus. Maybe they should ask the thousands of people who have switched from SaskTel to Sprint or AT&T, what kind of confidence they have in the review process. People don't always need to speak to make themselves heard, Mr. Speaker. People vote with their feet. And when it comes to SaskTel, they let their fingers do the walking.

In the recent review process that took place, SaskEnergy went to the effort of setting up a 1 800 line to handle the concerns of those who chose not to attend public meetings. Only 39 phone calls were taken, Mr. Speaker; that's less than one for each day of the review process. I certainly hope we hired no extra personnel to handle the flood of phone calls.

One reason that few people showed up is because of the lack of information that is made available for public scrutiny. This should be no surprise for the government or for SaskEnergy, considering their own spokesperson admits that both CIC and the Crowns have to do a better job of getting information to the public.

Just browsing through the 1995 annual report for SaskEnergy, there is no breakdown on the number of residential, farm, commercial, and industrial customers. This information would be helpful to have when looking at what the effect of rate increases will have on SaskEnergy's revenues. But it seems that SaskEnergy and the government does not trust the public with information.

The annual report simply states that SaskEnergy has over

300,000 customers. I did happen to find the number of residential customers in a newspaper article that pegged the total at 247,000. This does not include commercial and industrial customers who are always seeing an increase in rates and who represent 40 per cent of SaskEnergy's sales, not including gas-brokering activities.

SaskEnergy stated that each residential customer would see an average of \$15-a-year increase in their gas bill. Now a quick calculation based on 247,000 residential customers show this would yield \$3.7 million in additional revenues. SaskEnergy still needs 2.5 million to cover the increased depreciation costs.

According to some recent articles in the *Leader-Post*, the residential increase will cover the increased cost of transportation and storage, but not the 2.5 million in depreciation. What about the revenues raised by increases to commercial and industrial customers? Will these increases cover the cost of depreciation? These questions were not likely asked in the public review process because no one had the background information to ask the question — nor were they given the information.

I suggest it would be hard for the public to ask a question when they are not informed about the consequences of the rate increases, other than increased revenues for government. Even the government's own spokesperson admits having people ask us challenging questions would be a step in the right direction. The simple fact is, Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't want challenging questions.

This government thinks that the people of Saskatchewan don't understand the issues and they're quick to point out that the opposition doesn't either. Well, Mr. Speaker, give us the information on the issues and we'll make up our own minds.

This is a good example of how this government has lost touch with the people of Saskatchewan and how they continue to operate in a total vacuum. How can this government expect to get an informed viewpoint from the public review process when they withhold simple yet valuable information that should be made available in the review process. It's simply another instance of how the government has chosen not to give the whole picture to the people of Saskatchewan. And then they wonder why they can't get enough interested participants to take part in its own review process.

(1445)

One really can't help but be cynical of the process when the members of the government and the executives of SaskEnergy can't even make up their minds as to what the reasons are for the rate increases. One day it's because of lengthy cold spells; the next day it's because of transporting and storage costs. This confusion only helps to build cynicism against the whole review process and drain people's confidence in the system.

In closing, I would like to call on the government to re-examine its review process even further. As our opposition members have suggested, we feel that an all-party review committee, including industry experts and representatives from local

stakeholders, would help to restore the confidence in the review process without costing large sums of taxpayers' dollars.

We think that a multi-member committee made up of individuals from all areas of the community would not solve all the problems of the present review process, but it would certainly add some idea of trustworthiness to a process starved for some small fragment of credibility.

I would ask at this time to adjourn debate on this issue so we may have further time to scrutinize amendments to this Bill. I move to adjourn.

Debate adjourned.

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

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, The Planning and Development Act provides the framework for municipalities to manage the physical development of communities. Municipalities have suggested a number of ways that the Act could be improved. These amendments reflect our commitment of responding to the needs of local government.

The amendments include — on zoning — clarifying development fees, increasing flexibility for the provision of temporary uses, delegating authority to the development officer for approval of permits in demolition control and architectural control districts, and ensuring that there is adequate public notice for discretionary uses in the administration of zoning bylaws.

On approval of subdivisions and instruments, clarifying the requirement for approval by the approving authority of certain caveats registered by the Land Titles Office, enabling the minister to delegate approving authority to municipalities for certain subdivisions, allowing municipalities that are approving authorities for subdivisions to delegate approving authority to a development officer and on dedicated lands, providing municipalities with greater latitude in the management of lands dedicated to the public use.

Mr. Speaker, zoning bylaws play a major role in directing land use and controlling community development. Therefore there is a need to ensure that such bylaws provide administrative flexibility and that the public is fully aware of development proposals. Amendments relating to zoning bylaws are as follows.

Municipalities have expressed concerns that existing application fees established in zoning bylaws do not adequately compensate for the cost of administering and regulating development. We recognize that municipalities must have adequate means of meeting the administrative costs of local zoning bylaws on a cost-recovery basis.

Therefore amendments will clarify application fees for development permits, minor variance permits, zoning bylaw amendments, and discretionary uses. These changes will ensure that the cost of administering and regulating development are

fully recoverable by a municipality.

Municipalities often permit certain uses for a specified period of time. Amendments will authorize municipalities to consider discretionary uses on a temporary basis and provide for the extension of both permitted and discretionary uses allowed by the zoning bylaw. This amendment will increase flexibility in administering zoning bylaws.

The public has expressed concern that there is insufficient notice when councils are dealing with discretionary uses. Therefore amendments will require municipalities to provide public notice for discretionary uses. This will ensure that the public has the opportunity to bring any concerns on a discretionary use to the attention of the council.

Amendments will permit a council to delegate to a development officer the responsibility for approval of permits in a demolition control district or an architectural control district. This will allow municipalities to deal with development permits in these zones administratively and in an expeditious manner.

Mr. Speaker, on the approval of subdivisions and instruments, amendments will allow existing approving authorities for subdivision to delegate authority to the development officer. The development officer is responsible for the administration of a zoning bylaw, and delegation of authority by the council will provide increased flexibility in subdivision review.

Mr. Speaker, amendments will clarify where a certificate of approval is required. Presently there are concerns about the registration of caveats against entire parcels of land in the Land Titles Office when the caveats are based on an agreement for sale, lease, or mortgage of a part only of a parcel of land.

There have been occurrences where a caveat is registered without the agreement for sale, lease, or mortgage attached to the caveat, thereby circumventing the need to obtain a certificate of approval. The amendment will clarify this provision and provide the Land Titles Office with the authority to request a certificate of approval where a caveat is registered based on an agreement which affects part only of a parcel of land.

Mr. Speaker, The Planning and Development Act allows the minister to delegate to municipal councils approving authority for subdivisions. Many of the cities have already been given the authority to approve all subdivisions within its municipal jurisdiction. Amendments will permit the minister to delegate approving authority to municipalities subject to terms and conditions.

For example, the minister may delegate to a municipality the authority to approve certain classes of subdivisions such as a single first subdivision from a quarter section of land, and/or a single lot split. Delegation could be conditional on the municipality having access to technical and planning expertise. The amendment will increase local autonomy and expedite the subdivision review process for which authority is granted.

Mr. Speaker, on the matter of dedicated lands, previous

amendments to The Planning and Development Act allow a municipality to identify specific policies and zoning regulations for dedicated lands in accordance with the Act and the dedicated land regulations. Municipalities are often faced with requests for placing certain uses and structures on dedicated lands. This is especially the case in lake shore areas.

Amendments will establish a framework that will allow a municipality to permit certain developments and temporary structures on dedicated lands. The intent of dedicated lands for public use will be maintained.

The amendments, which are permissive in nature, will be subject to the provisions of The Planning and Development Act and the dedicated lands regulations. The amendments will provide municipalities with flexibility in dealing with proposals such as boat docks, fire pits, steps, and sidewalks. Amendments will be proposed to the dedicated land regulations in the near future which will clarify what development and temporary structures may be placed on dedicated lands.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, minor housekeeping amendments will clarify that either the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management or the Saskatchewan Water Corporation must be consulted prior to the creation of a new environmental reserve or the sale of it. The amendments will streamline existing administrative procedures, and will ensure that the relevant authority has the information necessary in making a decision on environmental reserve matters.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments proposed in this Bill are evidence of our support for local governments, and commitment to maintaining a legislative framework for effective land use management which serves the public interest and responds to the changing needs of Saskatchewan communities.

I would now urge each and every member of this House to support this Bill. Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of this Bill No. 26, The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 1997. Thank you.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to the amendments to The Planning and Development Act this afternoon. From looking at the amendments, Mr. Speaker, I see that the majority of the Bill is just some simple housekeeping.

The new amendments will hopefully streamline and clean up some of the administrative processes that are required by the Act, which the municipalities are responsible to enforce. The basis for the Bill seems to allow municipalities to continue to provide and maintain an environment that can sustain meaningful and effective land use, while at the same time continuing to provide municipalities with the framework to manage the physical developments of their communities.

I see the changes to the Act will, among other things, allow the municipal councils to delegate more authority to development officers. From the surface this seems to be a valuable addition to the legislation. This allows councils to take advantage of the expertise of planning and development professionals. My

concern here is that not all RMs may have the access to this kind of expertise, which may put them at a slight disadvantage.

The proposed changes will also help municipalities to control development on dedicated lands such as public, municipal, or environmental reserves, buffer strips, or other land that is dedicated for public use within the municipalities.

The changes also address the need for further public accountability by municipal councils by ensuring that the public will be given due notice when councils are considering discretionary use applications.

Changes to the Act go on to say that collection fees . . . or the collection of fees can now reflect the actual cost of processing, administering, and regulating the developments. While this is something that many municipalities have already been in the practice of doing, they are now given the authority to recover the actual cost of also providing notice to the public.

These costs are not small either, Mr. Speaker. They could easily range into the hundreds of dollars when an RM is required to post a notice in local newspapers. This is especially costly for RMs which contain satellite communities adjacent to large urban centres. Often these RMs are required to post notices in the major daily newspapers in this province at a cost significantly higher than small local newspapers would charge. It shouldn't surprise anyone here that a public notice published in a newspaper in Regina, Prince Albert, or North Battleford would easily cost considerably more than the same size ad in the *Fort Qu'Appelle Times* or *The Wadena News*.

When we take into account this simple fact, it must raise some questions and concerns in terms of the differing costs that can be expected from one RM to the other. Will some applications for development permits, minor variance permits, zoning amendments, or applications for discretionary uses or developments vary in price? And if so, could this deter or discourage some citizens who lack sufficient financial resources from making application under these new amendments? These are questions that need to be pondered.

Will these new amendments put the local government process out of the average citizen's reach, especially where small local government bodies are involved? Because these small local governments will soon be able to charge, and in some cases forced to charge, the full cost of administering, processing, and regulating these new developments, it will be the applicant's responsibility to cover these added charges. Presently, municipalities may be absorbing some of these costs in order to keep them affordable in an effort to promote public involvement and encouraging the public's input.

This raises one other concern, Mr. Speaker. As I have already pointed out, there can be a difference in costs associated with giving the public ample notice for proposed development and zoning changes between neighbouring rural municipalities. But the changes to the Act may also be evident in the costs of administering, processing applications and permits between rural and urban centres.

The simple reason is that larger centres already have the administration processes and the staff to handle these tasks in place, to handle the large quantities of the applications that are received. Unfortunately, in smaller rural municipalities the luxury of large administrative departments do not exist. Therefore it can be much more difficult and time consuming for rural municipalities to process applications at a cost that is affordable to the applicant.

What has been happening is that municipalities have had to in effect subsidize some of the costs associated with these requests, not to deter the public from having some input in making these requests.

However this new amendment does little to help municipalities recoup costs. In some cases, municipalities have already been recovering as much as possible, and in some cases, it's not been enough. The reason they cannot charge more is simply the people of these communities would not be able to afford to cover the entire cost of the application and the permit fees.

(1500)

I agree that it is encouraging to see that RMs and municipal councils are now being given the authority to recoup the expensive costs of providing their services to the public, but the legislation does little to determine where this money should come from.

And it leads to another situation, Mr. Speaker. Because of the difference in operations that I alluded to between urban and rural municipalities, once again we are going to have urban against rural, being pitted against one another. The cuts to municipalities will also affect the affordability of these new processes.

Another amendment included in this Bill, as I have already mentioned in my opening, is to allow governments to have greater control over placement of temporary structures on dedicated lands. This includes public and municipal reserves, environmental reserves, and buffer strips.

The general structures that this would refer to would also include temporary boat docks or fire pits. The Act allows for structures related to landscaping, which includes trees, walkways, trees, and the placement of sand or steps. My one concern here would be the impact of any of these temporary structures on the natural environment and whether this legislation or existing legislation would limit what kind of temporary structures would or are being considered and would be acceptable.

I also understand this particular amendment allows for the collection of any fees that would be incurred by the municipality to cover the costs of demolition or dismantling of these temporary structures. While this particular amendment seems to allow for the municipalities to assume greater authority, we are not sure of any other possible implications of this change at this point in time.

While much of this legislation seems to help to clean up some

of the administration problems currently being faced by municipalities, in fact some of the changes are already in place.

The biggest concern I see regarding this legislation is that with the cuts to operating grants in rural areas, these RMs will have no choice but to recoup their expenses through the taxpayer who, as a result of cuts from this government, are already seeing less bang for their dollars.

While I do see some added benefit for municipalities in this legislation, there are still some concerns that I would like to scrutinize with my colleagues and raise at a later date. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

**Bill No. 27 — The Municipal Tax Sharing
(Potash) Amendment Act, 1997**

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 27 amends The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Act. The changes being made ensure that municipal property taxes levied on potash mines will not increase unduly because of reassessment. At the same time municipal interests will also be protected because the amendment ensures that potash property taxes will be maintained at the same level in the year of reassessment.

Under the current provisions of the Act, the Municipal Potash Tax Sharing Administration Board is required to use the preceding year's municipal mill rates to determine the current year's potash mill rate. This potash mill rate is then applied to current year potash mine assessment to determine the property taxes to be levied on potash mines.

Because of the increase in assessment in 1997 due to reassessment, potash mines would have paid four to five times the municipal property taxes in 1997 as they did in 1996 if the normal calculation method provided for was used.

The amendments will require the Municipal Potash Tax Sharing Administration Board to adjust the potash mill rate in years of reassessment so that the same municipal property taxes are levied on potash mines in a tax-sharing area as in the preceding year. This doesn't necessarily mean that the property taxes will remain the same for each individual potash mine. Because of relatively larger or smaller changes in assessment for individual mines, their share of the municipal property taxes in a tax-sharing area may increase or decrease.

This amendment will only apply in years of reassessment, that is every third year. In the years between reassessments the board will use the normal method of calculating the potash mill rate based on the mill rates of the rural municipalities in the potash tax-sharing area. In these years, potash mine property taxes may go up or down depending on relative changes in assessments of mines and other properties and on the RM mill rates and tax policies.

The general trend should be to lower overall potash mine property taxes somewhat because potash assessments are not

increasing as much as other rural assessments.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 27, An Act to amend The Municipal Tax Sharing (Potash) Act. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have checked with a fair number of interested parties and feel that we have no great concerns that have to be answered right at this time and feel that we can have our concerns answered in committee. So we would be willing to pass this one on at this time.

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

Bill No. 19 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Act was introduced in 1988 to provide for our first provincial honour, the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, and also to define and protect our provincial emblems — the coat of arms, the western red lily, the bird and tree emblems, the tartan, and the wheat sheaf logo.

The Act has stood the test of time and indeed has been a model for other jurisdictions such as British Columbia. In 1995 the legislature amended the Act to provide for a second provincial honour, the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal. Mr. Speaker, experience over the past two years has resulted in two developments which require further amendments to the Act.

First, the time has come to name potash as the official mineral emblem of our province. In 1995 the Minister of Energy and Mines and the Saskatchewan mining association asked grade 7 and 8 students across the province to recommend the mineral they thought best represented Saskatchewan. The results of this consultation was a recommendation that this mineral be potash, scientifically known as sylvite.

I'm sure that all members will agree with this recommendation. Saskatchewan is the world's largest producer and exporter of potash. Four of those mines are in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. Our reserves of potash are expected to last hundreds of years at current production rates. The industry employs some 3,000 people and in 1995 had sales valued at \$1.2 billion.

We have all seen the long trains of potash hopper cars moving across the prairie landscape on their way to ports on the west coast and from here to our valued customers in such countries as China, Japan, and Korea. Potash is a key element of our economy and our international relations. It is high time to feature potash as an official emblem of the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the other proposed amendments to the Act concern our provincial honours. Members of the House will recall the first presentation of the Volunteer Medal by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to six outstanding citizens in

March of last year and the second presentation to seven citizens just four weeks ago. Both events took place in this Chamber with full participation of members. I know we were all proud to honour these deserving people in our midst.

The Volunteer Medal was an immediate success, Mr. Speaker. I am informed that for 1996 there were over 100 nominations from 48 communities across the province. Saskatchewan is known across Canada for its volunteer spirit. We have one of the highest rates of voluntarism in the country. For example, no fewer than seven Saskatchewan residents received the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award earlier this year. This is a sign of a caring, cooperating, sharing society created over the past century by Saskatchewan people of all walks of life and all ethnic backgrounds.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Honours Advisory Council has recommended to the government that the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal be formally declared a decoration, which enhances the status of a medal and gives the recipients the right to use the initials SVM (Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal). This is one of the proposed amendments to the Act.

The other amendments clarify that statutes of our provincial honours conform to international usage. Honours include orders, decorations, and medals, and it is important to spell this out in our legislation. Should some future legislation wish to establish a provincial medal, for example, for the centennial of Saskatchewan in 2005, the Act will facilitate the process.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is a province of progressive, caring, motivated people. As we mature as a society it is good for us to enshrine our emblems and honours in legislation and to keep the legislation up to date. It is therefore my pleasure to move second reading of The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us today seeks to amend The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act by officially recognizing potash as our provincial mineral. In addition, Mr. Speaker, it also seeks to provide official recognition of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal as one of our orders and decorations.

Mr. Speaker, I believe these amendments are worthy of praise. Each year in this House we invite a number of residents of this province to come and receive their Saskatchewan volunteer medals. They receive their medals as well as the attention and time of this Assembly. I believe such events and such decorations help focus public attention on many of the good works and selfless public service provided by individuals across the province.

Like most of my caucus colleagues, and in fact many other members of the House, I come from a rural area where the media is dominated by weekly or daily papers with a community focus. When we officially recognize the hard work offered by volunteers across the province, more often than not it's the local weekly or daily community papers which take the

time to tell the community about these individuals' hard work.

I think we owe a good debt of gratitude to these journalists for taking time to write about these very special people. By doing so, they are raising the profile of outstanding volunteers in many communities. They are also showing residents and young people that they don't have to be a Michael Jordan to inspire other people.

By writing about special volunteers, our local journalistic community is showing people that even though you're not famous — and you might live in a rural, remote community — you can make a difference by using your spare time for the betterment of others.

Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that Saskatchewan has a strong volunteer spirit. Across my constituency, for example, we have people volunteering on community clubs; on recreational boards; housing boards; for the 4-H; agricultural and exhibition societies; and museums and historical societies.

(1515)

In addition, we have many other arts and cultural groups, and many people involved in amateur coaching.

Actually tomorrow evening in fact, Mr. Speaker, I'll be attending a dinner theatre in the community of Pense in my riding, just as recently I had attended a dinner theatre in the community of Pasqua. And I'm not only impressed by the talent of the individuals in the riding, but also by the commitment that is shown by everyone who gets involved.

It was interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that some of the individuals helping with the play no longer live in Pasqua. They came home to help out and rehearse, because they told me it was their way of giving something back to the people of their community. And that, Mr. Speaker, does typify the Saskatchewan spirit of generosity and caring. To some degree it's a shame that people who provide such devoted service often receive little recognition. They are giving of themselves for others, but yet we as a society often give more credit to the people who earn millions as hockey players or movie stars. Those peoples' contributions to our lives are important but they are not normally as real, or as nearby, or as heartfelt, as the contribution from a local person who made our community a little bit brighter.

By passing this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 19, we in this Assembly will be providing needed recognition to many volunteers who toil daily without reward in our communities. Thanks to their selfless devotion, we can proudly say we are from this province and from this country wherever we go.

Mr. Speaker, while this Bill provides further recognition to volunteers, it should act as a reminder to this government to reflect on how it treats voluntarism. The members opposite, and everyone in fact, should reflect on how policies might affect others and seek to mitigate those effects before implementing them.

There are a couple of problems which the government does need to review. And one, for example, Mr. Speaker, is that many volunteer activities just don't function without money. A great number of volunteer hours are spent fund-raising for many efforts that are undertaken. And in that area this government has a few detrimental policies.

For one, they rake in millions of dollars from VLT (video lottery terminal) funds which once moved elsewhere in the community. Many community groups who once depended upon \$20 raffle tickets to help maintain their rinks find the market's drying up. And it's partly due to the presence of VLTs and, as well, declining rural populations. In my constituency alone this government collects another \$1.38 million of VLT money. Another \$4.94 million is collected in Moose Jaw and I'm sure Thunder Creek constituents in the Moose Jaw district also contribute to that, Mr. Speaker. Some money which once went to community groups now goes to VLTs.

Before the last election the Premier promised to provide some of this money back to those communities, but he later broke that promise. If the government wants to truly demonstrate its support for volunteer groups and community organizations through Bill 19, they should reconsider this decision and make good on those promises.

Other policies exist which might need to be reviewed with respect to how they affect and encourage voluntarism in this province. Last year the government changed policies designed to target under-age drinking in youth driving. While many people are pleased with these policies, I would urge the government to review them to see how they affect community groups and volunteers.

Because just as an example, again many community groups, like the dinner theatres, ask for liquor permits. Now if laws are enforced such that many of these groups are fined for seemingly benign offences, then few people in a community club would ever consider to put their name on a liquor permit for such an event. And we do know that alcohol can be used responsibly; so it's important that laws and policies be reviewed from time to time to ensure that they're not undermining the volunteer base which we so value in this province.

Before I leave the issue of volunteers as outlined in Bill 19, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the large volunteer efforts which will soon begin across the country. We all expect a federal election. We all rely, to a large part, on political volunteers and we also know that they don't get much public recognition. And we acknowledge and owe them a great deal of gratitude for the work that they do.

By becoming actively involved in a political party, by helping a candidate seek office, they are helping maintain our democratic system. Without people taking an active interest in politics, our democratic system would surely fall victim to apathy. And I'm sure you'll agree, Mr. Speaker, that that is by far its worst enemy.

So while I wish every volunteer were a Liberal, I'm sure all the

members agree with me when I do encourage people to get involved in whatever party or movement that they choose, regardless if . . .

The Speaker — Order, order. Now I have been listening for some time — order, order — to the hon. member's remarks and I want to remind the hon. member that the Bill before the Assembly is The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act and that I'm sure he'll want to tie his remarks to the proposals that are in the Act in order to establish their relevance in this debate. And I'll look forward to hearing that from the hon. member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the reminder that this Bill does in fact seek to recognize potash as our provincial mineral, and I think that many people are pleased in fact with that choice. While potash is important, I think it is an opportunity though to mention some other minerals which are so important to this province, like uranium, oil and gas, sodium sulphite, and precious metals.

In due time I'm sure in Saskatchewan we'll undoubtedly become known for exploration and development of other minerals as well, Mr. Speaker. But potash, however, is a good choice because not only do we have many mines but our reserves are extensive as well.

The presence of an ancient geological seabed where a lifeless body of water once existed has helped provide jobs and economic activity for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. More importantly, it also provides life and food for a hungry world. And there is some irony, Mr. Speaker, in the fact that a lifeless sea now does make it possible to support so many lives.

In addition to these factors, potash not only represents jobs and economic activity, but it represents our province's dependence on transportation and upon exports. Potash products are now expanding and diversifying, much like Saskatchewan itself, into specialty products for industrial customers.

As an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), I'm pleased to represent a constituency which includes the IMC (International Minerals and Chemicals Corporation (Canada) Ltd.) Kalium potash mine at Belle Plaine. It does provide many jobs and it's a valued part of this community.

But I have to at this point . . . I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't remind the Minister of Highways that many accidents occur near that mine related to the absence of proper access and acceleration lanes on the Trans-Canada Highway. And with the administrative functions that have now been moved to the mine from Regina and there's a lot more people commuting, I hopefully think that the minister will soon take that into account and that perhaps this year they would undertake the improvements that are in the works in terms of acceleration lanes.

Mr. Speaker, probably the greatest contribution which potash has made in this province is one that goes relatively without notice. Unlike producers in other jurisdictions around North America, Saskatchewan farmers consume virtually no

potassium fertilizer. So, Mr. Speaker, this same ancient seabed which has left us with extensive potash deposits has helped give the glacial soils of our province abundant supplies of potassium, one of the four major or macro nutrients that are required for agricultural production.

And while the NDP government may not be doing much to address rising farm input costs, producers can be thankful that millions of years of geological history and glaciers spared them of the expense of having to apply potash to their fields.

Mr. Speaker, part of the reason why I support this Bill though is because it encourages the people of this province and members of this House to focus on things that make us proud and grateful for what we have. In recent days, if you'd listened to the members opposite, you'd wonder whether they spend any time reflecting on the symbols, accomplishments, and the positive things about the country in which they live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Daily — daily, Mr. Speaker — they attack our national government and talk about how terribly we are doing as a nation.

Well in the spirit of the Bill before us today, the members opposite should instead be focusing on some of the good things in Canada. In this Bill we are focusing on the accomplishments of our volunteers and on how fortunate we are to have significant potash deposits and a potash mining industry.

So I think the members should take a little break from the daily attacks on the Government of Canada, whose evil Liberals . . . and reflect on their accomplishments and on those of the country as well.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we learned that Canada has the fastest growing population of any industrialized country in the world. In addition to that, a UN (United Nations) survey recently cited us as the best place in the world in which to live. A recent Angus Reid poll also discovered that citizens of other countries ranked Canada highly as well. When asked if they could live in any other country other than their own, which country would that be, Mr. Speaker? Well of course it's Canada.

While the members opposite suggest everything is wrong with this country, thousands of immigrants are choosing Canada as a place to live. By contrast, yesterday's census results suggest Saskatchewan is second last in population growth, second only to Newfoundland. So I ask the members opposite to reflect on these national accomplishments because people across the world pick Canada first as a place to live and they do clamour to our borders.

So, Mr. Speaker, before I conclude and take my seat, I ask the members opposite to think about the following question. When they condemn the Government of Canada for its handling of issues, are they suggesting that all of these immigrants who think this country are great are wrong? I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the 41 members opposite are wrong in their assessment of this country and its government, not the hundreds

of thousands of immigrants who are clamouring to get here each year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, just a few comments before we allow a vote on this Bill, The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act. I was listening as the minister was giving his statements as to why this piece of legislation is before the Assembly, and I certainly agree with the minister and the government in the fact that potash as a mineral is probably an appropriate choice for the emblem in our province.

And as I understand correctly as well, I think the government did ask a number of students throughout Saskatchewan to give their impressions. And I'm certainly pleased to see that students in Saskatchewan took some time to think, and obviously they felt that potash was something that was really recognized as being from Saskatchewan and a product that is known worldwide, as we certainly do export potash, not only across North American, but into Far East markets; certainly all over the world. And in that regard, I think it's certainly a fitting emblem for this province to recognize as a mineral.

An Hon. Member: — We have important dirt, though.

Mr. Toth: — My colleague from Cannington suggests that maybe the black dirt would be a good emblem as well, as we all are aware of this important resource, and it plays an important factor in the economy of our province. But certainly potash does as well.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned the fact that we have, certainly in this Assembly and through legislations such as this, taken the time to recognize the key work of individuals across our province. And while it boils down to a few who actually get that recognition in a formal manner, Mr. Speaker, we have, as we've seen in the last two years, recognized some 13 members for their volunteer work to their province, to their community, or to an organization.

We're quite well aware of the fact that so many other people throughout the province certainly dictate their time and efforts doing volunteer work to support their local communities and local organizations.

I should add, I neglected the other day when I recognized a number of individuals for their recognition at the South-east Saskatchewan Volunteer Awards ceremony, to recognize the fact that my colleague's sister was recognized there as well.

(1530)

An Hon. Member: — Susan Hagel.

Mr. Toth: — Susan?

An Hon. Member: — Hagel.

Mr. Toth: — Susan Hagel was recognized for her volunteer efforts at that awards ceremony and I apologize to the Assembly for not making that recognition.

But I just wanted to just let the Assembly know that while different groups may have dropped that program, the south-east regional sports program has kept the program going, Mr. Speaker. And basically they've done it through local initiative.

You will remember a number of years ago that there was a fair bit of provincial funding that helped cultural organizations offer these types of volunteer awards, medals, and ceremonies. And so I certainly want to give recognition to the south-east regional sports association for their efforts in continuing this program.

And certainly I would say in the last few years, as the provincial input as far as funds has diminished, it certainly hasn't diminished in the views of individuals and their efforts to maintain the program, to maintain the service, and to maintain that recognition to their area and surrounding area, which comprises an area, I believe, from Highway 6 right through to the Manitoba border, and the Qu'Appelle down to the American border.

That's a fair size area, but they do acknowledge a number of awards, and that has come about because of the fact that we have brought forward legislation that has said we want to recognize people for their services to our province.

So I extend to each and every volunteer group a hearty thank-you for all your work and efforts. And at this time as well, Mr. Speaker, I think it certainly is appropriate that we as individuals and as lawmakers do take the time to recognize that. I believe this legislation certainly brings out some opportunities to do that.

It certainly also allows us to recognize key characteristics of our province and the recognition of potash as the key mineral in this province at the present time. Although there may be some other persons or personalities might view other areas — such as uranium, maybe gold, in the future, as maybe a mineral that we should be looking at. But I think right now potash is certainly recognized by most people as a major export and something that we really have to offer and really have made available.

And so therefore, Mr. Speaker, with those few remarks, I really don't have any real reason to adjourn the debate and to hinder the movement of this piece of legislation. So I will now allow any other members to take place or to allow for a vote on this second reading. Thank you.

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

Bill No. 47 — The Psychologists Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Act is to regulate all psychologists in the province under one statute, and in doing so, improve their accountability to the people of Saskatchewan.

Psychologists in this province are employed by many different public organizations, including school boards, universities, governments, social services agencies, and health districts. There are also those in private practice. Levels of education vary as well. Psychologists can be trained at the doctoral level or masters level. The latter group is not regulated by the current statute.

This updated statute recognizes the diversity of the psychology profession. It provides consistent regulation of all these professionals under one body to ensure accountability, transparency, and public protection. I am pleased to say that this Act provides for a single professional organization to be called the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists.

The college will have the authority to ensure psychologists have the proper training and practice within their area of expertise and in accordance with any standards of practice the college deems appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I might add that this Act contains all the features of more recent professional legislation and is more responsive to our changing health system.

Numerous public accountability provisions have been incorporated into the Act. For example, the Act will expand on the college's ability to investigate and respond to public concerns regarding its members and allow for public disciplinary hearings. Representatives of the public will be appointed to sit on our college's council and its disciplinary committee, and the college will be required to file an annual report. In addition, bylaws proposed by the college that may impact on the public will have to be approved by the government after a consultation process involving concerned parties.

The Act before us today also addresses another important matter related to public protection, that of title protection. This government held extensive consultations with the three psychological associations, employers of psychologists, and other related professions on this matter. The provisions before us will allow psychologists trained at the master's level to continue to refer to themselves as psychologists. However, to help the public to distinguish between those trained at the doctoral level and master's level, members will be required to clearly indicate their educational credentials.

Mr. Speaker, this Act represents a new era in the regulation of psychologists in Saskatchewan. I am pleased to say that it was developed through consultations with the Saskatchewan Psychological Association, the Psychological Society of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Educational Psychologists Association.

Following passage of this Act, a council with representation from these three groups will be set up to ensure the necessary bylaws are established to regulate all psychologists.

I believe this new Act will serve the profession and the public well into the future, and ensure the continued delivery of quality psychological services in Saskatchewan.

I'd like to close by thanking the three professional associations for their participation in developing this updated statute.

Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of The Psychologists Act, 1997.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The practice of psychology has seen numerous changes in the last 37 years, and that's the last time the Act respecting the profession was updated. That's a long time to go without an update, given how much our world and our province has changed in the last three or four decades.

Mental health is now considered as important an issue as physical health. Emotional problems need as much in the way of treatment as do other health problems.

One would hope that seeking out the help of a trained psychologist does not bring with it a certain stigma. It should be no more of a humiliation to visit a psychologist than it is to visit an eye, ear, and nose doctor.

Mr. Speaker, we have to do everything in our power to ensure that people who need the services of a trained psychologist should be able to access that help easily. Just as one would hope that a doctor isn't too far away when we suffer a physical problem due to illness or accident, we also have to ensure that people who need the services of a psychologist are able to receive the counselling and the proper counselling that they need.

Mr. Speaker, our office is probably not alone in receiving many, many letters, faxes, pieces of e-mail, and phone calls regarding the new Act as proposed by the government. We have received submissions both on the pro and con side, Mr. Speaker, and we are carefully studying all the many viewpoints that have been expressed to us. Most of the comments we've gotten are from those in the psychology field itself.

Mr. Speaker, as I've stated, we must begin to recognize that psychology, though not a medical science, is an important aspect to our overall health care system. Therefore some checks and balances are necessary and have to be put in place in order to ensure that Saskatchewan people are receiving adequate treatment and that those who are practising in the field are qualified and competent.

As in other professional disciplines, such as dentistry, medicine, or law, who better to judge than your peers. Bill No. 47 responds to this by establishing the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists. This is an expansion of what's in place, namely, the Saskatchewan Psychological Association, established by The Registered Psychologists Act.

Along with those members, under this Bill will be current members of the Saskatchewan psychological society and members of the Saskatchewan Educational Psychologists Association. The Saskatchewan Psychological Association includes only those professional psychologists who have

received their doctorate. It does not include, at the present time, those who have received their master's level training, which, I understand, the majority of those practising applied psychology in Saskatchewan have.

Mr. Speaker, I know there's a serious division within the ranks of psychologists over this particular Bill. In fact, the fact that I keep referring to all of these people as psychologists is one of the main bones of contention.

As it does with most of its Bills, the government says it has consulted with those affected by the proposed changes. However, when there is such divergent views on the proposed Bill as we see between the registered psychologists and the rest of the profession, not everybody is going to be happy with the end result.

However, Mr. Speaker, we have to concern ourselves with the bigger picture here. We have to do what is right to ensure the best quality of care for the most number of people in our province. That's why it's so vital we have a proper body in place to regulate and control this profession and those who are involved in it.

Just as is the case with doctors or lawyers, with this Act we will see the implementation of a professional self-regulating body with a council and a public complaints process. This is very important, Mr. Speaker. And it's very important that very stringent regulations are in place for this profession just as they are in the cases of other disciplines within the medical profession as well as other professions.

Again, psychologists are not medical practitioners. But given their importance, they must be governed the same way, and this Bill does move in that direction. However, as is the case with the new Dental Disciplines Act, I'm very concerned about the government taking more power this time to regulate the supposedly self-governing body.

Self-governing bodies certainly aren't what they used to be. And just as is the case with the new Dental Disciplines Act that is currently being debated in this House, this Bill will give the Minister of Health extraordinary regulatory power over the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will give the minister the right to propose new bylaws to the college or request changes to any existing bylaws. And this Bill does give a pretence of deliberations on the part of the college. However, if the college does not agree with this bylaw change, the minister has to wait only three months before enacting the bylaw, whether the College of Psychologists, this supposedly self-regulating body, thinks it wise or not.

I question the wisdom of why it's necessary for the minister to have this extraordinary power in certain disciplines. The whole point of the self-regulating professional organization is that these people know what's right for their profession and what isn't. Now it appears the minister is the one who will pretend to know best. That's true with dental disciplines and it's true of psychologists. With these types of provisions, Mr. Speaker, it

appears the minister is simply once again trying to centralize more powers in his office.

That's been the government's standard operating procedure since coming to power, Mr. Speaker. We've seen it throughout the health reform process. Whereas the government and the minister profess to doing the exact opposite — that is handing over more control to local decision makers — in reality it's just not true. More power is moving to the minister with each move that he makes.

(1545)

The minister wants the power; he simply doesn't want the responsibility that goes along with the power. That's why we see him constantly passing the buck when it comes to the fallout from the decisions he has made and that the government has made. This latest move is only the latest symptom of that need to centralize all power in the minister's office away from the people who should be making these types of decisions.

Mr. Speaker, this Act is very similar to The Dental Disciplines Act in other respects as well. Like in that Act, as well as with The Occupational Therapists Act, there is no immunity from counter-suits for the college as a whole, if it decides to take disciplinary action against one of its members as a result of a complaint lodged with the college's discipline committee.

Again, Mr. Speaker, one questions whether this will make the committee think twice before taking up such a complaint. That's certainly a concern that was expressed to us as it related to the dental profession. And I'm sure the same concerns apply here as well.

Mr. Speaker, as I've already stated, we've had a lot of input on this Bill from the various levels and for the most part, members of the psychological society and educational psychologists, both groups primarily made up of master level professionals, agree with the Bill, while many registered psychologists are opposed.

Most of this disagreement comes from the use of the term psychologist, itself. The registered psychologists, or those at the Ph.D. level, have argued that only they should be allowed to use the term psychologist because of their higher education and superior qualifications. They say allowing others to use the term does not distinguish well enough the differences between the two levels. The fact that because of their education these people are able to call themselves doctor, while those with masters cannot, is not enough of a distinction, they argue.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have also heard from the other side as well. Educational psychologists and other master level professionals say they should have the right to use that term. Even some registered psychologists have expressed this view to us.

They say allowing the psychologist term to apply to all those with at least a master level of education, recognizes the reality that there simply aren't enough doctoral level psychologists in Saskatchewan to provide the necessary care.

And to further compound this problem is the fact that many if not most of these doctoral level psychologists are teaching at our universities. Thus the number of doctoral level psychologists providing health care as a regular part of their duties is actually quite small.

Mr. Speaker, each side makes good points over this particular Bill. And while there is a lot that is acceptable in this legislation, I feel we'll need some more time to study the arguments presented to us. Therefore at this time I move for adjournment of this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the Assembly that with respect to the immediately preceding item, Bill No. 47, The Psychologists Act, I wish to declare a conflict of interest and indicate that I will not vote on any stage of passage of Bill 47. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The House acknowledges the hon. member for Regina Victoria's declaration of conflict of interest. And pursuant to Rule 41, the hon. member will not participate in votes on subsequent stages of the Bill.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 7

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 7 — The Cancer Foundation Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I certainly am not planning on taking a lot of time in debating this Bill at great length or at further length. I think there are a number of areas we can certainly take time and address questions in committee.

But I understand that the Bill simply allows the Department of Health to pay for fee for service physicians directly rather than requiring the Cancer Foundation to pay for these services and then bill the department.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think that is appropriate and I guess it addresses two things. It does away with a lot of paperwork; it certainly speeds up the process of payment. And it creates another unnecessary form of red tape that has been around for far too long.

And in this regard, Mr. Speaker, we certainly are supportive of this piece of legislation. In a lot of regards it basically is a non-controversial piece of legislation which we don't have a lot of objections to. And the few questions that I think that we would like to raise we can certainly address directly in committee. And at this time I would allow for the Bill to

proceed on to committee.

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

Bill No. 17

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 17 — The Dental Disciplines Act** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, regarding the Bill No. 17, The Dental Disciplines Act, I have a few comments to make. The fact is I believe the Bill certainly looks at streamlining legislation relating to the dental professions by consolidating them into one Bill. But I think there are a few things that we will need to take a look at and address in this Bill, and certainly some other issues that I believe we need to take even more time to peruse before we even move to committee.

The Bill, I understand, as well provides for public consultation into disciplinary hearings for those professionals. And I think, Mr. Speaker, when I look at disciplinary hearings, it seems to me that when you look at all the professions in this province . . . And certainly an issue that came up just recently, even with the Department of Justice and some of the other professions, there's one concern I do have and that is that most professions, while they have a disciplinary committee, the committee is made up of individuals within the profession.

And many times when there may be a conflict with a public person, you wonder whether or not a commission made up of its own individuals, body, really take into consideration the problems that may be raised with that commission in view of the fact that they would be criticizing a member of their profession and having their own body address these concerns.

So I think the provision for a public consultation is certainly important if that indeed allows members of the public to address some of their concerns to a body even larger or outside of just a commission directly made up of professionals of that profession.

I understand it allows dental professionals more flexibility to operate in, and I think that's appropriate, especially when we look at the make-up of our province and a number of communities having a problem to find professionals, especially in the area of dentistry, to come and establish. For example it allows dental services to be made available or operated or care provided in special care homes.

It allows more flexibility in the types of services different types of dental professionals can provide, instead of the legislation spelling out at great length the types of procedures each discipline can provide. It allows each discipline to provide such services as are part of the generally accepted standards of training for that profession. And that, Mr. Speaker, obviously allows the different disciplines to change over time according to the standards of dentistry without requiring extensive legislative changes at each point.

And I understand as well from the minister that this Bill was written in consultation with each of the dental professions affected. And while there may have been consultation, Mr. Speaker, consultation doesn't necessarily mean that consultation was comprised of taking place with each one of the members of the profession, but certainly with the profession at large. And so it certainly would appear that the legislation here has . . . while we do have some agreement, it would appear that this legislation also has some areas that need to be questioned.

While the legislation improves the efficiency and flexibility of the medical services, and while that is positive, it certainly appears as well though that we are concerned with the funding cut-backs to the health sector. We will want to question the minister at large in Committee of the Whole just how thorough the consultation process was, Mr. Speaker. And I think it's important that time be given to allow for that.

We'll also want to assure that these changes are not a Trojan Horse for delivering poor services to health districts. And considering some of the questions that have arisen in the last few days regarding health care in this province and health services and some of the concerns that I see in my constituency, it's an area that we as an opposition party and opposition members certainly want to take time to address and address thoroughly.

The changes in flexibility for locale of practice may simply give health districts an excuse for not providing adequate facilities to dental professionals. And this is of a concern to us and of a concern to constituents throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

Likewise, for broadening the definitions of the duties each profession can perform, health districts may be able to get away with hiring, for example, a dental assistant instead of an actual dentist to do fillings, and this is of a concern to many people.

And Mr. Speaker will be aware of the debate that took place when the dental assistants were moved out of the schools or the school program was done away with and put into the professions or into the local dentists' offices. And while a number of people were concerned about it, there were arguments on both sides of the case at that time, as we do see today in the demise of the children's dental program.

On balance the Bill appears to allow dental professionals greater freedom to provide more efficient services to a broader patient base. However, closer examination will be needed to ensure that these changes have the desired effect.

And as I was saying, Mr. Speaker, there certainly are areas that we can see and we will agree with; there are areas that we feel we need to raise more questions to make sure we have a better understanding of what the intent of the legislation is. And in view of the questions that arise I think it would be inappropriate at this time to just move quickly into Committee of the Whole. And I therefore would move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 36

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 36 — The Health Districts Amendment Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few points on The Health Districts Amendment Act in terms of the intent of Bill 36. This Bill states that the government may pass limits on the rates of remuneration and reimbursement for expenses which may be paid to members of district health boards. After those rates are passed by this government, the local district health boards must stick to those rates.

I have to ask the question, is there a problem with the members of the district health boards voting to pay themselves too much for remuneration and reimbursement?

And the Bill also suggests that there is history of local health governance in this province is one of volunteer boards. It seems that the government's much heralded health care reform has resulted in a situation where the government itself thinks more controls are necessary in order to curb overly high spending by the new district health boards.

As a northern resident I have to ask, is this an indication of what awaits our new district health boards? Are we going to be looking to the district health boards as employment, Mr. Speaker?

And some of the situations we talk . . . when we talk about health care — very quickly just to again address some of the problems we have in northern Saskatchewan — in terms of Stony Rapids not having adequate water and sewer service. The poor quality of roads make it extremely difficult for people in the North to travel a long way for health treatment. The people of La Loche still receive health services in run-down, leaky trailers that insurance companies won't even insure.

(1600)

And the fact that after decades of representation by the NDP members in northern Saskatchewan, top-quality health care for northern residents still does not seem to be high-priority. Hospital and its spin-off purchases in Uranium City account for 70 per cent of the oil that Imperial Oil sells in that community and if the hospital moves or is downgraded or severely — well, closed — then of course, the Imperial Oil service in that particular community closes for all the residents.

And again with the Uranium City hospital issue, people in that community . . . no one realizes it's going to close, but there still has not been a whole pile of questions answered. So in reference to some of Bill No. 36, there is a whole bunch of questions we have to ask yet.

And we begin to address the problems of here we are talking about how much district board members are going to make, putting a cap on that, and the question we have is: why are they replacing volunteer boards; and secondly, how much more level of bureaucratic processes must we instil with our medicare

system in order for us to have control over it?

Well, Mr. Speaker, we feel that there is a lot of waste of time, a lot of waste of money, and this Bill proves that the priority is not necessarily building up health care, but really the Bill shows that it's intended to control health care.

So, Mr. Speaker, we obviously have a lot more to say about this, and we will as time goes on. And I sincerely thank you for the opportunity for expressing my views and I'll now take my place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think we were led to believe that this was a fairly non-controversial housekeeping Bill making minor amendments to The Health Districts Act. I believe the amendments largely deal with bringing in the wording of the Bill into line with the associated pieces of legislation, example, The Rural Municipalities Act.

The Bill also seeks to clarify the tax exempt status of health boards and formally allows boards to pay Public Service Commission level expense rates to board members. When I read this, Mr. Speaker, I do have somewhat of a concern, concern related to the costs of health care and the fact that we see — and as I note in my own constituency and across the province feeling that more and more people — that we're seeing lesser and lesser of fewer services being offered through our local health districts.

When I see the boards being given the ability to pay public health service level expense rates, one has to begin to wonder whether or not the feeling is that we have a piece of legislation here which really allows boards even a greater flexibility to pay themselves more and to eat up more of the funds that are available to them, rather than making sure that more and more funds are put into actual patient care services or services to the district to provide opportunities or services . . . or patient care, the needs of patients within the districts.

Mr. Speaker, I think when the government changed and formed the large health care districts in the province of Saskatchewan, the argument was made that they were going to save money through fewer boards. But the realities are . . . And they were going to save that by having fewer boards to eat up administrative costs or fees that were being paid to board members.

But we have pointed out time and time again that the boards that were in place, while there were a number of boards, most of the individuals on those boards are basically doing the service as an honorarium or as a gratis with very little fee, and in many cases, local RMs were picking up the fees. And the dollars they had coming to them were generally going into patient services.

Since the change, we however see a substantial increase in board rates and fees and dollars going in to pay board members. And while some would argue, well it's once a month, what I understand and in talking to board members, some board

members are actually on the go once or twice a week, which is a lot more than just one meeting a month. And when you think about that, based on the fee that they're being paid, a substantial dollar is being eaten up just covering the costs of running board meetings or running the different committees that boards have set up within their jurisdictions.

And so there are a number of concerns out there — concerns that taxpayers have and the fact that they are losing control of the ability of receiving the services that they have come to expect.

And while we're not standing here arguing that we should have the services we had years ago, or we should have the amount of beds available to the taxpayers of this province or the number of hospitals, the facts are, Mr. Speaker, that, I think, in view of the waiting lists that many people are still finding themselves on — and a current one that just comes to my mind I just received about three weeks ago where one individual is telling me that he's on a 17-month waiting list for a hip replacement — I think, Mr. Speaker, what people are saying is they don't mind being on a waiting list if it takes that to improve their health, but they get concerned when that waiting list starts to turning into a year and 17 months. Then they make inquiries as to why that waiting list is so long.

And we find out the waiting list is so long because the service is only provided in fewer and fewer locations. And as the beds are cut back, many times the waiting list is there because there aren't enough beds available for physicians to indeed bring their patients in that they want to provide the service to.

So what I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, while this seems to be non-controversial, this doesn't seem to have a major impact, I think the public of Saskatchewan feel we need to have a lot of other questions answered in dealing with pieces of legislation such as the one we have before us. And it would I think be inappropriate just to move this quickly into committee as well.

I think we need to take more time to focus on the Bill to address some of these concerns in second reading, and therefore I move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 42

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Scott that **Bill No. 42 — The Wildlife Act, 1997** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill No. 42 on The Wildlife Act, 1997, Mr. Speaker. This is an important Bill with potentially far-reaching implications and impacts on wildlife and on those that coexist with wildlife, like first nations, farmers, ranchers, oil and mining companies, and those that will administer the Act.

Through analysis and consultation with stakeholders, we will want to assure ourselves and our constituents that the Bill has

all the required provisions and powers to manage wildlife and protect endangered species. At the same time, we will want to establish that the rights of landowners, ranchers, farmers, hunters, and aboriginal people are not ignored or trampled on.

We will ask the minister to explain and elaborate on how he intends to use the powers granted to him under the Act and under the regulations. These are some sweeping powers that need to be justified as necessary for the administration and enforcement of the Act.

In particular, we will focus attention and scrutiny on section 11, Mr. Speaker, the big game damage compensation fund. Also part V, protection of wildlife species at risk, section 48 to 54.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to touch on that part of the Bill that I think has been a very big part for the farmers of Saskatchewan in the last couple of years. And I believe why we are taking special attention to this is we feel that the government of the day has actually been reneging on their responsibility to farmers, where farmers are being asked to pick up compensation that should be shared by the people of Saskatchewan instead of just strictly picked up by the farmers.

And I know the minister in charge of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), and actually the minister in charge of Agriculture, know what I am saying because they both know how much they've been dumping on our farmers. So I think this will be one of our areas that we're really going to check in this part of the Bill and check with people that are concerned, Mr. Speaker.

We will also explore the relationship between this Act and the federal endangered species Act. Is there any unnecessary or costly overlaps and duplications in the administration of the two Acts? What, if any, coordination is envisioned or planned between the two levels of government?

Mr. Speaker, there are but a few aspects of the Act that we intend to subject to thoughtful and careful and detailed examination to ensure that we will have a Wildlife Act that strikes a balance between and protects the interests of Saskatchewan residents and Saskatchewan wildlife. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I move that the debate on No. 42, The Wildlife Act, 1997, be adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment and Resource Management Vote 26

Item 1

The Chair: — Mr. Minister, would you please introduce your officials?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to introduce Stuart Kramer, sitting up here at the front, deputy

minister for the department. We have Les Cooke, associate deputy minister of policy and programs, and Ross MacLennan, assistant deputy minister of operations. And last but not least, Donna Kellsey, director of financial administrative services.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials. I'll be asking questions for the first 30 minutes or so and my hon. colleague from the constituency of Melville obviously will have some questions as well.

I'll guess we'll get right into it. I've got a number of issues of course we wanted to discuss. And there's 10,000 issues out there, as you're aware, but I'm just going to stick to about 4 or 5 here.

First of all, in reference to Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, can I just get a brief overview of what your responsibilities of your department is, please.

(1615)

Hon. Mr. Scott: — I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank the hon. member for the question. The Department of Environment and Resource Management does cover a wide range of issues, activities in Saskatchewan.

On the environmental side of the department we are responsible for monitoring a number of activities, from landfill sites to . . . We are dealing with underground fuel tanks at service stations, for an example. We are responsible for the licensing of uranium mines, working with other mining operations and industries such as potash, oil and gas.

On the resource side, we have a number of branches in the department. We have the parks branch, which is all of our provincial park system. We have the forestry branch of course, which deals with the forest industry. We have the fish and wildlife branch, which covers obviously fish and wildlife.

So we do cover a wide range of activities in the province here and what . . . We really rely on a lot of cooperation with the various stakeholders, and this is working out very well.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. One of the significant challenges we notice that your department has gone through for the last several years, and for the life of me I can't figure out why — you're such a nice guy — but the situation is you've gone through a significant amount of cuts in your department, significant to the point where it is now affecting how well your department performs — and not necessarily an attack on your staff's credibility or effort or desire to do their job, really it's an issue of being understaffed. And when you have a situation like that, it obviously is going to have an impact on monitoring the environmental challenges associated with all the different industries operating in Saskatchewan.

SERM, as you mentioned, certainly has a wide variety of responsibility in terms of monitoring how the mining sector works, how the forestry sector works, how well the wildlife is managed, and the list goes on and on. And granted that the

stakeholders do play a significant role in delivering that particular responsibility, nonetheless the Department of Environment and Resource Management plays a key role, the lead role, and probably the only role that has a lot of power and influence attached to it.

So these cut-backs certainly are having a drastic effect out there and I guess the big question I have in particular, it shows up in my constituency in the case of Buffalo Narrows. Buffalo Narrows, of course, wrote you a letter a couple of weeks ago and they're very concerned of a decision that your department made for reallocation and redistribution of staff — whatever their argument is — and they're very, very disappointed that they lost a position in Buffalo Narrows. Granted you moved it to a community just 60 miles down the road, to Beauval, but what that does, it creates animosity between the two communities.

So in that sense the concern that Buffalo Narrows has is, why does it seem these cut-backs are pitting community against community and it just doesn't seem fair.

Would you care to respond to that, please?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the compliments. Certainly the last number of years it's no secret every government department has had to do more with less and whether . . . This not only is restricted to government but businesses, big business corporations, as well. Everybody seems to be doing more with less and, however, we believe that the . . . we are through that hurdle at this time.

In fact we're very pleased to say that our budget has been increased by about \$6 million this year. A million dollars, a million and a half, for parks and facilities, which are very important to our people — we'll be putting more money into there. Another \$2 million for operations in the province, which includes conservation officers, the forest fire people, and also the forest fire management has also been increased by \$5 million.

So I can appreciate the hon. member's concerns, but there is always going to be change and, like I say, trying to do . . . make things more efficient. That's just the way of the '90s.

But we do believe that we are still doing a good job and we are still meeting our responsibilities through cooperative programs, partnership agreements — programs such as the tip line where people cooperate in reporting wildlife infractions. So I appreciate the comments, but we do believe that we're still doing as good a job as we can.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess one of the concerns that the . . . again, going back to this Buffalo Narrows problem, is it's nice to see that we do have an increase in SERM's budget. It's also nice to see that . . . some of the comments that you made in reference to partnerships and people wanting to work together in terms of stakeholders.

And I guess the other fact is as a result of your \$6 million

increase, can Buffalo Narrows expect to have the position that they once had retained at Buffalo Narrows, not at the expense of Beauval, but certainly in light of the fact that northern Saskatchewan consists of half the land mass of the province as a whole?

So you would assume instead of having cut-backs in an area where most of the animals are, most of the trees are, most of the mines are, and a great vast tract of land is, you would assume that any increase that you have as the environmental department that you would certainly look at putting positions, more positions as opposed to cut-backs, to northern Saskatchewan communities.

Would you care to respond to that, please, sir.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With the specific question regarding the conservation officer station at Buffalo Narrows, a large part of our downsizing a year ago was through early retirement options and it turned out that the individual station at Buffalo Narrows did qualify for early retirement; so he took that option. And the process is such that we cannot replace somebody that takes early retirement.

So at least for the time being, we will not be filling the position at least this year. But certainly if concerns are such and demand, we would certainly look at this in the future.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure Buffalo Narrows would be very happy to hear, at least, that in the future the consideration of this nature will be once again on the agenda of your department.

The other question I have is, who makes the decision in terms of where certain positions should go? Like suppose, example, you had another case of early retirement in another community. As you're aware, the communities in the north-west have unemployment rates that are quite high and every position that's available through the government, be it SERM or through the private sector, really is treasured. And when you have a movement like this, of course it will concern any community, and Buffalo Narrows is not unlike any community. They get concerned when they see job loss.

So who makes these decisions and these recommendations to replace employees or to not replace them or to transfer positions or to retire people? How is this all assessed?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the hon. member's question, we certainly do recognize the vastness of the North, the uniqueness. Of course the whole forestry industry is in the North, a lot of hunting and fishing opportunities are in the north part of the province; so we certainly distribute our resources to where the need is most. And certainly the North is not forgotten.

And to look specifically at forest fire-fighting operations, we do everything in our power to hire local people. In fact we offer training opportunities for local people, and we want to I guess, provide as many job opportunities as we can. Instead of bringing people in from the South to fight fires in the North, we

want to use local people.

So the decision to where people work is simply, I guess, the greatest need and the most logical way of employing people. For an example, where there's a large hunting community, we would certainly have conservation officers in that particular area.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. And I guess the first part of the question — I'm still waiting for an answer in reference to who makes the decisions and the choices. And would you undertake, kindly undertake, to contact the mayor and council of Buffalo Narrows to explain who made a decision and why the decision was made; so that they can get good clarification on why they lost this particular position?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, like all departments we are given an X number of dollars to operate in and our management team, some of which are here today, looks at the overall province and decides where we best need people employed or stationed, and I guess when downsizing — as was a year ago — is on the agenda, I guess they have to weigh very seriously where cuts can be made.

And as I mentioned in your particular case, the individual from Buffalo Narrows qualified for early retirement; so he was not at least out of work and he had a pension, and we did everything we could to sort of provide soft landings for people.

And more specifically, we'd be very pleased to contact the mayor of your community and explain to him the process. And we want to hear the local people's concerns as well; so we will certainly endeavour to do that.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I guess the other question is . . . I certainly appreciate the fact that you will contact the mayor and council of Buffalo Narrows. And I guess the only thing that'll probably be asked is okay fine, that the person was retired, we can appreciate that. You've done everything you can to make sure these landings are soft. And when one loses his job by his option or not, it's always nice to have these concessions for him.

It still does not answer the question, and I know the question will come back from the mayor and council, as to why the position was transferred from Buffalo to Beauval; and again you're dividing the two communities. I don't want to have to choose between the two myself because I'm, of course, representing both communities. However, I think the key thing here is that we make sure that we don't do . . . make decisions of this nature which divide communities.

And I think the key thing here is we can appreciate departmental budgeting. You know, being a former mayor myself, I can appreciate how you have to juggle dollars.

But again to go back to the earlier point we made, is northern Saskatchewan's got half the land mass. I don't know how many thousands of square kilometres they have out in northern Saskatchewan — but one figure we have is for every person we have in the North, there's approximately 90 square kilometres

for every man, woman, and child.

So the problem certainly is not one of departmental spending, it's really departmental priorities in saying that's where the land is, that's where all the . . . most of our job is, so that's where most of the positions should be — just makes common sense.

But nonetheless we'll continue on here to the issue of the Uranium City fuel farm, Mr. Minister. As you're probably aware, I did speak with the Minister of Northern Affairs this afternoon in question period and asked him about the whole issue of the fuel farm. And as you're probably aware, they get their fuel shipped in through Imperial Oil, and what Imperial Oil does is store the fuel for a number of winter months. And I think next month — May, I'm not exactly sure of the date in May — but that's the last opportunity in which they're going to have to make a decision as to whether Imperial Oil is going to pull out or not. Now if Imperial Oil does pull out because of the tank storage problems . . . they claim they have to replace these tanks because they're underground tanks, and the cost is just not possible for them to recover over the long term based on their operations.

So the situation we have here now is, what's going to happen to Uranium City to ensure that the replacement of these tanks is not a pressing priority in which that the people of Uranium City will not have adequate supply of heating fuel for their homes and their hospital and their school for the upcoming winter months of 1997-98.

(1630)

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, with leave, to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chairman, I want to introduce to the members and to you, a visitor who is seated in our west gallery. It's a young man who studies at the University of Saskatchewan. He's very active in the political scene in our province. He's currently the acting president of the Saskatchewan Young New Democrats and I'm very proud to say he's my constituent. Would the members please welcome Mr. Brendan Pyle.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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Item 1

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the question and I just learned about this situation a day or two ago, and we

realize the importance of having heating fuel at a remote area like Uranium City. And I can assure the hon. member that our department, along with your friend, the Minister of Northern Affairs, will be working with the community of Uranium City as well as the Imperial Oil company to do everything we can to ensure that fuel will be available.

I'm not sure of the conditions of the tanks but we will be checking into that. If it's a mere fact of having to monitor the tanks to see if they're leaking, if they don't need replaced, well that can be done very easily, but if the tanks are leaking we will have to look at that. So we are in the process of getting information but we appreciate the concern you raised on this issue.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess in essence then I could expect and anticipate that your department officials will immediately contact the chairperson of the local advisory committee, which is Jean Lepine, and advise him of the ongoing discussions and work with him firsthand as to how we can resolve this issue. Because it is a very serious issue, and as I mentioned today in question period, many people in Uranium City are losing sleep trying to figure out, with the hospital leaving and with this fuel farm problem, what's going to happen to our community.

So I think we have to give them a peace of mind and an assurance that your department will not come along and have the attitude that this fuel farm is an environmental hazard and we don't care whether it affects 200 people or 2,000, we've got to shut it down; we've got to replace these tanks no matter what.

But at this point in time we need common sense, logic, and compassion. And certainly I anticipate that's what you would afford the people of Uranium City. So can I again confirm that yourself or one of your department officials will contact the appropriate people to resolve some of their concerns?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, you certainly can and we would ask that you provide the name and address, phone numbers, of any individuals that you think we should contact in Uranium City and we'll follow that up very quickly.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure that they will appreciate that. I guess continuing on with the . . . just going down my list here. I've only got another 10, 15 minutes here of questions because the hon. member from Melville is giving me a nudge here.

However in reference to the northern leases of some of the lands, I just want to question . . . We have an article — I'm not sure of the date — but James Parker of the *Star-Phoenix* presented me with, you know, with the question on a fact that an Alberta group operated an illegal fishing camp in north-western Saskatchewan. And the camp ran for about five years before the government, provincial government, began to hear unsettling rumours about its operation in 1993.

It seems that the underprivileged children that this camp was

supposed to serve were actually unusually old and affluent and remarkably adept with a fishing rod. And I guess these people were from Alberta and they were actually older guys out there fishing and having a good time.

Could you indicate to me what's the situation of that particular case at this date?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, you raised an example of what we don't like to see happening to our resources and the article is correct.

These individuals from Alberta came to Saskatchewan and applied for a lease on a northern lake, saying they were going to use it for underprivileged children. We thought this was a good cause and we issued the lease. And within a couple of years we were hearing reports back from people that this was not a camp for underprivileged children, but for people that had wanted to come fishing and probably weren't too poor.

So once we heard these rumours, we initiated an undercover operation and we confirmed that this was the case, that it was not used for what it was intended to be used for, and we pressed charges. And I'm happy to say that the individuals were found guilty and received substantial fines. The lease has since been cancelled.

And this is just one example of how the public can help us out in managing our valuable wildlife and fisheries and all of our natural resources. We simply don't want to have abuse like this and misuse and we do appreciate the great cooperation we have with the public.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And it goes back to my earlier statement about not cutting back the North and not cutting back some of the Buffalo Narrows officers and positions, because again you look at the situation. We talk about co-management boards on an ongoing basis. We talk about hiring aboriginal people to work within the organization, of promoting aboriginal people. Some of the people we have in northern Saskatchewan are very, very good conservation officers. And they're from the northern communities and they're native people. So I want to certainly commend your department on pushing some of those opportunities for our native people, and I encourage you to continue. And I certainly encourage you to continue to have these people climb up the ladder, if you will, in your corporate departmental plans.

However just going on, the quote that I made in there is:

“You have a huge tract of land that isn't being monitored. There's room for all kinds of abuse. They have to get local people involved,” Buckley Belanger said Wednesday.

And that just goes to show, Mr. Minister, this is not about, again, politics; this is preservation of wildlife and protection of the environment. And who else do you afford that opportunity to, is the local northern people. So in reference to co-management and certainly reference to local people being employed, I encourage you to exhaust every avenue, because it's very, very important to us.

And also, don't do it at the expense of other communities, because that just creates division amongst communities and it doesn't do any good. And what you want to do is promote and enhance a cohesive effort of northern people working hand in hand to protect the environment.

But continuing on. We'll leave that alone. Just one final question on that. An elaborate camp with buildings worth more than 100,000 has been constructed and these disadvantaged fishermen from Alberta, or underprivileged fishermen from Alberta, what recourse have they got in reference to that building and what's being planned for that building that they apparently constructed on that site?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With the response to that specific case again, the convictions has been fairly recent in the last couple of months. And there's a very technical and legal process to go through in dealing with assets on the property, and we are just in the process getting that going.

The individuals were found guilty, but their assets on the lease, although the lease is cancelled, the assets may still belong to them and we have to sort this out through the process. And we will certainly be pleased to keep you informed as to the outcome of this.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And perhaps we should look at some of the proceeds of the sale and perhaps some of the fine income that you will get from the conviction. Perhaps we should use those dollars to look at more hirings in the North and more training of northern people so people like your Norman Fontaines, Brian Morins, Robbie Gardiners, Murdock Carriers, William Caisse, and to name a few people in my constituency that have done a tremendous job for your department.

And perhaps we should look at involving the communities more in co-management and involving the people more, so problems like this do not persist. And that just goes to qualify my case to you when you talk about having the people out there that are occupying this huge land mass to not be cut back but to in fact have your positions enhanced and protected out there.

Again, bouncing around a bit here, we have questions in reference to the town of Big River, and I've got a letter here I wish to share with you. You probably have a copy of this. It was sent to the Premier, Roy Romanow, on the Big River tree nursery. And one of the important things here and one of the quotes I want to use is: "We wish to persuade your government to keep the tree nursery in operation." And that was from Ron Harnett, who is the mayor of Big River.

And I guess the big question we're going to ask is, why did you close down the tree nursery in Big River? What was the rhyme or reason for that decision?

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The answer to the member's question is, first of all, we wanted to have the forest industry pick up more of the costs in operating our forest industry. And one of these was the forest industry did agree to

look after seedlings and reforestation, which we're very pleased about.

Unfortunately the Big River operation was a bare-root seedling plant which basically meant that the seedlings were out over winter and when they were pulled up they were bare roots. Now the most popular and most efficient seedlings and best survival rate, best quality, are seedlings grown in containers — and much easier to handle as well — and the survival rate is much better than the old system of digging the seedlings out.

So simply it was a case that Big River did not have the technology, did not have the facilities and the forest industry. We advertised far and wide for somebody to take this operation over; nobody wanted it. And we indicated to the employees at Big River a year ago that unless somebody picked it up that it would be shut down. And we subsequently are working with the community to find out what we can use the facility for and we will continue to do this.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm sure that Big River would certainly appreciate every effort that is undertaken by this government to try and find a similar opportunity, or the same opportunity afforded to them for many, many years. You know the Big River . . . the community of Big River is basically a forest-oriented community.

And just want again quote from an article of March 25, in which town councillor and owner of the Big River Hotel, Mr. Duane Davidson, and his comment . . . well actually he said Monday:

The provincial government is throwing away millions of dollars in shutting down the Big River Tree Nursery, Davidson said. The provincial government's prepared to bury approximately \$1 million in trees but not prepared to help the community get jobs. There is a brand-new building but they haven't done anything, said Davidson. The facilities are far superior to those in Prince Albert, and in addition they have moved the greenhouses to Prince Albert that they had here. For 10 years the government knew that greenhouses are the way of the future but they aren't prepared to do anything now.

What response have you got to say to Mr. Davidson, sir?

(1645)

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's always nice to have coaching.

With response to again, the Big River issue, the one component that the Big River nursery was lacking was the greenhouse where the seedlings can be kept going indoors and not having to worry about late or early frost. So again, the facility simply did not have the ability to compete and that's why nobody picked the nursery up.

And also, we do know that we only have the opportunity for one real efficient and successful seedling plant in the province, and industry has indicated that the Prince Albert site with the

greenhouse opportunities is the preferred sight. Now that is if we can keep it going even, and we haven't been able to decide that.

So we are doing what we can to produce our own seedlings, but equally important, we are working with the community of Big River. We're looking at various options for the site and the building at Big River. And this includes everything from a bowling alley to a recreational complex for local people at Big River.

But we will continue to work with the community to come up with the best solution and the best use of the facilities. And at the same time, employment opportunities are very high on our list as well.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Again, with all due respect, you're not able to bowl if you can't work. And the industry of Big River is associated directly with the forestry. And I'll quote again from a letter from the mayor again:

It is felt that the Big River nursery would be an excellent public investment because of the market for trees for reforestation. More jobs could be created by the building of greenhouses, monitoring plantation success, and researching ways to improve tree quality and disease control.

The increased jobs have not only improved Big River's economy, but as some of the workers come from surrounding communities their economics would benefit also.

I guess my point, Mr. Minister, is that the key thing here is that this community is fighting to save these jobs, tree nursery jobs. They live again in the fringe of the northern forests. They've been dealing with this industry for many, many years. It's going to have a severe impact on their local economy.

And they're again saying . . . time and time again, they're asking the government here to begin to make a commitment. They want to sit down and have steady, heavy consultation on the issue of their tree nursery. And for us to sit here and say, well it's not an option, technology has improved, they're doing better in Prince Albert — well those aren't answers people wish to hear, simply because they haven't got the full explanation. And I would encourage you, Mr. Minister, to look and meet with the Big River residents on a continual basis to talk about how we can reverse this decision.

If we are very serious about reforestation, moving seedlings that are grown in Big River into Prince Albert, and eventually getting seedlings that are grown and developed in B.C. (British Columbia). It doesn't make sense to a whole pile of us why seedlings in B.C. would grow better in northern forests. Why don't we build our own seedlings? Why don't we build in greenhouses? There's many, many questions associated with this decision, and I urge you to meet with the residents of Big River and to discuss this matter with them at great lengths.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, what we

have done is turned over the reforestation, the seedling production, to the industry. Obviously the industry did not see fit to continue with the operation at Big River. In fact they have chosen to bring their seedlings in from B.C. We are doing what we can to try to get seedling production brought back to Saskatchewan, but Big River as a nursery is finished. It just is not economical to operate.

But we will do as you suggest. We will continue to work with the people of Big River to make the best use of the facility and assist them in every way we can. And Big River, as you pointed out, has always been a timber, a lumber centre, and with the Weyerhaeuser sawmill there, we are aware that the number of people are employed. And again, the industry I'm sure will continue to employ local people, as we do in fire-fighting operations.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I just want to thank you for your information that you shared with me for the last 30 minutes. And obviously we'll be having discussions with these matters as we go along.

But in closing I want to assure you that I am fully aware of your commitment as minister to protecting the environment. I think in this particular issue, Big River needs a lot of leadership.

And the whole issue of forestry in general is that, as much as we like to support the industry of forestry, we must ensure that the development of forestry is sustainable and that we monitor and that we reforestate all the areas that we cut.

And unfortunately the issue of shutting down tree nurseries in Big River, not involving co-management boards, making decisions to cut back staff in the North — this simply doesn't make sense. It seems like it's going against the principles that we speak about.

And I know that you're committed to the protection of the forestry industry and you're also committed to the balance of enhancing our forests and our wildlife and all the natural resources out there. And I appreciate your effort.

However I assure you that we're all watching and we all wish to assist and we all hope that your leadership does come through in terms of dealing with some of these issues. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions to the minister, through you, something that my hon. colleague, my esteemed colleague from Athabasca had touched on, Mr. Minister, with respect to underground tanks. And I want to spend a little time with you on this because I'm sure it must distress you, as it does me, every time I drive through Qu'Appelle where there once was a small business that served gasoline and other condiments to people that wanted to avail themselves of that business, it's now shut down and it's wasted space. It's unable to be used for any type of business.

Somebody's gone out of business, a small-business person has gone bankrupt because of the environmental processes and needs with respect to underground tanks and seepages. And I

. . . Don't misunderstand — I appreciate there is a need to protect our environment in that respect and our soils.

When I drive through Balcarres I see another once thriving small-business person who supplemented a main livelihood with an operation that also looked after some of the needs of the local community. That's no longer in business. It's shut down and weeds are growing up — because of underground tank problems.

Springside, another community, and there are probably many, many throughout the entire province that are suddenly become pieces of wasteland because of this very stringent requirement to have underground tanks that are found to be leaking . . . and that are there now — there are no more fuel in them; there's nothing more to leak in the soil — but are leaking there and nothing can be done with them, with that property, until those tanks are uprooted and the ground, I understand, sterilized.

Mr. Minister, is there any process in place to lessen the impact or the effects of the need to sterilize or clean up those soils and lessen the burden on the very people that can no longer operate a small business because of the horrendous costs they're facing associated with cleaning up? In some cases some properties which are . . . through no fault of theirs, they find themselves trying to carry on a livelihood, but having someone now come along and say, well no, there was once an underground tank here and we believe it was leaking so you're responsible for cleaning it up, and they can't.

I was just wondering if there was any reconsideration of the very stringent approach taken to cleaning up these messes? Can you comment on that, please.

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank the hon. member from Melville for raising this very important issue; it is an issue which affects many communities. We all know of some communities that have an underground fuel tank in-site, and in many cases the owner of this site was looking at selling his operation and retire on it. And as the hon. member says, the site is basically worthless because the tanks have been leaking, the ground is contaminated, a would-be buyer cannot get a loan to purchase the property, and very few people would want it at any rate.

I guess the oil companies saw this coming and that is why they bailed out — sold a number of their service stations a few years back — because they knew that these tanks would only last so long in the ground before they would leak.

This is an issue which has been discussed in this legislature for over 10 years now. And originally it was a sort of a heavy hand — if you're tank's X number of years old, out it comes at your cost. We have made a number of amendments to that to the extent now where, if a service station operator will put in a monitoring well which costs about \$250 per tank, the tank can stay there until it leaks.

Now certainly the service station owner does not want to keep dumping fuel into a leaking tank; the community doesn't want the tank leaking and contaminating the soil, the water, and so

on and so forth.

We've recognized this and over a year ago, we appointed a committee — contaminated site liability committee — to decide who should pay to clean up these sites. And there's a number of players involved. And on this committee we have the industry; we have local communities; we have interest groups — SARM, SUMA; and their report is to be presented to me very soon. It was supposed to be prepared a few months ago and they just had a real problem in sort of trying to decide who should pay because every situation is different.

But we are looking forward to the report being tabled very soon and we want to, I guess, get at it, so to speak. You know, should it be the previous owner? Should it be the oil company? Should it be the government? Should it be the town? Should it be the current owner? Who should pay? And there's, I guess, arguments for everybody paying some and so we want to deal with that.

And we certainly appreciate the hardship that people are experiencing when they bought this property, to find out that it's worthless and that they cannot use it. And we want to try to help these people out as quickly as we can.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

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