

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of residents of the community of Glen Ewen. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

These petitions come from the Redvers, Antler, Bellegarde areas of south-east Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions, and reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

And these petitions are signed by individuals from the Redvers, Wawota areas of the province.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Wishart, Foam Lake, Rose Valley, and Quill Lake. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I too rise to present a petition and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

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

And these are signed by the good people in Rose Valley.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise with a petition from members of the Saskatchewan community surrounding the issue of cancelling the severance payments to Jack Messer and asking for the calling of an independent public inquiry into all the facts surrounding Channel Lake.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are mostly from the community of Melfort but also from communities in the entire north-east. I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions from people in the Spalding area:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to immediately call an independent public inquiry to find all the facts surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the good folks from Weyburn, Estevan, and Macoun. I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of people in the province concerned about the closure of the Plains hospital. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

Those who signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the

communities of Pilot Butte and the city of Regina. I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also present a petition on behalf of concerned citizens with respect to the Plains Health Centre:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that the essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

And the signatures on this petition are from Weyburn and Yellow Grass. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I also present a petition this morning by citizens . . . this afternoon by citizens of the province concerned with the impending closure of the Plains Health Centre and praying that the provincial government will provide adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

Your petitioners come from Mankota and Ponteix.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues today in bringing forth petitions in regards to stopping the closure of the Plains hospital. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to save the Plains Health Centre by enacting legislation to prevent the closure, and by providing adequate funding to the Regina Health District so that essential services provided at the Plains may be continued.

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

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from the Ferland and Ponteix area of the province. I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, roads continue to be a great concern for the people in the south-west, and I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach the necessary agreements with other levels of government to fund the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so that work can begin in 1998, and to set out a time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These petitioners, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Medicine Hat; Elkwater; Lethbridge; urban Alberta; Bindloss, Alberta; also from Alsask, Saskatchewan; and Richmond, Saskatchewan. And I'm happy to present them on behalf of those people today.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of the conference of Mennonites in the province of Saskatchewan praying for an Act respecting the conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan.

Of the Fondation de la Radio Française et l'Association Culturelle Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan, in the province of Saskatchewan, praying for an Act respecting the Fondation Fransaskoise, 1998.

And according to order the following petitions have also been reviewed and are hereby read and received:

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly regarding the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; respecting saving the Plains Health Centre; and respecting the calling of an independent public inquiry surrounding Channel Lake.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, are 20 air cadets seated in your gallery. They are the William G. Kindrachuk Air Cadets, Squadron 888, from Wakaw. And they are accompanied by Captain B. Young, Lieutenant Joan Parenteau, Lieutenant Lucie Gaudet, and Marlene Kohle. I would like the members of the Assembly to give them a very warm welcome, and I look forward to seeing you a little bit later today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the House and to the members in your west gallery, I'd like to introduce a teacher from Harris, Saskatchewan, Virginia Mireau, and her daughter, who are down here, I think, taking advantage of the Easter break. So I'd like the Assembly to welcome you here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, seated in the east gallery are a couple of young ladies that I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the House. This being spring break not only teachers . . . not only students but also teachers take advantage of the break. I'd like to introduce my wife, Gail, and my daughter, Lindsay. Thank you very much for coming into Regina and being part of today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to make several introductions this afternoon. First of all, in your gallery in the first and second rows are a number of the members of the Saskatchewan Professional Fire Fighters Association. It has become an annual event for them to come to Regina and hold meetings with elected members to

convey their, the concerns and issues that arise during the course of their work.

So I'd like to ask all members to welcome them into the legislature, and as a token of our appreciation for the work that they do all year round to keep our communities safer and better places, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Also today in the gallery, Mr. Speaker, we have the president, vice-president, and director of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, who have joined us no doubt to observe question period. And I'd like to ask the members to welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — And seated also in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Chala Heinemann, who is visiting her sister Vicky, who is a ministerial assistant in my office. Chala is from Strathmore, Alberta, and is a special needs teacher in Calgary. She is taking a well-earned Easter break and visiting Saskatchewan for her holiday, Mr. Speaker. So I'd like to ask you to welcome our visitor from Alberta.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the minister this afternoon in welcoming the professional fire-fighters here this afternoon and also the members of SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) that are in attendance today, on behalf of the official opposition, the Saskatchewan Party.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature, my sister, Jo Ann Nilson, and her husband, James Lokken, and their four boys, my nephews, Nils, Olaf, Torbjorn, and Knut.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice of welcome as well to the great fire-fighters association and to people from SARM. I'd also like to acknowledge as well the young people and the air cadet people that are here. Believe it or not, it was a long time ago, but I was a cadet as well, and I just want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to commend all the young people through their own initiative that avail themselves of this type of opportunity to belong to a cadet squadron of one type or another.

I'd also like to commend all the volunteers, the parents, and the people that assist these young folks along their way in education and learning what it's all about to deal with one another, belong to service clubs. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly, two

people in your gallery: Robin Gilbert, student at Eastend School, and she is with my daughter, Heidi Scott, who are here visiting on holidays.

And during the past week some of you saw a pledge form going around for the Eastend Museum. Heidi works there on weekends and she would like to extend appreciation to all who contributed and she assures me the money will go to a good cause and not a summer holiday. I ask all people to join me in welcoming them here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Saskatchewan Party caucus I'd also like to welcome the air cadets to the Assembly today and also to inform the House that I was also a member of the air cadets. That was after the invention of power flight, Mr. Speaker, not like the member opposite. So I'd like to welcome the cadets here also today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce a very special guest in your gallery. I would like to have her stand. It's my daughter Danis, and I'd like to explain that her name in Cree is . . . appropriately of course, means my daughter. And she has just come home after a two-and-a-half-year stint in Europe, Africa, and India. She actually arrived on my birthday approximately two weeks ago.

An Hon. Member: — How old are you?

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — And it was a tremendous pleasure to . . . my 52nd birthday. And indeed it is a pleasure to have her back home with my wife Linda and I, and I think she'll be trying to look for places to go to school. So I'm very pleased to introduce her to the House. Thanks.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Speedy Recovery Wishes for Cannington Member's Son

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis, members of this Assembly get caught up in politics and sometimes forget what is truly important — the health of each of our friends, our colleagues, and our families.

Sometimes it takes a tragedy to put things into some kind of proper perspective. The son of the member from Cannington was involved in a serious car accident during the holiday weekend, and is in hospital with some very serious injuries.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition would like to send our wishes for a speedy recovery, and to the member from Cannington, our prayers are certainly with you and your family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Indian Winter Games

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the

Saskatchewan Indian Winter Games are currently under way in Regina. Twenty-five hundred athletes from across the province are participating in the games which are hosted by the Touchwood File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council this year.

This year's games will feature four medal sports and two demonstration sports. Medal sports include badminton, volleyball, boys' hockey, and girls' broom ball. The two demonstration sports are men's basketball and women's hockey.

Participants will be coming from 10 different tribal councils, and will range in age from 10 to 17. For co-ordinator Glen Pratt, the games are about much more than medals. Glen feels that the games are also an important tool to be used to encourage participation, development, and healthy lifestyles for aboriginal youths.

Guest appearances are expected by former NHL (National Hockey League) Coach of the Year Ted Nolan and former Canadian Heavyweight Boxing Champion George Chuvalo. The purpose of having Nolan and Chuvalo speak at the event is to demonstrate the importance sport can have in personal development, but also to encourage the young athletes to choose healthy lifestyles and to fight through the many obstacles facing them.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all the athletes good luck and congratulate them on their choices to become active in sports.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Home for National Seed Collection

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 11, Saskatchewan, and indeed Canada, witnessed an important and historical event. Important not only to the agricultural research and development community but also to Saskatoon's growing agricultural biotechnology sector.

Saskatoon residents who happened by the airport last Saturday afternoon would have seen a Department of National Defence Hercules cargo aircraft deliver the first instalment of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's national seed collection to its new home in the expanded and renovated research centre on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan.

Plant Gene Resources of Canada, formerly located at the central experimental farm in Ottawa, represents not only a commitment to our province and our nation but it demonstrates a major international commitment by Canada to the preservation of the world's genetic diversity and food supply. The entire collection includes 110,000 different varieties of plants and is considered of such significance that only half of the collection was transported by air, while the other half will come by land at a future date.

The decision to relocate these genetic materials to Saskatchewan represents a recognition by the Government of Canada of the quality of our province's world-class research and development infrastructure and also acknowledges the significant potential of research and development to generate

the kind of economic activity . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The hon. member's time has expired. Statements continue.

National Appointment for Sylvia Maljan

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Often, getting involved in organizations can and will lead to national recognition. And, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what happened to Sylvia Maljan of Unity. Sylvia has recently been appointed to chair the National Women's Task Force Committee.

Sylvia is employed by the Landswest School Division in the capacity of secretary of the Unity Public School and is a member of CUPE Local 1972. The Canadian Union of Public Employees, or CUPE, has a membership of 460,000 in Canada; 276,000 of the CUPE members are women.

The task force which Sylvia will Co-Chair is composed of representatives from each of the CUPE provincial divisions. The committee will examine topics of equality and women's issues. The committee has not met for six years and so has much work to do.

Sylvia has been actively involved in CUPE Local 1972 and has always been supportive of equality and women's issues. One of the main tasks that Sylvia will accomplish in her term is the planning of the national women's conference for November of this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to both congratulate Sylvia and wish her luck in her tenure as Co-Chair of CUPE's National Women's Task Force Committee. I am confident that with Sylvia's extensive experience and ability, she will be an excellent Co-Chair.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Best Wishes for Nicholas D'Autremont

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with all members of the Assembly a story of tragedy, but also one of courage, commitment, perseverance, and love.

Nicholas D'Autremont is the 15-year-old son of the member from Cannington. I know that Nicholas is watching the telecast of these proceedings today because he really enjoys politics. In fact his mom and dad have been dragging Nicholas to political meetings for most of his life, so it isn't unusual that Nicholas would be interested in watching the question period on television.

What is unusual is that today Nicholas is watching these proceedings from his room on the 9th floor of the Plains hospital in Regina. On Friday, Nicholas was a passenger in a car that was involved in a serious accident on a grid road not far from his home at Alida. Nicholas was rushed to the Plains hospital where doctors diagnosed him with a serious neck injury.

Nicholas's injuries have left him without the ability to move his legs; however, he does have some use of his arms and hands. Doctors are now waiting for some of the swelling around the injured areas to go down in order to assess the need for surgery. Nicholas will begin physiotherapy today.

Nicholas is a very brave young man who has remained confident and positive throughout this difficult time. Through it all, Nicholas has been supported and cared for by his mom and dad, brother and sister, grandmother, and many other relatives and friends.

I have with me a gift of encouragement that we will be delivering to Nicholas later today. It is a picture of all the members of the Legislative Assembly that I will be asking each of you to sign for Nicholas.

Nicholas, I know that I speak for all members of this Assembly when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family. May God guide the doctors and nurses who are taking care of you and may God speed your recovery.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Provincial Sales Tax-free Fire Truck Purchase in Saskatchewan

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First to the member from Cannington: our prayers and thoughts are with you today.

Mr. Speaker, I remember several occasions in this legislature when the member from Kelvington-Wadena stood up and complained that the local fire departments had to pay PST (provincial sales tax) for their fire trucks. I can understand her raising the issues here. What I can't understand is her silence about the fact that Naicam fire department, which is in her constituency, is the first in the province to buy a PST-free fire truck.

According to the Naicam fire chief, Carl Peterson, the Naicam fire department will save nearly \$10,000 as a direct result of the 1998 budget. The Naicam fire department is using these savings to buy a better-equipped fire truck than would have been possible before the good news budget.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to responding to the needs of the people of Saskatchewan. We continue to pay down the Tory debt, balance budgets, and provide incentives and tax breaks where we can and at a speed that we can afford. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Cadet Honour Band

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I notice in the gallery we had introduced to us a number of cadets. Mr. Speaker, I think members of this Assembly are quite well aware of the cadet honour band and their travelling across western Canada at this time of the year. I've had the privilege of attending a couple of their concerts, and I can say they are very inspiring.

And I'm sure that any member who's had the privilege, any

cadet who's had the honour of attending that performance is certainly going to be . . . You leave there feeling real excited because of the dynamics that are presented by the cadet honour band. My only regret, Mr. Speaker, is singing in a group with three other gentlemen, our own quartet, I would think it would sure be nice to be able to sing along with that honour band playing the background music. I think they would really provide an excellent job.

So I would just say to each and every one who's been involved, congratulations and we're certainly pleased to see that you do take the time to even stop in our fair city to give us the pleasure of being able to listen to such excellent and inspiring music.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Youth Futures Pilot Project

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Youth Futures is a pilot project program in Prince Albert that has been operational since August of 1997. It is a holistic, community-based approach which focuses on helping youth make the transition from dependency on social assistance to becoming independent, contributing members of the community.

The pilot program places direct responsibility on the youth by requiring them to plan their future and then take appropriate action. For example, each individual involved would start with an assessment of their skills, abilities, and ambitions. This is followed by the development of a plan to identify and achieve the desired goals. And once the plan is developed the appropriate programs and services available are used to achieve it. These may include necessary academic training or skills training, Mr. Speaker.

The government is partnered with local businesses and industry in Prince Albert to ensure community support for the program. Youth are given an allowance equal to levels of social assistance they were formerly receiving while they are developing and implementing their goals.

Eighteen-year-old Tara Fleury is just one example of the many success stories associated with Youth Futures. She says, and I quote, "I actually just got a job . . . so I guess it has helped me quite a bit, because I never had a job before." Tara is now off welfare and planning to get her first apartment.

This program gives youth a hand up, not a hand-out, and our youth like that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Inquiry into Channel Lake

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, your old friend Jack Messer has now testified under oath that he told the former SaskPower minister everything. Messer briefed the minister on three occasions leading up to the June 20 board meeting, the meeting at which

the Channel Lake cover-up was put in place. On June 17 Messer gave the minister a detailed review of the Channel Lake fiasco and the minister agreed with Jack Messer's plan to keep the matter quiet.

Mr. Premier, it is now clear the minister knew everything. You fired Jack Messer for his action in this cover-up. Are you going to be doing the same thing in firing the minister?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, one thing I would urge the member, the member from Kindersley, to be aware of is that during an inquiry, one thing I would urge him to do is to listen carefully to all of the responses and witnesses who come. And I would anticipate that you will hear different views of the same circumstance from a number of different people, as was the case with the Deloitte Touche report.

And at the end of the review, it would be my advice — for what it's worth to you — to then review all of the comments made. Mr. Lautermilch will appear before the committee . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member will recognize of course not to use proper names of members who are current sitting members of the House, but to refer to them solely by their position in the House. And I'll ask the minister to wrap up his remarks.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for that. I want to indicate that the former minister in charge of SaskPower will appear before the committee. But I would urge you, sir, if you're going to be a legitimate member of the committee and work on this file, that you wait till all of the review is completed before you jump to conclusions.

The way you got into trouble is jumping from the Conservatives to this new party. It's going to come back to haunt you. But wait till the review is over. There will be a report written and you'll have a chance to make your comments as to what we should do about it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, Jack Messer is testifying under oath currently. And he says that he gave the minister a detailed briefing on the Kenny legal opinions which found negligence on the part of Lawrence Portigal and other SaskPower officials. Messer, under oath, says he gave the minister a detailed briefing on the Milner Fenerty legal opinion which recommended immediate legal action against DEML (Direct Energy Marketing Limited).

The minister had all of this information, and did he order a legal, any kind of legal action? Did he order any kind of further investigation? No, he did exactly the opposite and covered it up. The minister and Jack and the entire board of directors of SaskPower got out a big pail of whitewash and covered it up.

Mr. Deputy Premier, your own Department of Justice said the SaskPower board and the minister should have immediately ordered a full investigation. And by failing to do so, they are every bit as guilty . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member has been extremely lengthy in his preamble and I ask him to go directly to his question now.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Deputy Premier, you fired, your government fired, Jack Messer for his actions. Will you do the right thing and let that minister go as well?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I say again to the member opposite, that Mr. Messer was interviewed by Deloitte & Touche and you will realize that, given the fact that the March 9 report was tabled in the House. I would expect that Mr. Messer is giving the same information to the committee that he gave to the Deloitte & Touche group when they interviewed him. And the former minister of SaskPower will have his day before the committee where he will be able to give his opinion.

Now I wouldn't be surprised if there were a differing of views as to the same circumstance. Your job will be, as the Deloitte & Touche report is, to try to find where the truth lies out of the opinions given. But the Deloitte & Touche report says this: "Documentations presented to the board at SaskPower was, at a critical juncture, incomplete to the point where the board was not being effectively informed."

That's what Deloitte & Touche said. Now we're holding an inquiry. Let's listen to all the people who come before the committee before you jump to conclusions at what the results should be.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, are you saying that someone then is not telling the truth? Are you suggesting that under oath Mr. Messer is not providing the committee with the truth as he has stated he would under oath? He made a very telling comment about Channel Lake and the \$5 million loss. He says it's no big deal — it's no big deal. Saskatchewan taxpayers just got ripped off for \$5 million due to SaskPower's incompetence and Jack Messer says it's no big deal — it's no big deal. Let's just keep it quiet. No one will ever know about it.

Well your Department of Justice thinks it is a big deal and the Bogdasavich opinion says, and I quote: "If anything, the fault lies with SaskPower's board in failing to pursue the matter."

Mr. Deputy Premier, do you agree with the Justice opinion that says the SaskPower board and the ministers are at fault, or do you agree with Jack Messer's opinion that the \$5 million loss is no big deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — First of all I will refer to the statement that I made in the House some five weeks ago now, where I said this issue needed to be reviewed and I said mistakes were made. I couldn't have been more clear about that. And the mistake was this — and the Deloitte & Touche report confirms this — that rather than making \$7 million on the deal, \$2 million was made. Let's get that fact straight. Well read the report. Read the report, that's what it says.

But to the member opposite, we have already dealt with the issue of whether mistakes were made or not. It is our government's view that on this issue mistakes were made.

But for you, sir, what I would urge you to do is listen to all of the witnesses who will come before the committee before you jump to conclusions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) as well, and it seems that mistakes are continuing to be made.

This morning Jack Messer released his indemnification agreement which says that SaskPower has to pay all his legal bills. The agreement states that the only way SaskPower can get out of paying Jack Messer's legal bills is if Jack Messer acted dishonestly or if he realized illegal personal gains from his actions.

Mr. Minister, you've told this House that SaskPower is no longer going to pay the legal bills of Jack Messer. So would you please give me the grounds. Is it because he acted dishonestly or because he benefited in an illegal way, in a personal way? Under what grounds are you denying him access to his indemnification agreement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I want to make it clear to the member opposite that the statement I made about the indemnification and the payment of legal fees for Mr. Messer is that it is not our legal opinion in CIC that we are responsible for the legal bills. This does not mean that Mr. Messer cannot put in a bill and try to receive payment.

But I want to say for the potential leader of the Conservative Party that when it comes to legal bills, you will learn a great deal about them if you become leader of the Conservative Party — a great deal. But I say to you as it would relate to Mr. Messer's legal bills, we are not responsible at this time. This is a legal opinion we have. That does not stop Mr. Messer from exercising his potential to try to recover from SaskPower legal expenses.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, I quickly understand that this government has no problem breaking legal agreements at their whim, and this seems to be the case. So which way is it going to be, Mr. Minister? On one hand you said you don't have to live up to the indemnification agreement because of whatever reasons you find that Mr. Messer is not entitled to it; and on the other hand you say you have to pay him a severance penalty.

You can't have it both ways. Either he's legally entitled to his legal bills and severance or he's not. If you've got grounds for not paying his legal bills, why in the world are you paying his severance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You see here the dilemma for the potential leader of the Conservative Party. Now he's arguing that the taxpayers should pay for Mr. Messer's legal bills. Now he's arguing that we should pay the legal bills. Yesterday, or last week, he was arguing that the taxpayers shouldn't pay.

What I'm telling you very clearly is that at this point the bills are not being paid for legal counsel for Mr. Messer. And I made it clear at the time that the only way SaskPower and the taxpayers would pay the legal bills is if there were a legal requirement.

Nothing has changed — nothing has changed — and what I would urge the member opposite to be careful of, becoming leader of the Conservative Party, you better study up on where your responsibility is as to payment for legal counsel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regina Emergency Services

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, over the weekend there was a very serious incident in Regina in which one young man was murdered and four others were seriously injured.

In light of the serious injuries involved, it was extremely disturbing to learn that Regina's hospitals nearly couldn't handle the sudden influx of five people. Five people, Mr. Minister, clogged up the system. The General was already full and these five victims completely filled the critical beds at the Plains, Mr. Speaker, leaving only one emergency room open in the whole city for the second time in two weeks.

Mr. Minister, five people is not that many to be taken to an emergency at one time. That's one serious car accident, one serious fire, or one violent incident as occurred on the weekend.

Mr. Minister, when are you going to admit that there is a chronic shortage of critical care beds in the city of Regina?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to first advise the member that as I travel around the province, which I have been over the last several months and have visited almost all of the health districts in Saskatchewan, and particularly the southern health districts across the province, they have advised me that they have not had much difficulty in accessing the systems of Regina for emergency services. In fact the districts in the South tell me that they haven't had any difficulty on an emergency basis to access any of the Regina services, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to say to the member opposite that unfortunately the incident that occurred with a young man, Mr. D'Autremont's son, I want to today acknowledge as well on behalf of the government our sincere appreciation for the health system and I hope that your son is served well, Mr. D'Autremont; and to say to you that there were a number of people in Saskatchewan this weekend who were injured and arrived at the Regina system for

services. On no occasion, Mr. Speaker, have I heard that they haven't been adequately met.

We had a serious accident in our part of the world, in the Yorkton area, and people were transported to Regina, were well served, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the member opposite that to suggest for a moment that Regina's not meeting the needs of emergency services is simply not fair and not correct.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hospital Bed Shortages

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month in this House we told the Assembly that there was an estimated 6,600 people presently occupying surgery waiting-lists in this province — an all-time high, unprecedented high, Mr. Speaker. And as a result, people who require surgery are forced to put their health care needs on hold and in many cases lives are placed in jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, joining us in the legislature today is Meryl Bintner, whose 81-year-old mother underwent surgery last Wednesday to remove blood clots in her leg. Marjorie Bintner's condition was described as a ticking time bomb, but she was forced to wait six months for surgery — six months, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, will you tell this House why any Saskatchewan resident should be forced to wait six months, hoping surgery will take place before that ticking time bomb goes off?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member opposite I want to say, first of all, that in this province, the decisions — and across the country — the decisions about what people's medical needs are, are determined by physicians. And when individuals require surgery they're put on a list if they're not emergency — if they're not emergency, Mr. Speaker. If they are urgent or elective, they go on a list and the decisions about when people receive surgery are then made by those physicians.

If sometime during the process, somebody who might be on an elective list for, let's say, a period of six months, their condition changes, the family physician advises the medical system, including the specialists, and then the person moves up on the list, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that that surgery's performed. That's the way the process works.

I want to assure the member that I have a great deal of confidence in the medical community in this province, and they serve us very well. Now if the member opposite believes that practitioners in the province aren't moving people up fast enough on the urgent list, then he should be advising me in writing of that so that I can provide that to the medical community to suggest that they might ensure that that process is expediated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is very

adept at blaming the doctors and the nurses, who are worked to the max in this province, for their ill-begotten wellness model in this province.

Mr. Speaker, Margaret Bintner underwent surgery on Wednesday and she was sent home on Saturday. Nurses told her daughter that she should not have been discharged because her blood levels were not at a safe level. But she was released anyway because of a bed shortage, not because of the doctors.

Mr. Minister, the same day Mrs. Bintner was released from hospital she suffered a stroke. Today she is in stable condition in hospital and encountering paralysis.

Day in and day out you claim that there is no bed crisis, Mr. Minister, in this House. You say that the Liberal opposition is fearmongering. Can you honestly tell Meryl Bintner today, in the gallery today behind you, that our health care system is just fine and that her mother did receive the best possible care?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that in this province the kinds of medical services that we have, we believe are being well served.

I have today with me a copy of the Canadian newspaper on primary care. It's published as a Canadian issue, and they list the provinces from west to Manitoba and . . . or Quebec. And here they talk about the rocky road-map of government negotiations and they list what the issues are that are going on in British Columbia with physicians. They list the issues that are going on in Alberta with physicians and in Manitoba with physicians and in Quebec with physicians.

But what they've done here is they have clearly highlighted that in Saskatchewan we have an excellent relationship and we have an excellent service in our physicians. So when the member stands up and says that Mrs. Bintner was discharged from the hospital because she was unstable, because she was unstable, he says to me that the physicians who are making decisions in this province are not able to do that adequately.

And I say to the member opposite that that's not what physicians across Canada are saying from west to Quebec.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Next question.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All I can say, all I can say, Mr. Speaker, is heaven help us if Saskatchewan is the model of health wellness in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier and the Minister of Health both stated that the solution to the current bed crisis is to simply discharge patients more quickly from hospital. Well this tragic case underlines why no one should be released from hospital before they are ready.

Mr. Minister, what will it take to make you understand and admit that you've made a serious mistake with your ill-conceived wellness model, and what will it take to prove that you have finally crossed the line?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure whether or not the member opposite has the full appreciation of what the role of the medical community in this province is, or for that matter across the nation.

Maybe he doesn't have a full appreciation for that, but I will share with him one more time how it is that somebody gets admitted into an institution or for medical care, and that is that you need to be referred to a medical institution by a physician. Nurses don't admit patients, Mr. Speaker; physicians do. And physicians are also responsible for the discharge of people today in the system, and has always been the case.

For the member opposite to suggest, for the member opposite to suggest for a moment that the nurse says that somebody should not be within the system, the responsibility, Mr. Speaker, and to the member opposite, rests with the physician.

And if in fact there is some concern about the ability for someone to return home in a fashion where they wouldn't be safe, I tell you that physicians in this country would never have it happen — never have it happen — because of the huge insurance costs that they pay, Mr. Speaker. And they would never discharge anybody whose health would not be safe, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Community Homes Program Review

Mr. Hillson: — An order in council released yesterday gives details of the government's review of the community group homes program. The terms of reference, however, say that it specifically excludes an examination of the group homes which may be involved in any case presently before our courts. These restrictions will effectively exclude from the review precisely the cases which have given rise to the review in the first place. In that case it is very similar to the Justice review we had last year, which was initiated because of certain problem cases, but the problem cases couldn't be looked at.

Mr. Speaker, surely the difficulties we have had — the tragedy in North Battleford — could be examined without looking into the issue of the guilt or innocence of the girls charged. Will the minister explain why the review is taking place in the first place if he is not going to examine the tragedies which initiated the review to begin with.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the community homes program, as it has enabled young offenders to move back into the community from secure custody and open custody and has served as a transition for young offenders back into their neighbourhoods and community, is 10 years old. I believe it's a program that has served the province and our communities and young offenders very well.

Having reached this 10th anniversary and because a number of questions have been raised about the community home program from a variety of sources, it seemed to me and it seemed to government the appropriate time to do an overall review of the community home process. In that review, Mr. Speaker, we have

been guided by legal advice telling us that as issues are before the courts, they must be left before the courts and within the jurisdiction of the courts.

That aside, Mr. Speaker, it is time for a review of the community home program. I'm hoping that we can see it be strengthened in fact by that review.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Surely though, if it is to be a general review, that general review has to include the cases which have given the most difficulties, including the tragedy in North Battleford. Unless the Montgomery home circumstances are included in the review, the review will fail.

And surely the terms of reference can be broadened sufficiently to include those homes that have given rise to court cases, with the proviso that the guilt or innocence of any party presently before the courts is not to be investigated.

I ask the minister, will you broaden the terms of reference so that you will get a true general review, a general review which will include those cases which have led to tragedies and court cases?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, a choice faced myself. We could have delayed a review process until all outstanding court matters had reached their conclusion. Given the process and due process of law — and the member will well know this — that may have taken some significant length of time.

My view, Mr. Speaker, was that we should initiate a review with some very, very well-respected and competent reviewers selected from our province. I am very confident the work they do will prove beneficial to the program, strengthening of the program for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Maintenance Enforcement

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. I have been inundated with complaints from people frustrated with the lack of effectiveness and efficiency of maintenance enforcement.

These people state that there is no listed telephone number for maintenance enforcement should they want to inquire about faulty child support payments. Nor is there a stated address for the maintenance enforcement office to which people may go or write to if they have concerns.

Something is very wrong with this picture, Mr. Minister. Why is the maintenance enforcement office inaccessible to the very people it was set up to serve?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to respond to the very first question this session that I've received, and it's a great pleasure to be here.

What I would like to say is that our maintenance enforcement program in Saskatchewan is doing a very good job. When this program started, approximately 20 per cent of the orders were being followed. We're now up to about 85 per cent of the orders being followed.

Because of the large number of cases that are being handled, the people who have the orders registered have access to a new system which provides information via the telephone pretty well any time that they call. This system gives them access to whether the cheques are there, whether the amounts are paid.

We don't have a system that allows every person who is worried about their cheque to sit and talk to somebody. And I think the kind of question that I'm being asked here relates to that. We have made a decision to put our money in the place where we're going to enforce the most orders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 26 — The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 26, The Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act, 1998 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 27 — The Public Service Act, 1998

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 27, The Public Service Act, 1998 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 28 — The Meewasin Valley Authority Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 28, The Meewasin Valley Authority Amendment Act, 1998 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.

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day I'd like to have leave to introduce some special visitors.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, it's indeed a tremendous pleasure for me to introduce with us, Lawrence Yew, former member, MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Cumberland, as well as Don Favel, the director for MNS (Metis Nation of Saskatchewan).

Mr. Speaker, in regards to Mr. Yew, a lot of people will know that in regards to the health side, he had a heart and lung removed and had survived, you know, that operation. And it took a lot of grit and determination on his part and to move on.

As we went in . . . Mr. Yew did a lot of standing up for people in my constituency through the years for which I have tremendous gratitude. As he moved in on his side, Mr. Speaker, he's moving in on the issue relating to Metis and the Primrose Weapons Range. He continues to stand up for his people, Mr. Speaker, and I think he's a tremendous inspiration you know, for all of us in this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like everybody to please give special recognition to Mr. Yew and Mr. Don Favel. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll say a few words in our own language.

(The hon. member spoke for a time in Cree.)

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Before orders of the day, Mr. Speaker, to ask leave to introduce guests as well.

Leave granted.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce guests to you and through you from various parts of northern Saskatchewan. These guests are in the city today to meet — and have met — with the Hon. Ralph Goodale. And they are part of the Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range negotiating committee. And I'll just quickly read the names out to you.

Up on our gallery we have Alex Maurice from Beauval, Ernest Gardner from Cole Bay, Edward Gardner from Cole Bay, and George LaRiviere from Cole Bay as well. And on the floor, of course, seated just over there, we have Don Favel, who is also from Ile-a-la-Crosse and is the area director.

And of course, as we mentioned, the former MLA from Cumberland who served this Assembly most admirably and is certainly as an example of one of the first aboriginal people to ever grace this Assembly. He set the course for many of us, including the current member from Cumberland, I'm quite sure. And I want to pay a special tribute to him as well because he most certainly throughout the years, as the member from Cumberland indicated, committed his time, his energy, and now we see his health. And it's not too often in this political world that you see individuals commit so much to such great causes for northern Saskatchewan people.

So I'd like to ask the Assembly to pay a special tribute to Lawrence and also the elders who have for many years fought on this very issue, and the younger people like Alex Maurice, and Don, who have contributed time and energy as well. And I must say that I admire Lawrence so much because he suffered through the Tory years, Mr. Speaker, and now he's here still standing strong. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I request leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

(1430)

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, if I could indulge in the members of the Assembly to join with me in welcoming the elders from northern Saskatchewan, but particularly our good friend and the former member for one of the . . . Cumberland, who was also part of that small group of New Democrats who used to sit in opposition after the Devine party gave us a terrible shellacking in 1982.

And I remember so clearly because . . . I remember so clearly because when Lawrence came into the Assembly, he was the only new elected New Democrat. Most of us, most of our caucus being wiped out, but Lawrence came and he was a great addition to the caucus.

And I remember the Speaker, Mr. Swan, who was continually lecturing us on repetition, because with only seven members trying to carry the House in opposition, it was a very difficult time. And our hidden weapon was Lawrence Yew. Because as soon as he finished his one-hour speech in English, he would give it in Cree. And nobody could ever figure out what he was saying. And we would cheer: hear, hear! And when he would sit down, Lawrence would say, you're cheering at all the wrong times. He says, from now on, I'll give you a signal when to say, hear, hear!

So Lawrence, I want to say — and fondly, we used to call Lawrence the Chief — welcome back to the House, Chief.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — I'm pleased to supply the answer to question 27.

The Speaker: — The response to question 27 is tabled.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Request that question 28 be converted to orders for return (debatable).

The Speaker: — Question 28 is converted to motions for return (debatable).

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 14 — The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to rise to move second reading of The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, when the subject of adoption arises today, the atmosphere, the process, and even the language is significantly different than it was 25 or 30 years ago. Rather than the secrecy of the past, Mr. Speaker, a discussion around adoption today

would likely include such terms as openness, ongoing communication, and intercountry adoption. There's no doubt that adoption has undergone a dramatic change. As a result, Mr. Speaker, we will be introducing three major changes to The Adoption Act.

Mr. Speaker, one very significant change which has occurred over the past number of years is the interest and involvement of birth fathers in the adoption process. The Adoption Act provides a definition of who is considered to be a birth father for the purposes of adoption with the intent being that the majority of birth fathers will be included in the adoption process. However, Mr. Speaker, it is our view that the current definition ignored some birth fathers, a situation which may have implications for these birth fathers in the future.

For example, when a birth father plays a role in the adoption process he is involved in planning for the child's future. He must make a decision as to whether he wants to be involved in the parenting of the child or prefers that the child be placed for adoption. The adoption record reflects that he did not . . . that he did consent to the adoption. And should he, at some point in the future, wish to utilize the services of the post adoption program, he would have no difficulty doing so.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, if the birth father is not recognized at the time of the adoption, he would be unable to avail himself of post adoption services, including search and contact, without the permission of the birth mother — permission which might be very difficult to obtain 20 or 30 years down the road.

Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that birth fathers' rights are protected and that as many birth fathers as possible are included in the adoption process. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we will amend The Adoption Act to include under the definition of 'birth father', a person who is named by the birth mother as the birth father and who acknowledges that he is indeed the biological father of her child. One aspect of adoption, Mr. Speaker, has not changed and that is the need to ensure that all adoptions and all parties to adoption are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner.

Mr. Speaker, the philosophy which forms the foundation for adoption in Saskatchewan is that when a child is adopted he or she becomes a member of the adoptive family unit just as if they had been born into that family. The adoptive parents enjoy exactly the same freedoms and accept exactly the same responsibilities for raising the child as they would if he or she were theirs by birth. And that, Mr. Speaker, is as it should be. Adopted children have the same right as biological children to feel secure, loved, and supported in a stable family situation.

Today in most adoptions, both the adoptive parents and the biological parent or parents favour some degree of openness. That is, having some degree of communication and/or contact among adoptive parents, birth parents, and the child. In fact often adoptions which initially involve the parties meeting only on a non-identifying basis move to more openness over time. Education and counselling at the time of the adoption can help to prepare adoptive and birth families for successful, ongoing communication and the contact.

In situations where there is agreement for both communication and contact between the adoptive parents, the birth parents, and the child, the agreement may be put into writing. While it is not legally binding and therefore not enforceable, it does serve to remind the parties about their agreement. Mr. Speaker, some have suggested that when such an agreement for communication and access exists, it should be considered part of the adoption order. They further suggest this might be possible under the Act as it now exists.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that if access orders were to be made part of the order of adoption, this would constitute a major shift in the philosophy of adoption. It would have the potential — the significant potential — to undermine the ability of the adoptive parents to make decisions regarding the adopted child in the same way that other parents make decisions in the best interests of their children, and reduce the clarity that surrounds the responsibility that belongs to adoptive parents. Inevitably it could result in the development of an adversarial relationship between the adoptive parents and the birth parents. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, any such conflict or dissension between the adoptive parents and the birth parents would clearly not be in the child's best interests and in fact could result in significant problems for both the child and the adoptive family as the child gets older.

A communication agreement, on the other hand, eliminates the secrecy of adoption and allows for information to be shared and for questions to be answered. It allows the adoptive parents to meet with the birth parents and get to know them. It allows the birth parents to see or read about how the child is doing, which helps to confirm that the decision to place the child for adoption was a positive one. It allows the child to ask questions about his or her past and have them answered in a natural way as they arise.

And so while, Mr. Speaker, we fully support and encourage openness in adoption, we need to take steps to prevent the possibly damaging effect of a legally binding communications agreement. We will therefore, Mr. Speaker, amend The Adoption Act. We will amend it to make it very clear that communication access agreements are not part of the adoption order, that communication and access orders are not enforceable, and that birth parents cannot make an application for access.

Legislation and processes have been implemented over the past several years which ensure that all parties to adoption are counselled and supported, and all implications of adoption are carefully and clearly explored. This includes expectations surrounding a communications agreement. Experience has shown, Mr. Speaker, that both adoptive parents and birth parents can be prepared for a successful open adoption involving communication and access.

Let me turn now, Mr. Speaker, to the question of intercountry adoption. Over the past several years a number of Saskatchewan families have successfully adopted a child or children from a jurisdiction outside of Canada. These children have adapted well to their new families and to Canada and are growing up happy and well-adjusted.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, as intercountry adoption became an increasingly popular option for those wishing to add to their

families, some disturbing problems emerged in some nations. Adoptions were sometimes arranged through fraud or for monetary gain. Parents, who often felt they had little choice, were pressured into relinquishing their child or children for adoption.

These tragedies occurred, Mr. Speaker, because there were no legally binding international standards in place and no system for supervision to ensure the rights of children were protected.

In 1998 discussions at the Hague Conference on Private International Law included creation of a system of central authorities who could communicate directly with one another. On April 12, 1994, Mr. Speaker, Canada signed an agreement, The Uniform Intercountry Adoption Act, commonly referred to as The Hague Convention.

In 1995 this House passed The Intercountry Adoption Implementation Act, 1995 which established the Minister of Social Services as the central authority with sole responsibility for regulating and providing international adoption services in Saskatchewan in accordance with The Hague Convention. By becoming a party to The Hague Convention, Saskatchewan agreed to help to ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in an atmosphere of honesty and trust, and that the interests and the well-being of the child remains paramount.

Mr. Speaker, the convention sets criteria for consent to adoption and for reports on adoptive parents and children, prohibits improper financial gains, and ensures the child's legal transfer between countries.

In order to clarify procedures for intercountry adoption and to ensure that our legislation is consistent with The Hague Convention, Mr. Speaker, we will repeal section 27 of The Adoption Act and replace it with a new section 27 which borrows the language and provisions from the Hague legislation. This will ensure that all intercountry adoptions by Saskatchewan residents will follow similar processes and requirements.

These amendments will extend the protection enshrined in The Hague Convention to all children coming into Saskatchewan. They will as well benefit those interested in adopting a child or children from another county, Mr. Speaker, and that the Department of Social Services will be in a better position to support and assist them. The process for adoptive applicants will not, however, be significantly altered as a result of these amendments.

Mr. Speaker, finally, The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998 will make several other minor changes to The Adoption Act. These changes will be of a housekeeping nature and will not constitute any change in policy.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to move second reading of The Adoption Amendment Act, 1998.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just a few comments before I move adjournment of debate on the Bill before us, The Adoption Amendment Act. In listening to the

minister, I hear a few — in fact I shouldn't say just a few — I think that there's a number of positive initiatives that this Bill is bringing forward, and I think that . . . I firmly believe that it's time they were addressed.

And, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, I commend the minister and his department for reviewing the whole adoption Bill and coming to grips with some of the changes that have been taking place.

As the minister indicated earlier, the facts are that fathers are becoming more intimate and involved in the birth of their children, whether that's a father who's very near or whether the father is somewhat removed, and in different circumstances people face different situations. But each birth parent has a genuine interest in their sibling . . . in the child they brought into the world.

(1445)

And I think it's certainly appropriate that birth fathers are recognized and that they're certainly acknowledged, because I think, as I found in my own personal experience, Mr. Speaker, a person who's been put up for — or I should say, use the word "put up for adoption" — but has been adopted by other parents, have in the past, we haven't had the openness in regards to information about the birth parents.

And many young people, as they've become a little older in life, have always been interested in finding out information about their birth parents. And so I think this redefining the definition of the birth father and acknowledging his presence as well, I think is appropriate and certainly important for the sake of individuals who may find themselves in the situation of being adopted and then want to find out more about their birth parents.

And I think this certainly improves the channels for them to go about seeking that information, finding out who the father was. I think there are cases where maybe it was easier to find the mother but the father may have been left out of the case. And as the minister commented, I think that maybe goes to addressing that concern. I think that's certainly appropriate.

The commitment by the minister and the department to clarify communication and access agreements and make sure that they're not part of the adoption order, because they're not enforceable, I think is appropriate. And I would certainly ask the minister and his officials to really look at this one closely and really make sure that they, when we get into the Act, that the Act addresses that concern, because I think that it's a very major concern, especially when you . . . Well let's move a bit from adoptive parents.

Let's move to situations where people are separated and some of the problems that individuals run into, spouses run into, in a separation or divorce settlement where agreements may have been reached in the court setting but that doesn't necessarily mean that either partner may actually be able to fulfil . . . or even have access based on the agreements that have been reached.

And in the case of adoptive children, Mr. Speaker, I think for

adoptive parents, they have adopted a child with the idea of providing that child with a good home and giving him a good home and a quality home to live in. And if indeed we started opening it up and giving access or communication, I think that destroys the ability of parents to really identify with that child. So this is an area, as the minister has indicated, that needs to be looked at, that this piece of legislation wants to address very carefully so that we don't create an area of conflict that may create a situation where it's uncomfortable for the adoptive parents, as well as the birth parents.

In regards to the foreign adoption process, the minister is right. Through the past number of years, as a result of conflicts and situations in other parts of the world and the lack of children who are up for adoption in this province and in this country, different parents have started to look to — and with reaching out I guess I would use, like to use, the term, arms of love — to children who are in situations where there is really no one to love them, no one to care for them.

And in that case they've begun to reach beyond our borders and reach out to children in other lands, children who are in orphanages because their parents aren't around or because there's no guardian, and have brought, offered, their home as a home environment. Number one, because they would love to have children themselves; because they would love to have more members in their families. But number two as well, I think anyone I've chatted with, they've done it and as they reached out they had some . . . were somewhat reticent to reach out to someone in the other part of the world.

But as they reached out and after a long, tedious process to make sure the papers were in order and put the adoption process in place, to wrap their arms around that little child, with the idea of bringing them home into their home and offering them a loving, home environment, Mr. Speaker, I think anyone of us who's been . . . had the opportunity of meeting parents who've reached out will certainly attest to the fact that we can see a genuine love that's been offered.

And so the intent to clarify and certainly make this Bill consistent with The Hague Convention, I think is appropriate. It's certainly a way of . . . basically I guess what it says to us as well, Mr. Speaker, is we're offering individuals in other parts of the world, even little children, those who are in the most vulnerable position, giving them a place of hope, an opportunity, if indeed they are fortunate and if indeed they would love to be part of a Canadian family or Canadian home. We're offering them an opportunity to become and be part of a loving family and a great country.

And that I think, Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the minister's comments, I certainly think it's appropriate. I believe it's fitting that we as well adopt and become . . . make sure that our adoption policies are quite consistent with The Hague Convention. And I think as well we, Mr. Speaker, need to look very carefully at the whole process. I think this piece of legislation is doing that. And there's no doubt in my mind that maybe down the road we're going to have to make a few more changes, as we find, even though we've identified a number of areas that this Bill, this piece of legislation, specifically dealing with the whole process of adoption, is in flux and in change. And we may have to look at some other changes down the road.

But I think in general, The Adoption Amendment Act, Bill No. 14 before us, certainly addresses a number of the issues that have been coming to the forefront. And with that in mind, I would . . . as I indicated earlier, I am quite supportive.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a little more time to review the Bill and a little more aggressively before we get into questions in Committee of the Whole. And with that in mind, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 22 — The Electronic Filing of Information Act

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Electronic Filing of Information Act.

Mr. Speaker, the members of this Assembly will be familiar with the increasing demands from the general public for improved computer access. The Government of Saskatchewan is not exempt from these demands. With this Bill, the government is moving towards easier computer access to government services by Saskatchewan citizens.

The purpose of this Bill is to facilitate electronic filing of documents and information by members of the public with government agencies. This legislation will allow any government department to designate Acts under which computer filing will be allowed. Regulations will then be passed under those designated Acts, setting out the form and content requirements for the filing of electronic information with that government agency. Further, the Bill will allow for direct computer filing where appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is an initial response to the public demand for one stop computer access to government services. To that end, a pilot project is currently under way in three centres known as the one stop business registry project. Under this six-month pilot project, Saskatchewan Justice corporations branch clients will, with the assistance of our community partners, be able to use a locally based computer terminal for certain applications.

If the computer pilot project is successful, this Bill would then permit us to implement regulations to formalize and broaden this process throughout the province. Mr. Speaker, this Bill is an important first step in allowing government agencies to move toward electronic filing as they become technologically capable of doing so.

Rather than presenting a series of amendments to each existing Act to accommodate electronic filing, this Bill establishes the criteria and rules for electronic filing under a variety of Acts which may then be addressed through the regulations under those specific Acts.

Mr. Speaker, with this Bill and pilot projects like the one stop business registry project, government agencies are moving toward the one stop electronic access to government services that new technology permits and that members of the Saskatchewan public demand.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act respecting The

Electronic Filing and Transmission of Documents and Information.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the minister indicated, certainly we live in an age where technology has certainly changed and the use of computers is advanced to a point that . . . As I was chatting with a gentleman last night, I'm basically in the Stone Age when it comes to the use of computers. But I know many people across this province and certainly the young people, younger generation, are really up to using computers and then have gone beyond just what some would have termed buying a computer and getting into the game format, to the fact that there's so much available on computers.

And I think what computers do and what they offer and the electronic age has offered to us is the ability to access, in many cases, somewhat more readily a lot of information that would be very difficult. The volumes of books that you would have to have on hand and the accessibility to them, for many people they would find it quite cumbersome and certainly it would be quite time consuming. But to go to the computer and to just open up a file and get the information that they're looking for, seek information, whether it's a student at school or a university student seeking information to do a paper that may be requested of them, or whether it's a business person who wants to keep up to the changes in technology . . .

And I was interested in seeing how other businesses of similar nature are operating and functioning. It's certainly important that we indeed take a look at the information that's available, and an orderly process I believe is what the Bill is trying to do. Put in place an orderly process whereby people may offer to an agency, information, and allow it to be filed on computer so that it's made available.

And I'm not exactly sure if, in opening up this filing information Act, whether or not the agency that will be running it at the end of the day may start to shake their heads with the inundation of information that may come to them to be filed. But I'm sure once it's filed it's more readily accessible and that would be positive.

I guess when we look at the information before us and we look at the Act, I'm not exactly sure, and this is a question we'll certainly ask of the minister when we get into Committee of the Whole . . . is the whole area of privacy and information, whether or not provisions are being made if people offer some information, whether or not they would like some restrictions on it. I guess that's some of the information and some of the questions that we would be wishing to ask the minister when we get into Committee of the Whole.

But in general, I look at the Bill and what I see . . . I don't see a lot of major concerns with it. However, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate to at least peruse it a little more in depth before we move into committee, and therefore I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 23 — The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1998

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1998.

This Bill makes several minor amendments to a number of existing statutes. It corrects inaccurate references, numbering errors, punctuation errors, and other minor mistakes in statutes.

The Bill also corrects errors made in previous consequential amendments. These amendments ensure that minor technical errors in legislation are removed.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Statute Law.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of comments, because in reality this piece of legislation doesn't really need a lot to be brought forward. I think it's fairly straightforward. It's quite self-explanatory. I'm not exactly sure I'm in a position to try and tie up 15, 20 minutes or an hour's time of the Assembly to try and address every dot and tittle of the piece of legislation we have before us.

But however, Mr. Speaker, if I could just make one comment. As I've been sitting here this afternoon I've been viewing the quiet behaviour of the minister's nephews up there. I really commend them for having sat here for this time and have been so observant of the Assembly. And I'm not sure if that's because of the formidable opponent or whatever that the minister would be as an uncle, but I think his family members, his sister, needs to be commended, and I would certainly welcome them to the Assembly this afternoon.

With that said, being said though, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this piece of legislation, we're more than prepared to move to committee.

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

(1500)

ADJOURNED DEBATES**SECOND READINGS****Bill No. 13**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Sonntag that **Bill No. 13 — The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak for a few moments today on Bill 13 because I believe it is not only important to have fair and sound regulations when it comes to liquor and gaming in Saskatchewan, it's just as important to ensure our business owners and their employees are dealt with by the government as fairly as possible.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, owning a bar in Saskatchewan today, particularly in rural Saskatchewan, is not the most secure

business around. As the populations in our smaller communities continue to dwindle — thanks in no small part to the policies of this government — it is becoming harder and harder to make ends meet as the owner of a local tavern in a small, rural community. And, Mr. Speaker, it's important that these businesses, like all businesses in Saskatchewan, be preserved and in fact be allowed to thrive.

In some communities the local hotel or bar is one of few places to gather in the community. Even for those who do not consume alcohol, these country bars are a place to come together with one's neighbours. Go to any town which has lost their pub to bankruptcy or fire or either, and the people will tell you what a hole it leaves in their town. Though some people in our communities may choose not to frequent these establishments — a decision we all respect — there's no denying that the local bar is very important to life in small town Saskatchewan.

In the larger centres the bar may not play as important a role to the fabric of the community. But those who own lounges or nightclubs are in a very precarious position as well. The bar business, like the restaurant business, is a very tough one to break into. The failure rate among these businesses is very high.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, while not all of us make a habit of spending our spare time in these places, they are businesses that employ many people both in the city and the country. For this reason the regulatory burden on these establishments should not be so onerous as to make their survival even more difficult.

However, when we're talking about liquor and we're talking about gaming, it is very important that we do strike a good balance between some . . . balance between too lax regulations and over-regulation. And government, particularly the NDP government of Saskatchewan, in particular has its responsibility in this area since so much of the money that flows into General Revenue Fund year in, year out, comes from liquor and gaming.

If you'll allow a slight digression, Mr. Speaker, this year the government estimates it'll transfer \$374 million from its liquor and gaming slush fund into General Revenue. When one considers that the government is only running a real budgetary surplus of 6 million, we can all see how important the liquor and gaming industry has become to this government, especially when you remember that the Minister of Finance has predicted 17.25 for a barrel of oil this year. The last time I looked, Mr. Speaker, oil was well under \$16 a barrel. Speaking of gambling, that's pretty risky estimating.

The NDP may want us . . . may have us believe the balanced budget, if in fact ends are being balanced, is due to the astute management of members opposite, but the people of Saskatchewan know better, Mr. Speaker. They have learned a great deal about this government's astute management in the last couple of months with the almost daily revelations regarding Channel Lake. I believe this sorry affair, more than anything, speaks most accurately about the management style of the members opposite.

Oh sure, the NDP is great at taxing the people. But when it actually comes to spending this money wisely, it ends up down the drain in Guyana or at the bottom of Channel Lake or in an NST-SaskTel deal. Mr. Speaker, the NDP has balanced the

budget with utility rate hikes, higher taxes, downloading, and most especially, liquor and gaming.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, \$374 million this year into the General Revenue Fund. That's why I always find it a little difficult to comprehend when members from that side rise and say they are concerned about things such as liquor consumption or over-consumption, or that they are worried about gambling or problem gambling, because without these the government would be running a huge deficit year in and year out.

Yes, it's true that alcohol has been with us for a long, long time and governments have been reaping the rewards off it for a long time too, just as they have with tobacco. But full-scale gambling, the type which we see with video lottery terminals and casinos, have only come to Saskatchewan in the last few years since the members opposite have deemed it okay to make money off yet another vice, another weakness of the people.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's very important to properly regulate those who are involved in the business of selling and serving liquor. And yes, it's important as well to regulate the gaming business, including bingo halls. But it's also important for the government to keep in mind that it too plays a role in the problems that exist in our society because of liquor and because of gambling.

On the gambling end in particular, the government has shirked most of its responsibilities. VLTs (video lottery terminal) have been introduced in this province at the request of hoteliers, which is understandable, given they need more to bring in customers into their establishments. But it is the government that is the biggest winner in this newly found love for gambling. And it is the government which constantly shrugs its shoulders when questions are being asked about the increasing number of addicted gamblers in Saskatchewan.

It is the government that shrugs its shoulders when we hear about more and more cases of people stealing from their employers to feed their addictions to the VLTs. And it is the government that scoffs when it's suggested that the 130 million that's taken out of our communities each and every year through their VLTs may actually hurt their communities.

It's the members opposite who refuse to return any of this money to the communities where it came from. This is harmful, particularly to our smaller communities, Mr. Speaker. You take a couple of million bucks out of a community of 5,000 and, believe me, it's noticed. It wouldn't be so painful, Mr. Speaker, if some of this was returned in the form of services, as those members claim. But that isn't true.

Our smaller communities are having to do without decent access to medical care, more and more are losing their schools, people in these communities have to do with worse and worse highways, and yet the government says this money is getting back into these communities. I guess they must know exactly where it's going, but the people in these towns and villages certainly can't see it.

This is a government that is absolutely addicted to gambling itself, Mr. Speaker. It's hit the jackpot since the introduction of the VLTs and it has no intentions of stopping the windfall now.

And none of the rest of us have benefited. Perhaps it is the government that would think about its own use of gaming and liquor when it starts amending regulations for the businesses and the charities who also benefit from these two enterprises.

Regarding this particular Bill and the changes that are made, I would have to say for the most part they are positive — for the most part. As I stated earlier, there are a great many people working in the bars in this province, many of them on a very low wage. Many of them, I would guess, relying heavily on tips they get from serving the patrons. For these workers the closure of their placement of employment, even for a short time, is financially devastating.

Many of these people are students putting themselves through school, or single parents struggling to make ends meet. For them, the loss of even one night's work may mean the difference of being able to pay the rent or being out on the street. That's why I think it's important that the government, through this legislation, is changing its penalty for contravention of the Liquor and Gaming regulations to include fines instead of the automatic closures we've seen in the past.

This also applies to places like community bingo halls. While often owned by private individuals, it is the charities that use the bingo halls who are most often hurt when the hall is closed. Just as it was when the charities who were hurt . . . when the provincial government's VLTs cut heavily into the bingo business in this province beginning in '93.

Mr. Speaker, for this reason I support the concept of fines for those who are guilty of offences and who have failed to heed warnings from the Liquor and Gaming Authority. I think that there may be times that the bars may have to be closed for a constant and flagrant abuse of the law from an irresponsible bar owner.

I think this has to be the punishment in the end for those who simply will not play by the rules. The fines should be used for offences that occur after initial warnings, but if the abuse is continued on and on despite such crimes, the government should close these establishments.

I believe as well that the option of handing out fines should give the Liquor Authority a little more leeway when it comes to punishment. Whereas in the past even the most minor offence would result in closure for a period of time, with the fine option, different levels of fines could theoretically be handed out for different types of offence, be they serving minors, opening outside of regulated hours, etc. I say theoretically, because like so many other Bills introduced by the government, important details like this are left up to regulations, Mr. Speaker.

And that's worrisome because I don't think anyone should be handed a \$10,000 fine. The exact nature of the offences and the fines must be outlined in full before we can decide whether or not the government has got it right.

I noticed that in our neighbouring province of Alberta the maximum fine is much higher — a hundred thousand dollars. However that province also has a very specific schedule of fines that are to be levied depending on particular offence and the

number of times a bar has been cited.

I believe this government must also set forth a similar schedule of fines. As it is, this legislation leaves it absolutely open-ended, so we don't know. And I find it unlikely that the \$10,000 maximum will be used in any but the worst cases. But other businesses should know what they are really facing in terms of fines.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a few concerns about the fine process when it comes to bingo halls. As we all know, many of our local charities depend on bingo for their fund-raising. And unlike the government's VLT windfall, the money raised by charities and other community or any non-profit groups actually is used for the good of the community.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, the legislation makes it clear that the only owner . . . that only the owner of a bingo hall in question can be fined for violations that occur at the bingo hall. Now I'm the last one who wants to see community groups face onerous fines, but in all fairness if in some cases it is the groups who are using the halls who are breaking the rules, does it make sense that the owner is fined? Just as it is not fair to the charities when a bingo hall is forced to close because of violations of the hall owner, it's not fair that the owner is fined for the violations of the group using the hall. Obviously this would be a rare occurrence — at least one would hope so — but I think it's still a concern that should be raised here.

I also have some concerns about the appeal process. While I'm glad one is in place, I fear that as was the case before, it's very much of a case of the Liquor and Gaming Authority hearing an appeal on its own decision to the Liquor and Gaming Commission. I'm not sure if this is a completely fair process to business people.

Mr. Speaker, I also have concerns about the three-year statute of limitations placed on this Bill. It seems to me that this is a longer statute of limitations that is in place for far more serious offences and crimes. It also seems to me that this gives the Authority much arbitrary power. For instance, it is conceivable that government officials could hold the most minor of offences over a business person's head for a full three years. This seems to be unnecessarily long time and I don't see the value in it.

Mr. Speaker, on a positive note, I am pleased about the changes in regulation regarding special occasion permits. This will allow the holders of these permits to purchase their beer and wine from off-sale vendors instead of from government-owned liquor board stores. This will be a convenient change especially in communities that don't have liquor board stores. Mr. Speaker, it's not often we see this government giving up a monopoly voluntarily like they are here. Hopefully we'll see more of this kind of free thinking in the future.

Mr. Speaker, for the most part I believe the changes in this Bill, while not perfect, will bring about a better system. We do however have a number of questions for the minister at such time as we see this Bill in committee. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn. Thank you.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 2

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 2 — The Correctional Services Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is certainly much one could say about the way correctional services are handled in this province. Unfortunately this Bill doesn't say anything about them at all.

Bill 2, An Act to amend The Correctional Services Act, focuses on a couple of very specific issues when it comes to those who are imprisoned in the correctional facilities in our province. And for the most part, I have no objections to the changes that are proposed in this piece of legislation as far as the administrative changes. I do, however, have some concerns regarding the alternative programs and the security that is entailed and the responsibility when something may go wrong with one of these programs.

Before I get into the Bill in detail, I do have some comments to make regarding issues surrounding our correctional facilities and justice issues. In his remark the other day the minister stated that significant changes were made to correctional services in Saskatchewan in 1993 and that now is a good time to take a second look and see what's missing.

Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to believe that the only thing the minister could find that is wrong with our current system is what is contained in this Bill. Surely the minister is not saying that the only thing that has to be changed when it comes to crime and prisoners in this province are the rules which govern how they are transferred from one facility to another in Saskatchewan.

Because from my discussions with people throughout this province, it has become clear that there are many things that people do not like about how criminals are handled in Saskatchewan, or how our prisoners are dealt with once they are caught and put away to serve their punishment. And while these issues may not fit in exactly what this piece . . . with this piece of legislation, I think it's worthwhile noting some of these issues today.

(1515)

Mr. Speaker, in his remarks last Wednesday, the Minister of Justice spoke a little bit on the issue of public safety, and that is precisely what I'm concerned with as well. The safety of our law-abiding citizens is paramount whenever we are dealing with a Bill related to our justice system and to those who have broken the laws to our province or our country.

Too often the citizens of this province feel that the system is set up entirely for the criminals instead of those who are victimized by the criminal element. And who can blame them? When we hear over the weekend that a man is let out of prison after only four years when he participated in the brutal killing of a senior citizen, who can blame people for losing faith in the justice system?

When we hear the members opposite deny that youth crime is a problem in Saskatchewan for the first six years they were in power, who can blame the people for having their doubts? It was not until the NDP's own polling told them yes, youth crime and crime in general is a major concern of the people of this province, that they begin to act concerned. And I believe "act" is the operative word here, Mr. Speaker.

I mean that when people hear the Minister of Justice not a year ago tell this House that youth crime isn't a problem when 70 cars have been stolen off the streets of Regina, how can they be asked to believe that the government has suddenly done a full 180 on this issue and now is concerned? Just find a safe place to park your car, he told us. That's the amount of concern he showed last year, Mr. Speaker.

So is it just . . . It just isn't credible now for those people to pretend that this is really a concern to them. But it is true that people are very concerned about crime in Saskatchewan, and they're concerned about how prisoners are dealt with while they're in prison. And they are concerned with the system used to let them out of prison. Most of all they are concerned about their own personal safety and the safety of their loved ones. Who can blame them, Mr. Speaker?

Recently we heard the startling news that the teenager accused of killing a seven-year-old La Ronge child in some grotesque ritual has simply walked away from the mental health facility in North Battleford where he is now staying.

This escape, and that's what it was, left the people of North Battleford and La Ronge and all people of Saskatchewan frightened and concerned for their own safety. This is a young man that police have called psychotic and dangerous, and yet he was in a position where he could simply run away from the facility while he was out for a nice stroll in the sun.

Mr. Speaker, technically of course, in our curious system, this isn't a Justice issue. In fact it was the Minister of Health on his feet in this legislature answering the questions about this case, about this unlawful escape. And what was his response to the concerns of the people of Saskatchewan that this person was on the loose for 16 hours? He said that everything was just fine and no changes in the system were contemplated at the facility.

This was hours after Sandy Charles was apprehended and taken back to the mental health hospital. Only a few hours had passed and the minister felt he had sufficient information to tell the people of Saskatchewan that everything was just fine in the system.

The minister told the people of Saskatchewan that he would not even consider changing the system that allowed Sandy Charles so much freedom that he simply ran away from his attendant while pretending to tie his shoelace.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if everything was just fine this kind of thing wouldn't happen. This young man didn't even have to put up a struggle. He was simply put in a position where he was simply allowed to go free. There was no struggle; there was no daring escape. He simply ran away. This is completely unacceptable.

And the minister stood in this House and said the only concern

we should have is for the dignity of Sandy Charles. Mr. Speaker, of course we have to have concern for all those who are confined to mental hospitals for various ailments and illnesses. However, when we are dealing with a person who is described by police as extremely dangerous, perhaps we have to have other concerns as well. Like the concern for the people who may have been put in peril because this person was free, or what the minister called, elopement.

The people called it an escape, and I think I'll go . . . The police called it an escape, Mr. Speaker, and I think I'll go along with the police. Their terminology seems to be far more accurate.

And the minister stood here and told us that while everything was fine, he would not guarantee us or the people of Saskatchewan that another escape by a person like Sandy Charles would not happen again. Mr. Speaker, if everything was fine with the system, the minister would have been able to offer us that guarantee.

The minister talks about dignity. What about the dignity of the people who are afraid to leave their homes at night? Are they not entitled to dignity as well? What about the dignity and well-being of people who are constant victims of crimes which, though less serious than taking someone's life, are making our province a less desirable place to live? Mr. Speaker, what about the person who has his car or home broken into constantly? Of course car thefts and vandalism are even more maddening now than that . . . now that the government has seen fit to raise our deductibles to \$700, breaking a contract with tens of thousands of motorists in this province.

And those guys over there just turn their heads the other way. Oh sure, they'll fire off the odd letter to Ottawa. Whenever they can point the finger at someone else, the NDP will surely jump at the chance. But they will . . . have not, will not, and probably never will accept their own share of responsibility when it comes to our justice system, whether it is young offenders or adult crime.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on in vein for hours and I'm sure the members opposite probably wish I would. However, I think these are pertinent facts to bring up when we discuss any piece of legislation having to do with our correctional facilities or our justice system.

Mr. Speaker, regarding this Bill specifically, for the most part, the administrative changes that are proposed in this piece of legislation seem sound and reasonable. The minister told us there are approximately 2,200 transfers of prisoners in Saskatchewan on an annual basis. For one official to personally approve each and every one of these transfers seems very onerous. In most cases it is probably quite acceptable that the employees in the correctional system lower than the executive director be allowed to approve such transfers. The executive director of corrections, after all, probably has many more important things to do than to approve each and every one of these transfers.

The minister stated that the executive director will still be required to authorize the transfers in cases where there is concern for public safety or concerns about the cost or concerns about the care and condition of the inmate. I guess I would have

a question here about who makes this determination. Who decides when a prisoner falls into one of these categories prior to his or her movement between correctional facilities? I am worried that a few of the more dangerous prisoners who are incarcerated in the system may fall through the cracks. And I'll definitely be asking the minister for some assurances that there are enough cautionary procedures in place that there isn't a mistake made when transferring prisoners.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that for the most part — or at least a large part — prisoners who are transferred from one facility to another are moved so that they can take advantage of certain programs that are set up. And I guess I try to understand this and it's to help rehabilitate them. Of course, Mr. Speaker, rehabilitation must be an important aspect of any prisoner's time in jail. Society is not well served if prisoners simply sit in their cell all day or simply use their time in jail to take notes from their fellow inmates and learn to become better criminals. This does none of them any good.

So alternative measure programs, in theory are positive. However, again public safety must be the first thing on our minds when we discuss such programs. Part of these alternative measures is the appointment of a community justice committee run by volunteers from the community. I commend the people who serve on these committees or will serve on these committees. Part of the reason for this Bill is that these people will be freed of liability if something goes wrong with a criminal who is taking part in these alternative programs and not spending his days and nights behind bars.

I think it's important that these volunteers from the community do not have to worry about liability. If this was a concern I'm pretty sure no one would be lining up to volunteer. They are volunteering for a very vital role and I will need some assurances from the minister about training for these people and backgrounds of those who are serving on such committees. When we do talk about liability we are saying that there is a potential at any time for something to go wrong.

Once again we are back to the issue of public safety, Mr. Speaker. This Bill acknowledges that yes indeed there is a possibility that something could go awry when a person who would otherwise be in prison is taking part in a program in the community. When something like this happens we are left with the question: who is responsible?

This Bill not only takes away potential liabilities in the community justice committee, as the minister suggested in his comments, it also takes away potential liability from the minister himself or the minister's department for things that go wrong. Section (4)(b) of the Act states that even problems that arise due to neglect or default of execution of good faith under this system cannot be held against the Department of Justice.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if there is indeed neglect occurring and there is a threat to public safety because of such neglect, somebody has to be held responsible or those problems will simply continue on and on down the road. We are going to have to explore this issue in much greater detail with the minister before we can approve of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think I'm raising unfounded concerns

when I raise the issues I have today. I think it's incumbent on all of us to remember there are two sides to the justice system: there are those who become part of the system because of their own actions and there are those who are part of the system not of their own accord but because they are victims of crime. So much of the legislation we deal with in this House, and much of the legislation dealt with by the House of Commons, deals specifically and only with concerns from the criminals themselves.

I think it's time that all of our legislators remember that for every criminal in the prison system or every criminal enrolled in one of these alternative community programs, there is a victim out there. And while it is important that we do explore alternatives to simply locking up criminal element, we have to be ever mindful of public safety. We cannot be putting these criminals in positions where the public may be put at risk.

And we will also be questioning the minister very closely about who exactly will be held responsible if something goes terribly wrong. These are the questions the people are asking and these are the questions we'll also be asking, Mr. Speaker. So at this time I would like to adjourn.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 3

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Nilson that **Bill No. 3 — The Public Utilities Easements Amendment Act, 1998** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I review this Bill and in many ways this Bill is actually fairly dry to say the least, we in the official opposition caucus actually have been noticing how few really substantive Bills have been brought forward so far this season . . . or this session.

We would almost think that the members opposite were running scared and wanting to get out of the Assembly quickly. I'm not sure if that's what their purpose is. None the less, Mr. Speaker, it is our job as official opposition to give every Bill thorough review and examination. And I see already, Mr. Speaker, I've hit a nerve and I've got a response. And we intend to do that with every one of our Bills and every other piece of legislation before us.

As the minister noted in his speech, the main intent of this Bill is to expand and enhance the provisions of The Public Utilities Easements Act. When the Bill was originally drafted in 1950, the range of services that require easements was not contemplated. These include such things as cable TV lines, and CO₂ pipelines. Clearly it is in the public interest that such provisions should be made. The businesses that provide these new services need to have the security of knowing that they have perpetual rights when they lay cables, or lay pipelines or cables.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, landowners need to have their rights on these matters protected and enshrined. It needs to be very clear that the grant of these easements must always be strictly voluntary and not the products of expropriation or

coercion.

Of course such reassurance cannot be given absolutely in this province. The right to grant easements as a form of property, since we still do not recognize property rights in this province, landowners will continue to be subject to government whims. So long as the government continues to have broad and unrestricted powers of expropriation, the minister's words about the voluntary nature of this Act will always ring a little hollow.

(1530)

How were the easements handled at Condie, for example. Did our dear friend Mr. Messer go out and seek voluntary participation from the residents there? Clearly not. Instead we had communities and landowners up in arms about the power line. The NDP and Mr. Messer turned a deaf ear to these protests and simply deemed the project to be in the public interest. I guess, Mr. Speaker, that's all part of that unique personality and management style of his that we hear so much about.

The continuing problem with easements and with property issues in general in this province is that they depend on the goodwill of the government and its agents in the public utilities to deal fairly with landowners and that has certainly not been the history of this government.

Mr. Speaker, we can look back to issues such as the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) debate and other pieces of legislation. Even the judges' contract. Instead, this government has repeatedly shown its willingness to trod on the rights of landowners, use its vast executive powers to define public interest wherever they see fit, and to order expropriations at will.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill does nothing to address these concerns. However, that is a broader, more philosophical argument that can wait for another day. Even leaving that issue aside, there are some areas where this Bill fails — by implication, if not by what it actually does.

The Bill stands as a testament to the slow-moving wheels of government and to the dangers of micro-managing government regulation and red tape. To repeat the reasons given by the minister, this Bill was brought in because the 1950s Bill didn't anticipate things like cable TV lines.

Well Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring it to the minister's attention that cable TV has been around for about 20 years now. And what have cable TV companies been doing to secure easements and other agreements from landowners up to this point? Why has it taken so long for this minor and obvious change to take place? And with the growing segment of the viewing public switching to satellite dishes, it seems like we brought this legislation before the Assembly just as the cable industry is struggling to avoid becoming obsolete. That kind of bogged-down, slow-moving government is simply unacceptable in this era when technological change is moving so quickly.

Mr. Speaker, it is true enough that this Bill makes some effort to change that by allowing new types of companies to be added by regulation, but the original Bill is still rife with obsolete

references. For example, the original Bill repeatedly refers to easement rights to telegraph lines. Yes, Mr. Speaker, for telegraph lines. In the age of the Internet we still have laws on the books defining the rights of anyone who wants to set up a telegraph line. I think it would be pretty safe in eliminating things like that from this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

More importantly, this Bill is really only a stopgap to the solution or to the question of changes in technology and the property rights that go along with them. All the Bill does is move the red tape and paperwork from the legislature over to the bureaucracy. A new industry would still have to go through an elaborate process to get its transmission rights recognized in regulation. Perhaps that is a good make-work project for officials in the Justice department, but for anyone else it is just a hassle and a barrier to doing business in this province.

The real question that this Bill should be addressing is why do we need to have these sorts of civil matters micro-managed in the first place? What this Bill should simply say is that anyone seeking to transmit goods or services across property or to otherwise erect a facility on that property should have the right to negotiate an easement with the owner that could then be registered with Land Titles.

Mr. Speaker, there is no need for the Justice department to keep great long lists of who can and cannot negotiate such easements. It should be recognized as a simple principle of contract law that is open to anybody, whether they are erecting a telegraph line, or maybe 20 years from now putting through a nuclear fusion power transmission line.

This would not detract from the power of the Crown to regulate this or that industry with relation to safety standards and the like. This Bill does not address any of these issues nor should it.

The lesson that we should have learned from the old Bill is that we cannot anticipate every circumstance where an easement is necessary. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we should not waste public resources either in this legislature or in the civil service to try to detail every circumstance that may come up.

The government has made a commitment to reducing red tape and bureaucracy as it relates to business. So far we have seen very little evidence of that. This Bill, far from simplifying red tape, just perpetuates.

For these reasons, our caucus will be proposing a number of amendments to the Bill at committee stage. Although we agree with the overall intent and goals of the Bill, we feel that it can be enhanced and streamlined even further. If this government is serious about reducing red tape, I would urge the minister and the members opposite to consider seriously the points that I have made today.

With the support of all members, I think we can show the public that the parties in the House can work together to improve legislation like this. And, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to considering this Bill further at committee stage.

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

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

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

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, we're a little early and so some of my officials have not yet arrived for these estimates, but to my right is Michael Littlewood, the director of third-party funding and legislative services.

Before we get into the contents of the estimates however, I'd ask for leave to introduce some guests that have come here from Japan.

The Chair: — Maybe we'll just wait for the guests to get totally seated, if that's okay.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly, a group of exchange students who are seated in your gallery. These are 77 grade 11 students from Yamate High School in Yokohama, Japan. And they're in Saskatchewan attending classes at the Saskatoon Catholic high schools.

They are accompanied today by teachers, Mr. Jinmi, Mr. Takewaki, Mr. Sato, Mr. Takei, and Mr. Winskell, as well as chaperons, Mrs. Albers, Mr. Rowley, and Mr. Murdock. They're also accompanied by David Knight, who is the international student program coordinator for the Saskatoon Catholic schools.

Yamate High School is a private high school in Yokohama that was founded to foster global awareness and understanding among nations of the world. All grade 11 students in this school are required to participate in a two-week exchange. The students are staying with the families of Saskatoon residents and will be participating in all family activities during their stay.

At this time I'd like to ask all of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to extend a very warm welcome to these students from Japan, and we hope that you enjoy your stay in our province and in our country. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: — I recognize the leader of the opposition.

Mr. Krawetz: — With leave, to also introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, I'd also like to join with the Minister of Education to welcome the students and the teachers from Japan. I hope that your two-week stay here in the

province of Saskatchewan and in Canada is rewarding and that you learn a lot about our country and the people that are here. And of course I know that Saskatoon will prove to be an excellent city and I know that your hosts will do just a terrific job in welcoming you here to Saskatchewan.

On behalf of the official opposition I'd like to welcome you to Saskatchewan and I hope you have a terrific stay. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome, Mr. Littlewood, this afternoon, and I know that there'll be other people that will be joining in.

I'd like to begin, Madam Minister, and I didn't have the opportunity to send over to you information that I'd like to have for estimates. I didn't realize Education estimates would be up this soon in the session. So if I could have the assistance of a page.

I have provided for you, Madam Minister, and your officials a list of information that has been shared by your department with the opposition before. And I'd like to indicate that the information that I'm requesting is a list of all senior management officials and responsibilities of each.

Number two, a list of all Department of Education employees at March 31, 1998.

Number three, salary average for people in the department and an employee breakdown for each of the sections of your department.

Number four, enrolment statistics as of September 30, 1997. And what I'm looking for there of course, is the provincial statistics per the different classifications of school divisions.

Number five, provincial statistics for the assessments, the mill rates, the number of schools, the number of students in those schools for each of the school divisions. And I understand from your comments last night we're at 107 school divisions now.

Number six, the provincial summary of the grant calculations for each recognized expenditure area.

Number seven, the summary of grant amounts allocated to each school division under the foundation grant formula.

And number eight, the summary of projects approved by the facilities department: major capital projects, and (b) repair and renovations.

(1545)

With that . . . and I know that that will take awhile for the information to be made available, but I'm sure it will be available before we actually get into next estimates. And I see you have other officials arriving as well.

Madam Minister, I guess, just before you rely on any of your officials to provide some of the documents, I guess this past year I think, has been one of change in the education community regarding school divisions. And the comment I made is the fact that we are now less in numbers, in terms of numbers of school divisions.

Your department embarked on a survey I guess, of school divisions, not only parents and teachers but the public as well, and from that you concluded that voluntary amalgamations was a step in the right direction. And a number of school divisions have taken advantage of that, and I'll say "advantage."

Could you indicate, Madam Minister, how you feel amalgamations have gone with those divisions that have experienced that? Where in the province are we having school divisions amalgamate? What do you see as some of the positive things that have occurred in amalgamations, and what kinds of difficulties have you been able to identify as far as the amalgamations, in that respect?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — To answer your question, we have had several amalgamations that took place in this past year. We had school board elections in the fall of 1997 whereby people were elected to several new school divisions.

I'll give you the names of the school divisions that have restructured. Obviously Canora and Timberline, which you are familiar with, has been restructured into Crystal Lakes School Division. Kerrobert and Wilkie have become the Landswest School Division. Long Lake and Last Mountain have become Sask Central School Division. North Battleford and Battleford School Divisions have become the Battlefords School Division. The North Battleford Roman Catholic School Division, Unity School Division, and Wilkie School Division have become the North West Roman Catholic School Division. Oxbow and Arcola have become Souris Moose Mountain School Division. And Prince Albert Rural, Prince Albert Public, Carleton Comp., and Kinistino School Divisions have become the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division. And Wood River and Gravelbourg School Divisions, and Mankota Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School Division have become the Golden Plains School Division.

So we have moved from 119 school divisions to 107 — 79 public divisions, 19 separate divisions, and 9 francophone divisions. And I can tell you that in this session of the legislature, as a result of the consultation that the francophone community has undergone, there will be amendments to The Education Act whereby francophone school divisions can restructure into one division in the province.

As far as how has it gone? For the most part I think we're just now into the process. School divisions are now just starting to negotiate the new LINC (Local Implementation and Negotiation Committee) agreements, because there were several local teacher collective agreements that have come into the new division so the process is just begun. However we have received

many positive reports from parents and trustees, in fact people who weren't sure that this was going to work well, and they have said for the most part it has meant more services for students in the classroom.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister. In the area where you've identified amalgamations and you indicated that school board officials, I think were elected for the first time last time, last year, based on the new school division, have there been any difficulties in the actual administration now being put in place in each of those school divisions?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that nothing that would be out of the ordinary in that we've had new divisions come together under one roof. There have been new trustees elected to take over the larger school division. But nothing that we would consider out of the ordinary.

Mr. Krawetz: — What role do the umbrella organizations, that is LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents) and SASBO (Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials), what role are they playing in terms of the successful amalgamations that you've had so far?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm advised that both SASBO, LEADS, the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation), and the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association are all involved on the restructuring committee of the department. And our observation has been one of helpfulness, that LEADS and SASBO and the other partners have been extremely helpful in the process.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, last night at the spring council you talked about criteria for amalgamation and probably being able to evaluate amalgamations as to whether or not particular school divisions should amalgamate or whether there's an advantage.

Has your department developed a set of criteria that you would expect voluntary amalgamations to adhere to, or are you looking at amalgamations from if there are two or three willing participants, then no matter what the set-up is in terms of numbers of students, numbers of schools, that those types of amalgamations will proceed and get support from your department?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can say, thus far when school divisions have applied to the department and to myself to go through a restructuring process, the requirement has been one of consultation with the public and major public support in the area.

We have not set up criteria *per se*, but what we have indicated to school boards, that if a particular area wants to go elsewhere and it makes sense in terms of the mobility of the people in that particular area, that's something that could be accommodated.

An example would be, when the Blaine Lake School Division voted to dissolve and go with the Saskatchewan Valley School Division, that folks in Hafford wanted to go with the Battleford division, and they were allowed to do that.

And as you know, the Battleford division has now restructured

with the North Battleford School Division into the Battlefords School Division. So there hasn't been a problem with people using common sense and going thus far where it makes sense to go in terms of restructuring.

Mr. Krawetz: — You raise a good point, Madam Minister, that I've had a couple of contacts from, different school divisions who have already amalgamated. And I guess I look at the boundaries that are in existence right now for school divisions, I think are created somewhere in 1944. And what we're seeing, and you gave the example of the two school divisions within my constituency, being of course Canora and Timberline, I think what has occurred there is the existing boundaries of both school divisions have just been put together into one block and now we're referring to that as Crystal Lakes.

How will the department be dealing with those concerns on the fringe areas where you have areas, because of economic change, because of demographic changes, where we have a need to have to address the concerns of boundaries not being necessarily in the right place?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well first of all what I've said very clearly is that this is the restructuring process; this is not necessarily about amalgamation, amalgamating the same school division. In the case of your school division, at no time was there a request made to have part of either of those two divisions go with another division.

In the case of the Blaine Lake School Division, they wanted, the people in Hafford, wanted to go to Battlefords and that was fine. So what we encourage school boards to do is respond to public concerns at the local level. If divisions feel that they need to go in another direction, a particular area of the division feels they need to go in another direction, then that should be seriously considered and looked at to make sure it makes sense.

Mr. Krawetz: — Is the Boundaries Commission a functioning body right now and who are the members on that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Yes, this is a functioning committee at present. It is chaired by Jack Lloyd a former director of education and also someone who works in the department. As well, Dolores Neil, who is a person from Harris who is a member of the Saskatchewan school councils association, Tany Penn and Valerie Porterfield. I believe Tany Penn is the person that's been involved as a secretary-treasurer, and Valerie Porterfield is a former school trustee.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, if there were concerns — and you've indicated that you haven't had any requests from school divisions — if there are concerns with boundaries, regarding students that are crossing boundaries and attending schools in another division, would this be the commission that would review that boundary? And how would it go about making recommendations to you?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The Boundaries Commission has not been used thus far in restructuring. It has been used to deal with issues of boundaries between school divisions. When school divisions can't necessarily come together to determine what would be an appropriate boundary, the commission has public

hearings and they issue recommendations to the minister.

So the commission thus far has not been used in restructuring or for restructuring, but it certainly has been used in other boundary issues.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, you've indicated that of the 107 school divisions that exist right now that there were nine francophone, I believe, and you said, you indicated that there may be potential for changes in those numbers and that we might be seeing some changes there.

If we leave those out and look at the other existing school divisions, do you still see future amalgamations in 1998 and '99? And I guess what I'm asking you is to look ahead and indicate what you think will be the types of school divisions that we'll have in a year, year and a half.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I would be reluctant to speculate on the numbers. What I can say is that there are many school divisions across the province that are having discussions with their neighbours; they're having discussions inside their school division boundaries.

We just had a set of elections in the fall of 1997. So I would predict that if there's going to be more major restructuring initiatives in the province, I suspect that they will not formally happen until the elections in the year 2000.

(1600)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister. You indicated that, over the winter I assume, that the new boards of education for those newly, newly created school divisions are busy probably with their various teacher groups in trying to obtain LINC agreements. And when we start to look ahead at LINC agreements, will your department be assisting the various officials? And I know that we're talking about a representative of course of LEADS, as a director of education, and the local negotiating committee.

If you will be providing assistance or if you're not, do you have a timetable in place for when you see these new boards of education arriving at a negotiated contract? Is there a hope that those contracts will be in place by a specific time? Or are you just going to let it take its course if it takes two, three, four years to arrive at new agreements?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well as you know, the province does not involve itself in the local bargaining — the LINC agreements. I don't know how long the process will take. This is entirely up to the local school division and the teachers that are involved at the local level.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, back in December, your department cancelled the protocol agreement between the trustees association and your government. And I guess, as a result of that, we've now . . . there is a negotiated contract in place for the teachers but there is also a contract in place that is not signed by the largest player in this whole, in this whole game, which is the trustees association.

And I'm wondering if you could identify what you see as a plan of action that you're putting in place as minister or that your officials are putting in place to have a more cohesive approach to negotiation that involves, I guess, the support of all the partners — the teachers' federation, the trustees association, and of course government. How will you arrive at a plan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We have a collective agreement with teachers that will take us to 1999 — the end of 1999. As you know, we have had two protocol arrangements with the trustees. At the end of the day, in December after numerous meetings, we just weren't able to come together in the collaborative way that we would have wanted to. And we ended up ending our formal protocol arrangement with the trustees.

And the trustees were at the bargaining table with us when we negotiated the collective agreement with the teachers. They were involved in all of the process, the meetings. They were sitting at the table with the province, and on a point of principle I believe they've determined not to sign the collective agreement.

As you probably know, the members of the government team, the five members, are senior people in the Department of Education. They are the assistant deputy minister, the director of third-party funding and legislative services, the director of OMLO (official minority language office), and two of the regional directors. And this took a lot of their time and their effort, and as a result of the significance of the bargaining and all the meetings that were held, these are officials that now need to do the rest of their work in the department.

So I think what we will see is a bit of a cooling-off period so that the officials can get back to the day-to-day work of the department, because a lot of things were put aside because we were negotiating a collective agreement. I've continued to meet with the school trustees. I've met with them, I believe on two or three occasions in the last few months and I will be meeting with the trustees again.

Do I have a formal plan? I would say, not yet. I think that what we need to do as government and trustees is sit down and talk about where do we go from here. And we're not obviously at that point yet, but I think we will be in the future.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister, for those comments. I think that it's critical that you arrive at a situation where there is support for a procedure past 1999's contract because there's no question I think, that there has been a fragmentation and I think it will mean that there will be conflicts throughout Saskatchewan between trustees as individuals maybe and between teachers as well. And I don't think that that's going to be the best for education.

So I would encourage you to continue with your plan. As you've said, I believe that there needs to be a cooling-off period first and that, you know, negotiations will begin for a new contract probably in early 1999 and that should mean that everyone is at the table again.

You indicated yesterday also first that the structure is as The Education Act currently indicates, which is a five/four relationship and that you have no desire to change that at all. I

would ask then, if you are going to work in that kind of system, what kinds of changes can you make internally to involve all participants, that is all nine members, to feel that they are going to be able to participate and contribute to negotiating a contract that the current . . . that the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) is responsible for over 60 per cent of those costs.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I could say to the member is this: that — and I understand this from speaking to folks that were around in the '70s and the '80s — there has been a tension, for whatever reason, surrounding the make-up of the trustee-government bargaining team, even in the days when the government was funding 58 per cent of the cost of education, if you exclude pensions and benefits. Now if you include pensions and benefits, then obviously the province and the trustees are about 50/50 in terms of the overall costs of the delivery of K to 12 education in the province.

So there has been this tension that has existed long before I was on the scene, long before you were on the scene. It existed in the '80s; it existed in the '70s and I think it's because of the legislation — the five/four — five government people, four trustees. And trustees have not appreciated that. And you as a member of . . . the president of the school trustees association, and as far as I'm concerned, the trustees came as close as they'll ever get to a four/four/one, with a protocol agreement, without amending the legislation.

Now what was clear from my experience in this — and my experience is practically five years long — is that it didn't work. It did not work. And what we now have to do is figure out how do we deal with the tension, because I think these are historical tensions and they will be tensions that will go on into the future. How do we deal with these historical tensions, the tensions, in such a way that we can be more collaborative. Because it seems like there's two competing interests here but we're supposed to be the management team.

The teachers are extremely focused on what their goal is and what we need to do as government-trustees is to figure out what our goal is in a collaborative way. And I'm not sure how we work through that, given that there is this clash that is historical from what I can gather from speaking to people who've been involved in the process in the past.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, I guess where I'd like to begin with your comments there is to indicate that the relationship between the government and the trustees is a relationship that occurs away from the bargaining table. Because when you're at a bargaining table you have two groups. The one group is the teachers' group and the other group is the management group, as identified by the Act, and you've indicated that that's a five/four combination.

I've been part of that management group and have sat at that table. And I guess the things that go on before you enter into a negotiating meeting with the teachers are occurring in a closed room, where the teachers are not aware of what you're planning in terms of strategy, and the government decisions that are looked at by the management committee to determine what is available for funding, what is available for non-costing type of clauses that may be negotiated, the expansion of an agreement

— all those things take place before you get into that negotiation session.

So when you indicate . . . and you said the protocol agreement, and I won't even refer to the protocol agreement, I'll say the four/four/one relationship that existed didn't work — those were your words. And I guess I'd like you to expand on that by indicating why you think that a four/four/one outside of the negotiation process, before it begins speaking with the teachers' federation, why didn't that process work? What kinds of difficulties can you identify that contributed to that agreement or that kind of an arrangement falling apart?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well the reason why the four/four/one didn't work, the protocol agreement, where we had jointly agreed to chair in the last collective agreement in particular, was the fact that the person, the one could not cast a deciding vote. So it was a stalemate, and we just could not agree on a mandate change.

I'm not going to go into all of the details here. But I can just say this, that we had nine meetings, nine lengthy meetings to try and get a mandate changed, and we couldn't get the change. And at the end of the day ultimately the government is responsible. We are ultimately responsible for public education in the province. At the end of the day you have to make decisions. You cannot have stalemate, stalemate, stalemate that goes for a year. You have to make a decision.

And that's why I would say, and I was pleased to see Dr. Melenchuk from the Liberals said this last night, he doesn't plan on changing the five/four if he ever becomes the government. We didn't hear your view on this. You said you'd tell me today.

Well I would say to you that we've had the Conservatives, your party, in the legislature, your party in the legislature in the 1980s and they didn't change the five/four.

And so what I would say to you is, what is your intentions? Are you going to change the legislation? Sounds as though you are. What is your public position here, Mr. Leader of the Official Opposition?

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, I am not in government right now and the position, the position that I will take, the position that I will take will be one that will determine what is best for education. And if that is, if that is a five/four relationship, because the education is a provincial responsibility, that will be a decision that we will make in government.

Madam Minister, you stated . . . I want to indicate, Madam Minister, that you pointed directly at me a number of years ago and you said, as Minister of Education I will make this agreement work. That's what you said directly to me. I will make this agreement work.

And it hasn't worked. As a result, you've now indicated that it was because you couldn't reach a mandate with the people that were at the table.

Now I guess the question would be, is the mandate over

finances? Is it over the fact that the government wasn't able to determine what it would spend on this agreement? Is it to do with clauses that were being put forward on the table?

You indicated that you don't want to share those kinds of things today. But I think people in Saskatchewan, especially the trustees association, want to know what kind of a situation they're getting into for 1999. Could you expand on that, please?

(1615)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The member says that I said I would make this work. Well this is like a marriage — takes two people to make it work, takes two people. We are the management team. In order to make it work you have to have a willing partner.

And I would say to you that, in the case of the protocol agreement, for a variety of reasons we became unwilling partners. We could not make it work. We wanted . . . our goal as a government was to get a negotiated collective agreement without a strike. We had a mandate. We had a number that we had in mind that would meet our goal to have a balanced budget, to deal with debt reduction, and to also have program decreases . . . or increases. So I would say that we were in a position where we just couldn't get the trustees to agree to a mandate change. For whatever reasons they were not prepared to agree.

And at the end of the day, after one year, after numerous meetings, after meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings, that went on and on and on and on, we decided that the time had come to get back to the bargaining table with a mandate so we could get a negotiated collective agreement.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, I'm not sure whether you're referring to one protocol agreement or two. As I understand, after the first protocol agreement . . . the negotiations that took place under that first protocol agreement arrived at a situation where the contract was also not signed by the trustees' association, and could you explain whether or not there were negotiations and actual changes to that protocol agreement to arrive at what you felt would be a more workable protocol agreement?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There were. There were people that were strongly lobbying the province not to enter into another protocol agreement with the trustees. We wanted to make this work. We thought that this could work, but at the end of the day with the second protocol agreement and after trying to bargain a collective agreement for a year, it just couldn't work. It did not work.

Mr. Krawetz: — Was this a fault of the conditions of the second protocol agreement or could you identify some of the unreasonable requests, I guess of your partner in your marriage here, and I guess that's the trustees' association. Could you identify some of the things that you felt and your team felt were unreasonable requests from the trustees' association that made this second protocol agreement without the ability to survive?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As you'll recall, before Christmas the teachers had applied to go to conciliation. We were heading into

conciliation just before Christmas and with a position where the government and the trustees could not agree to mandate, couldn't agree to strategy, we couldn't even table some of the things that we'd agreed to. So I would say that we were in, just in an untenable position.

You cannot go into a conciliation process with the employer being in a position where they don't agree on mandate and they don't agree on strategy.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister. When you said that you couldn't agree, were there concerns that your five members were putting forward before the cancellation of the protocol agreement that the trustees wouldn't agree with, or was it vice versa?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — We only had four members at that stage.

Mr. Krawetz: — I apologize, Madam Minister. It was four . . . (inaudible) . . . prior to December 18. Was it the position of the four members that were putting forward some particular mandate to the trustees that was unacceptable to the trustees, or was it vice versa?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The four trustees, the four government department people, could not agree with each other.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, as a result of the cancellation of the protocol agreement, what steps brought down . . . You had indicated that the conciliation process was in place. Was that put on hold pending negotiations? Or was that a condition of the cancellation of the protocol agreement, that indeed the conciliation application by the teachers' federation would be put on hold?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — There are absolutely no conditions.

Mr. Krawetz: — Madam Minister, if we could turn to another area of concern that was expressed I think yesterday, and you as well as I heard the debate and the concerns around aboriginal schools and schools being built on reserves. There was some discussion about this last year at this time when you had indicated that you felt that the federal government, I think, was looking at a number of applications from different bands and that there may be additional schools.

What has taken place in 1997-98 regarding numbers of federal schools? Do we see greater numbers? Are there projects in the planning stages right now? And what kind of arrangements do you have in terms of a working relationship with the federal department of native affairs?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The federal government does not share any of their information with us. As you know, first nations people come under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Band-controlled schools do not come under the auspices of the provincial government.

So I would say we have very . . . we have no knowledge other than to say that the Flying Dust Band in Meadow Lake has approached the department to assist them along with the Meadow Lake School Division in looking at the possibility of a

joint facility for the Meadow Lake town and the Flying Dust Band which is located outside the town of Meadow Lake.

Mr. Krawetz: — Previously, Madam Minister, you've indicated that capital projects will probably receive a greater success rate if there are partners involved. Are you looking at the federal department as being a partner for the approval?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — The partner in the case of Meadow Lake would be the Flying Dust Band which would receive funds from the federal government under treaty, and the Department of Education, and the Meadow Lake School Division.

Mr. Krawetz: — One other concern that has been raised by a number of communities where there are Catholic schools right now is around this partnership thing and the fact that you've indicated I think that capital projects will probably be much more successful if there's joint usage, if there are more partners than just the one system.

Is this a criteria that your facilities department will be following? That is that schools specific to Catholic education will not be approved if they are not with another partner?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Not at all. I've just approved or the government has just approved a Catholic school, high school in the city of Lloydminster, Holy Rosary, as well a remodel of Father Gorman School. So that's not at all the criteria. It depends on the location. It depends upon enrolment pressures. It depends upon occupational health and safety and joint use. And there is a premium. You get a premium in terms of the criteria if there's a joint use facility.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm very pleased to hear that indeed you will look at I guess the need first of all, and that if there is a structure that is required in one community or another, it will not be based of course on whether or not it's, you know, solely public or solely Catholic, but in fact that it is needed.

You've indicated before I think in a press release that I saw somewhere that there were about 200 projects that are before the facilities department right now — 200 applications. And I'm wondering what do you see in terms of your capital budget being able to handle all of those kinds of projects?

And I've indicated in my request for information I'd like to have you provide the approved capital projects, the major ones as well as the minor renovation and repair projects. How do you see the amount of money that has been provided in this year's budget for capital? Do you see it being able to address the immediate needs or are there some very serious concerns out there that this budget will not be able to address?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — As the member knows, we have received a significant increase in capital, about \$7.3 million. About \$8 million will go towards block funding which is for smaller projects. We anticipate that there will probably be about 100 block projects approved.

We're trying to get that information out to divisions as quickly as possible because we've been criticized in the past that this

information wasn't necessarily shared with divisions until July, August, September. And so the plan is to get the information as quickly as possible to division so they can get at their construction or renovation immediately.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Good afternoon, Madam Minister, and good afternoon to your officials.

Madam Minister, I have just a couple of questions, I guess concerns that I have regarding capital funding in the Humboldt constituency in the Humboldt area. The budget has come down and I have had no indication that in the budget there was any funding for a joint educational facility that was proposed by the community college and Humboldt Collegiate Institute. And from my understanding, the government has talked with representatives from those educational facilities, and that there would be some money coming I believe this year in order to facilitate renovations and an addition to buildings there. Can you tell me at this time whether or not there will be funding forthcoming?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What I can tell you is that the project is a high priority for the Department of Education and Post-Secondary Education because this project would bring the regional college and the K to 12 system together and it would provide wonderful opportunities for high school students to do for their training in high school and it would also provide opportunities for adults to do some adult basic education.

What I can tell you is that we are . . . there is no money in this year's budget for this project. But the departments are continuing to work with the Humboldt Collegiate and the Carlton Trail Regional College.

We have money in this year's budget to do North Battleford Comp and their regional college, to finish off some of the Estevan Comp and the regional college. And these are the only two projects that I'm aware of where there is committed funds to deal with this notion of joint use between regional colleges and school divisions.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. As far as I understand, there has been quite a lot of talk and consultation with government for quite some time now regarding this facility. And I know also that the municipalities have got some funding in reserve for this project.

My concern is that some of those municipalities may withdraw that money by 1999 if there is not government money coming. I think it would be an awful shame because, as you well know, there are provincial training programs going on through the community college, etc., etc. And on top of that, the Humboldt Collegiate have got some, I guess some environmental and health concerns with that structure. From what I understand from Mayor Still, there are CO₂ emissions, okay, that would jeopardize the health of the students.

And I just wonder first of all, what was the amount of money that the government had stated that they would bring forward for this project. And, you know, can these people look forward to this being included in next year's budget?

(1630)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Let me say this, that we have not yet approved this project. We know that the Humboldt Collegiate Institute and Carlton Trail have been talking for some time. In 1994 we approved the concept and suggested that they go ahead with the design. I understand that about half of the design work has been completed. But we have never formally approved this joint use facility.

We're told that the preliminary cost estimates are about \$10 million, of which Education and Post-Secondary would share about \$7.5 million.

It has not been budgeted in this year's budget for this project because there are other projects that are coming ahead of it, and I'm not in a position to share with you what could happen in next year's budget. But obviously as projects are . . . About projects this year, some of the projects are in construction, some of the projects will be constructed next year. This project has not yet been announced.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, just one other question, and I guess it's more a commentary. With reassessment having taken place in the last year, as you have heard I'm sure from a number of people, the property owners are really quite burdened right now by the kind of taxes they have to pay. The particular school division that I have some concern about is Saskatoon (East). Now Saskatoon (East) has got . . . the property owners are looking at 70 per cent of the share of education funding; that means 30 per cent by government.

Now I understand why that happens with equalization, etc. I'm not sure that I totally agree that that's something that should always be put on the table. But in conjunction with this whole issue in Saskatoon (East), I know that you have received a letter as I have from people doing home schooling.

So because they're engaged in their own home schooling and they're not really using the educational facility, etc., and they are property owners, they find that this burden of excessive taxes is more than they can bear. And again I hear from them, maybe we should move somewhere else. People that would like to enjoy rural living that have engaged in their own home schooling are finding that it is becoming almost impossible for them to be able to make ends meet.

So what would you say to those people engaged in home schooling regarding their level of taxes? And is there any reprieve for them on the horizon as far as possibly being exempted from some taxes. Could you comment on that.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I think you raise a concern that's certainly been raised with me. This is not unlike people in Saskatchewan that don't have children in the public education system or the Catholic education system and they're paying taxes — they either have never had children or their children are now grown. And there are those people in some cases that will argue, why am I paying school taxes when I don't have children in school.

Then you have people whose children go to private Christian schools who pay taxes, school taxes, and they would argue the same, why am I paying a tuition fee at the private Christian

school and my taxes are going to the Catholic or public school division. And then of course you have the home school person who would say, why am I paying school taxes and a grant being given to the school division for my child when my child isn't in school?

What I would say is that over the many, many years in Saskatchewan's history, we have chosen to fund public education in two ways. We fund it through property taxes, and everybody pays property taxes; and we fund it through the provincial operating grant, the foundation operating grant.

I think what I would say is that I don't think that that principle of how we fund public education, the notion of school taxes on property is going to change. We raise a little over \$550 million a year for all school divisions across the province from property taxes; \$384 million comes from the foundation operating grant.

To take school taxes off of property, the government would have to find \$550 million in additional revenue, which is unlikely in the next several years.

I guess what I would say to the person that is concerned about paying property taxes and also home schooling, that this is the way that we as a public in the province of Saskatchewan have chosen to fund public education — a combination of taxes on property and the grant.

But I would say to that person as well is that over the years the province's share of educational funding has dropped and 60 per cent . . . well, we're hoping 59 per cent this year will be funded by property taxpayers and the rest, 41 per cent, funded by the foundation operating grant to provincial taxpayers. And what we need to do is reverse that.

And we plan on doing that over a several year period and the notion being that as we increase grants to school divisions, the expectation would be that the school divisions would reduce property taxes on properties located within those division boundaries.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess, Madam Minister, we all wonder where this is going to end up in the years ahead.

Last night when we were at the STF convention and the bear-pit session, as you well know, I noted a couple of comments by yourself and . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . What was it? Whatever it was. I think it was a bear-pit session.

There were comments from yourself, and also from members of other parties, that they all agreed with public funding of education. And there was a comment from one of the people on the floor that mentioned, well if they're, because of equalization if they're not going to be by the year 2000, if they're not going to be funded, if their funding goes down to zero, how then can we say that there is public funding of education? It seems contrary to the statement. You know, what is happening seems contrary to that statement.

So if government is proposing to move ahead back up to the 60 per cent share, and still at the same time saying that by the year 2000 some school divisions will have zero funding from the

government, that contradicts itself. So could you comment on that please?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well what I would say is that as the province moves its funding up, everybody is . . . funds are allocated to all divisions in most cases.

Now there are some divisions in the province that have a huge assessment, there's a huge value on their assessments within their school division boundaries, and they receive little grants from the province. And the reasons tend to be oil and gas. Or the reasons might be highly, highly assessed farmland. And the other reason might be very few students so they have a greater capacity to raise revenue locally relative to other parts of the province.

And it's not unlike — and I didn't make this point last night — it's not unlike Ottawa and the federal government where those provinces that have small populations and a small capacity to raise money, there's equalization payments to them. And those provinces that have a large population and a greater capacity to raise money, they don't get equalization.

And the whole idea is to have a similar kind of health system across the country, a similar kind of post-secondary education system across the country, similar kinds of services. And it's like the wealthier provinces assisting the lower, the poorer provinces.

And it's not unlike that in Saskatchewan where we don't want to penalize people when it comes to their public education depending upon where they live.

So I know it's hard for school divisions where they pay very . . . they get very little grant to see all of this revenue coming out of their area and they say well you know this isn't public . . . we don't get much grant; this isn't public education. But it's the whole idea of cooperation, sharing, and educating all of our students in the province not just some students in some areas.

Ms. Julé: — And just one more comment, Madam Minister, regarding the closure of so many schools in rural Saskatchewan.

There is the argument that the economics of it makes that feasible. However, I really want to pass the word on to you from many rural people that in fact the quality of education is declining not because the teachers are not trying to put forward a good form of teaching, but it is declining simply because young people driving on a school bus, or riding on a school bus for up to two hours sometimes. Even though there may be a short distance that they have to go to school, the school bus routes are long and those children are very, very tired when they get to school, and it's impossible for their minds to be alert and for them to work. So I do hope that there will be no more school closures and that rural Saskatchewan can strive. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I certainly share your concern about school closures in rural Saskatchewan. And if I look at the numbers of school closures in our province in the last 30 years, there have been schools closed in every year in this province. It looks like in 1998 we will have the smallest number of school closures in several years. And I would think that that may have something to do with the way we fund small schools in the

province.

We have tried to develop public policy where we ensure that K to 8 students are as close to home as possible, that they have a minimized bus trip as much as possible. The notion being that high school students can travel further and they can be on the bus a bit longer than smaller or younger students.

So I would say we have some difficulties. I think I said this last night — 52 rural school divisions in the province lost 1,200 rural students last year. You look at the September, 1997 figures. There are a variety of reasons of why that is happening, but there is no question that there are some major demographic changes that are occurring in rural Saskatchewan, and we're going to have to determine very quickly how we are going to deliver . . . continue to deliver a good quality public education as close to home as possible.

And I think it's becoming much more difficult to deliver a good quality public education to high school students when you have, you may have few high school students in a particular area with teachers trying to teach 12 or 13 subjects. And the demands of post-secondary institutions these days are such that you have to have people who know the subject area very well delivering those courses to students. And students are demanding that.

So I think that if we were to look at our magic ball well into the future in this province, I think what we will see is a real attempt by school divisions to have schools as close to home as possible for K to 8 students. And I think what we will see is the coming together of high schools in a division so that they can have enough numbers to deliver good quality public education to high school students.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Madam Minister, I want to welcome your officials here today and I take exception to what you just . . . the statement you made to the member for Humboldt. You said that funding small schools has slowed down the closure of small schools.

I'd go a step further. I think funding for small schools is what started them to close in the first place. I believe if you go back to 1991, if you add up all the funding cuts you've made to date, it's like \$360 million.

But when we go to health, because you didn't have the ability to pass it on to the local governments, you actually put more money into Health. When we go to social services, I believe you just about doubled the budget in Social Services — once again because you had no where to pass it on. But with education, because you can pass that down through the municipalities and they didn't run deficits, they were easy pickings.

So I guess what I'm saying is that your . . . I don't agree with your version of why small school closures are down a wee bit.

I'd like to . . . It's near and dear to my heart, Madam Minister because I have . . . last year I had five schools slated for closure — five schools. Now we're down to where Bredenbury is on hold. Tantalton, Spy Hill are still in the process, may be closed.

But let's go, Madam Minister, you say what happened. Let's

talk about MacNutt School. And the question, I guess my first question for you is: is the reason that these small school are closing strictly due to the population drop of the number of pupils?

(1645)

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well what happened last year, member — and I'll tell you what happened — what happened last year is we increased the small schools factor in this province for small rural schools to \$1,000 per student.

What else have we done as a government? We've introduced a rural technology factor for rural schools in this province.

I have to tell you that you are dead wrong when you say that the way we fund small schools in this province has led to school closures. Ask your colleague. Ask your colleague. Your colleague will tell you that there are people in this province that say that our small schools factor and the way we fund small schools has meant that they'd like to have closed the small schools but they can't.

So I would say to you, member, that you are dead wrong in terms of what our policy has done. Last year we increased the small school factor significantly, we introduced a rural technology factor, and I predict that this year we may well see the fewest number of school closures in this province in decades.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Madam Minister, I go back and I disagree with you strongly, but I ask a question here. Is the main reason that small schools are closing because of the number of pupils just . . . the number of pupils that we're losing out there — is that the main reason?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think that the main reason — and you have colleagues that have said this in the past — if you look at the numbers of schools that have closed in this province, just go down the list: 1971 — 9; '72 — 18; '73 — 20; '74 — 11; '83 — 19; '84 — 20; 1985 — 13; '86 — 14; 1990 — 20. And just go down the list. You will see that schools have closed every year in this province for decades.

Why do I think that's happening? I think it's happening — and I just said it to the member opposite: 52 rural school divisions, primarily rural school divisions, in this province lost 1,200 students last year.

The other point I would like to make that if you look at some of the reasons why people are . . . school divisions are losing numbers, for many years aboriginal people on reserves were in rural schools. And they are now building their own, their own schools on reserves. And that has had an impact upon rural enrolment.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Madam Minister, in the case of MacNutt who you so wisely pointed out to me a few minutes ago what happened in my area, well I'll tell you what's happening. MacNutt School is slated for closure along with like Theodore in my neighbouring constituency. The 10, 11, and 12's are being transferred to Yorkton.

I don't know if you realize or have taken the time to realize what happens to a small school or community when that school is closed. It's devastating to a small community. It's one of the last straws to break the camel's back out there. And I don't think you people opposite even pay attention to that. You've found somewhere to cut funding and you've done it. And you really don't care what happens to us out there.

You say that the number of pupils dropping is one of the main reasons for schools closing. Well I'd like to give you the example of MacNutt School. Next year they're going to have four to five more students than they had this year — or would have had, had your funding not helped close that school.

On top of that we have a new hog barn being built in that area which is going to bring families in there and very likely bring young families in that would have kids that would help make this school viable.

So, Madam Minister, when you preach to me and tell me across here I know absolutely nothing what I'm talking about, I think you'd better go out and talk to the people at places like MacNutt, the school board at MacNutt, a retired teacher out there who knows exactly how it works and is furious with your department. I think you'd better go out and tell them rather than me have to go home and try and explain what I don't even understand what you're doing in many cases out there, closing these schools. You go tell them. It would be easier. You give them that sermon and see if you come away without any scars.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I'm going to say to you, I'm going to indicate to you something that I indicated to the rural congress on education in the province. I grew up on a farm . . . I'm having a hard time speaking here but I just wanted to say this to you.

I grew up on a farm that before it became the farm that it is today, 10 farm families lived on that farm. Now my grandparents had 10 children. And if you go down the half-sections that are now part of our family farm, the people that lived on those homesteads had seven children, eight children, nine children. That farm now has three children. Farms have gotten bigger in this province and you know that. Farms have gotten bigger. We do not have the population that we once had.

Now I would say it . . . And the member says it's because of me. Well I just want to say this, I want to say this to that member. The small town that I went to school in, Springwater, had a post office; it had an elevator; it had a grocery store; it had a hotel. The last thing to go in that community was the school. Now the post office wasn't run by the Government of Saskatchewan. The elevator wasn't run by the Government of Saskatchewan. The credit union and the banks weren't run by the Government of Saskatchewan. They were either run by federal Crown corporations, grain handling companies, or local entrepreneurs.

Now I know that it's easy to blame the people on this bench. But I also know this, I also know this, that I see people in Saskatoon in the grocery stores buying groceries that come from rural Saskatchewan. I know this, I see people that could go and get a haircut in Biggar and they go to Saskatoon. I know

people that go and buy their cars elsewhere. And if we're going to look after our communities, then we have to think locally and shop locally to support our local communities because the wealth is created by us. And when we move that wealth that is created inside of that community elsewhere, that means jobs for our communities.

And that's why, sir, I do not shop at Alberta. I shop in Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan jobs. I get to go to the odd little ministers' conference, and I don't shop there because I shop at home because shopping at home means jobs and kids in our schools in Saskatoon, not elsewhere. And so what I would say that it becomes easy to blame the government, but we have to look at ourselves and what we do. That's what we have to look at.

Now the grain handling companies in this province are restructuring. The railroad companies in this province are restructuring. Demographics are changing in this province. And we can wring our hands and blame the benches here, but I have nothing to do with the changes to the Crow benefit, absolutely nothing.

You did. Before you became Tory, you were a Liberal. And so were you. You were a Liberal, you were a Liberal, and you were a Liberal. I know you were a Tory before you became a Liberal. But anyway, and now you're a Tory.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — But I would say to you, sir, that in MacNutt there are 37 students in a K to 9 . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. I'm having difficulty hearing the minister, but before I turn the microphone back to you, Minister, I want to ask all hon. members to address their remarks through the Chair. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Now I would also say this, that The Education Act in the province of Saskatchewan makes it very clear who is responsible for making those kinds of decisions about whether or not a school will stay open or close or be built. It is determined by the local school division.

In the case of you, sir, the Yorkdale School Division which is a democratically elected school board, and what the Yorkdale School Division did was they decided to close MacNutt, after going through all of the processes as determined by The Education Act. And they determined that they were going to phase out or end grades 10 to 12 in Theodore — 28 students.

Now if you look at the numbers for the Yorkdale School Division, I believe that in the Yorkdale School Division, they lost 58 students this year in that school division . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . In a number of schools, that's right. That's right, they lost 58 students and when you lose 58 students what you do, what you do is that you lose funds from the province so there is a transition period, but you lose funds.

And it's not unlike . . . in 1968 or 1967 when the Minister of Agriculture was a student in that school division, in Saltcoats, and the high school students were . . . the school, high school was closed and the students were sent into Yorkton. It's not

unlike my situation in the '60s when Springwater School was closed and we were sent to Landis and some of the students were sent to Biggar.

This has been going on during Ross Thatcher's time, during Tommy Douglas's time, during Woodrow Lloyd's time, during Grant Devine's time, and during the Blakeney years, and during the Premier's years — this has been going on for decades. And I would say that we have done more to support small rural schools in this province than any other government has ever done because we have a rural technology factor and we have increased the small schools factor to keep those kids as close to home as possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Madam Minister, I believe you have a very short memory and I think you just find that as an excuse to forget what really has gone on in the last six or seven years in this province. I believe in '91, when you came to power, did the government at that point not fund 60 per cent and the municipalities 40 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, but I believe they did. But we forget about that right away because that's not a convenient thing to talk about because now you fund the 40 and the municipalities the 60, and then you say something like the protocol agreement won't work.

I think you made the statement here a few minutes ago, Madam Minister, that the ultimate responsibility for education lies with the government. When the protocol agreement wouldn't work — in your words — you had to step in and just take over, remove the trustees, and push them out of the system, and then you decide what the teachers will get for an increase. At that point you took your responsibility. But the minute it comes to funding, you're right there to dump it on somebody else — that somebody else kept their house in order and you found that an easy target.

Madam Minister, you talked about families having 10 kids here a minute ago and that's right, they did. Families were much larger. But maybe we should be looking at why they aren't as large as they used to be. Did we ever once think on that side that maybe it's because . . . a lot to do with high taxes; both members of the family, both members of the family have to go out to work. When the wife and the husband both have to go out to work, guess what? It's probably one of the reasons we're down to one or two or maybe three in a family. That hurts rural Saskatchewan far more than the cities. You're draining kids out of rural Saskatchewan at a higher rate and trying to let on you're really helping them.

It all boils back, Madam Minister, to the things your government has done. You said that in 1991 you don't agree that it was 40/60. You forget to also . . . you said how much you do for the school system out there; you're forgetting to say right now you're also collecting 800 million more in taxes than when you came to power. How come you found a wee bit more money for Health and a wee bit more for Social Services, but when it comes to Education, when it comes to closing the MacNutt School, the Spy Hill School, Tantallon, Esterhazy East, Calder, Saltcoats, Bredenbury — that's one constituency. There's 57 more — how come when it comes to those people, all of a sudden you have no idea what I'm talking about?

Madam Minister, it's time you woke up and smelled the roses. Everything doesn't revolve around the city of Regina and Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well I just have to tell you that I'm sure the women of Saskatchewan will be pleased to know that the reason why they no longer have 10 kids is because they don't want . . . they are so highly taxed.

I mean I just have to tell you that that is one of the most offensive statements that I have ever heard from a colleague in my 12 years in this legislature — that women don't have 10 or 11 kids any more because they can't pay the high taxes.

It's ridiculous. Women don't have big families any more because they don't want to have big families any more. That's why they don't want to do it.

Now the member said that when we came to government, that when we came to government in 1991, that the province funded 60 per cent of the cost of education. And that's simply not true. In 1991 when we came to government, the province funded . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Order. Order. I can't . . . The Chair is having a terrible time hearing the minister's response. I would ask the House to come to order and let the minister respond, please.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I think I heard the member say that when our government came to office in 1991 that the province, the previous administration, funded about 60 per cent of the cost of education. I think you said that.

The point that I want to make is that no government has ever funded 60 per cent of the cost of education. The closest that we have come to funding 60 per cent of the cost of education was in 1975-76, 56.85 per cent under Allan Blakeney, the former NDP premier of the province.

And what we saw during the Conservative . . .

The Chair: — Order, order.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

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