

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 many people in Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure that the required level of service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District and the priorities of its board be adjusted accordingly.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the signatures to this come from many communities in north-central Saskatchewan, communities like Melfort, Nipawin, Tisdale, Kinistino, Gronlid, St. Brieux, Star City. I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to put a moratorium on the closure of the Plains Health Centre until they conduct a comprehensive review into the health crisis we are currently experiencing.

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

These petitions come from the Carievale and Carnduff areas in the south-east, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions in regards to the Plains health care centre, reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to put an immediate halt to all plans of closure of the Plains Health Centre.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitions I'm presenting today are signed by individuals from Prince Albert, Lebret, Fort Qu'Appelle, Carievale, Gainsborough, Carnduff, Redvers, certainly across the province. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take

immediate action to ensure the required level of service in radiology is maintained in North Central Health District, and the priorities of its board be adjusted accordingly.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The communities involved, Mr. Speaker, are Melfort, St. Benedict, Pleasantdale, Tisdale, many corners of the province. I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present a petition, and these are signed from people from Parkside, Shellbrook, Vonda, Edam, and basically from communities all over Saskatchewan, and the intent of the petition is to request the cancellation of the severance payments to Jack Messer. I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens from all through the north-east — Melfort, Kinistino, Star City, Tisdale, Nipawin, Pleasantdale, and even Regina, Mr. Speaker — concerned about adequate funding for radiology service in Melfort. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action to ensure that the required level of service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District and the priorities of its board be adjusted accordingly.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today from the people in rural Saskatchewan regarding the Carrot River Hospital asking the government to cause . . . to take immediate action to ensure the survival of their hospital. The people who have signed this petition are from Arborfield and Carrot River.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned about inaction on the part of this government with respect to completing the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in this province. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon the provincial and federal governments to meet immediately and conclude a cost-sharing agreement on the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan so that twinning of the remaining portions of the Trans-Canada Highway in Saskatchewan can be begin at the very earliest possible date.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Those who've signed these petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from all across this province. I so present.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present petitions on behalf of northern Saskatchewan people, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to take immediate action to allow the North to join the rest of Saskatchewan.

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

And the people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Canoe Lake, Saskatchewan. They're from Uranium City, Saskatchewan; from Camsell city, Saskatchewan and from all throughout the land, Mr. Speaker. And I so present.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise again today on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan to present a petition. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to: (1) change the law to allow Saskatchewan citizens to erect a cross if they so choose where their loved one was killed; and (2) establish safety guidelines to ensure that is done properly.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by people right across Saskatchewan and I'll just quickly go through a few just to show the expanse of support that this petition has from the people of Saskatchewan.

Signatures on this petition are from the communities of Mankota and Glentworth. Mr. Speaker, they're from the city of Regina. They're from the city of Moose Jaw, from Rockglen, from Fir Mountain. They're from Milestone. They're from Weyburn. They're from Coleville, from Prince Albert, from Christopher Lake. They're from Togo, Mr. Speaker. They're from Strasbourg.

Mr. Speaker, they are from Strongfield. They are from Viceroy. Mr. Speaker, they're from Riverhurst. They're from Briercrest. They're from Elbow. They're from Saskatoon. They're from Yellow Grass.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's a good indication of the support that this petition has and I so present.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise on behalf of concerned citizens from right across the province with respect to the closure of 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 these petitions, Mr. Speaker, are from the great communities of Ituna, Fenwood, Homefield, Goodeve, Willowbrook, Hubbard, and Wadena.

I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I rise with petitions on the dangerous practice of night hunting. And your petitioners

requesting that night hunting be banned come from Moose Jaw, Assiniboia, Vibank, Pilot Butte, Regina, Davin, Melville, Stockholm, Killaly, and Bengough.

I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring forward petitions in the people's efforts to stop the closure of the Plains hospital here in Regina. 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.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from Assiniboia, Limerick, Rockglen, Lisieux, Ponteix, Moose Jaw, Coronach, Big Beaver, Lipton, Fort Qu'Appelle, Indian Head, Lemberg, Melville, Balcarres, more from Ituna, several from Regina, Kelliher, and several from the constituency of Regina Albert South. I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to present petitions and honourably so, on behalf of those who are concerned with and seeking justice for men and women who have lost spouses in work-related accidents. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended for the disenfranchised widows and widowers of Saskatchewan, whereby their pensions are reinstated and their revoked pensions reimbursed to them retroactively and with interest, as requested by the statement of entitlement presented to the Workers' Compensation Board on October 27, 1997.

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

The people who have signed these petitions today, Mr. Speaker, are mostly from Regina, from Cupar, and Regina again. Thank you.

Mr. Goohsen: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present the petitions as usual and I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to reach 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 the time frame for the ultimate completion of the project with or without federal assistance.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These all come, Mr. Speaker, from Fox Valley, Piapot, Maple Creek, Lancer, Hazlet, Cabri, Shackleton, Abbey, Leader, Prelate, Lancer, Fox Valley, Golden Prairie, Mendham, Liebenthal, Prelate, Gull Lake, Webb, Tompkins, Eastend, Consul, Frontier, Robsart, Vidora, Shaunavon, Swift Current,

Medicine Hat, Burstall, and Richmond, along with several hundred thousand other names from all across the land. And I'm happy to present them today, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province humbly praying: for the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway; for the government to work with aboriginal Metis leaders in an effort to end the practice of night hunting; for the ban on the practice of night hunting; praying to cancel any severance payments to Jack Messer and to call an independent public inquiry surrounding the Channel Lake fiasco; praying to have The Workers' Compensation Board Act amended to reinstate pensions for disenfranchised widows and widowers; praying to relocate Highway 40 at the entrance of North Battleford; praying for action to allow Steve and Kimberley Walchuk to remain in the custody of their maternal grandparents; praying for action to allow the North to join the rest of Saskatchewan; and finally praying for the government to take immediate action to ensure that service in radiology is maintained in the North Central Health District.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT, AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to present the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations which is as follows:

Your committee recommends that upon completion of the committee's investigation into the acquisition, management, and sale of Channel Lake Petroleum Ltd. by SaskPower and the payments to Mr. John R. Messer when he ceased to serve as president of SaskPower, the Assembly do authorize the committee to table its report thereon intersessionally by submitting the same report to the Clerk of the Assembly, whereupon such report shall be deemed to be tabled.

And further, that upon receipt of the report of the committee, the Clerk of the Assembly shall: a) cause a copy of the report to be delivered to all members of the Legislative Assembly; b) distribute the report publicly as directed by the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations; and c) make the report available for public inspection during normal business hours in the Office of the Clerk.

Mr. Speaker, I do now move, seconded by the member for Regina Coronation Park, that:

The seventh report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was being deferential, as always, to my other colleagues, but it is my pleasure to introduce to you today another group visiting us from Massey School. There was a group here yesterday. I am very pleased to recognize in your gallery today a group of grade 5 students from Massey, and they're here to observe the proceedings, and I'll have a chance to meet with them afterwards. So if you would join with me in welcoming them, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, sitting in the east gallery here this afternoon, is a group of grade 8 students — 22 of them if my count serves me well — from the Herbert Elementary School. Sitting with their teacher, Darryl Walls; chaperon Jim Wright or Jim White, I'm sorry; and the bus driver Brenda Schulz.

So I'd like everyone to join with me this afternoon in welcoming them here to the legislature and I hope that you enjoy your tour.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, Rose Rothenburg who has worked in my constituency office in Prince Albert since 1986 when I was elected. Along with her is her son, Tyler, and I want to welcome them both to Regina and to the legislature and I hope they enjoy their stay down here.

Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Forest Fires in the North

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The forest fire situation has taken a turn for the worst. Ile-a-la-Crosse had its road closed and heavy smoke hangs over the community. I'm going home tomorrow to review the situation and help in any way I can.

What distresses me, Mr. Speaker, is the lack of understanding from the member from Cannington and his party have about forest fires. Yesterday he suggested ways to get water to a fire area, and I quote from *Hansard*:

... it was in a movie sometime I saw where helicopters were actually dumping the water into the fire-fighting equipment from the air.

... if your helicopters are so good they can drop a marker within a few yards of the fire, surely they could dump a couple hundred gallons of water in the back of a vehicle

...

Then in regard to the safety of fire fighters, he said:

... if they are busy fighting a fire they wouldn't mind getting a little water on them once in a while; it would probably be ... refreshing.

Mr. Speaker, the force of the water alone would be enough to crush vehicles and kill people. He was suggesting fire-fighting costs are a waste of tax dollars and our fire-fighters don't know how to do their jobs.

People and communities are threatened by fires, properties will burn, and the forestry industry is affected. These matters are serious and need support from all parties. This is not *Backdraft*; this is real life.

Our province was burned once by his Tory Party and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that people of the North are going to pour cold water on their future hopes as well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Twinning of Trans-Canada Highway Begins

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to inform the legislature, and especially the people of south-west Saskatchewan, that our government today announced the awarding of two contracts that signal the start of twinning work on the Trans-Canada Highway west of Gull Lake.

Cee Gee Earth Moving Ltd. and Wappel Construction Company Ltd. have each been awarded 1.4 million contracts for grading work on a total of 27 kilometres of new highway just west of Gull Lake.

Mr. Speaker, the total value of both projects is estimated at 4 million, including materials and resources. It is expected that the two grading projects will be completed by the end of October this fall.

The paving contract to complete this 27-kilometre project is expected to be tendered this winter and paving work should be completed by the fall of 1999. Mr. Speaker, this twinning work is being done totally at provincial expense. There is no federal money in this project.

And that is a shame, Mr. Speaker, because if we had a meaningful cost-shared national highway program from the federal government we could complete our twinning program in 7 or 8 years rather than the 15 years we have committed to.

As a member from south-west Saskatchewan I know I speak for everybody in the area when I say this project will benefit the people of Saskatchewan — from the tourist to the trucker and all other motorists.

With these twinning contracts and with the commitment to spend 2.5 billion over the next 10 years to improve our roads and highways, I am pleased to offer my congratulations to the government and to the Minister of Highways and Transportation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Roads

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, this morning I watched the BBS (Baton Broadcasting System) program, the Vicki Gabereau show. Today famous Canadian singer John McDermott was a special guest. John McDermott, as you know, tours all over the country from coast to coast and knows a lot about travel throughout our country as a result.

Well Mr. McDermott was noticeably limping on the show and when host Vicki Gabereau asked him what caused the problem, he unfortunately related the condition back to our province of Saskatchewan. Now the Health minister might worry that this is another health horror story but he can rest at ease here; it isn't. It's a highway horror story.

On nationwide TV, Mr. McDermott said:

I was just outside of Regina when I fell in what people in Saskatchewan would call a pothole but what the rest of us would call a canyon.

This is just another reminder to the whole country of just how bad our roads are. Yes, sadly our roads are the laughing stock of this country.

When a nurse spoke up against the government, you tried to silence her with harsh criticism. When a doctor spoke up against the government, you tried to silence him with an investigation into his professional background. Now that a musician has the nerve to criticize this NDP (New Democratic Party) government, I wonder if the minister responsible for culture will now try to silence one of our country's finest singers. This is becoming an all-too-familiar tune, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Open House at Pacific Regeneration Technologies

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pacific Regeneration Technologies (PRT) is holding an open house at the Prince Albert forest nursery on June 17. By working with the Minister of Environment, officials from SERM, and forest companies, PRT have established a major nursery for reforestation in central Canada.

Since 1997, 2.5 million square feet of greenhouses have been constructed. The entire greenhouse complex is filled to capacity with 8 million seedlings. This has created significant employment in the Prince Albert area and will continue to do so.

Mr. Speaker, PRT has plans to expand in the future. This is good news for Prince Albert and good news for Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Party Lines

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that members of the Saskatchewan Party expected me to get up sooner or later and ridicule them for the sheer coincidence of the fact that when

people try to reach the Conservative Party, they actually get the Saskatchewan Party. And when they look at a phone book, the Tories and the Saskatchewan Party have the same address.

I know those Sask Party members probably thought I was going to get up and bring attention to that pure coincidence. But, Mr. Speaker, I decided it was best I didn't bring attention to the pure coincidence of the Tory and Sask Party sharing the same phone numbers and addresses.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Bengough Health Centre Anniversary Fair

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I mentioned the partnership between the South Central Health District and the Deep . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order! Order, order. I remind all hon. members that the members' statements are not debatable. Order, order, order. And I will ask for the cooperation of all hon. members to permit the members who are making statements to be heard. And it has been a bit restless here today and I'll ask for the cooperation of the House to allow the hon. member for Weyburn-Big Muddy to be heard.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I mentioned the partnership between the South Central Health District and the Deep South Personal Care Home in Pangman as a fine example of community-based health care.

The integrated Bengough Health Centre in my constituency has also been providing excellent health care and services. The centre offers assessment, observation beds, convalescent, long-term care, and recently added palliative care. As well, the doctor's office is in the centre.

The long-term care services have been offered for 30 years in this community. On June 11, this Thursday, there will be a health fair, open house, and barbecue to celebrate this 30th anniversary of long-term care.

For a small town, Mr. Speaker, Bengough is planning a big day. There are booths where you can have your blood pressure taken or learn about the expanded emergency services offered in Bengough and other communities. You can learn about the work of the Alzheimer society or the government residential rehabilitation assistance program. The RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) will be talking about child safety and the rural health counselling group will be talking about rural initiatives in health care.

And there is music and there is food.

Also, Mr. Speaker, two special people will be honoured. Kay Kleven is the only original staff person still with the centre, working there for the entire 30 years. And Mrs. Lena Vienneau is the last original resident.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Bengough have a great deal to celebrate and I look forward to joining them on Thursday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Integrated School-Linked Services

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're aware of the importance of the quality of education for our young people. As part of the child action plan, a program of integrated school-link services has been established. Integrated school-linked services involves creating collaborative culture among service providers and encouraging new approaches to service delivery that are comprehensive and integrated.

Integrating services and coordinating the work of other agencies has been identified internationally as one of the most promising comprehensive solutions for addressing the needs of children in families at risk.

Nutana Collegiate in Saskatoon is a small inner-city academic high school with a student population of about 600 students from grades 9 to 12. Nutana attracts a large number of at risk youth from all areas of the city and also serves students from the Whitecap Dakota Sioux first nations.

Sask Education, Social Services, Health, Justice, Saskatoon Action Circle on Youth Sexuality, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, Wanuskewin, Saskatoon District Health, U of S (University of Saskatchewan) College of Nursing, and the Saskatoon Friends of Students and Kids have worked together to find innovative school programs with the aim of providing leadership and training enabling students to become partners in the very important process of giving at risk young people an opportunity of leading fulfilling, productive lives.

These kinds of initiatives give at risk youth population a chance to improve the quality of their lives. As such they are an integrated part of our government's commitment to young people of our province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Column Proposed

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, every Monday all members eagerly await their Leader-Star paper of choice and turn immediately to the "In The Corridor" or "Not in *Hansard*" column. In a world of uncertainty and mutability the column reassures us by its consistency. It is consistently unattributed, consistently half-baked, and consistently half-accurate.

But when we have read the last fictional scrap of "In The Corridor" we know, as poet Robert Browning said, "God's in his heaven — All's right with the world," or as Murray Mandryk would say, that hypocrite Browning.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I propose that we flatter our refugees from correspondence J school by initiating our own column on them beginning next session, and that all members be expected to contribute as long as no names are used. And that our irregular newsletter be called *Inside the Buzzard's Nest*.

As with our model, there will be few but stringent rules, like overheard half sentences in the halls or cafeteria are simply lines waiting to be completed by a leap of faith; like incidents

that are imagined or dreamed assumed credibility of revelation; like no aspect of a reporter's life is too small. On second thought, all aspects of a reporter's life are too small.

Finally *In the Buzzard's Nest* will have no editor because that would suggest forethought; no proofreading, because that would suggest sober second thought; and no relevance because that would suggest thought. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Pasture Land Lease Rates

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Minister, this morning we learned of your plan for dealing with the terrible drought conditions in pasture lands in this province. In a letter to leaseholders you outlined your solution is to gouge farmers and ranchers even more.

Mr. Minister, your department is sending out letters raising its pasture land leases by 25 per cent. Most of these pastures are already in terrible shape. There's hardly a blade of grass on them. Cattle ranchers and farmers are in desperate shape just to find enough feed for their cattle, and what is your government doing to help them? Jacking up lease rates by 25 per cent. This is a typical NDP response. The farmers and ranchers of this province are down because of drought, so you give them a good kick.

Mr. Minister, you should be dropping lease rates at a time like this. Why are you gouging farmers and ranchers who are already having enough problems finding feed for their cattle.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, the member knows how the rates are set. The rates are set through a formula every year that includes the price of cattle. Now if you're in a situation where the prices were up last year, of course the formula dictates the leases are going to go up this year. We held it to 25 per cent; it could have gone up way more than that — way more than that.

And so . . . but because of the conditions . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, the parties opposite say, you know, get government out of your life and then . . . But now they say, but make government dictators in your life. And we're not doing that.

What we're doing is trying to be as helpful as possible in terms of all the programs we have with pastures in terms of water, water pumping. I've written the federal government. We've got close monitoring of our community pastures and these rates . . . the member knows it is very opportune political timing for him to say that. He knows how the rates are set.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, on behalf of the farmers and ranchers, thank you oh Grand Exalted One for all of the help; 25 per cent rate increases in pasture lands and the farmers are

supposed to thank you for that. That's what your plan is, is to attack farmers once again. What have you been doing for the last three months of this session, Mr. Minister? Have you been sleepwalking the entire time that the session has been going on.

Farmers and ranchers are telling you all over this province that pasture lands and crop land is in serious condition and you get up and say that you're going to stop the increase but it's only going to be a little bit less — 25 per cent, we're only going to jack them up by — you have no plan to deal with this.

Mr. Minister, immediately after question period we'll be calling for an emergency motion on agriculture, calling on you and the federal government to immediately start developing a contingency plan to deal with the growing threat of a poor crop and a trade war.

Mr. Minister, will you wake up, help the farmers of Saskatchewan, the ranchers of Saskatchewan, and agree to the debate this afternoon?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, when the motion is put forward we'll decide at that time whether we agree to it or not. But I'm not disagreeing totally with this member.

Because of the process in which the rates for leases are set, I didn't think were totally fair. So what I'm doing, having the department do is review this rate-setting system. Because the problem becomes . . . if a year is such that the cattle price was high the year before, then we get a condition like we have now with drought, the lease rates go up and the problem is there's no pasture.

But the opposite could also be true, where you might have low cattle prices one year and then you could have lots of grass and your rates would actually go down in a better situation.

So the process here is not quite right, so I've asked — I appreciate his concern — I've asked my department to do a review in this. We will be trying to formulate a new rate-setting mechanism that allows farmers to budget more accurately when they are putting their cows in pasture.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, in the meantime the lease payments are still due. For the past few weeks you've been sending out notices to farmers and ranchers. This gentleman's is for \$2,048 increase, this gentleman is \$514 increase, \$249 increase, and they go on and on and on. That's the kind of help that you're offering to the farmers and ranchers of this province.

You don't seem to have any plan other than to gouge them even further than you already are. You don't seem to be concerned about it at all. Jacking up leased lands at this time is immoral. Drought conditions, no grass, no feed, and you jack up the rates.

The farmers I spoke with this morning were absolutely livid. They tell me they don't even have cattle on some of these leases because there isn't a blade of grass on them. The pastures are as barren as your promises to help them, Mr. Minister.

Why, Mr. Minister, are you launching into another attack on Saskatchewan farm families? How can you possibly jack up land lease rates when farmers and ranchers are already facing desperate conditions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I've just outlined to the member what we're doing because I didn't think the process was quite right. This is set by formula and the problem, the member knows, like that . . . the old Conservative attitude is that you know, just do what seems to be convenient at the time.

We do have a plan. We do have a plan to try to make this . . . the lease rate setting more efficient. If the farmers don't have . . . There's a crow in the House, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a situation where we're not gouging farmers. There's a problem with the land; if the cattle aren't in the pasture, of course they won't be paid. These rates are payable in October, Mr. Speaker. So if the cattle don't utilize land for the right period of time, there won't be a full charge.

The fact of the matter is this is the process we have to date. We're going to try and improve that process and we'll be monitoring the situation. Trust me — I tell the member we'll be monitoring very closely.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Out-Migration

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. Madam Minister, 1997 was a fairly good year for the Saskatchewan economy with no thanks to the NDP government. We can credit the low interest rates, we can give thanks for strong potash, uranium, grain, and oil prices, and we can even thank low inflation. And we can thank the strong international markets.

But no thanks, Madam Minister, to the NDP and your sky-high tax burden, the highest tax burden in all of Canada. No thanks to the NDP's unwavering commitment to gouging people with increases in their power bills, in telephone rates, their gas bills, and their insurance premiums.

Madam Minister, the sad truth is that despite a decent year for the economy, last year Saskatchewan posted a net out-migration of 1,765 people. Madam Minister, if things are so great — and you keep telling us they are — why are people still moving out of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, first of all, thank you for the question and the opportunity to talk about the economy. The member is right: 1997 was a great year for Saskatchewan — more people working than ever before in our history, almost all of the jobs — full-time jobs — the vast majority going to young people.

And I would say as well to the member opposite the population of Saskatchewan is increasing; it's increased by about 18,000.

More people have health care cards now than in the past.

And I would say to the member opposite, probably the most important indicator is what's happening with our youth. Recently, Saskatchewan was chosen as the province where the opportunities for young people are the best of any place in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — So what I say to the member opposite is, we have record employment, record jobs, record opportunities for young people, and we will continue to work with the people of Saskatchewan to make the future even better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the reason why we have an increase is because there was 4,565 more births than deaths last year. It doesn't matter how much NDP rhetoric you can come up with. The fact is the NDP has inflicted the highest taxes in Canada on the people of Saskatchewan.

The fact is that last year Saskatchewan suffered a net out-migration of 1,765 people. The fact is the NDP's massive tax burden is chasing people out of this province. People are casting judgement on the NDP with their feet. They're just leaving the province. And there's one simple reason, Madam Minister — high taxes. Saskatchewan people pay the highest taxes in the entire country.

Madam Minister, do you know how a young engineering graduate can get an immediate \$2,000 pay increase with no change in salary? Move to Alberta.

Madam Minister, it's time to stop the brain drain. Madam Minister, what is your plan for digging out from under the NDP's mountain of taxes and keeping our young people in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I hate to say that the members opposite are a little slow on the learning side, but we're into day 60-something and they've suddenly discovered taxes in the economy — wonderful.

What I would say to the member opposite is what her basic premiss is, is absolutely false. We do not have the highest taxes in Canada. In fact if you looked at it, we're at about the middle of the pack — we're about the middle of the pack.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now hon. members will appreciate the fact the minister is not located that far from the Chair, and the Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the answer being provided. Order.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — And what I would say to the member opposite . . . on the tax side is we made a commitment to the people of Saskatchewan that first we would clean up the fiscal mess, which we did. The minute we could afford major tax reduction we would do it, and we did — in 1997, a

non-election year, not close to an election, a dramatic reduction in the sales tax.

We continued with income tax cuts this year. We have targeted tax cuts to business sectors where there has been growth and jobs.

So I say to the member opposite, her basic premiss is false. This province is in good shape. Our economy is booming, there are more jobs, our taxes are coming down, and our fiscal house is in order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Payment of SGI Death Benefit

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance). Mr. Minister, last year Karen Rodenbush of Oxbow was killed in a tragic car accident. Her family is supposed to be entitled to a \$15,000 death benefit from SGI. That's hardly compensation for the loss of a life, but that's all that's paid under your no-fault insurance.

However, Karen's husband Ron was told that the family would receive no benefit whatsoever from SGI because they were receiving a small benefit from Workers' Compensation.

Mr. Minister, how is that fair? Karen Rodenbush paid the premiums into both programs, her family should be entitled to the benefits from both programs.

Mr. Minister, why is your no-fault insurance program so unfair? Why is it using Workers' Compensation as an excuse to weasel out of providing the benefits to Karen's family and denying her SGI benefits?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the issues the member raises is important and a serious issue. It deals with a specific case. I'll take notice of the issue and report back to him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Waiting-lists for Cancer Patients

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last month the Liberal opposition tabled a report from the Saskatoon Health District which confirms that cancer victims are forced to wait an average of 20 days for surgery.

On two occasions in the past week, we have raised a specific case involving Alick Paterson who was diagnosed with cancer on May 15 and was told he would have to wait until June 11 to see an oncologist. However, Mr. Paterson could not wait. His pain became so severe he was admitted to Royal University Hospital last week.

My question is to the Minister of Health. Why is it that care is provided only when the pain of a cancer victim becomes so severe that he must be admitted through emergency?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, first I want to say to the member opposite that we have always said in Saskatchewan we have one of the best cancer services in the country. And I want to say to the member opposite that that has again been reinforced by the report that just came out of *Maclean's* . . . just a couple of days ago. And I want to read to the member opposite what they said. They said, Saskatchewan has fewer cancer deaths — 171.6 per 100,000 — than the national average. And they also go on to say that . . . 184 fewer heart disease deaths which is 173.7 per cent of 100,000, which is less than the national average.

And I say to the member opposite that what he needs to start to do in this province is he needs to start talking about all of the good things that are happening in health care. Because when you look at what *Maclean's* reported and then you look at what the *Leader-Post* and the media has reported in this province — I have in front of me here 43 front page and third page articles that talk about how health care in this province is in a crisis, which you dramatize and the press leak.

And I say to you, Mr. Member, when you read the *Maclean's* article which is a leading-edge piece of information that Canadians have across the country, where does our story of Canadian . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the minister should stop looking at national averages, show some leadership, and deal with the hundreds of people that come before this legislature to get their health care needs met.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition has received two letters in recent days about this issue, one from the director from the department of radiation oncology. In this correspondent, Dr. Mohamed writes, and I quote:

. . . the increasing workload and the shortage of oncologists makes it impossible for us to provide the service as rapidly as we would like.

Waiting, for a cancer patient, is most distressful but under the present circumstances it is a reality.

Mr. Minister, cancer victims and their families don't find this situation acceptable, cancer specialists don't find this situation acceptable, so why do you?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite that we don't find this acceptable and we've done some things to enrich, in this province, the health care system and to ensure that we can enhance cancer treatment and cancer service.

Just recently, Mr. Speaker, we signed an agreement with the physicians in this province that have said to us that they will help us recruit additional specialists. And they're helping us today recruit oncologists that will work in cancer clinics in both of our two centres in the province.

We've just announced an additional 600,000 new dollars that will go to the cancer clinic which will help enrich the number of people who are working within the system. And I say to the

member opposite that if he were to continue to look at or should look at the report that *Maclean's* has highlighted, which I say to you has the facts about what's happening in health care across the nation. And we talk about the number of enrichments that we're making today in both physicians, in nurses, the number of bed reductions which is less than anywhere in the country.

And you've been going around and espousing on a regular basis the number of bed reductions and they've been appearing on the front page of the newspapers in this province. And what happens when we get a good story, when we get the facts about Saskatchewan? They appear on the eighth page of our newspapers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, perhaps what the Minister of Health should be doing . . . Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for bringing them under control.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps instead of quoting from some magazine what they would like to quote from and read from will be a couple of letters sent from doctors outlining this situation. I'd send this over to the Premier and to the Health minister now please.

Mr. Speaker, the executive director of the Saskatoon cancer clinic also has issued a letter, one of these, noting what he calls a major problem at the Saskatoon Cancer Centre. David White explains that staff are trying to cope, they're trying to prioritize cases, and apologizes for the fact that cancer patients are forced to wait.

He explains, and I quote, "Waiting, for a cancer patient, is never acceptable, but under the present circumstances in Saskatchewan, it's a reality."

Mr. Minister, this situation is going from bad to worse. One of six oncologists on the staff recently retired, and another is preparing to retire at the end of this month. As a result, the waiting period for treatment threatens to get even longer.

Cancer victims and their families are looking for . . .

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

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, what immediate steps are you going to take to find a solution to this crisis? And what are you doing to attract oncologists to this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I believe that I've answered that question to the member but I'll attempt one more time to try to do that.

I want to say to the member opposite that we understand as he understands that in this province any family or individual who suffers from cancer is a tragedy, Mr. Speaker. It's a tragedy.

And what we do in this province is we provide the best services — as reported by many national researchers of cancer treatment — in this province at the two centres of Saskatoon and Regina. Some of the best services in the country, I say to the member.

Say to the member opposite when he asks me what we're doing — we've just added, Mr. Speaker, just added \$600,000 to help with the nursing professions in the two cancer clinics in Saskatoon and Regina.

We're working very closely with the Saskatchewan Medical Association and the district health board to recruit more oncologists for the sites of Saskatoon and here in Regina. That's an undertaking that the department has made, it's an undertaking that SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) has given, and it's an undertaking that the district health board has given because we know the kinds of issues that cancer patients across this province are facing. And we're working to ensure that we can fix that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Storage of Blood from Umbilical Cords

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, during pregnancy the umbilical cord serves as a lifeline between mother and child. But medical research has found that blood contained in the umbilical cord provides a potentially life-saving material and this can be used later in a child's life to treat a variety of life-threatening diseases such as leukemia, other forms of cancer, and genetic disorders.

Unfortunately the only time that cord blood can be collected is immediately after the birth of a child, and then it has to be stored.

My question is to the Minister of Health: Mr. Minister, what are you doing to ensure that expectant parents are aware that this process exists?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that this is a very, very important question that he asks because, as our health system evolves into the future, we know that the importance of storage of our own blood . . . is extremely important for future treatment.

And the member identifies correctly that in the treatment particularly of leukemia, the umbilical cord blood is very, very rich in a very specialised cell configuration. And that configuration of course is used today in the future for the treatment of leukemia.

And today obstetricians across the country are made aware of that process. The education process may not be as broad as we'd like it to be. We're attempting to work with the college of physicians and surgeons to ensure that that medical information gets revealed across the country and certainly to the people within our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Multiple Sclerosis Treatments

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health. I have tried my very best to discuss serious health issues with the minister behind closed doors, and I've done so because I believe that it is in the interest of patients to protect their anonymity and respect their confidentiality. I've also tried to point out approaches to addressing the issue of the treatment for multiple sclerosis based on reason and not emotion.

Now the minister has had ample time to review how well he thinks his government-appointed panel is doing with its Solomon-like power in determining who does and does not get approval for different drugs for MS (multiple sclerosis). And I wish for him today to please tell this Assembly, Mr. Minister, how fair and just your government's method of approval is.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — First, Mr. Speaker, I want to extend my appreciation to the member opposite in the manner in which we've been able to deal with a number of very serious concerns that she's had about individual patients and clients that she's been working with and constituents across the province.

I think that's the appropriate process in the way in which we deal with very difficult situations. And I want to thank the member for us being able to deal with those behind closed doors, unlike what have been other situations in this House during this past session that I've had to deal with. I appreciate that, Madam Member.

I want to say to the Madam Member that the approach that we're using today in the determination of who's eligible for the two drugs that we have under the plan, that criteria has been designed by other provinces of which we've simply adopted. The criteria is relatively simplistic in its fashion and clearly the administration of that criteria is now done by a panel that has been selected — from experts or professionals across the province — and they're the ones that are making the determinations. We have an appeal process beyond that that they use, and from time to time that's been the case.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, I want us to take a moment and just have us examine what is really transpiring. MS patients are being denied treatment by a panel that does not even see the individual.

And as a panel, as a group, they have no licence to practise medicine. Their decisions have been deemed, and I quote, "too arbitrary and utterly ridiculous" by neurologists who have posed the following questions.

Since a major criterion for approval is being able to walk 100 metres unassisted, what if the patient can only walk 99 metres? And will you admit, Mr. Minister, that such requirements are motivated only by monetary costs?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that a number of comments that she's made are not accurate. First and foremost there are three people who sit on the committee today, and two of them, Mr. Speaker, are

in fact people who are practising medicine today.

One is a neurologist and the other is a general practitioner, both practising medicine in Saskatoon, they're both on the committee, along with a pharmacist and Dr. Hader, who of course is a physician as well, and is a renowned individual who works with MS clients across our province for years and years.

I want to say to the member opposite that the criteria that we're using today is criteria that we've adopted that's being used in other provinces that in fact have ensured both Betaseron . . . in this province both Betaseron and Copaxone. So I say to the member opposite that the criteria that we're using today is ones that we haven't developed but are using in comparison and in continuity with what's happening across the country.

And if in fact an individual is rejected by the panel and isn't satisfied with that review that the doctor has done on their behalf, they will be referred to another individual who will either be a neurologist or a family practitioner who will do a further assessment and provide a determination of information to the panel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce to members of the Assembly some special guests in your gallery. These are the representatives for "Let's Root for Canada" Youth Ambassador program. This is the second year that the Tree Canada Foundation is doing this tour across country.

This program has gained international recognition and will be adopted by Ireland in 1999. And we are very pleased to have four representatives from Ireland on our Canadian tour this year and perhaps those four individuals could stand up. Thank you very much for joining us here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Scott: — The youth ambassador program has 33 young ambassadors with representatives from each province and territory. Two of these ambassadors are from Saskatchewan. We have Leah Laxdal from Prince Albert and Allison Sanborn from Drinkwater. We're also very pleased to have Alan Appleby and Murray Little acting as hosts and coordinators for the Saskatchewan leg of the tour with us today as well.

TREEmendous is a non-profit organization that was started jointly by the Saskatchewan Forestry Association and SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management). When this organization started, the objective was to plant one million trees. Today we celebrated this milestone at Government House with His Honour Lieutenant Governor Jack Wiebe.

Please join me in thanking SaskPower Shand Greenhouse for supplying over 1 million seedlings. And we also congratulate Leah and Allison and all of the ambassadors from all across Canada for their contributions to our environment, our country, and our future. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before orders of the day I rise pursuant to rule 46 to ask leave of the House to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity.

The Speaker: — The hon. member from Kindersley requests to introduce a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46. I'll ask the hon. member from Kindersley to very, very briefly outline why he feels this is a matter of urgent and pressing necessity justifying setting aside the normal business of the House and to advise the House briefly of the motion he wishes to introduce.

(1430)

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Deteriorating Agricultural Conditions in Saskatchewan

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Conditions in agriculture across this province continue to deteriorate. Pasture lands are dried out, crop land is dried out in many areas, crops have been frozen, re-seeding is taking place across the province. Because of the very serious conditions, there is an immediate need to take action. We would want to then move the following motion, Mr. Speaker:

That this Assembly urge the federal government to assume its responsibility for international trade and immediately develop a contingency plan to protect Canadian farmers from falling grain prices in the event of an international grain war. And that this Assembly urge governments to do everything possible under the crop insurance program and other available programs to address the deteriorating crop conditions in Saskatchewan caused by poor moisture conditions and frost.

The Speaker: — Hon. members have heard the description of the member from Kindersley as to why he would like to see the House set aside its normal business and the nature of the motion he wishes to introduce. Leave is required. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across the province today, we are seeing a very, very serious situation develop in agriculture, Mr. Speaker. The crop conditions are deteriorating almost on a daily basis. Rains haven't come to many areas of the province of Saskatchewan.

First affected of course is the areas that contain a large acreage of pasture land across Saskatchewan. The next area of concern obviously is with the spring-seeded crops. Many of the spring-seeded crops have been seeded into very, very dry conditions in large areas of Saskatchewan.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, many, many areas that had a pretty

good emergence of the crop have been very seriously hit with a series of frosts, some of them extending several evenings and early mornings in Saskatchewan. We have heard reports that in some areas of north-eastern Saskatchewan, the weather conditions were so severe that we have seen up to minus 10 degrees conditions, which would seriously affect if not kill a crop out entirely.

Seeding conditions have been further compounded by the fact that re-seeding benefits from the crop insurance program are woefully inadequate and you just have to talk to farmers across Saskatchewan to find that out.

The other day in the Assembly the minister talked about it being adequate and his only solution, his only advice, was to tell farmers in Saskatchewan not to fertilize their crops. How ridiculous is this Minister of Agriculture? When it comes time to help out agriculture and help out farmers in this province that's the kind of advice he offers up.

All you have to do is check with an agrologist and any one of them will tell you that under very difficult conditions, particularly at this time of the year with seeding dates being backed up as late as they are, if you're re-seeding a crop, putting a little bit of phosphorous, a fertilizer that is not mobile in the soil, is a very good idea — to try and get the maximum pop-up benefit for your crop to get it up and off to a good start, particularly given this late seeding time. So that's his advice to the farmers of Saskatchewan.

We are saying, Mr. Speaker, and to the Minister of Agriculture, that this is a serious situation. Farmers and ranchers are very, very concerned about it. We're getting increasing numbers of calls all of the time from farmers and ranchers across this province.

Today in question period we outlined some of the concerns with respect to pasture lands, one of the areas of course that is first affected any time you have a drought . . . or pardon me, an early season drought, Mr. Speaker. Pasture lands require early spring rains. They just didn't happen in many areas of Saskatchewan.

And part of the concern obviously is to them, that they won't have feed for their cattle. The minister's advice again has been, sell your cattle herd now and then. Well that's a pretty poor, pretty poor solution to a very, very serious problem, Mr. Speaker.

Cattlemen and women across this province have been building up herds over recent years because of relatively good prices in the cattle sector. And now the minister's advice is — after you've started building up a savings account essentially of cattle — is to just simply sell them off and that's their solution to the problem. But we are saying that the solution to the problem involves things like coordinating some trucking, coordinating some trucking of cattle to where there is feed, coordinating of some trucking where there's feed, to where the cattle are that are suffering because of drought conditions.

There's a lot of things that this government could be doing to help out this very, very serious situation. But unfortunately their solution, Mr. Speaker, has been to simply jack up the rates for pasture land in this province for the leaseholders. We have been

contacted by a number of people this morning, and I would ask agriculture producers across this province to continue sending your faxes, continue sending your copies of the letter that you received from Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food. In about May 28 approximately these letters were sent out across Saskatchewan.

This producer phoned me this morning telling me that his, on a relatively small parcel of land . . . is going to go up, his pasture land, 25 per cent increase — \$249.70. He told me there isn't \$249.70 worth of grass on that pasture. He hasn't put any cattle on that pasture at all this spring because there isn't anything for them to pick away at out there these days, Mr. Speaker.

The next one that I had a copy sent to me this morning was from another fellow, in the Perdue area. Many of them are coming from areas like Perdue, around Saskatoon, out to Rosetown, certainly down in the south-west part of the province — Val Marie, areas like that — extending up to the north-west through the Lashburn, Lloydminster, right up to Meadow Lake areas of the province of Saskatchewan . . . have been dramatically affected.

In this particular situation, Mr. Speaker, this farmer-rancher's increase is \$514.08 plus GST (goods and services tax), and your billing notice will indicate the actual rent change. And can you imagine this. They say the increases would have been 33 per cent but we are such good guys that we're going to hold it down to 25 per cent.

At a time when the farmers and ranchers of this province desperately need some compassion and some help from this province, what do they get from the Minister of Agriculture here in Saskatchewan? A big fat kick in the teeth when they can least afford to try and reach into their farming operation or their ranching operation a little bit deeper to try and eke a living out — this is what kind of support they get from this government.

And always what we've been hearing to date in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and all through this session is the provincial government getting up and slamming the federal government every opportunity they get with regard to problems in agriculture. Certainly there was a role for the federal government in all of this, but there is also a role for the provincial government and the member from Rosetown-Biggar should be aware of that.

He recalls the kind of absolute mistrust that his government has built with agriculture producers and ranchers across this province because of some of the experiences and some of the problems he inflicted on the agriculture community not too many years ago. Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely serious situation.

Another gentleman from the Perdue area sent me a notice of his increase in land pasture rental — \$2,048.29. Again, another very serious, serious situation; a problem that cannot simply . . . we cannot simply sit and wait for this government to finally get off its hands and do something.

There is a need for immediate action on this. Farmers are already facing tremendous concerns, and now on top of all of that we have the concern about an international grain war taking

place across the world.

The federal government has responsibility in this area. Obviously the provincial government has responsibility in this area as well. We are seeing the European community has already started massive subsidy programs with respect to barley exports, and we hope that's just not the thin edge of the wedge.

We've seen up to \$70 per tonne rates of subsidy from the EEC (European Economic Community) in the last few weeks, Mr. Speaker. And in some cases that's more than the entire crop would be worth here in Saskatchewan. So there's tremendous concern about those levels of subsidy coming from the EEC these days.

And what happens, what happens . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I hear the member from Lloydminster chirping back in the corner over there, Mr. Speaker. At a time when farmers and ranchers are particularly impacted in a constituency like that one, what are the comments from that member? Where's the help from that member? Where's the concern from that member? She chirps from her seat, well we'll just get into the kind of conditions we had back yesteryear.

Well, Madam Member, the farmers and ranchers in your community, in the communities where you are representing, Mr. Speaker, that that member represents, should be upset with those kind of flippant comments from that member. Unfortunately that's the kind of thing we've learned to expect. That's the kind of thing we've learned to expect from an NDP administration.

At a time when farmers and ranchers are down, jack up the rates and then make fun of them on top of it all. Make fun of the agriculture producers, saying that they're looking for more help from the government. Well after all, what are you government for but to try and do something to help the people of this province. What is your role? What is the role of government in these situations, Mr. Speaker? Obviously there's some tools at the government's disposal.

There are tools at the government's disposal, Mr. Speaker. They should be utilizing some of those tools. We've been advising this government on many things that they could be doing, starting off with opening up the NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) program to allow for people — ranchers, farmers, across this province, to withdraw monies from that program.

We understand that the administration has taken some steps in that area and we very, very much appreciate the fact that they've moved to try and address a very, very serious situation here in Saskatchewan and have moved in that regard.

But when it comes to re-seeding benefits nothing from this government. When it comes to helping in transportation, nothing from this government. When it comes to helping in terms of grain marketing, nothing from this government. In fact what do you do? You stand in the way in many of the areas that are of concern.

Mr. Speaker, the situation continues to be of grave need here in the province of Saskatchewan. Farmers and ranchers are

contacting us. As I've said, any farmer and rancher that is hearing our concerns being brought to the table in the legislature here today, I urge them to send your complaints to us about the administration here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the motion that we have put forward before the Assembly today is of urgent and pressing necessity. It's an emergency situation. That's why we have called for an emergency debate here in the legislature. I hope members of this government would be prepared to speak about the issue. And most importantly as well, I would hope that other members of this Assembly, particularly Liberal members, will be prepared to put their views on the table today. They have a role to play in this as well. Their federal cousins aren't helping out very much these days as well.

The federal Minister of Agriculture and the one responsible for — or pardon me — the former minister of Agriculture, the one responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board is not helping — Mr. Goodale — not helping the situation at all. Vanclief, Vanclief, what's he doing these days to help in terms of transportation, to help in terms of agriculture? Strangely silent.

And another concern that farmers have is, yesterday the Prime Minister of Canada was in town wanting to speak to people representing urban and rural governments. And what did he have to say when it comes to agriculture? Absolutely nothing.

Where was the Minister of Agriculture, where was the Premier of Saskatchewan standing up for farmers and ranchers? Totally absent from the debate, weren't prepared to talk, weren't prepared to debate the issue that we put before the House yesterday on transportation.

When you have the Prime Minister in your own back yard, now is a pretty good time to try and twist his arm a little bit, I would suggest. But where were the government? Where was the Premier of Saskatchewan? Getting ready to organize a cocktail party or something for him, or a little dinner perhaps?

Where was the help? Where was the Premier of Saskatchewan when the farmers and ranchers most needed him yesterday — when the Prime Minister was in town? I don't recall seeing him when it comes to anything to do with this situation.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, we would move the following motion:

That this Assembly urge the federal government to assume its responsibility for international trade and immediately develop a contingency plan to protect Canadian farmers from falling grain prices in the event of an international grain war, and this Assembly urges governments to do everything possible under the crop insurance program and under other available programs to address the deteriorating crop conditions in Saskatchewan caused by poor moisture conditions and frost.

I would move the following motion, seconded by my good friend and colleague from Saltcoats.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1445)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I have a few words to say on this but I know one member wants to introduce guests so I'll do that. But I just wanted to get my place in the debate.

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

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — May I have leave to introduce guests, please?

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, in the west gallery, my niece, my brother Ralph's daughter Bethany. I ask Bethany to stand, Bethany Nilson and her friend Rochelle Leonard.

Bethany's just graduating from grade 12 at LCBI (Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute) in Outlook and she is a student, was a student at Campbell Collegiate in Regina. She's from Regina.

But I think the important part is that she has decided to go to Norway next year to study at Sand i Ryfylke to learn about the language and the culture and to continue the traditions in our family.

So I'd ask all members to welcome them to the gallery today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Deteriorating Agricultural Conditions in Saskatchewan

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, the member certainly put some of his thoughts on the record. And I'd like to say that, you know, we're at day 63 I think, and I bet I can count on one hand how many times that group over there has asked questions in agriculture, and all of a sudden it's an emergency.

We've been working. I've written to the federal government and I can table the letter. I don't have it with me but I can get it, if members . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the floor is available eventually for all members to put their remarks on the record. And I would urge them to put their remarks on the record rather than debating spontaneously across the House while members are on their feet. Order!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I can't help but think that I hit a nerve. And members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, like the member from Lloydminster, have made members' statements on the drought and the concerns that we have.

And one of the big problems that the members opposite have, Mr. Speaker — and that speaker before me — the big problem that he has, is he has no presence in Ottawa, all he can do is

chirp from his seat here. And that's the problem with this Tory government. They're isolated in Canada; they're isolated in Canada, and all of a sudden . . .

The Speaker: — Now hon. members will recognize the Chair just rose a few seconds ago to ask for the cooperation of the House to enable the minister to be heard. I ask again for the cooperation of all members of the House . . . Order.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I guess I rest my case about hitting a nerve.

Anyway, members on this side of the House . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . There they go again. Well I'll talk anyway. Most people won't be able to hear over the drone over there but — many members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, have spoken on the drought in agriculture.

And the member talks about a number of things in his statement, talking about the leasing situation for cattle. I gave him that explanation today. He knows how it works. But the members over there just work on an ad hoc basis and you can't operate that way.

Cattle prices are still decent. We know there's no hay. If they don't put their cattle in the pastures, they don't get charged. The payments don't have to be made until October. So then we're working on that because we understand.

And the difference between this side and that side is I've been working on it for over two months now and they just, day 63, start to think it's an issue. Well, that's a little bit hypocritical.

And I also want to say just, Mr. Speaker, I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have a long list, two pages, of information at agrologists' offices across this province to outline what's available for the drought situation.

One of the things that's key though on this, one of the things that's key in this whole debate, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that our federal Liberal friends — now the Liberals in this province are in a very tough situation because nobody'll listen to them and won't even listen to Mr. Goodale, the representative out here — but they allowed, in their genius, they decided that the Crow benefit of \$320 million a year should be eliminated right after the WTO (World Trade Organization) negotiation's last round.

Did the U.S. (United States) eliminate the export enhancement program? No. Did the Europeans eliminate their programs? No. They reduced them by 36 per cent over five or six years, as was the agreement.

What did the genius Liberals in Ottawa do? They come home and say, oh it's for your own good, we're going to cut this subsidy. So now we sit, we're the only ones without subsidies while the other countries are playing this game.

Europe selectively imports barley into Florida and California to stick it in the U.S. face. Now the U.S. do 30,000 tonnes back to selected parts in Europe, subsidized, and guess what? We've got the Liberals wringing their hands and saying, didn't you guys learn anything? You shouldn't do this.

Meanwhile our farmers out here are paying one-third of the initial costs of grain, of wheat, as transportation costs because the Crow benefit's gone.

That's the problem in this country. Right now the input costs of transportation is killing the profit line — killing it. And we have to, as governments across Canada, work on that, and I have written the federal government on this issue and continue to talk to them about this issue.

And we're going into another round of WTO, and again we're asking them to be partners in the negotiations. And it's a struggle. We are struggling but we are getting our word across that we have to have ourselves heard as representatives of Saskatchewan farmers.

Mr. Speaker, the federal representation in this country has thrown up their hands on agriculture. We see the international grain trade wars, and here's the situation. The federal government cuts the subsidy. Grain costs per shipment go up. The international grain war brings down the price of grain.

And we have a government sitting in Ottawa doing what? Saying you shouldn't do this. Well of course they shouldn't do it, but they're doing it. And just because Ottawa's abdicated responsibilities to the farmers of this country is no reason for them to continue in that vein and wring their hands and say you shouldn't do this.

Mr. Speaker, it's important — and I won't go on, although I could because it's a very important subject — it is important that this House at least, I'll tell you, we will give the Tory Party a bridge to Ottawa, if they so desire, if they come onside and help us in supporting the farmers of this province.

And we will give them that bridge because they don't have that bridge there themselves. They have no representation in Ottawa, and they know that when they can sit and chirp here.

We will accept the Liberal Party as partners if we can come together, and if they write letters, like we have, to the federal government saying the international grain trade war is creating zero margin for producers, and Ottawa, you have to do something about it — you have to be able to have us compete.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will support this motion. Two reasons: number one, I agree with the first part that we have to be unified. Secondly, as far as crop insurance is concerned, we are doing all we can. We've lowered the price of crop insurance premiums by 33 per cent over the last two years.

Do they stand up and say thank you for that on behalf of farmers? No, no, it's always the negative side. And I understand that's their problem.

But if we want to solve this problem, and it's a serious situation, we're going to have to work together on it. I'd ask the members to swallow their pride and come and work together with us on this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the

opportunity to rise on an occasion such as this when there is a topic of such significance to be discussing here this afternoon in terms of what our farmers are facing in this current growing season.

And wasn't it inevitable, Mr. Speaker, that some day it would come to this in this province, weather being the way it is; how it was bound to happen. We've experienced it in the past; we should learn lessons from days gone by. We've heard this government talk before in terms of their entire government's operations as far as establishing what they would call rainy-day funds in their Crown corporations. What happens to the frosty-day funds, you know the dry-day funds. We've saw a government across here who, since coming to power, has gutted — literally gutted — the budget for agriculture in this province. Now what is that doing, what is that doing to establish a fund for eventualities — for what we're talking about here this afternoon?

Now we've heard the Minister of Agriculture talk about the fact that we don't have an inordinate, an unusual amount of crop insurance claims to date. He likes to talk in terms of 2,200-some claims to date. But what is the significance of those claims in terms of the number of acres they represent and the financial impact, the severe financial impact that they could mean for producers in this province. To express them only in terms of a number of claims is not to do them full justice.

We've urged the Minister of Agriculture to make all attempts, and he's given us his commitment earlier — or late last week I believe it was — that he would look into this further as the weeks wear on. We, yesterday, asked the Minister of Agriculture also to commit, to do as we have and visit some of these areas that have been severely affected. Try and get some ideas from some of the producers that are most severely affected by this situation. Try and find out what they think should be done to assist them when they're needing a government finally.

These are groups of people, farmers and ranchers, who don't like to come to governments cap in hand. They never do that; they're proud people. They don't like to view their governments provincially or federally as their keepers, somebody to come asking for assistance. So the Minister of Agriculture certainly isn't going to have his door knocked down or his phone ringing off the hook from these people. But none the less that doesn't make it any less significant, the fact that they need help desperately.

And I think that everybody here in this House has a responsibility to try and find out what is best done to accomplish what needs to be done for producers in this province. If that means enhanced safety nets looking down the road, then certainly we're there. If a year like this is going to be the kind of year that highlights where the loopholes are, where the shortcomings are, of programs that are in place to assist people in agriculture, then certainly now is the time to impress upon all levels of government that changes are needed.

But it has to be mentioned because we can't emphasize enough that this government cannot completely get off the hook in this matter. We saw this government, as I said earlier, slash the Agriculture budget since it's came into power. We saw them rip

up GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts to producers, worth 188 million, \$200 million. And all with the idea that it was always going to be tall grass and fat cattle in this province. But we all know that the way the weather is in this province, it just isn't going to happen.

And all the producers would have asked of a government, provincially and federally, is that they have programs in place that would have kicked in to help them when disasters of large proportion, like what we could be facing here this growing season, that things will be taken care of to the point that they don't have to worry about — in the face of international grain trade wars and rising input costs — that the cost-price squeeze on the farm or on the ranch will be their undoing.

And believe me, there's people out there right now who are teetering on that brink right now, even before the problems with weather kicked in this spring. And I think the Minister of Agriculture across from me is as aware of that as we are here in the Liberal opposition. But this is the kind of situation that tests the resolve of governments, provincially and federally. These are the sorts of times that we could be coming into right now in agriculture when we can see if a government is there when people actually need them.

And believe me, Mr. Speaker, we sitting across here are hopeful and optimistic that this level of government and the federal government will be there for producers in this province if we need them. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1500)

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm most happy to be able to stand and discuss this particular issue on behalf of the farmers of the south-west corner of the province. I'm most sad that we have to be here as a result of the weather to even have to address these issues, but the fact of the matter is that we do have these conditions, and the fact of the matter is that the people from the south-east part of the province, around Weyburn and Estevan, have already suffered through what the rest of the province is starting to go through now.

So they're in for their second year while of course farmers in the south-west started to experience the drought problems earlier this spring. We had hoped that a big rain would come and prove that we weren't going to have to address this issue before the rest of the province.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, to the other members, through you, that I have travelled a considerable amount in the province over the weekend — as far north of course as Saskatoon line and east over to Regina. There's a small pocket around Regina and Moose Jaw where the crops aren't in too bad a shape. But the rest of the province has some very serious problems. And there's no fooling that we have to support this resolution and that we have to prepare for some very serious problems.

The grain in the fields, while it has survived the frost, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the accompanying drought, has had the effect that for some reason the leaves on the crops, while they're still green in most cases, have taken to a bit of a curled

up appearance, which makes them appear to be sort of hunkering down and heading towards the ground again.

And it's a condition that we've seen very seldom, but it is a condition that if you lived long enough you've seen before. And I have had the experience of seeing crops that look like this before and I suspect that history will repeat itself. Although we can always hope that a lot of rain will fall and we'll have a late fall and that things will turn around and that history won't repeat itself. But most likely it will.

And what it tells me is that the minister should be prepared to pay out some crop insurance claims this fall because the crop won't be a bumper crop. It probably, at very best from my experience, would be an average crop and no better. And we can at least hope that we'd get that.

People in the south-west, Mr. Speaker, of course still are among those that grow fall rye. Fall rye of course was headed at the time that the frost hit. Winter wheat of course is not a crop that we grow a lot of, but there is some of it.

Anybody that says that minus two degrees Celsius is not a very bad frost had better think again if they had fall rye or winter wheat that's headed because at this stage of the development this grain is going to be feed and no better. And that's a given — there's no way getting around that if those fields were hit by the frost.

Now if they happen to be in an area where they're up high or something like that and the frost missed, that's fine. So we have that combination, Mr. Speaker, of drought and frost.

I would have to talk for a few minutes about the drought conditions for the ranchers in the south-west because we do have a lot of ranch land in the south-west. Some of them are fairing not too badly, and I want the minister to know that this is a kind of a hit and miss situation, as always, in Saskatchewan. There are some ranches that have had some rainfall. The showers have hit and their grass is holding on not too badly. Unfortunately, probably over half of the ranches have hills that look now as though they looked in October, and that really isn't enough grass to feed a gopher, let alone a cow. So the drought in the area will be severe for those people that haven't had rain, and for some, they're going to get by for a while.

I want to impress upon the minister that this problem is serious. It is serious also because we are at a time in history when the six-year moratoriums have come due. And the banks of course that have been holding land, and the people that have been farming land as a result of those protections that were given to them in the early '90s — those special exemptions that were provided for — those things have ended. And an awful lot of farmers are going to end up now losing their land because with the drought and the frost and the low commodity prices, those things all tied together with very high input costs most certainly will end up having a lot of farmers in serious financial trouble, and I just can't see any way but that they will probably go broke.

Agriculture is still the backbone of this province, Mr. Speaker. All of these other things that we have are very important and very necessary and we're always glad to have them, but we

have to remember, that as the backbone of this province, it will seriously affect all other segments of our economy.

The Asian flu that has hit — and of course that is the reference they make to the economic collapse of the Asian countries — that is impacting Saskatchewan farm commodity prices. It will continue to do so for this year at least, according to the experts that I've listened to and talked to.

And of course the net effect immediately is that machinery sales have dried up. Communities of course like Humboldt and those communities that have small manufacturing for farm machinery are suffering an immediate impact. People are being laid off. Training programs that had been designed to bring people on-stream to work in those kinds of factories and in those kinds of workplaces, now are finding themselves with employees that no longer have a job because there are lay-offs happening and cut-backs happening in those areas as a result of the dried up machinery sales.

And so what that tells us, Mr. Speaker, is that Saskatchewan, always by tradition, has been first into a recession, last out. We are starting in, and there's a recession definitely starting to develop. And I hope that the people in charge of running our country, not our province but our country, who are in the most beneficial position to be able to try to circumvent this, are listening to the reality that a recession is beginning. And unless they nip it in the bud, it's certainly going to happen and it will affect the entire nation.

So this is where it begins. We can identify it for them. All we have to do is get them to listen to it.

The other problem that we're having coupled with frost and drought and all of these other high input costs, Mr. Speaker, of course is the rail-line abandonment that's going on.

And the Minister of Agriculture's indicating that he would like a copy of the information that I've gotten for the transportation problems. So rather than to read the several hundreds of pages of documents I have, I'm going to offer to send them over — ask the pages to photocopy them so that he can have copies — and table the other copies.

In here, Mr. Speaker, the minister will want to note very quickly that in these reports are all of the documentations that go back to the history of the railroad. The history of all of the times that farmers, the taxpayers, and the people of this country have paid for the railroad; the way that they paid for the railroad system in terms of land grants — all of this material was supplied to me by the library, and I want to thank the officials there for doing such a great job of rounding up all this material.

I want to thank them of course in general for all of the work that they've done for me in this past session. It's phenomenal the ability they have to gather information.

And I really appreciate the fact that we can supply for the Minister of Agriculture all of this information that will fortify his debate and his ability to go to Ottawa and fight for the rights of farmers because he needs to have the ammunition to be able to fight this battle for us, and we're going to supply him with all the ammunition he needs starting with these documents and

carrying on with whatever else is needed.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the south-west are a hearty lot. And given that the drought is so severe in the east Rosetown area and other parts of the province, all I can say is I sympathize with those folks up North that haven't had these experiences too often.

We know what it's like in the south-west. It doesn't mean we like it, but we are hardened and we are conditioned, and most likely the folks in the south-west will continue to survive because that's the kind of hardy people they are.

A lot of people though that aren't used to it, depend on regular incomes from year to year to pay their bills, and they're not conditioned for this sort of thing and it will affect them much more adversely.

So I call on the Minister of Agriculture, not only to support the motion but to carry it to Ottawa and take it wherever it has to go, and certainly I want to pledge my support on behalf of the people of the south-west to go along with that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, the member for Thunder Creek has already very well put our party's position on the record, but coming from the area of the province that I think has been most hit by adverse weather this spring, I would like to put some comments on the record.

Of the 16 rural municipalities in the North Battleford area, 14 of them are reporting poor conditions. I understand that they are not allowed to report conditions as very poor but if that was a category many of our rural municipalities would fall into it. The area of the province, which falls into the poor conditions category, is expanding, almost on a daily basis.

Now the minister told us today that those who do not take cattle to the community pasture will not be charged even though rates for the community pasture this year have increased dramatically. My understanding in the North Battleford area is that the farmers have been told they may well have to remove their cattle from the community pasture within the next two weeks if there is not significant rainfall, or in the alternative they may have to start bringing feed into the community pasture.

My question for the minister is, will those farmers be charged if they're not really getting service from the community pasture, if they have to either remove their cattle early, or in the alternative haul feed into the community pasture? It seems to me they should not have to be paying the full cost of community pasture pasturing.

Net income for Saskatchewan farmers last year plummeted to a negative 79 million from 1.2 billion in 1996. Now the projections for this year are not encouraging, and with the increasing drought and frost, and the prospect of a second germination in much of my area because the first germination was less than half the crop, we know that there are going to be very serious pressures. The hay crop in my area is virtually non-existent. So feed for cattle is going to be very serious even if we do get a grain crop.

We, in the Liberal opposition, are anxious to join hands with other members of this Assembly in pressing the needs of Saskatchewan farmers on the federal government. But I would like to close with just one brief comment though, Mr. Speaker.

When the Saskatchewan Party was formed, the members of the new party told us that one of the advantages of the new party was that seeing as it wouldn't be linked to any federal party they would be able to grouse and complain no matter who was the federal government. Now that seems to me not a terribly productive view. We have to push the needs of Saskatchewan and of Saskatchewan agriculture on the federal government. We need to be able to . . . we need to speak up forcefully about the requirements of Saskatchewan agriculture. But for a party to say that our big advantage is we can always be in the position of complaining because we will never have to work with a federal government to try and make the situation better, it strikes me that that is not a particularly productive attitude to take. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to rise but this is becoming an interesting debate. Here we have a lawyer from North Battleford telling us how we're supposed to be running agriculture, indicating that another lawyer from Regina is the Ag minister who knows all about it.

Mr. Minister, if in Justice — a farmer was to be the Minister of Justice — every lawyer in the province would be up in arms . . . every lawyer in Canada. But we in agriculture, Mr. Minister, are prepared to accept that perhaps lawyers do know a little bit about agriculture; unfortunately that's never proven the case. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

(1515)

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Before orders of the day I wish to table, pursuant to section 25(1) of The Members' Conflict of Interest Act, the annual report for 1996 of the Saskatchewan Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Also I table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the returns of election expenses by registered political parties and candidates, pursuant to section 211 and 218 of The Election Act in conjunction with the North Battleford by-election of November 19, 1996.

And finally I report the Chief Electoral . . . table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the amounts of reimbursements to registered political parties and candidates pursuant to section 223 and 225 of The Election Act, in conjunction with the North Battleford by-election of November 19, 1996.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the answer to written question no. 72.

The Speaker: — The answer to question 72 is tabled.

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave, I would hereby table the answers to questions 73 to 80.

In doing so, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the administration who got all of these answers ready to be able to, in the interests of open and accountable government, provide that to the member requesting it.

The Speaker: — The answers for questions nos. 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, and 80 are also tabled.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I move that the Assembly now proceed to Government Orders.

Leave granted.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Assembly now move to Government Orders.

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

The Chair: — Before we start today, I would ask the minister to introduce her officials again please.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my immediate right is my deputy minister Brian King; to my immediate left is George Stamatinos, who is the executive director of the southern region. Behind Brian King is Barry Martin, who is the executive director of engineering. And behind myself is Lynn Tulloch, the executive director of central services.

Subvote (HI01)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome, Madam Minister, and your officials.

Madam Minister, I just have one quick question that I want to raise with you and that question is in regards to Highway No. 16 going through Kipling. I'm wondering, Madam Minister, who's responsible, who has ownership of Highway 16 through Kipling? Is there a co-ownership agreement with the town and Department of Highways — or is it strictly under the Department of Highways? And who's responsible for maintenance and repair? Pardon me, Madam Minister — Highway 48.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, the town of Kipling is responsible for that, the piece of highway that goes through the town; if there's over 1,000 people and population, then the town is responsible.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, we've gone over most of, I think, our questions in Highways. But what happened yesterday, I would really like to get an answer or a response from you.

We came up and we proposed a rule 46, an emergency debate on a national highways program, and it totally amazed me when your government voted this down. To me this was nothing more than just a good lob to your side of your House, because if we'd had got an all-party concession we must have more clout than what your government has been doing because you've been getting nothing out of the federal government.

We hear continual whining on that side of the House in question period; in every speech we hear about federal funding whether it's in Health, Education, Highways, whatever it is, you're always dumping on the federal government. Yesterday you had an opportunity with the Prime Minister in the city of Regina to completely — all parties — put some pressure on the Prime Minister and you chose to not do that.

And I'm wondering why, Madam Minister? And I would like you to somewhere along the way try and explain that to me. I'm beginning to wonder if it's on account of the Premier and the Prime Minister are such good friends, and the Premier doesn't want to hurt his appointment to the unity brigade in this country once he retires from politics in Saskatchewan.

You know, Madam Minister, there was premiers in this province that I was proud of and didn't believe in their politics. And you know a name that you'll remember very well is Tommy Douglas. He was one of the people that I respected for one reason — he stuck up for Saskatchewan people in Ottawa. You didn't have to like his politics, his social conscience programs that he came out with quite often, but you had to respect the man for sticking up for this province when it came to dealing with the federal government.

The Premier we have today, Madam Minister, does not fit in that category. He is friends with the present Prime Minister and above all that seems to outweigh anything that we get. Whether it's for agriculture as we talked today, whether it's for our highway programs, we never hear our present Premier hollering for Saskatchewan.

And Madam Minister, I'd like you to comment on that and why you would vote down a rule 46 yesterday, when what we were really doing is lobbying you a good one over there to all go together and put some pressure on our present Prime Minister to honour our twinning of our highways, which I agree with you, the federal government should be putting money into. They're obligated to put money into, we need that money, and if they would put into that we would have more money here to put into our secondary highways. Madam Minister, will you please respond.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I am glad to have the ability to respond to this, or have the chance to respond to this.

We have sent, and we have done everything, the Transportation ministers . . . the Premier has at the very top level spoken to the Prime Minister, has lobbied the Prime Minister. We have worked in every aspect on trying to get more money for

national highways but also to address the grain transportation strategy, and a lot of other issues at the national level.

And yesterday our Premier was at the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. He spoke there; he certainly put forward again the importance of a national transportation strategy, the importance of a national highway system. And he actually got a standing ovation of over 1,500 people at the Canadian municipality meeting there yesterday for how he was standing up for this province and also standing up for Canada because he also thinks it's important that we have a country that is unified.

But he certainly has the interests of Saskatchewan people at the top of his list in priorities. And transportation, agriculture issues, all of those issues, the Premier has raised over and over at the federal level. We certainly wish we knew that the provincial levels were also helping us with that.

But we have made every chance possible, and we certainly will be looking again at hosting. I mean that we've talked with the western premiers to look at the type of lobby that we need to organize out of western Canada. Our Premier is on top of this issue.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well, Madam Minister, Mr. Chairman, I commend him for being there and lobbying the Prime Minister, but what I am saying is, once again he did it very quietly behind the scenes, kept it really out of the media for all intents and purposes so nobody would hear him. And can you tell me then if he did all this lobbying on behalf of our province, what commitment he got out of the Prime Minister yesterday for infrastructure money for this province?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — When he was at the meeting yesterday, the media was there, and one of the frustrations is that the media doesn't carry the coverage, doesn't take the coverage of the positive news that was there.

The Premier, as to my knowledge, has had no commitment at that level. But that does not mean that we're not going to continue to lobby and put as much pressure as we possibly can on the federal government.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Minister. Welcome to you and your officials. I have — not unlike everyone else in this Assembly it seems like — areas that are a tremendous concern about the condition of their highways, specifically highways 317 in my constituency, 30, and 44, and the one through Dodsland-Plenty areas.

I'm certainly — coming from that area of the province — and certainly familiar with the conditions with those highways in absolute horrible repair. Highway 30 from Eston, south to the Riverside Park there, there was construction done on that one last year. And I think my hired man probably put it the best way anyone could — the highway used to be in poor shape but now even the ditches are in poor shape.

What they did was they came in and filed that pavement — what little pavement there was — off into the ditch. Rocks and chunks of pavement and everything like that. A number of farmers, because they want to maintain the ditches themselves — have mowed them for years there — now find that they can't

even mow the ditches because of the big chunks of pavement and the rocks that are there.

And then the highway is in absolutely horrible shape. I mean, we're talking a highway that is holes throughout. And we're wondering if there's any plans on that one.

The highway leading from Eston west to Glidden, again is in absolute terrible repair. They've monkeyed around out there a little bit trying to do something, but basically it amounts to making it worse rather than better. We're wondering what's happening in that area.

The highway out in the west side of my constituency, 317, is in terrible condition. It's not a paved highway; it's a gravel highway. And the people in that area have been calling for some assistance for years on that one. The ministers of your administration, through successive ministers, have been out there on numerous occasions and yet nothing happens.

Madam Minister, I wonder if you would care to comment at this point.

(1530)

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, in response then, the Eston west, the Highway No. 44, — it will be receiving above average work on it and intensive preservation will be done on that piece.

Now the piece Eston south, now that's the piece I think there that they'll be working on to keep it safe, serviceable. And if that's the piece in which you said there was chunks in the ditches and so on, they are going to check that and try to clear that up because that shouldn't be case. They should definitely pick up those pieces if there are pieces in the ditches then.

And on Highway 317, again that's the gravel highway that you were talking about, certainly there will be maintenance on that. We are buying a gravel pit in the Macklin area for future work in that area.

Mr. Boyd: — So am I to understand you, Madam Minister, that Highway 44 will have a . . . from Eston west will be repaired this summer? And am I to understand that Highway 30 south will be repaired this summer? I want to know what your definition of repair is too.

We're talking about sending a truck up and down it to have a look at it. That's not what I call repairing it. I call having a crew come in and oiling it again is what's needed to be done there, filling in all of the potholes, which basically are 15 miles in length, right starting at Eston and leading down to Riverside Park. You got one pothole lasting 15 miles there. You better have a look at it.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on Highway No. 44, that's the piece that will get more intensive work and we will be in the areas that are needed, again depending what work it needs. It could be putting on more oil, but it'll be more intensive work. On Highway 30, which is south of Eston, in that it'll be more of a routine maintenance. But certainly, I mean, filling potholes and so on, but it won't receive the level, the intensive preservation work that Highway 44 will be receiving.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair . . . oh, and good welcome. Good afternoon to the minister and her officials.

I've got one specific concern on behalf of a constituent of mine that I'd like to raise with the minister here this afternoon first before getting into some other lines of questioning.

But I believe the minister may be aware of this one. I had sent a copy to her just days ago. It's concerning a gentleman in the Vanguard area of my constituency, Mr. Henry Barbier.

His problem is he converted a gravel truck to a grain truck. And what his problem is — or I'm sorry, not a gravel, a cement truck — but the problem is he's not allowed to haul gross weightwise as much product as similar trucks that are still in use as concrete trucks. He feels perhaps he's being unfairly treated in this matter where he's only allowed to haul twenty-five and a half tonnes, he's being told, gross weightwise. There's concrete trucks in use right now by permission of your department that are able to haul 32 tonnes.

He's utilizing the same tire pressures, as are the concrete trucks, which are still in use for that purpose versus the converted use that he is having on his farm for grain.

He's wondering if your department will give him the same rights to use his vehicle to these same weights as what you're allowing trucks that are being in use right now for concrete?

Before getting into other questioning, if you might just respond do this concern on behalf of my constituent I'd certainly appreciate that.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, in response to that question, this is one that is fairly complicated, because the permits were available back in the mid-'70s for this type of a configuration, for these kind of weights for concrete trucks.

And since implementing the transportation partnership program, the department has capped the privileges, which are available to the concrete industry. Any expansion in privileges will only happen if they're part of that partnership program.

And so even looking back then to your constituent that has bought one of these trucks then. Then he could enter into a partnership agreement to carry extra weights in which then he would receive some benefit, but we'd also receive some benefit back to the department, which goes back into the roads.

And it's one of the things when we went into some of these new configurations, new programs, and the trucking partnership and so on, we grandfathered some in, but we aren't going to see any more expansion of that unless we get part of that partnership agreement. And that's how we would approach the constituent that you have raised this concern about.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, just a quick geography lesson on the constituency that I represent. As you know, on the west side of the constituency we have what is called Diefenbaker Lake, a tremendous resort area accompanied by a wonderful golf course, and you name it. You've probably been there, probably some of your support staff around you probably have been there and fished or golfed

or partaken in many of the activities that the lake provides.

Unfortunately, surrounding the lake there are highways by the numbers of 19 and 44, 42, 15; also access via ferry that if it isn't broke down, will be able to get people across the river and access to that tremendous tourist attraction.

I wonder, Madam Minister, you are one of the . . . you're the only minister that hasn't accepted my offer to come out to that constituency and look at the state of those roads, and I'm saddened to hear that. And I'm hoping that you will change your mind and do that some day and not rely on your bureaucrats to take and show you the roads that they think you should see.

However I'm wondering, Madam Minister, what kind of discussions have taken place since you've become minister, with your department in looking into that area, into those highways to get some resolve there so that I can . . . so I don't have to put up with the calls that I get from tourists leaving Saskatchewan phoning my constituency office and saying that they'll likely never come back to that area to use the lake or the golf course or what have you? And that's pretty poor advertising, as the minister who sits next to you represents the constituents on the other side of the lake I'm sure receives many similar calls as I do.

He recognizes the problem as do I and we'd like to know what you and your department are going to do to address that situation.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on the highways that you've mentioned, Highway No. 42, there's 40 kilometres slated for intensive preservation. So there is a tremendous amount of work being done on Highway No. 42. And actually that is a highway that I have travelled.

And Highway 367 . . . you didn't mention that one, sorry. Highway No. 19 is the other highway that you mentioned. Hawarden to Junction No. 15 is also getting intensive preservation. I don't know if that's the area exactly that you were referring to.

We are also entered into an agreement with three RMs (rural municipalities) to take the potato haul out of the Lucky Lake area and trying to avoid damaging Highway No. 19. And so we're working with both in that particular area, and I have met with people from that area about the concerns that they do have about the road systems servicing both Lake Diefenbaker, the potato industry, and some of the other things that are going on in that area.

And also in the larger piece, also in the transportation area planning, some of those concerns are being . . . and we're trying to work with them on how we do tackle these issues into the future.

Mr. McLane: — With all due respect, Minister, your consultation processes are about seven years too late. Your government's been in power since 1991 and you're still consulting. Meanwhile the roads are disastrous.

You keep talking about spending money. The rail line from

Broderick to Moose Jaw is up for abandonment. Canadian Pacific Railway has said that they want to sell that line, and the farmers and municipalities and communities over there are trying to find someone to come there and take over the line. The problem is, if that doesn't happen, the rail line is gone. And No. 19 Highway then is a major artery along that line, running parallel to that rail line.

So the question is, start looking. And you talked about preservation; you talked about patching potholes. That doesn't make the road any wider, Madam Minister.

And if the Hon. Agriculture minister would pay attention and listen, you'd be able to hear my question.

So that doesn't make the highway any wider, it doesn't help the safety. I had people in here . . . And your government is paying one family in the Central Butte area because of your inability to maintain the roads. It's costing taxpayers thousands of dollars to look after that family, and rightfully so. But that's one of the problems with the highway. Patching the holes is great day-to-day, but it doesn't widen the highway and it doesn't make it safe for people to travel on.

The municipalities in that area, in the area of 44, have told me that they need No. 44. And for your information in case you're not aware, No. 44 has taken the conservative route and has gone back half to gravel. And the farmers are saying and the municipalities are saying that they need that artery of 44 to access the terminals in Davidson.

Have you undertaken any discussions with those municipalities to talk about what you can do on Highway 44 to get it back to pavement and get it back so that the truck traffic is able to drive on it and keep it off the municipal secondary roads.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on the questions there — and I hope I got them all — first of all we have been working out in that area with people, and we've actually had some meetings in the Davidson area also.

Right now on Highway No. 44 there is no plan to resurface it in this year's budget. We're certainly though working in the area to look at, where is the grain traffic going? Where do we have to work together with local governments in order to put the dollars together . . . that we do have heavy truck haul routes that service areas?

But on the idea of the branch lines and the short lines, we are working with communities in areas in order to try to give as much both . . . help to see about the viability of the branch lines. But what we would call on you, as provincial Liberals, is to look to Ottawa, to the federal Liberals on the area of branch-line abandonment. It's certainly not our province that is doing that.

And we're trying to do everything in our power to work with groups to look at the kinds of choices that there ought to be. There are tremendous changes going on. We hope that more branch lines can stay in place because it will help preserve our road system.

(1545)

Mr. McLane: — Yes, thank you, Minister. Yes, I too am working with the federal government to try and bring them to some consensus with these short-lines.

The problem that I don't like to hear is — I hear the same thing from them as I hear from you and your government. You tell us in this House daily and you just said it again, talk to your federal counterparts. We talk to them and they say, well talk to your provincial counterparts. Why in the world don't you get together and come out and join in with the rest of us that live out there and farm, and our livelihoods depend on it, and let's fix this thing. Let's solve it.

Let's decide who's going to save the Imperial subdivision in my own community. Who's going to save that? I'm organizing a meeting right now for next week where all the communities are coming together and they're madder than a hatter about what's happening here. There's no action from you or your government. There's no action from the federal government. There's nothing for them.

You offer assistance. You send out a bureaucrat and they'll . . . yes, you can do this or you can do that. But nobody says we're going to stop this. We're going to stop the abandonment until we get this thing straightened out.

Now you will have some responsibilities in that area after the Canadian National rail line in our community abandons that chunk of line. It'll come into your jurisdiction and you'll have some authority then. And I'm asking you then, well talk to us. Are you willing to work with us and stop this rail line from being abandoned until we get things straightened out with the highways and the roads? And that certainly can apply to the Broderick to Moose Jaw line as well.

However in the same area, near the community of Riverhurst, we have a ferry as you know. And of course we have trouble with that thing every fall and every spring and the people in the communities on both sides want something done with that crossing. My question at the end will be what are you doing to make that a year-round crossing? You've made some commitment. I understand some of your department's made some commitment to the communities out there to look at this seriously. Where are you going with that?

But I want you to know that last spring when that ferry should have been in operation, your department was busy tearing the engine out of the ferry and those people had to wait days and weeks until they could use that ferry. Now your member, the minister that sits next to you across the way there, was aware of this and we looked at it. We tried to speed up the process but it was too late. We shouldn't have to go through that every year.

Why do we have to go through that and what is your department going to do to guarantee that those communities of Riverhurst and on the west side of the river, to guarantee that this thing doesn't happen again next spring — that when they want to use the ferry that the thing is up and ready and running and ready to roll?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, now first of all, on a number of comments there that were made in the questions, first very much I'd like to say to the member of Arm River that we have

been saying, stop the abandonment. And we have said it, as all western provinces, the Premier has said it; it doesn't make any sense to have a review of a grain transportation system as the system itself is being torn apart. And then at the end of the day there may be different rules, there may be different circumstances and you've already lost the system.

So we have been saying, stop the abandonment. We don't have the jurisdiction to stop it. That's the federal government's jurisdiction, and I wished we could do it as a province, but that is the jurisdiction of the federal government.

So we certainly have been, and I'm interested that the member from Arm River is talking to your federal counterparts. And certainly we would hope that there'd be a halt to abandonment at least until the end of the review of Estey, and what would be suggested after that on how we see a more efficient, effective grain transportation system.

More specifically on the Riverhurst ferry crossing, what happened this spring was not anticipated so there was an unanticipated circumstance. It did not take weeks; it took days to get that back in operation. And certainly we'll try to get it operating as . . . to operate as long a season as possible.

We are also doing a review on the whole transportation system in that area. Part of that is looking at the feasibility of a bubbler system in order to keep that crossing a 12-month operation. We've done some review of where this is operated in another province under cold circumstances. But we're working with Economic Development and looking at what the potato projects — and how the development will go in that area — to try to meet those needs in the transportation system.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Minister, hope doesn't save the rail lines; hope doesn't do it. You need action. You need something; you need to do something. And you're talking about hope — hope doesn't do anything; hope doesn't save the rail lines, hope doesn't build the frigging highways. We want some action.

It's my understanding — and maybe some of your officials can correct me or maybe they don't know — it's my understanding that once a piece of rail line comes out of the national system, it comes under provincial jurisdiction. At that point in time, you have the authority then to move in and put a moratorium on that piece of rail line. That's something that you need to check into, and I'd like to receive an answer in writing in regards to that question.

The other thing on the ferry — you're off the mark, Madam Minister, because they knew full well last fall that that ferry needed work on the motor of that ferry, and the work could have been done over winter. It wasn't anything happened this spring other than let the ferry freeze into the water. That's what happened.

So don't stand here today and tell us that. And the people in the community are going to receive a copy of this *Hansard* and they know full well that the ferry needed work last fall, and it could have been done and should have been done over winter time, not this spring when the ferry needed to be used.

Madam Minister, I would just ask that . . . and I asked the

question earlier and I wasn't sure that I heard the answer — when you talk about working with people in that area. But the municipalities that border Highway 44 are talking about, seriously about, having that highway built. If that rail line goes, that highway is crucial to them to get their grain to Davidson to those two huge terminals there that the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and the United Grain Growers have both built there, hoping and praying that the farmers are going have to haul their grain there.

Have any of those discussions seriously taken place with those municipalities?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Okay, Mr. Chair, in response to . . . still on the Riverhurst ferry, to the knowledge of the officials here, we did not know, we did not anticipate that in the fall, but we will certainly give you a written response to that.

The other piece on short-line railways — our unit within our own department, the short-line advisory unit, has been working with groups right across this province on branch lines and trying to see the viability of branch lines and trying to give the producers choices so that they do have an opportunity.

We are working with the federal government to look at the possibility of some kind of . . . also financial resources that could be targeted towards short- line rails. That is looking promising, but we do not yet have any guarantee on that.

But certainly there is a lot of changes that we would like to see in the Canadian transportation Act that would allow for more competition in the rail system, which would allow for joint running rights. Those are the kind of pieces that we need to have, that will make branch lines, short lines viable in this province.

I have had very good response with our short-line unit that does go out and work in areas to see the possibilities of what can be done to maintain branch lines in this province.

The other pieces — when you're talking about communities and looking at major changes and what dollars are being spent on roads, especially those that are going to major terminals, there certainly is . . . they have the opportunity to apply through the CAIP (Canada/Saskatchewan Agri-Infrastructure Program) funding, which was a good program but we need more dollars in that. And that's why we still believe there should be more dollars coming in to help build the infrastructure when we see this tremendous change happening in grain transportation.

But they do have the opportunity to apply for those kinds of dollars that will help address some of the roads that are severely impacted by changes in grain transportation.

Mr. McLane: — Thanks, Minister. The changes have been happening for the last seven or eight years, they just didn't start happening tomorrow, or yesterday, or the day before.

I'll extend the offer to you once more to come to Arm River and tour those highways with me and see for yourself firsthand what we're up against. And we'll talk to some of the folks out there, the real people that live and use those roads along there, and look forward to your visit to Arm River.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I certainly will come out to do a tour of Arm River. I was actually in Arm River constituency over the weekend. I travelled actually on a number of roads, and actually met real people that were from Arm River. And actually the roads that I travelled on were absolutely in excellent shape. Now I certainly can look at other roads in your constituency, but I did meet real people that had a lot of compliments on the roads that had been built.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Madam Minister and your officials welcome. I just have some brief questions. Taking a quick survey on the map — we have something like 12 main highways, or fairly main highways, coming in from Manitoba, eight from Alberta, and about 10 or 12 from the States. Do you have any priorities for those particular highways that would attract or would carry traffic from outside of province, particularly from the U.S. side, from the tourist attraction area? Do you give those highways priorities?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, the highways that you're mentioning that go between provinces and also join with the United States, of course the highways that are under the national highways system would certainly be getting a priority, those like No. 1, 16, 7, 39.

Other highways also that are important are provincial highways that are designated as provincial highways. We're certainly doing some major work on Highway 39 from Portal. Also Highway No. 6, Regway, coming up in that direction because they're meeting with other jurisdictions. They have set some priorities and we try to make sure that we are kind of meeting up with the priorities of some of our neighbours, especially for Economic Development, for tourism, as you have said.

So there is, I think, on a number of the highways that you have said, again depending on volumes, how they would kind of — the traffic use — those are highways that do get a priority.

(1600)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and I'm pleased to hear that. I know that you and I have exchanged some correspondence, particularly on at least two occasions, about Highway No. 47.

That highway is not anywhere near my constituency but a lot of folks from my area travel down through Estevan and into the U.S. And people coming from the U.S. through Estevan have told me on more than one occasion that the stretch of No. 47 Highway between Stoughton and No. 1 Highway should in fact be shut down for safety's sake because of its deplorable condition, particularly at night when it is . . . when the problems and the dangers are magnified. People not only have to be worried about perhaps running into wild game but the serious condition of the broken up hard top or hard surfacing. And I've had people on more than one occasion . . . and I've corresponded with you, but I wondered if there was any priority being given to that stretch of highway. It was as recently as about three weeks ago that visitors from Estevan suggested that it was extremely dangerous, particularly from Stoughton to No. 1 Highway.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on Highway 47, it's not one

of the provincial highways. It would be considered . . . it has a little less volume of traffic and so on on that piece. There is a number of kilometres, somewhere probably around 30 kilometres or more that is getting intensive preservation on it. And so it has been identified as a piece that does need work and there certainly will be work done on that piece this season.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. I'm pleased to hear that. Just to change — switch gears here a little bit. There was some correspondence from the town of Fort Qu'Appelle sharing concerns with the RM of North Qu'Appelle and Qu'Appelle with respect to, in the not too distant future, the building of Terminal T-22 near Balcarres and the access to it. And I see your officials nodding and are aware of it.

Madam Minister, could I ask what stage of consideration for some alternate routes on behalf of that community that you might be looking at to ease the pressure or take away the excess heavy traffic from right through the town of Fort Qu'Appelle?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, there have been a number of discussions around Terminal 22, and actually there seems to be . . . we're working on a solution with the RM there. It looks like some construction of an access that will then avoid the heavy traffic going through Fort Qu'Appelle. There are some safety concerns about where they want to construct that access, but we're still working with them and hopefully we can get that positively resolved.

And we'll still be meeting also with I think is the Qu'Appelle Valley transportation committee that's going to be out there to work on those issues. I think it's this Thursday.

Mr. Osika: — I thank you, Madam Minister, and I guess that's the kind of assurances that the people would like and appreciate. I did attend one of the meetings with respect to the concerns over access off No. 10 Highway to terminal T-22, and I appreciate that. So I'm encouraged and I'm sure the folks will be back in Fort Qu'Appelle that you are already talking about alternative transportation routes.

One more question, and if I could just ask, has there been a resolution to the situation on Highway No. 1 east, just east of McLean, the difficulties or the problems that Wood Country was experiencing relative to their accessibility to their facility. Has that come to a conclusion as yet or is it still kind of up in the air?

I know that I recall that and I very much appreciate your addressing and taking personal interest in that situation. And I guess I'd just like to know if that has been finalized or if there is still a need to do some work to bring it to closure.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, in regards to No. 1 and Wood Country, we have no plans to remove the approach, so the approach will stay. So I think those circumstances are addressed.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, I guess there were a few things we didn't finish the other night in estimates. I guess the final question I asked of you the other day was to bring a written response — the total number of claims and on which stretches of highways and such. Did you bring

that information with you today?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, to respond to that, we do have a vehicle damage claims paid sheet here put together to answer your request that I will give you. In putting it together in a fairly short time, we think it's as close as we possibly can get. We don't really have the information system set up to have an absolutely accurate . . . well, we hope this is as accurate as possible, but there may be some information that's not all there. But we have put this together and I will send over a copy of it to you.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, do you also have the priority list of all the highways in the province? We used to get that each and every year and I don't recall seeing it this year as yet. Could I get that?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, what we have right now, we still have last year's list. We don't have it updated for this year. A lot of the unit costs, the construction costs, have changed considerably and so it needs to be updated.

So it's not totally reflective of this year, but we could certainly still give you the same . . . it would be the list that you got last year, but we don't have an updated list for this year as yet.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, now just so we're talking about the same list, are you talking about the projects that are underway, or are you talking about the list of, you know, Highway 13 used to be somewhere about 120 on the list of priorities? Is that the list we're talking of?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — The list that I'm, Mr. Chair, the list that I'm referring to is the benefit-cost analysis project-ranking list. And so we still . . . the only list that we have right now is the list from a year ago. We do not have the one that would be updated; it needs to be done.

As I said previously that there's been a lot of change in cutting unit costs, on construction costs, which would have to go into this to have it updated.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, could you send over last year's list. I don't have mine with me here today.

Now I see on the vehicle damage claims paid list that you've sent over, there is a number of claims, some 35 claims, from flying stone claims. And I guess that's because of the highway patchwork that your department is doing now where you just put down a lot of gravel and some of these stretches of gravel covering potholes now are getting to be quite lengthy.

I have received today a letter from Mr. Leroy McGillicky at Coronach, Madam Minister. I'll send you a copy over so you can follow along.

In this letter from Mr. McGillicky:

On Wednesday, May 20, 1998, the Department of Highways were doing their yearly summer job of patching Highway 34. That afternoon as we were returning home from Bengough we met one of the Department of Highway trucks. This person who was driving did not slow down to

a responsible speed. We were virtually coming to a complete stop, but of course we received two stone chips on the windshield of our car.

We stopped one of the other trucks after this and told him what happened. The answer we received was, "We, the Department of Highways employees are not responsible for any of these happenings." Yet there are signs posted such as men working, loose stones, and slow down. I guess it is only the taxpayers that are responsible for any of these dealings these days and no one else.

As a result it cost us \$25 to have the windshield repaired that we don't have to replace the whole windshield. Enclosed is the bill. It is about time the Government of Saskatchewan started to take some form of responsibility. Mr. Leroy McGillicky.

Madam Minister, you have a copy of the bill. When these claims come in, people that have lost their windshields — and I've had three of them myself knocked out because of those gravel stretches on what should be a paved highway — can you tell us the process as to what happens so that the costs are picked up by the Department of Highways, or your department?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, just on this specific letter, certainly George Stamatinos here is the executive director of the southern region; we will look into this.

And certainly, I'm not just sure exactly where the quote came from and which employee, but that is not how we like to deal with complaints.

Now I've said various times here if there . . . we monitor roads; we try to have them signed and flagged. And if we are not responsible at all for damages, then it would go through SGI. If we feel there is total responsibility because of the condition of the roads and so on, we're then liable for that or we pay that.

(1615)

Sometimes we do get into those areas where there is some question, and we are looking at how our claims are being dealt with. We are going to do a little bit of a pilot process. But the process is usually that it has gone to an area manager, which then may go to an executive director of each region. And then sometimes it moves up.

But we do try to make settlement in which we feel we are responsible for.

We are going to look at trying to give a little more standardized process so that everybody is absolutely clear. We're looking at the possibility, if someone doesn't agree with the settlement, of setting up kind of a third person that would be like a referee to look at the claim also.

Mr. McPherson: — So, Madam Minister, when people have stone chips, what exactly is the process? What do they have to go through, you know, to get your department to pay for it?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, normally we would not pay for stone chips if the road is marked, and it's known to have

stones on it, and it's marked. People are to slow down and understand those conditions. If it is not marked and we are responsible, or if it is because of one of our vehicles, then we might be paying the claim then.

Mr. McPherson: — So if there's no small red flag or danger or bump or whatever the signs are today, and someone comes along and they hit a stretch of gravel on a paved highway where they're not expecting to see gravel and stones, you will pay — correct?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, again we have to check and investigate each one. Now if it's . . . like I said, if it was because of we did not have a gravelled area marked, that was definitely a stretch of gravel that we did not have marked and flagged, then we may be responsible. But like every stone chip — we're not responsible for.

And it's hard to know how a stone got on a piece of pavement or whatever, so that's why we look at them on each individual case.

Mr. McPherson: — But, Madam Minister, where you'd have some problems, perhaps the person that received the stone chips could be near stopped. In fact, that's what happened in my case. And the vehicle that was coming towards me was speeding on this paved highway, Highway 13. You don't expect to get your windshield taken out on paved highways.

Now when that vehicle goes by and you lose a windshield, well whose fault is that? You know the other vehicle isn't stopping to pay up. And really if you're travelling on a paved highway, you can hardly blame the person that lost their windshield. And I see here . . . I mean you have made some claims on . . . well some as low as it looks like \$35, some \$50 claims. So you're admitting that on some of these highways there is a serious problem.

By how do the people out there determine when it's fair for them to bring forward a bill or not, and who do they give that bill to?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, as I said previously, normally we do not pay for stone chips. But if it's . . . we try to have signing out there that would say slow down, take care, protect your windshield, those kind of warnings. So now if somebody feels that there was not adequate warning and they feel it was the responsibility of the Department of Highways, then they raise that concern to the area manager in that area in Transportation and Highways, and that's where it will get dealt with — the area manager for each area from the Department of Highways.

Mr. McPherson: — Have you made this public where people can take their claims for windshields or other damages? Have you advertised it in the newspapers or let people know by way of a letter from your department what they should do?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, we've had a reasonable number of claims, which is . . . and I mean and we hope that we would always get them down in numbers. Last year I think there was somewhere around, you know, 200-and-some claims and we paid out about 100 claims on it.

We have over 700,000 vehicles registered in this province. There is, I think, over 7 billion kilometres driven. It hasn't been a huge, huge issue.

But certainly I think there has been enough coverage, media coverage, and so on that people do recognize if they have valid concern . . . and I think people are very reasonable. If they really do believe it was the condition of the highways and roads that they do know to contact either our department directly, which we do sometimes get calls, or they go through an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), or they can go, like I said, to the department, the area, the people that they probably know in their local areas.

So we certainly . . . it doesn't have to go to the local area. If a concern comes to us at a minister's level, at any level in our department, we take it seriously and we look into it.

And I think most people are very reasonable and do contact us if they think there's . . . they need . . . that they have a claim that is valid.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Madam Minister, I agree, people are reasonable.

But I know in my own case, and I've been the critic of Highways, I was led to believe by the government before — I won't get into which minister informed of this, but he's sitting in here today — that in fact stone chips weren't covered.

I myself have three vehicles that have had the windshields knocked out in the last year because of the highways in the south-west which are 25 per cent gravel. And that's unfortunate. But who do we send these bills to? I'm not going to send one in; I'm not going to.

But you know what? As the MLA, if I didn't know that you weren't advertising this . . . until today you weren't making this known to anyone that you were paying for stone chips. But somehow certain people can phone into your department and get their bills paid. And you think that's fair? You think, Madam Minister, that there are only 35 vehicles that have had this happen to them in the province in the last year. You probably have 35 a month.

That's why I'm saying on your claims, when you don't go into your cabinet meetings and fight for the department that you represent, and you don't get these highways fixed, at least would you advertise in the papers . . . I mean, you're running millions of dollars worth of ads each and every year as a government — you know, promoting things, you know, your monopoly Crowns and such — that people don't have a choice in. Well why wouldn't you just run an address of your phone number in the legislature, or the Department of Highways number, or your deputy's number?

Of course, you and I both know there's far more than 35 stone claims.

Madam Minister, the claim that you have with this letter today, would you feel it fits in with this plan of yours that the ones that are fair would get paid for? Or what is the process after this? Now that you've received the letter and the bill, what do these

people have to prove — who they talked to, or which truck? Do they need license plate numbers? What do they need?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, first of all, I want to say very clearly: normally we do not cover stone chips. We've said that clearly.

What we have said is, if there are claims that come in because something was totally not signed, there was some condition that was not expected, we look at the claim, and we try to deal with them carefully. But as I said before, normally, we do not cover stone chips.

I also want to say that in the area which you represent, that there's about 3 per cent of gravel surfaces there. People that . . . on gravel surfaces, if they know that the surfaces are there, there are chances that there will be stone chips. Those will not be covered.

What we have said is, if there's a claim that comes in, then — because there had not been signing, that people did not know that there was going to be a section . . . or there needed to be some repair and there was damage to their vehicle that was a result of us not giving the proper kind of warning — then there may be some coverage.

Mr. McPherson: — Madam Minister, did I hear you say, in the south-west part of the province, in the constituency I represent, because you're not putting proper monies into the highway system and you're throwing gravel on top of pavement, that in that area you wouldn't recognize any claims?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, where it is signed, where it says there's a change of surface, no, those will not be covered.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Madam Minister, I can't think of one location on Highway 13 where it says slow down and save your windshield, or there's a change of texture on top of the road. Now there's a lot of those little red flags. They look like New Democrat lawn signs in a small version. Do those suffice, in your view, if there's a change coming up?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, if the surface has changed into gravel there would be sign, if it was a significant stretch. If it's a very short piece, or something that's going to be fixed later, it may just be flagged. But there would be indication of the conditions that it's time to slow down.

Mr. McPherson: — So, Madam Minister, we're sort of back to where we were about 10 minutes ago. You know, if I'm driving down 13 and we see these red flags — and there are a number of them — are you then saying if I slow down but somebody else that I'm meeting does not slow down, and I lose a windshield on these ridiculous highways that you're in control of, that somehow the victim should be at fault? That I wouldn't have my claim recognized?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, as we have said, or as I have said previously, if you feel that there was some responsibility on it, the claim would be looked at and we'd look at the circumstances which it was under and there'd be some adjudication of that. And like I said, clearly we try to have the surfaces marked. And if the surface is marked, then we would

say that people are to slow down and take caution on those pieces.

Now if you say there's a circumstance when somebody else was responsible, if it was the Department of Highways responsible, we would look at that claim.

Mr. McPherson: — Well dealing with the first claim then of Leroy McGillicky, you read the letter, you look at the bill, am I to assume that this is one you're going to pay through your department?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, we will investigate that claim as we do any claim that comes in, and I will not judge it here in the legislature. It will be dealt with as other claims are.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Madam Minister, one that you have had for some time, and this is the letter from Mr. and Mrs. Todd Coburn at Shaunavon. They have a bill here for just about \$900, and that was chunks of pavement, not stone chips — chunks of pavement flying through the grill of their vehicle. Is this one that you could as minister say, you bet; you know you're driving down the road and you got 10, 12 pound chunks of pavement coming through the grill, I think it's safe to say that there will be a claim paid.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, certainly we will be looking at the claim. That one is being dealt with now by the people in Department of Highways. And that one will be looked at.

Mr. McPherson: — Perhaps, Madam Minister, when we take a look at the number of claims coming in, and I recall last year dealing with some of these questions, the problem we had last year. Of course we had to go through freedom of information to get the answers to these. But I think it was something . . . last year you had ordered through your department 7,000 of those little red danger flags, whatever they are, bump flags. Seven thousand you ordered last year, and would you be able to tell us, are those enough? How many thousands have you ordered this year?

(1630)

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, last year was ordered, if I think if I understand what you're talking about, the diamond reflectors that are a little bit brighter, is that what you were talking about? I think that's the one you're talking about that was ordered. Anyways, that has been handled for a number of years. They are just a better reflector and they can be seen at night.

Mr. McPherson: — Well no, the ones that we were talking about last year, I don't think they were a special reflector of any sort, they're just that little red . . . do they reflect? I don't think they reflect. I don't think they really do the job either. In fact you'd be amazed, Madam Minister, I'm sure your office gets the same calls we get.

I've seen flags where, you know, there was no bump. It's like somebody had some extra flags and they just wanted to plant a few to say okay, there's none on the truck.

And then you're going along . . . Well, Madam Minister, come

to the south-west and take a drive around — you sit there laughing; you're laughing really in the face of the people of south-west Saskatchewan — but take a drive down there and you're going to find what I guess you would call a bump. The pictures that I sent to you a few weeks ago during question period, that was my vehicle that we drove into that supposed pothole, which is about 30 feet long and covered the width of the highway and was 8 inches deep. And you're saying, like a red — one of those little red stakes that's enough.

Somebody coming from Weyburn travelling down 13 and they're hitting these bumps and perhaps it's not, you know, real enjoyable, but that same flag, that same little red flag is going to signify one thing at Weyburn, and yet another in that area around Admiral-Scotsguard where the pavement is gone and it's 8, 9 inches deep?

I have suggestion perhaps that could resolve some of the problems here, Madam Minister. You're using the red flags perhaps too much. What you need is a colour coding. You know, yellow, blue, green — to show the severity of the hole or the crater.

Now would you be prepared . . . You know in a sense it's amusing perhaps to a few of you. But in another way it's not. Because the day I was taking that picture of my vehicle that I had in that hole, a fellow came through with a mini-van from Saskatoon and he just about ripped the bottom off his mini-van about a quarter mile before he got to where I was out taking a picture. He had some nasty things to say about the Premier.

Now would you consider colour coding flags to let people know just how ridiculous some of these holes are?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, if there's a flag put up — or as I said we are starting to replace those flags with these reflective ones that are little bit easier to see at night — it certainly means to slow down, that there is a problem with the surface of the highway, and so that's what that's indicating to people. And if there are larger stretches or a break where there's work being done, those are also signed appropriately.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Madam Minister, I think you've got to get out of Regina. I know cabinet often gets into a bubble here and you want to, you know, stay away from the public because you're not very popular.

But the fact of the matter is those holes that I'm talking about on Highway 13; they're not a bump. So don't let on like this is some little nuisance as you're driving along at 100 kilometres an hour. These, in fact, if you hit them at more than 10 kilometres an hour, you rip wheels and rims off your vehicle.

And it's the same little tiny red New Democrat lawn sign or flag there as where you just have, you know a slight bump in the road. So I suggest to you, go with a colour coding system. So at least if people see a certain colour, they know it's much safer to get off your highways which you refuse to put money into and which you refuse as a rural cabinet minister to defend the people out there. Right? Go with a colour coding system so that people know it's better to get into the ditch if they have to.

Or else, Madam Minister, start to advertise your phone number

of your office here and start to pay these bills.

You can't have it both ways. You're collecting half a billion dollars in fuel tax and motor license vehicle fees in this province and you're putting about 40 per cent of that back into the highway system. You maybe think that's fair. You may think, as a rural cabinet minister, it's fine to let your urban colleagues, you know, suck up all the money for their projects.

But I'm telling you the people in rural Saskatchewan think that you're doing a ridiculous job because those highways cannot be driven on. And it's about time you took some action.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, we do sign appropriately. We could certainly look at the suggestion you have made. I do want to remind you that I actually travel the highways and roads nearly every day and I certainly do not stay or live in Regina.

And actually last year when we put our transportation strategy together, we put a plan together for good planning, but we also put more dollars in. We put \$30 million in last year. We had another 10 per cent increase in our budget this year of \$20 million. And there are a lot of good highways right across this province. There are certainly some that we need to work on and we will be doing that.

And I do also want to say that within the Department of Highways and Transportation, the people that are out there working on these highways, I think, have been doing a tremendously good job . . . certainly wishing that we could get more support from some of the other levels of government, especially the federal Liberal government.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Good afternoon, Madam Minister, and I do welcome your officials. I have a couple of brief questions for you. I don't think they'll take just too terribly long.

Madam Minister, my concern is that I was notified that there is some confusion as to why, I guess, proper information or a vehicle or a way to allow the public to know about the new laws that are associated with snowmobile safety. Specifically that last year I guess there was a law passed in the legislature that indicated that 12- to 16-year-olds who do not have a valid driver's licence must take a course, a snowmobile safety course. Now I understand that it's snowmobile clubs that would notify the people in their areas. However, Humboldt does not have a snowmobile club.

And so I'm wondering how people are to know that this safety course must be taken and how they're to receive the information that in effect would give them some indication as to where the courses are held and what must be taken. It's my understanding that the RCMP didn't even realize that this course was a must. So could you please comment on that for me?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, this actually comes under SGI, but I certainly will pass that information on because I know there's been the changes with the safety courses like you say, and also some other changes with the licensing provisions for snowmobiles. And I know one of the things that are very important is communication of that. So I will pass those

concerns, and get answers back to you, through our Minister responsible for SGI.

Ms. Julé: — I thank you, Madam Minister. I wanted you to know though that it was presumed that SGI would be the body that would give some direction with this. And they gave my office the indication that until the *Saskatchewan Gazette* published the law that they in fact could not advertise it. But at the same time, the law was in effect January 1 of '98, so that caused some problem for SGI.

And the Saskatchewan Safety Council did indicate that they would take the names of people that would like to take the course. But that still didn't allow for anyone within that community to know who to contact, possibly a hall to have that course in, or who would get the snowmobile or whatever the case may be if there wasn't a snowmobile club there. So there is some confusion as to how that safety course could take place in communities for those youngsters, especially where there are no snowmobile clubs.

And the other thing I would just like to mention while I'm on my feet is, I see that sitting in the Assembly at the present time is the Minister of Agriculture. And I would be, through you to him, would like to relay that the No. 20 Highway between Lanigan and Humboldt is really in very, very wicked shape. And I guess I would ask you if there's any plans on doing something with that highway. I'm not sure if the Minister of Agriculture has relayed the same message to you, but if there's anything that is being done this season, I would like to know about it.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on the piece of highway that you mentioned — No. 20, Lanigan to Humboldt — the decision there is being made. There will certainly be maintenance of that road. Now whether or not to then be putting dollars in for intensive preservation . . . or maybe a major upgrade may be happening on that road. So it's certainly identified as one of the priorities, be dealt with . . . trying to have good maintenance probably this year but it looks like some work for next year.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome, Madam Minister, to yourself and your officials. I'm looking forward to bringing up maybe 10, 12 points in the next 20 minutes or so.

Before I begin, Madam Minister, I want to say that over the past 20 years northern Saskatchewan has had a number of problems and a number of challenges with their highway system. And during the '70s we certainly had the NDP government in power, and certainly during the '80s we had the PC (Progressive Conservative) administration in power. And again in the '90s we also have the NDP government again in power, and yet the roads in northern Saskatchewan continue to be forgotten, and many people in northern Saskatchewan again have at times been very, very frustrated, Madam Minister, with the lack of action on our highways.

And it's been to a point where, Madam Minister, the frustration is shown in a petition that I had circulated, and by accident the petition was sent up to the good people up in Stony Rapids. And the highway actually dealt with . . . Highway 155, which of course goes from Green Lake north through Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, La Loche, and on to Cluff Lake. And by all means,

you know, we try to get all the people in northern Saskatchewan to cooperate and coordinate on their battles, you know, for recognition of their problems.

And we got the petition back, and the petition was filled from names of Stony Rapids, and of course Stony Rapids is not anywhere near Highway 155. But the people of Stony Rapids signed the petition in support of the communities along the Highway 155, which include Patuanak, Turnor Lake, Dillon, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Buffalo . . . and so on and so forth.

So I guess I'm going to send this petition to you just to basically show you that the people of northern Saskatchewan, no matter where they are, have a common bond and certainly have displayed common efforts to try and bring these problems to the forefront.

Madam Minister, I guess the first question I have for you today is, we have been receiving reports back from the communities that there's been a rumour — and I wish you could substantiate the rumour yea or nay, and the reasons behind if it is a true rumour — that half of the budget allocated for our particular region, which is Meadow Lake north, has been cut from the Highways budget.

And I want to say today, is this a rumour? Is this a fact? And if it is a rumour, will you again stand up today and say that if that is a rumour, displace it at this point in time. If it's a fact, then turn around and say no, we'll not reduce the budget by 50 per cent for Meadow Lake and Points North, particularly the highway route around 155.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, from the money that was being identified in this year's budget for that area, there has not been any cut in that. So I'm not just sure exactly what the rumour is that you have heard, but as far as our knowledge here, no, the dollars are being spent that were budgeted for, for that area.

(1645)

Mr. Belanger: — Okay, from the allocation we have here in terms of 155, there's been an indication that there's at least a minus 32 per cent cut from the budget that we had from last year. Could you give me the specific numbers if there has been a cut, if there has not been a cut? And if there has been a cut, what the amount is? Is that a fair assessment to make?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I think possibly there's maybe some dollars in . . . like the last year there was an exceptional amount of gravel that was higher than usual, so some of that may have come down. And also some of the maintenance levels might have come down, like the dollars being spent there. But what has happened is that there is a lot more dollars gone into major capital work. So overall there's more dollars actually being spent.

Now this is . . . now I don't know if I've got it down to just your region exactly, but in the northern area, the major capital projects from 1998 budget was at 11.443 million, those are estimated for . . . But anyway what I will just say, I won't get into all the specific numbers, but is that the dollars more in capital have gone up. There may be some areas . . . And maybe

some of it is in some of the routine maintenance; there may have been some less dollars if there had been increased gravel last year in some of that area.

Mr. Belanger: — So I guess the point I want to make, if it's a yes or no, Madam Minister, what you're saying to me at this point in time for the Meadow Lake area . . . Is the Prince Albert area is different? Meadow Lake is of course Green Lake north. You're saying to me this evening that there is no cut to the budget overall for the highway construction programs or the highway maintenance programs for Green Lake north.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — From the item that I have here on the expenditures for . . . that's 4,620 kilometres of highways and airports in the northern NAD (northern administration district) area which would be the Meadow Lake area north. In major capital projects, it's gone up from, last year from 11.433 million to 16.415 million. So it's gone up in that area.

The partnership expenditures that we have has gone up from 330,000 to \$2.66 million. From last year in preservation projects it's gone up from 3.287 million to 3.55 million. And in other surface preservation, that budget has also gone up. So I'm just not sure exactly where you're getting these other dollars from.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay, Madam Minister, I just wanted to hear from you because the source that we got the information from of course is a couple of northern leaders. And they've been hearing a lot of these rumours that the highways allocation for our particular area has been drastically reduced. We want to make sure that there's no evidence of that, that it was never entertained, and that it's certainly not true.

And I can basically see from the figures you've given me today that in fact that may not be true at all. And I want to ensure people out there that we want to alleviate those concerns and to nip these particular challenges in the bud before they get to become a problem area.

The other particular area we have a concern, Madam Minister, is what we refer to as the proposed construction of a super highway in our particular region. And I spoke to you behind the bar about this particular problem. Fort McMurray, of course in Alberta, we have been trying to make a connection to Garson Lake and on to Highway 155, La Loche area.

And to date we have seen a tremendous amount of money being spent on an alternate route, that route going from the Meadow Lake area into the Canoe Lake area, then on to the Dillon area, and now they're pushing through to the Grizzly Bear Hills which is west of the main route feeding all the Highway 155 communities.

So what we see happening here in the northern part of Saskatchewan is that we see the potential for a link from Fort McMurray directly into Meadow Lake as a result of the tremendous amount of money being poured into that highway which is 903. And that impression we're getting is further supported by the fact that Highway 155 is getting a meagre amount of money for maintenance compared to Highway 903 which is primarily a logging road.

So my question to you, Madam Minister, is the millions of dollars that these communities have invested into infrastructure, to the homes of many people in Buffalo Narrows, the business people of Ile-a-la-Crosse, and Beauval, of Green Lake . . . all those people in all those communities would be displaced. They'd be in fact as short as 10 years from now, could be off the beaten track if Highway 903 becomes a super highway and connects Fort McMurray, Alberta directly into Meadow Lake. They could in essence bypass all these communities.

And Madam Minister, that's a great concern to all the residents in my constituency because I've talked to many businesses in Buffalo Narrows and many people there. And again if that happens, if that shift happens, Madam Minister, then all the communities along that route will be severely, adversely affected.

And I want your assurance today that Highway 155 will remain the only vital link for the transportation of goods, will remain the only vital link serving the north-west today so that 10 years from now we don't see that development happening. Could you give us that assurance in the House today, Madam Minister?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on both of these stretches that were talked here now, on 903 there's no plan to build a super highway there. There is some work being done on it as there is some work being done on Highway No. 155. At this point there . . . like I'm not sure if the timber companies or somebody else is planning to make a connection off of 903 over, like you say, to Garson Lake, but we don't have that plan.

Mr. Belanger: — Well, Madam Minister, it's a grave concern as I mentioned to you before. The communities and the people are quite riled up about this whole scenario, so I want your assurance that, as Minister of Highways in cooperation with the Minister of SERM, in cooperation with the Premier, that any effort to develop a super highway that could have any adverse effect on these west-side communities that you will ensure that these highways are closed to general traffic and that this will not be someday opened up as a main route to serve the west side.

And that again, as I mention, is a grave concern to the people of the Athabasca constituency, in particular those communities that are served and connected by Highway 155. And that's why, Madam Minister, the frustration on the level of service to the main highway . . . We don't want to see that highway become a gravel road. We don't want to see it become a road that only small traffic can travel on. We want to see that road built up and developed to a proper level so that people can travel in relative safety and in comfort.

And this is why there's been a great amount of concern.

They're quite frankly afraid that that Highway 903 will become a super highway . . . that in its current state now it's in better shape than our main route feeding all these communities. That is why there's a concern. And in fact we're seeing that there's a heck of a lot more dollars pumped into that Highway 903 than there is in Highway 155.

So I don't know if it's a conspiracy amongst private business people in Meadow Lake or Fort McMurray, but I want you to

ensure the people of that particular area that that main highway will not be changed from 155 to 903.

And the other point, Madam Minister, once I have that assurance from you, we need to see evidence of that through constant injection of dollars into that main route so that people's concerns can be alleviated. Can we get some of those comments on that particular issue, please?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, to address those questions I just want to reassure you that on Highway 903 there is some major upgrading happening up to, I guess, about where that — Canoe Lake — where that intersection is there, and that's to carry the heavy truck haul. But after Canoe Lake on, there is just . . . it's not in the plan to put major dollars in that or to look at any kind of connection up to Garson Lake. I mean that's just not in our plan at all.

Certainly the connection from Cole Bay . . . I think it is here, over also to Highway No. 155, there is some upgrading happening there because there's access into a number of communities and resort communities there. But certainly Highway No. 155 is still seen as a major road for connection of those other communities and for a road that will be certainly worked on into the future.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister, and this is the reason why if somebody were to ask me, as the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Athabasca, what's the one road you want to see built, and the road of course, Madam Minister, would be the road from Garson Lake on to Highway 155, La Loche area. And that's the primary reason because if we want a connection from Fort McMurray, we want that connection to go through Garson Lake, La Loche, and on to the main route. And then the tourism will flow, and the benefits will flow along that area, and that you would not see the Meadow Lake, Fort McMurray connection.

So I guess the other point that we raise is that Garson Lake is a very important road to all the west-side communities. They understand that. And, Madam Minister — if I'm incorrect, please correct me — but you're assuring the House today that it's not in your plans to have the super highway developed thereby alleviating some of the concerns and I'm glad to hear you say that.

The other factor, Madam Minister, is that some of the communities like Turnor Lake, Patuanak, Pinehouse, and Dillon area, they have been for years asking to have the roads fixed up. And I see some work being done in the Turnor Lake area, and I'm sure many people appreciate that work and are going to hopefully see the benefits of some of that commitment.

But the other point I wanted to make, is there any indication that your department may be looking at a training program, a massive training program over the next 10 years, of taking people that are perhaps on social assistance or taking people that are unemployed or taking people that maybe are wanting to train, to see if you can take 10 or 15 people from each of the communities and train them on heavy equipment to rebuild these roads?

Imagine for a minute, Madam Minister, if you have all these

people training on heavy equipment, rebuilding these roads, perhaps one day we may see a very well-built and well-maintained highway system in northern Saskatchewan. Have you ever considered that as a departmental objective and something that you could prioritize as Minister of Highways?

(1700)

The Deputy Chair: — Why is the Minister of Justice on his feet?

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

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Deputy Chair, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the legislature, Dr. Irvin Waller who is in the front row. Dr. Waller is the director of the International Centre for Crime Prevention in Montreal. And he's a friend from many years back when we worked together on the Church Council for Justice and Corrections in Ottawa. He's in Regina today to work with the city of Regina on various crime prevention initiatives and bring his broad experience from around the world to deal with some of these issues in Saskatchewan.

He's accompanied, behind him, with Terry Mountjoy, who's the director of social development for the city of Regina; and Craig McLean, who is a crime prevention officer. I'd ask all members of the legislature to welcome Irvin to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

Subvote (HI01)

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I think a number of your suggestions there are very worthwhile. And some of those we have been working on. And there's two areas I just want to touch on . . . is that we've had these transportation area committees also in the south part of the province. But we are looking at the North also, how to work together with the communities in kind of a large-area planning, maybe through New North, some of those areas in order to help with figuring out priorities that meet the needs of communities.

But the second point that you mentioned I think is really good. We've done some work in the Garson Lake area where we have worked with Social Services, unemployed, some to try to get into training. I know there's examples to more probably on the east side in the North right now where there's some programs in which the contractors are working with people to give them heavy equipment training. I think we need to continue to work with the contractors — our own policy too — to be hiring and working with more Northerners in the northern part of the province. And so I believe a lot of your suggestions in working

with training in this area, we are working on, and we need to continue to work on, and certainly look to your advice on how successful we are and ideas to implement that.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I know there'll be a lot of people very happy to hear some of the positive comments you have because there's roads have been a problem for many years. La Loche has led the example of how they can take people that are primarily unemployed and train them on heavy equipment to rebuild roads. So there's a lot of potential in that particular area.

And the final few questions I have for you is in terms of the NRT (Northern Resource Trucking), northern trucking firm. How much did they contribute to the province for hauling some of their goods and services on the roads that we talk about this evening?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, could I have that question just repeated or clarified? I'm just not sure that we caught the question.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, the question — I understand that NRT contributes so many dollars to the Department of Highways for travelling on these roads with extra loads, extra heavy loads; and I was just wondering what kind of dollars did they contribute to your department as a result of this agreement?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, we don't have that information here, but we will get back to you with it, what they have contributed. We do have, through other partnership expenditures . . . that we are spending 2.6 million in the North.

But on the NRT we do not have that right now. But we will get back to you.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. And I guess the other point I wanted to make is that, in the event that some of the people that may have hit a pothole, or may have hit an unmarked problem area on the highway, what is the general procedure for them trying to claim some damages back from Highways or from SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) because there are many people out there that have ran into this problem? Many of them have swallowed the cost because they assume nothing could be done about it. But many times, these areas are unmarked. And it's a road hazard, and they hit it, and they feel that they have no particular recourse to try and get some help getting their vehicle fixed.

So could you explain the process as to where SGI's responsible? Where Highways is responsible? And how people can begin to look at the option of trying to get some help for their damaged vehicles in the event that there's an unmarked area of the highway that causes damage?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, first, if the damage is the result of it being not marked and they feel that it was Highway's fault, then they would see the area manager and file a claim there, and that would be reviewed. If it was a condition of the road in what you felt that we were not liable, they would still go through the regular then SGI claim.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. I guess the final point I want to

make, Madam Minister, I want to thank you and your officials for sharing the information with us. And I never really did have the opportunity to congratulate you on your recent appointment.

I certainly hope that you provide as much energy and support and focus on northern Saskatchewan as you have in other regions of the province.

I think the points that the northern people want to make is that we've been very patient with the highway system. We have been very supportive over the past number of years.

And a lot of truckers, a lot of taxi operators, and general public travel these roads. They're extremely frustrated. They say to the government, at the very least, let's have a plan. Let's have a commitment you're going to give us that, within five years, our highway system would have some opportunity to get some dollars injected into them to try and bring them up to at least a half-decent standard.

And if you can work on a solution that we have — which includes a major road rebuild training program — which would take a number of people from these communities to rebuild the roads. That's an option that we looked at and sincerely are very interested in having the government investigate.

And secondly, look at some of the proper maintenance of some of these roads. Perhaps we need more direct consultation with the communities impacted to say how could we improve the maintenance of your road? For example, Turnor Lake, Dillon, Patuanak, Pinehouse, these communities.

Because when you have a centrally located highways depot, these people spend an hour and a half travelling to these roads to do an hour and a half work and then they got to travel back an hour and a half and there you've already blown four and a half hours. So there's a lot of lost time transporting vehicles and equipment back and forth, and that again is an injustice to the certain communities that have to be serviced.

And, Madam Minister, these communities aren't small. Turnor Lake, for example, has close to a thousand people. Dillon, you know, they've got a thousand people as well. These are people that we need to serve . . . Patuanak. And that's the incredible challenge we have is we're leaving thousands of people in northern Saskatchewan isolated because of poor road conditions.

So at the very least, look at these options, give us your commitment, and always respect what the northern people have been stressing for many years, the fact that they do need some solid commitment when it comes to the highway program.

And I sincerely look forward to the next year to see what happens. And again I wish you the best of luck in your new portfolio and advise you that we'll certainly be keeping our eyes and ears open into the coming year to see what plans that you may have for the North. Thank you very much.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to make a comment that I appreciate a lot of the suggestions that you have said. We certainly have targeted a \$35 million increase . . . \$35 million being spent in the North. We do need

good planning. We want to work with the communities. Since being appointed as minister — I guess it's a little bit less than a year — I have put on 66,000 kilometres on a vehicle and certainly are trying to travel the roads, plan to be in the North, plan to be across the South, so I do appreciate a lot of the comments that you've made today. Thank you.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And welcome to Madam Minister and her officials here this afternoon.

I want to just get into a few more items that are more constituency specific before I go on to some other questioning. And one of them deals with agreements that Highways and Transportation would enter into with private individuals for the acquiring of aggregate related to construction of highways. And I'm looking at, I guess the correct title being "Agreement for the Removal of Material."

And the ones that I'm most curious about actually are specific to, I guess you might want to describe it as, the road to Avonlea or perhaps better describe the road almost to Avonlea — the Highway 334. Now I've had some individuals that have asked with respect to contracts, agreements that have been entered into if . . . well for one thing, prior to me asking these questions, would you just explain for my benefit and for the benefit of everybody here that — what procedure you go about acquiring aggregate let's say from private individuals?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, first, any time that we're building a road, in which we need to do a haul on aggregate, we look at where we do already have sources. But if it's too far away and it looks like the truck haul will be too expensive, we do investigate a local area to try and find aggregate. And so they do the investigation, field investigation, do sampling, look for the quality that they need. And then if they can find the kind of quality that is needed, they negotiate a sale. And we have somebody that would go out and negotiate a sale at fair market value. And that is usually how we would acquire aggregate close.

Now if we're talking on the road to Avonlea, that was one of the concerns . . . is to get aggregate that was close because a truck haul some distance could damage a lot of other roads too in that area.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And Madam Minister, with respect again then to this specific project, how many outside suppliers or private land owners did you end up entering into agreements for aggregate with? What specific quantities were supplied by each of these? And what sort of values, dollar values, were paid to these individuals? Are the payments already out in their entirety, or are there still some payments left to be made to suppliers on some of these contracts specific to this Highway 334 project?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I think because of the specifics that you're asking for on this that we will get back to you with a written answer on it. And it is property acquisition is what happens with this, but we would have to get back to you on the details that you're asking for.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and, Madam

Minister. So we have your specific undertaking here this afternoon that you will be providing us with the details that have been requested.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, provided that it's not protected under freedom of information, we certainly will be able to provide that information then to you.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, then I'd have to ask how many contractees would be involved here. Would you at least be able to provide us with that here this afternoon because some have been in communication with myself and they have asked if I could obtain some information on their behalf?

My understanding in speaking with some of them is they have some concerns that perhaps the amount of aggregate that they understood was to be contracted for hasn't ended up being required by the department. And they're wanting to know if there's going to be further required from the department or not, this sort of thing. So if I could get some idea of how many contractees are involved.

And I certainly, probably could get their undertaking to get the informations from your department on their behalf. I'm sure they wouldn't have any problem with that and thus remove the necessity of talking about freedom of information.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I just ask you, give us the specifics and we will try to get the answers. I don't think we've got the information here to be able to answer that in details, but we certainly will try to provide the information to you in a written form.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and, Madam Minister. Another more constituency-specific concerns that I have centres around Highway 363. And I know there was a small project — I guess that's the best way to describe it — in terms of some resurfacing done on 363 just west of Moose Jaw.

There were a number of concerns expressed that, almost immediately after this particular stretch of road was resurfaced, it was starting to come unglued, I guess would be one way of describing it.

Could you perhaps this afternoon describe for us what went wrong on this project? Because it would seem that something did go dreadfully wrong in that an improper surface application must have been used that it would already have been literally coming apart.

And if I could just have your comments on this this afternoon, because not only has that small stretch of 363 that has been repaired, if you'll call it that, not only that part has been of concern, but certainly the entire Highway 363 is one that really begs some attention. It's a highway which is of tremendous concern to those who have to use it.

I know I hear members opposite from time to time try and argue that well, there's just not that much traffic on that road. Well the fact remains though, the traffic that is on that road at times could be carrying some people in rather precarious circumstances in the event of some serious injury along that stretch of road or in adjacent farms; ambulances up and down

that highway. We have school buses trying to travel over that highway on a regular basis as well, and there's safety concerns surrounding those as well.

So if I could . . . I'll take my place here briefly and let you perhaps respond to some of these concerns.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on 363, on the piece that you were talking about that had been repaired, if it had come apart right away, I mean the contractor that did it we wouldn't have accepted it, and he would have to go back and do the work on it. Now we're not absolutely certain exactly on the timing of the piece that you're talking about.

There are sometimes pieces that are done on these surfaces of Highway 2, say, in the fall of the year. They still will have some difficulty in the spring with freezing and thawing, and then usually if the repair is added one more time to that, they do improve. But if it was just immediately after — and I mean there is some difficulty with that surface — the contractor would still have to go back and work on that piece.

Just in generally, on highways, as you say, on some of the thinner-surfaced highways like a 363, of course those are still important networks for our communities, and we certainly do try to keep them in the best condition possible. It's important for both the economic and the safety of our communities.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. If I might just for a moment bounce back to Highway 334, the road almost to Avonlea. And I know I attended a public meeting that the Highways department had sponsored in Avonlea — it's some months ago now — concerning highways in and out of Avonlea and what to do with the balance of the work that sorely needs to be done. I know you were at the meeting asking community leaders, residents — local residents and area residents — to help provide some solutions along with yourselves as to what to do with the balance of these roads.

Of course, the highway leading out of Avonlea west, and 339 being the condition that that it's in as well, it's — and one of course that leads to what is a national historic site now in the Claybank brick plant and the tourism that is associated with that or hopefully that will continue to be — provided that people don't give it a bad review after trying to get there and find out that it's too difficult to traverse the highways and go back and tell friends and families, well, look, it was a great place to go visit, but it was difficult trying to get there.

If you might just update us here this afternoon as far as what your intentions might be in terms of improving the balance of the roads in the area and just what specifically do you have in mind in terms of what you require from the local governments in this issue because I had a sneaking suspicion at that meeting that you were skirting an issue of whether some local funding initiatives might be provided towards trying to improve some of those roads, and a bit of an offloading of some responsibilities on the part of yourself and the department and this government. It certainly sounded dangerously close to that, and I'd like an update whether that's what it in fact is.

I know . . . well this weekend in fact there's a benefit auction being conducted in Moose Jaw, and some of the proceeds are

going towards raising some funds for furthering the development of the Claybank Brick Plant as a historical site and tourism spot.

And dollars being precious with respect to those sorts of projects, we don't want to see any area dollars going to have to serve the purpose of getting these people to the site.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to be able to address this question because this area too used to be in my old constituency. So I know these roads really well and have travelled on them a lot.

So, okay, on the section that is under the CAIP funding, there is \$4 million being spent there, as you say, on the road almost to Avonlea. On the rest of the road into Avonlea, we're actually going to do an amount of work this year on 3 kilometres in which there had been some damage because of the aggregate haul, the gravel haul there. And we feel responsible for that.

We've met with the communities there, and we've certainly assured Avonlea, and to the Claybank Brick factory, an important historic site, that there will be strong maintenance and work on that road to keep it in very good shape, all the way to Claybank. We're talking a little bit on a five-year plan. So that will be a priority area.

I know all the way from Avonlea to Kayville, getting down to Bengough, which does get into my constituency, I actually met some people the other day, and they said that's probably the best shape they've seen that road in, in a long time, and that they're very pleased for the kind of work that we've been doing on those roads.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And, Madam Minister, I just don't have in front of me right this minute the benefit/cost analysis that was prepared last year that you provided to the member from Wood River earlier. But I don't believe that the projects that you're talking about, the initiatives that you're speaking of here were very highly ranked previously.

Am I to understand then that they've moved significantly up the list? Are we talking about a reshuffling of rankings? Or is it strictly just a matter of re-costing the projects on that list? I guess we get into these greater questions now, whether specific to the benefit/cost analysis. Just why is . . . what is the delay? What are all the reasons for the delays? Why don't we have an updated list in front of us right now? Is there some re-shuffling going on? Or is it strictly just a dollars and cents issue and trying to arrive at current dollar costs?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, as you the know the major project there, the \$4 million project, is under CAIP funding which we've established. Certainly we've taken some responsibility to do some work on a piece there that we said, because of the gravel haul, was severely damaged.

The type of work that we're talking about for the rest of that system is not a major upgrade. When you look at that BCA (benefit/cost analysis) project ranking, that's for an upgrade of a

road to a different structure. But we're talking still that intensive preservation, or some time it's reconstructing a road that's there. But it's going to be at that type of level. It's not going to be upgraded to a new level of road. But what it will be is that there will be dollars put in to do a good access type of road. It might be rebuilt in some places, but it won't be upgraded to a different level.

Mr. Aldridge: — So thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. So, Madam Minister, I take it from your response that the type of work that's going to be done on this particular stretch of road is better than what would be achieved if it was bumped up the list. So correct me if I'm wrong, but what you're talking about here in terms of what you intend to achieve on this stretch of road — stronger maintenance, some rebuilding where required — will in effect upgrade this road to essentially what would be a higher standard any way. And one that's more safe and more conducive to tourist traffic to the national historic site.

(1730)

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, for example on that three kilometres I've talked about, that will be strengthening, so it is almost a type of an upgrade on it. The rest of the kilometres into Avonlea over time will all be upgraded to the same standard that's being done to Highway No. 6. From Avonlea to Claybank, there is going to be intensive work done there, and it will be monitored into the future to look at the traffic volumes and so on. But that traffic there probably won't have the kind of heavy haul that some of the other roads, so we'll be working in the area to make sure that we have a very good, strong road system. Certainly the tourism thing is a very important piece in that area.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, and Madam Minister, again we get back to this discussion about traffic and types of traffic, and I know there's been some discussions that have taken place in the past concerning . . . in terms of prioritizing these sorts of projects and what sort of highways should get attention and shouldn't. And you apply what I guess you would call or your department would refer to as an acceptable level of risk, I guess, as it would relate to highway safety.

And Highway 339, I would maintain, is an important route, perhaps maybe . . . and I might give you . . . perhaps not quite as much heavy traffic as the stretch heading east of Avonlea. But nonetheless it's the route for ambulances when they come out of Moose Jaw to pick people up in Avonlea and area to take them into the Plains hospital here in Regina, the major trauma centre. So certainly it's one that is of concern from a safety point of view.

And I just want to know, in terms of your department, in terms of yourself, just how high on the list is people's safety on these highways? The acceptable level of risk that you might refer to in terms of departmental policy, just exactly what does that mean? Do you accept that there's a certain number of highway mortalities, or would you consider or should consider . . . but maybe I better put it to you, would you consider that one is too many? It's an issue that we have to deal with everyday, and I'm sure that your members, as well, have concerns expressed to them about highway safety. So if I could just have your

response to this.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, of course highway safety is a top priority. I mean it's like you say one mortality is too many. When we look at accidents, we always want to analyse if there was road conditions or if there was structure of the road or any piece there that was involved in it.

Generally, like I have said many times before, we want to put our dollars, use them in the best way possible to keep our road system as safe as possible for both economic and social reasons for our communities right across Saskatchewan. And certainly roads play an important part of that.

The second factor in that is to make sure that the drivers that are on these roads are being trained and are as safe as possible. And so that's why there's a very important initiative, the drinking driving initiative, other things about probationary licensing — all of those pieces are trying to attack so that we can have a road system, transportation system that is safe in this province.

The other piece to that too is to make sure that the vehicles operating on those roads are safe and that's why we've got to work with the trucking industry. We have to work with all of these in partnership to make sure that our roads are as safe as they possibly can be, whether it's on a farm access road, whether it's a gravel road, a secondary highway, a provincial highway, a national highway. All of those things have to be addressed and they are of utmost important to us.

And we are working in transportation area committees with communities. We are working with the local governments. And again we would like to pull in the federal government to be a partner in a transportation strategy, because I think it's absolutely important to have a safe transportation system and a system that meets the needs for economic development in our province and also the social needs of our communities.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Deputy Chair, and Madam Minister, you mentioned the area of transportation planning committees and it concerns me, given that these committees are essentially formed by very well-meaning local individuals. I think they have the best interests of their regions at heart certainly and are trying to work towards what's best for their regions.

But I have a constant concern in hearing the sorts of discussions that take place between themselves and yourselves as department or your greater government, that really what you're manipulating them — and you might take issue with that word — what you're manipulating them towards is arriving at what you want the conclusions to become.

And I have a very real fear that there'll be options presented to a lot of these people in their regions that, well look, you've got these many kilometres of highways and you've got these many types of highways and that consists of highway no. such-and-such and so on. And it becomes a choice that you present to them not of how to go about maintaining, upgrading all of the system, but one of a choice of, well, you only get to keep this one or that one or only a certain number of them.

So now you as a committee have to arrive at which ones are going to essentially be more or less abandoned or if you choose

the Tory option, turn them back to gravel.

So I'd like to have your comment on that because I see some abuse of a committee structure that's there and manned by some individuals that are rather well intentioned. In fact very well intentioned, they have the best interests of their communities and their regions at heart, and I don't like to see them being manipulated to achieve some end that they will regret at sometime in the future.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, in response to this it doesn't surprise me that you might think this is some type of manipulation. I take exception to that. This is a provincial government that is working with communities because of the tremendous challenge that has been placed forward to us mainly because of a federal government that doesn't understand the kind of cooperative decision making and cooperative responsibility across this country.

So when we've been working out there, and what I've seen with these transportation area committees, and I have seen and have no evidence that they have felt that there is any manipulation in this. What we're trying to do, is kind of like . . . I look at it as the Saskatchewan way to solve a tremendous challenge that's there.

And part of that challenge is looking at what's happening to our branch line system which is not been determined by this provincial government or those local municipalities where we're seeing an abandonment there. They're looking at what are the possibilities of us working together to look at possibilities of short-lines. How do we see some of the changes and where we do have to prioritize for our area?

And they know that there is limited dollars, and they know that things are changing in their communities. And what we're doing is trying to be there to help them and to help us in our decision making so that we are building a system that will meet the needs of today and into the future of this province.

And what I don't see again, sitting there and helping us out, is the federal level of government, which is putting this huge challenge upon us in this province. We've seen a loss of a Crow benefit that's had a huge dollar impact. We've seen the changes in the branch lines happening here.

And so we need to work with communities to face these challenges, and we are there to work with them as partners and for them to give us their advice so that we make good decisions for the future of a system that will meet the needs of today into the future.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Deputy Chair, and Madam Minister. I guess if I could be more specific with respect to these processes then. Do I have your commitment and the commitment of your government here this afternoon then that it will not be acceptable to end up downgrading highways within these regions that are already requiring maintenance just as they are ranked currently? There will be no downgrading as a result of the interactions that you're describing that are not manipulative of nature . . . you're suggesting.

I take the contrary view there because I've had some private

discussions with people who have been involved. They have these concerns; they'll continue to express them, I'm sure; I'll continue to relate them to you.

We can continue to blame whoever we want here — blame federal government, whatever we want. But what I want to avoid in this issue is that at some point in time we stand here and you try and blame some local regional transportation council for some decision that you made them arrive at. So I want your undertaking here this afternoon that we're not going to see the highway system downgraded as a result of this initiative.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, in response to that, we certainly will be working with the area committees and making joint decisions. And no, what we're doing with our system is building a system that will work to meet the needs now and into the future.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, with respect to your department's policies, procedures in place to dispose of Highway department assets, supplies, and so on, could you describe for us how you go about doing that. Who is involved in . . . Perhaps you have a list of people who are authorized to sign off on supplies or assets of your department, let's say to whatever agency you may use to dispose of them — if you could outline that procedure for us here this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, it would be senior officials within my department that would sign off. They would then go through SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) through sales and salvage.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And, Madam Minister, could you perhaps provide us with a list of those officials that are currently authorized to do that? Do you divide up the duties? Are certain officials responsible for the disposal of certain types of assets within the department? Could you describe it a little bit further for us here with respect to that?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Yes, it's more than like one official; and you're right, it gets divided up. So we can get back to you with more specifics in a written form.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. But, Madam Minister, at least for our benefit here this afternoon, could you at least categorize the assets for disposal. Perhaps you don't have available to you here right now the list of individuals authorized to dispose of assets of the department, but how would you break it down? Are there one or two or three categories of supplies or assets of the department?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, the two main groups would be . . . one would be fleet services and the other would be probably the office and technical, you know, type of equipment.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, I've had it described to me —and maybe you could tell me where things like fleet services and so on would fit in here — but I've had it broken down as departmental non-revolving fund items, Highways and Transportation revolving fund, Highways and Transportation revolving fund

but just sundry items only.

Now this, I assume, is perhaps how you've broken it down for SPMC before when . . . I know they've been caught in the past in terms of the Provincial Auditor and the fact that a lot of departments . . . I'm not pointing the finger at yours here but there have been a lot of departments that have perhaps disposed of certain supplies from their department and not really . . . and they haven't done it without proper authorization. I'm not suggesting that was your department here, but this is how it was broken down before. Is that how it currently would be broken down, the three categories I've just described?

(1745)

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, the fleet services, what you described is the revolving fund and that would be the part that would be dealt with under the fleet services. That's where it would go through is the revolving fund.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, pieces of heavy equipment, heavy highway equipment, does that fall under that same category then for disposal?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chairman, the big equipment would go through the revolving fund; that's where it would be. The sundry items that you mentioned before would be the smaller, more technical, those types of items.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, the Minister responsible for SPMC last year had described in terms of what they had disposed of for the Department of Highways . . . and I guess this would have been for the '96-97 fiscal year. But he described it as . . . oh, here, and you can check verbatim for this. But last year they had handled one of the largest sales ever for the Department of Highways. And at the time he attached a figure of something like \$11.9 million towards the proceeds of disposal.

Would you be able to outline for us this afternoon just how much Highways equipment you intend to dispose of during this fiscal year? How much for the '97-98 fiscal year which I'm missing within here? Because I know so often we've heard, well perhaps from your predecessors or perhaps from yourself, that a lot of our problems or some of our problems that we can attribute to Highways relates to the massive sell-off of Highways equipment under the Tory administration.

Now I might maintain — and others — that perhaps all that was done here is it was just handled a little bit more slyly by the New Democratic administration in that perhaps it was handled in a series of smaller sales, but to accomplish the same end, versus the way the Tories had handled it before. Because I heard a lot of comments from people who have a problem with having to operate equipment that they feel might be past its prime, so to speak, when there is other pieces of equipment that might have been disposed of for that same use that were in much better condition. Perhaps for the sake of . . . the decision was made — maybe it was more saleable, a newer piece of equipment versus an older one.

But in the end, what did we end up arriving at for a disposal

price? Did we get essentially what was the full value for that piece of equipment? Did we get 10 cents on the dollar? What was described by the SPMC minister as one of the largest sales ever handled for the Department of Highways, did that \$11.9 million that he described to us — what did that represent? Did it represent a good value for the equipment, or was it something that might be considered a lot less than desirable. Because we also heard stories about where contractors, who may have picked up some equipment from some of these sales, ended up turning them around rather quickly, and for a tidy profit too.

So I just certainly welcome the minister's comments with respect to the procedures involved and the results of sales in the recent past, and certainly what your intentions are for the current fiscal year.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on the year that you said you don't have the dollars there, '97-98, it looks in the area of about \$1.7 million is what had been up for sale that goes back to the revolving fund. It was a replacement of equipment that's wore out; that's what is involved there; '98-99, I don't have the numbers, but we don't . . . Again it will be just for replacement of equipment.

And we've been trying to upgrade equipment. Somewhere in the area of 3 to \$4 million has been spent in the last two years — Or is that each year? . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, each year 3 to \$4 million is being spent to upgrade our equipment.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Madam Minister, would you be able to send to us a summary then of assets, equipment that have been disposed of, '96-97 and '97-98, specific to the piece of equipment disposal price. Would that be possible to obtain that?

Also would you confirm or was it correct — I'm assuming it was correct — that the minister had advised me that there was something in the order of \$11.9 million worth of assets disposed of on behalf of the Department of Highways for the '96, I'm assuming it's for the '96-97 year.

He specifically said last year they had handled the disposal of that much equipment for your department. Would you be able to verify that and in turn, as I say, send over a summary of what in fact was disposed of?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I'd want to just confirm that the '96-97 wasn't anywhere near the 11.9 million that you're saying. We don't have the exact number here. We think it was substantially less. And so we will give you those numbers. We will even give you the number for '96-97 and '97-98.

I again confirm that '82 was by the far the largest sale of any equipment that was ever done in the Department of Highways and Transportation.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, changing or shifting gears here, if we would. With respect to, and I know the member from Wood River had alluded to, and I guess in the greater sense of government — in the amount of money spent on advertising and communications globally with respect to government — I think your department

expends a rather healthy sum of money in that regard.

Would you be able to provide us with the sort of figure that your department might be intending to expend in terms of . . . specifically for advertising and communications?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, on the advertising piece here, I'll send over part of what the budget has here as an agency report on advertising and communications. I don't have a total on it, but what I do want to say is that I think it's been very important.

One of the big pieces was the highway hot line that we set up with a toll-free number right across the province now. And that was advertised and was certainly an important initiative that we heard lots of good reports, especially in rural Saskatchewan. Because when we talk about some of the issues that you've been saying about safety, I think this is one of the pieces that tell road conditions, what's happening with ferry crossings, now with construction happening in the province. And people can phone that toll line, and it is free access for right across the province . . . certainly heard it from ambulances and health districts, school buses that they really appreciate that piece.

And certainly some of the other programs in which we've been doing some major advertising is some in the construction zones, but also on some of the safety things with the trucking industry within the province.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, now the member from Wood River had spoke earlier and suggested some, I think some rather valuable things for you to consider. And some of them surrounded the fact that you could stand to do a little bit more advertising of the fact that people should be submitting some claims in terms of damages done to their vehicles.

And it seems . . . you know when I look here too under your department's attempts to gather public opinion, I notice there was something done here in March of '98 — I guess the agency of record, Quest Communications. It's billed as a customer satisfaction poll, cost of 6,300-and-some-odd dollars. Do you have a copy of the results available for us? Could you send that across to us this afternoon?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I think what you're referring to again is on the polling. That is public information. We don't have that information here. We certainly can give you a copy of that or you can get it . . .

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Madam Minister, I guess to make the point, it seems like your department is long on telling people how good things are and you're rather short on trying to gather their input on how things are.

So if you're really wanting to be earnest in gathering some public input, you might utilize a certain amount of those advertising dollars to advertise the fact that the Liberal opposition in the province has their 1 888 621 Bump number activated. And the fact is that people could be letting us know of their concerns province-wide with respect to highways. And we certainly in turn would be letting you and your department

and your government know about all of these problems.

Just in winding up here, I noticed that there was a certain amount of money expended in terms of computer software. And it states the purpose as being a sign inventory software upgrade. And I'm just curious whether that upgrade included perhaps upgrading the program — that it would perhaps be able to better assist you in deciding how to properly sign a lot of these hazardous stretches of the highway. Because I think the member from Wood River had suggested, and rightly so, that there's a lot of inconsistency in terms of your application of this signage on our highway system.

You'll travel the roads in some of the senior cabinet ministers' constituencies and there might be a minor ripple in the highway and they'll have a bump sign or a warning sign there. You'll travel some of the highways in some of the rest of our ridings, and my gosh, you get conditioned pretty quickly to some rather severe bumps, and they're not even marked. It has to be craters, it has to be what — well what the musician that I referred to earlier referred to — what we call here in Saskatchewan as potholes are actually thought of by people outside of the province as canyons. So certainly there's a lot of inconsistencies in how these signs are applied.

I certainly hope that the upgrade to your software might be working towards trying to achieve some more equitable application of these signs, because they certainly are not as effective at warning people or pre-warning people of some rather hazardous conditions on the roads.

And just in closing, too, it's rather unfair — and following up on some of the questioning of the member from Wood River from earlier — rather unfair that you as a government would further victimize victims of your highway conditions when you would even consider not allowing claims to proceed when granted. A stretch of highway might be signed and telling people to take caution and slow down, but the victim may be travelling at a snail's pace. But it is the person going by that smashes out their windshield, who obviously disregarded the signs, why should suddenly the victim end up having to prove something that occurred on that stretch of highway when that car or truck has gone by at a 120 kilometres an hour, when they should have been slowed down to an appropriate speed.

(1800)

There's a lot of inconsistencies in your policies. There's a lot of inconsistencies in terms of how you prioritize projects in this province. I don't think you apply enough . . . you don't give enough weight to highway safety, to people's lives. And I think there's a lot more attention that needs to be paid by yourself and your department during this fiscal year to some of these issues that we've outlined here this afternoon.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I just want to say that again, safety is a top priority in any of the work that we do. And we looked over at the sheet that I gave you on communication strategy, on all of those pieces there in communications . . . is all to do with safety: with the orange zone, winter safety, wildlife, the highway hot line. So certainly it is a top priority to us.

Certainly in the claims — and I've gone over that today — we are determining a process in which we're trying it in a pilot to have a neutral referee to determine if we are fair in these claims. And so I believe we are addressing the issues.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Madam Minister, I want to say that the member from Kindersley, the member from Wood River, and the members from Thunder Creek, the three MLAs that surround the Cypress Hills constituency, have done a very admirable job of asking a lot of questions. And of course those questions are important to me because they have included many of the highways that run into my constituency and through it. So there is very little to be gained by re-treading all of the old grounds.

So I fully intend to take the answer that you've given to those members and distributing them to the people that are interested in the south-west in what your answers were with regards to their highways.

There's only a couple of areas that I noted that they hadn't specifically covered that I think it would be important for me to ask of you — your answers and your opinion with regards to direct questions I received from constituents. Those areas will of course be the No. 13 Highway to begin with, south of Consul, which leads to the United States border. And of course that becomes No. 21 Highway at Consul and runs south.

They tell me that this road has been fixed and that it has again deteriorated and that it is in very poor shape. Now because it is a link with another country, I would think that it should get some priority from that point of view.

But on a local issue of course it is a school bus route, and it is the only highway, the only good road that an awful lot of folks have got down in that corner with which they can access the hospital at Eastend, or of course if they choose to go straight north up to Maple Creek, 60-, 70-mile trips either way. Nevertheless a very important road to them.

What plans do you have to improve that road considering that the plans that you already have indicated don't seem to be sufficient?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, first I just want to thank the member for taking the answers that have already been given in your area to other members, so I appreciate that.

On the piece that you were talking about on Highway 13, on Highway 13 itself there is some work designated there for some intensive preservation. On the piece that becomes I think Highway 21 that goes south, again it will be routine maintenance. Certainly we want to keep that a safe route. It isn't a piece that has high traffic volumes but we still have to make sure, as you say, that it's in safe condition for school buses and for other vehicles that travel that road.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that you're going to give that road some attention. Because even though it's not a high traffic road, as I mentioned, it is the only one for a lot of people. They don't have another alternative. Most of those folks don't have airplanes or helicopters of course, and so the road is extremely critical to that area of the province which

covers so many miles and only that access to get anywhere.

I think you should note just in passing, that an awful lot of the traffic out of that area does go south because obviously Havre, Montana is a lot closer as a trading centre for those people. And even though you may not see them all coming north or to the east, that road is used an awful lot by the farming community and the oil industry to go south.

And of course one of the problems we've run into there is that the oil industry has started to develop that area, as I've talked to you about before. And what has happened, of course, is that that road was built for lighter traffic and it simply can't take the pressure as you know. But I want to point that out so that you will put that into your mind and into your bank of information. The reason that it breaks up is that it just simply was never built for the kind of traffic that's on it today. And I think we'll have to build for that kind of traffic because it looks like it's going to stay that way.

I wanted to mention to you, Doug Archer, the mayor of Regina, whom I had the good fortune to talk to just a little while ago here in the legislature, and he indicated to me that his efforts are ongoing with regards to trying to get the No. 1 Highway twinned. We in the south-west want to publicly express our thanks to the mayor because his efforts, of course, are very much appreciated and they have not gone unnoticed by the people in our area. When the mayor of Regina is worried about our road out in south-west Saskatchewan, it makes us very happy to know that he's willing to go to the extra effort . . . and all of the meetings that he's conducted and called, and all of the things that he's done to contribute.

I think one of the things that I want to mention to you that he said today that's of great importance, is that his approach to this is that we have to get the federal government onside with an infrastructure program. And I fully agree with him.

He also makes another very important point that I think we need to take into consideration, Madam Minister, and that being that we need to approach this in Ottawa on a non-partisan basis. Because if we offend the federal government politically by pointing fingers at them or being partisan, then they're obviously going to get angry, dig in their heels, and they won't do anything.

So he has said that he has gone to Ottawa and lobbied with all of the political parties and has tried to do it on a non-partisan basis saying that highways are necessary for people, that politics should stay out of it. Let's get on with the job and all work together, and all take the credit together. I thought that was a very important message that I pass on to you. And I would ask you if you would share that approach with the mayor and if you will support him in his ongoing efforts?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I want to acknowledge, as you've said, the importance of that national infrastructure system, and we certainly . . . It's been interesting that all provinces, the Territories, all different politics there see that as important and that we should be . . . and we certainly do want to work with municipalities right across this country to look at the importance of a national system. And as you say, it's important for people, and I agree with you.

Mr. Goohsen: — We thank you for that commitment, Madam Minister. A few weeks back you will recall that a school group from Prelate, the St. Angela's Academy, were in the Assembly as visitors. On that date they asked me if I would help them to get a petition going which would beg in the prayer for relief that you and your government would pay more attention to our secondary highways. They expressed concern that, with the changes in the regulations for the trucking industry, that this might pose greater hazards. And I fully agree with them that if you're going to have maybe even bigger transport trucks on the roads, then of course holes and bumps and sways make it more dangerous for those longer rigs to be controlled absolutely.

Now the drivers in this province are excellent drivers, and they do a pretty good job. But realistically, if you're on a bad road and the thing gets out of control, somebody could die over it. So, Madam Minister, they expressed that concern that we concentrate on our secondary highways. So on their behalf, I ask you the question: do you have plans to put more intensive work into our secondary highway system?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I can appreciate the question. I think one of the things that we did target in our budget . . . and you know the balancing of . . . when you say the importance of the twinning projects and we certainly are doing some twinning. But we also have to identify that there's an important infrastructure system on secondary highways that serve our community. And we added . . . Really the increase this year in our budget of \$20 million. If we look at the dollars spent in the system for rural infrastructure for those secondary systems . . . is \$23 million. So it's certainly one of the priorities that we have set.

The second piece I think is also extremely important that you've identified is making sure that if you're having increased trucking, that we have safe trucking. We look at still using . . . The trucks cannot operate on our secondary system with primary weights. If we do any type of trucking partnership agreement, that those all have to be taken . . . The one factor that's the most important is the safety factor, and so we have to totally look at that.

Yes, it was a \$23 million increase — I want to make sure that that's clear — on our secondary system that we identified for the budget this year for those kinds of highways that you've identified . . . are also a priority for us.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Yet another set of concerns comes from a group of people at Eastend who approached me, they said you had attended the meeting in their community. And they had gotten a strong feeling that you had made certain commitments to them, and they're worried that you're not keeping your commitments that you've made to them.

What commitments did you make and how are you seeing to it that those commitments are met?

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, yes I was in Eastend to meet with the community group down there, and different people that were at that meeting. And I certainly enjoyed the meeting.

The commitment that I made is that we would work with them.

And we've had meetings still down in that area to look at the priorities that they identify, to look at the fiscal resources that we have, and try to kind of work out a longer term plan for the area. And I believe that we are living up to that commitment. Those meetings have taken place and it's getting to be a real understanding of the amount of dollars, how we can spend them the best to meet the needs of those communities.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I'll let those folks know what your answer was.

In the area of transportation of course, which is also under your jurisdiction, we of course have talked in length about the problems of rail-line abandonment. And you have of course made some commitments, and the Minister of Agriculture has made some commitments, to work hard in those areas.

I guess my question has to be, will you join with the Minister of Agriculture in attempting to resolve the abandonment problems? We particularly have the Notukeu Line from of course Shaunavon into our constituency, which goes down to Consul and loops back down around to Frontier. And so that's a very important line.

If we lose that we've got our whole area of south-west Saskatchewan with no transportation with rail. We are looking for and we have people brainstorming to try to come up with ideas of how we could more effectively use the railroad. We've even talked about moving crude oil by tanker cars in order to find ways that we could make that line more profitable so that it could stay in existence, whether it be as a short-line railroad or by CP (Canadian Pacific).

(1815)

Now I want you to answer your commitment to working with the Minister of Agriculture, along with your commitment to the farm community, remembering also that the line from Hazlet to the North is also in jeopardy. And that leaves the Hazlet, Verlo community without any rail service if that one's gone. And of course over at Fox Valley we have another one in the south-west. It never rains but it pours. But the tail-end of that line of course is in jeopardy as well, which loops through Fox Valley and goes down to the salt mine. And so of course we have those three concerns in the area of transportation.

Before I allow you to answer the question, I also want to offer to you the package of material that I offered to the Minister of Agriculture earlier today. It has been tabled so all you have to do is ask for copies. I won't bother sending it over again. And it's nothing original or new that I've created at all. I simply went to the library and asked them to put together a package of information that would give us the tools and the ammunition to be able to work with when we are going to Ottawa or to wherever we have to go to discuss these things. And I want you to have that available to yourself, without having to go to the library and do it over again. You might as well take that package because they did an excellent job on preparing it.

It has a lot of ammunition about the history of the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) and how Saskatchewan farmers and the rest of the farmers of this country have bought and paid for the CPR probably about three times already, and it shouldn't

have to be bought again. It might be good ammunition for these short-line railroads when you're discussing what they should be worth, because in fact what they should be doing is giving them to the farmers because they've already paid for them. I'll let you respond, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I could respond in a long way but I'll try to be really precise here and concise. First of all, yes, I really appreciate . . . we'll get a copy of the package that you have put together. And certainly the Minister of Agriculture and myself as the Minister of Highways and Transportation, we've worked on . . . I mean we think the short-line issue, the rail-line issue, we are . . . I mean we work on this together.

We both agreed. I mean our government has and our Premier has said, first of all there should be a halt to abandonment during this major review. We've also got the short-line advisory unit within our department that is certainly out in your area and out in various areas working through transportation area committees; working with producers to look at the challenges that they're facing as their branch lines are abandoned, trying to check to see what kind of choices that they do have. Helping them with — is there viability to it, helping them with studying the line, and helping them put proposals together so they can deal with CP and CN (Canadian National).

Certainly we think there needs to be changes in the Canadian transportation Act that would be more short-line friendly. We believe joint running rights is a part of that, and that you've heard a lot of our comments before. But I certainly agree this is a top priority for me as the Minister of Highways and Transportation. Also I mean a top priority for our government, because nothing is more important than the grain transportation to our agriculture community right throughout this province.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Madam Minister. It never hurts to repeat good things, and it never hurts to repeat over and over a position that is necessary, because sometimes by repeating ourselves is the only way we ever get anything done that's positive.

One other area that I want to discuss with you, and I know I'm a couple of minutes over the time that I had allotted to myself to ask questions. But I think it's important that you know that the people in the south-west, while they're happy that you're working on Highway No. 1, very happy, they're hopeful that you can expand that program. That if there are any excess dollars available at the end of the season, if there happens to be a little surplus in the budget from anywhere, what they want you to remember — is where does the money in Saskatchewan come from that the provincial government spends?

And what they want you to remember is that the leases, the royalties, the fuel taxes, and all of those things that the government puts in to the general fund, an awful lot of them come out of the south-west. And in fact some people have done some research, and the amount of money that comes out of the south-west from all of those areas of taxation, from all of those areas of revenues is far, far greater than what goes back into the south-west. And the people there feel that they have first claim to any share of a surplus.

They're not saying you should discontinue the health program

or the education program. But I want you to know that in south-west Saskatchewan health care may be number one, and probably it should be, but highways and transportation are the number two issue of south-west Saskatchewan.

I've heard other members get up and make their statements that health care and education, and down the road they go. Well, believe me, it's roads and it's transportation in the south-west, come in very closely to health care as the number one issue that people are worried about and concerned about, because that's what affects their lives the most at this point in time.

We don't want to downplay the importance of all of those other areas. But I would ask you to make a commitment to looking into where the money comes from before you spend any surpluses as the end of the year. And make some commitment that it should go back to those parts of the province where the money comes from.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I think we've made a substantial commitment in where we see that highways and transportation, as you said, is a top priority for us. And that's why we've made a long-term commitment of 2.5 billion over 10 years. It's also why we put a strategy together. So if we have more dollars, that we are spending those dollars in the very best way possible.

I've certainly had the chance to meet with the area that you represent in that south-west area. And they've brought those concerns to our attention. And we certainly will be putting the dollars as we see . . . As a government we want to be able to put more dollars into highways and transportation. Of course, we've got to balance all of the other priorities. And I certainly recognize I guess the concerns and the issues that you've raised here today. Thank you.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Madam Minister. We appreciate your candour and your honesty. We are happy with the work that you've done in general for the first year. Now you have to, of course, accept the fact that you're a veteran, and next year we do expect even more.

I want to thank your officials. Certainly the people in the Department of Highways have worked hard with communities; we recognize that. We're not always happy with the answer that we get to our questions, but we certainly do appreciate the effort and we do understand that effort is being made.

Front-line workers of course are the people with the picks and the shovels. We don't want to forget them. We think they do a reasonably good job in most areas of the province, and with the time and the effort and the equipment that they've got available, I think they do a pretty good job as well. So thank you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Chair, I just again want to thank you for the questions and the questions from the opposition. I do want to thank my department officials that have come here today, and the rest of the department staff that work right across this province to provide the very best in transportation and try to provide the very safest of transportation systems to meet the needs of the community of Saskatchewan.

Subvote (HI01) agreed to.

Subvote (HI02), (HI04), (HI03), (HI06) inclusive agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1998-99
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Highways and Transportation
Vote 16**

Subvotes (HI04), (HI03), (HI06) inclusive agreed to.

Vote 16 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

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

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. This evening I have with me a team of staff from the Department of Health. On my right is the deputy minister, Con Hnatiuk. To my immediate left is the executive director of finance and management services, Mr. Rod Wiley. Behind him is the project director of acute and emergency services branch, Lauren Donnelly. Directly behind me is Mr. Neil Yeates, who is the associate deputy minister. And behind the deputy minister is the assistant to the deputy minister, Mr. Dale Bloom.

Seated in the back row, or the back chairs, Mr. Chair, is George Peters, executive director of capital and operating policy branch; Jim Simmons, executive director of community care branch; Barb Shea, executive director of the drug plan and extended benefits; Bob Firnesz, the associate executive director of medical services and health registration; and Rus Duncombe, who is the district director of the district support branch. That's my team of staff, Mr. Chair.

Subvote (HE01)

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I welcome you here tonight, and your officials. I guess we'll start off rather easy with you; you've had a lengthy day or a lengthy session.

But I would like to find out from you, Mr. Minister . . . it was, I can't remember how many days ago, ten days, two weeks ago, you mentioned that it would be within a few days you would start to announce capital projects throughout the province. And I was wondering if you'd be able to table that list for us here tonight.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Member, for the comment. We've started to announce the capital projects. We began, I believe, just a few days ago. On April 20 actually, I think, was when we announced our first one, but more expeditiously from June 2, and we'll continue to do that until June 26.

Mr. McPherson: — Could you table the list of what you have to date, what you have announced, and what upcoming projects you're going to announce in the next days?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — In the format that we have here, I'm not looking at the exact copy of all the capital projects that we have, Mr. Chair, but what we're doing with this of course is announcing them in due course, and we'll continue to do that, as I said, until June 26. We can provide for you the constituencies, I think, of which the capital projects will be announced in if that would satisfy your wish.

Mr. McPherson: — Do you have it there broken down by constituency?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — What we can do is provide those for you that we've already announced, and we'll provide for you the following dates in which we're going to be making announcements in and in which ridings.

An Hon. Member: — Could you send it over? Could you send it over now?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I don't have that with me tonight, but I can provide it for the member.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you very much Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, your staff. I guess, Mr. Minister, it seems like we've been across like this for some months now. And I guess we have. So really I think question period turns into an extension of estimates.

Mr. Minister, recently I attended a district board meeting in Nipawin where the residents of Carrot River and area provided a brief to the district health board with concern over the lack of services or the cuts to services that they're about to see in Carrot River, in particular in the Carrot River Hospital.

That day when the district board introduced the board and some of their staff, there was members from your department at the meeting and the person there was introduced as a consultant. I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you could tell me what the role of that consultant is that attended that meeting and where I might find her salary, what line in the budget?

(1830)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, the name of the staff is . . . Vivian Krakowski was the individual that was there, and her salary would be in the *Public Accounts*. And the role of the district support staff of course are to assist districts in their planning process, in the development of their plans, and also in the administration or assisting them in how they administer the district health plans through the course of a given year providing advice, direction, support.

Mr. McLane: — You say her salary is shown in the *Public Accounts*. I'm wondering can you show me what line on the budget item in the Health budget where that appears.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, it would be under subvote (03) under district support staff.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, does every district have a consultant? How do you decide whether a district has one, attends every board meeting . . . different districts, different staff?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — All the districts do have consultants.

Mr. McLane: — Do they all have one . . . yes, do they all have one?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Some are shared, Mr. Chair, and some districts are covered off by one, but the majority of them are shared.

Mr. McLane: — Some of the larger districts for example, maybe the Regina Health District, how many consultants would sit around a district board table on an average?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, one staff for Regina, and Saskatoon is one as well.

Mr. McLane: — Are there any districts have more than one?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — No.

Mr. McLane: — Can you tell me what the average salary might be? Let's use the lady that attends the Nipawin meeting for example on that district board. What would her salary range be?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The staff salary, Mr. Chair, would be approximately 50,000.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, can you tell me what role that consultant would play in attending each and every district health board meeting?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — There are several roles that they would play, Mr. Member, through the Chair. They would be involved in sort of the policy interpretation direction, would also be involved in the communication link between the department and the district health board, and would be involved in the planning process, both pre and post in the administration of the district health plan.

Mr. McLane: — What sort of reporting mechanism would there be for these consultants back to you, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — They would report to the director, and then they would report to the assistant deputy minister.

Mr. McLane: — And of course the assistant deputy minister would report to the deputy, and the deputy then to you?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — That's correct. They would report to the ADM (assistant deputy minister), and the ADM would report to the deputy, and then the deputy would report to me. That's correct.

Mr. McLane: — What kind of reporting mechanism, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, is there back then from you to the district board through this consultant?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, there are a number of processes here. I attend, of course, the annual SAHO convention. I also have attended the majority of the boards across the province. I've met with all of the boards, by and large all the boards, across the province. We have a health advisory committee of which I attend on a regular basis. We have a CEO (chief executive officer) form. And then of course we have the . . . I have the responsibility of approving all of the district health plans when they're submitted to me.

Mr. McLane: — Specifically, Minister, the question was, is your . . . the mechanism that goes from you through your deputy down through the assistant deputy through the manager to this consultant, this consulting person who attends these district meetings, is that the same kind of a . . . would that be an accurate assessment of how your message goes back to the district board?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think that would be an accurate description of the process of how the information gets related up and down the system. I think that's accurate.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. I think, Mr. Minister, since last year about this time and your predecessor who is now the Minister of Finance in this discussion, I actually think we've made some progress. I can recall back to those days questioning him in this forum. I suggested at that time to that minister that the government was indeed in charge of the health system in the province and certainly sent each and every district their marching orders and how they were to operate.

I think since then we've made some progress. Of course the minister of the day didn't agree with that. However a number of things have happened since that time that give every indication and have proved I think beyond a shadow of a doubt who's in charge. And the answer to that, Mr. Minister, is you and your government.

One of the most recent events that has taken place that has confirmed this — not only in my eyes, but in many people's eyes across the province — is the announcement that you made a couple weeks ago. I think it was a political by-election announcement of 600 nurses to the system. And I think what that has done is tell everybody in the province that you are indeed in charge because you made that decision without the district boards having any knowledge of that announcement. And many district boards have said that, hey, we had no idea what they were doing, that they were going to make the announcement. I think you'll agree that it was a political announcement.

So, Mr. Minister, I think you've confirmed that in everyone's eyes that the government is in charge. And having said that, I guess I have a number of questions that I want to ask you as the minister in charge and the minister in charge of the health districts, is that will you be intervening then in Carrot River with that district board and saying no, we're not going to allow . . . keeping a commitment that your predecessor made and that you have made and that the Premier made in 1995 in a provincial election, that there'll be no more closures, that there'll be no more bed closures. There'll be no more staff cuts.

Are you going to intervene in this one, Mr. Minister, and tell the

people in the north-east that, no, Carrot River will not lose its hospital services and that they will be maintaining the level of services that needs to meet the needs of that district in that community. Are you about to do that, Mr. Minister, or have you maybe already done that?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, I want to say to the member opposite that he and I both disagree, I would say, philosophically disagree on the process of how the district boards manage their affairs and what the responsibility of district boards are. And we've had this discussion, as you've said, in the long fashion over the last several months.

I want to say to you though that, first of all, I'm sure you didn't mean that we're hiring 600 nurses. I think you meant probably 200 nurses, unless you're announcing an additional 400 nurses for the province. It would be kind of nice to do that, but it's really only 200 nurses.

And I say to you that the specific question you ask about Carrot River, I have met with the board and with the community, met with the town and the RM and some of the community folks, and we talked at length about what they believe will be in fact the final outcome in their community. And I have here a letter that was signed by the town of Carrot River, the RM of Moose Range No. 486, and the North-East Health District. And I think what's important for me to share with you just very quickly is that . . . and I'll read the bottom line of this because I think that's what's most important:

We want to be very clear that we are not promoting the status quo. It is about making the best plans possible for the community of Carrot River. We take our partnership very seriously, and we believe that we can solve problems and work productively together.

So I say to the member opposite that this is the letter that I've got from the district, the folks that I've described. Our Health department through officials that I mentioned earlier will be working closely with them. And I await their district health plan so that in fact at the end of the day, they'll have the best services in their area.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Minister, I've gone through this procedure for years with different communities, and it's always been the same thing. A community says okay, the axe is on us. Your department has said we're going . . . and you as minister have said we're going to cut services here. It's all about money. We don't have the money, so we're going to cut these services. So the community comes forward and says, well, okay, we're willing to give a little. We're willing to take a little because if we don't, we're going to lose everything.

I suggest to you that you've got the same scenario here again. I've seen it happen a hundred times in my career within the health system as a volunteer. And I see it happening again. I'm hoping that the community of Carrot River and the surrounding area, which is quite a large area as you may well know, will do and talk about what is best for their community and for the people that live in their community. I have confidence in that.

Where I don't have confidence is in your government — that you will listen to what these people have to say. We've see it

hundreds of times across this province, that people say these are the needs of our citizens, of our community. And in your wisdom, your government has come and said, no, no, those aren't your needs. These are your needs over here; this is what we think you need. You need the wellness model; we can do away with bricks and mortar. We don't have to treat people in bricks and mortar.

And we see that hasn't worked. People are sick and tired of the wellness model in this province, and they don't want to continue with that.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairman, I have a number of petitions here that have been signed by the good folks in the Carrot River community and the area, and they're from Zenon Park to Carrot River to Nipawin. And, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to table those this evening and the minister can take a look at them.

And so these people are a little more than relaxed in thinking that they're going to have the services in their communities that they need. They put their signature to these things not because they have nothing else to do but because they have some major concerns. So I don't for a minute believe that the people are saying that, hey we're happy with what you're suggesting; we're happy with something less than what the people need.

You know, Mr. Minister, I don't know how long you've been involved in health care — and maybe it's immaterial — but it used to be that in a community the people would sit down, and they'd talk with their local boards, and they'd assess what the need was in the community. And then they'd say, okay, this is what the needs of the people are that we have to meet, and then they'd go about trying to fund this thing. And they would do it. We did it over and over and over again, whether it goes back to the little hospitals that were built back in the '50s or the '60s, or integrated facilities that were built in the late '80s and '90s. They were there to meet a need. They weren't built in majority for some political whim.

In most cases, boards, volunteer boards like mine . . . and I see you squinting, Mr. Minister. You can probably pick two or three cases where our predecessors that put us in the terrible debt we're in today went and did some things politically. But in most cases any boards that I worked with there was a need. And we went about doing it, and we fought hard whether it was with your administration, the NDP, or whether it was with the Conservatives. We fought hard to get what we wanted, and we did it.

Unfortunately, now a district board sits down at the table and the first thing is, okay we've got this handful of money; what can we do with it? It has nothing to do about what the needs of the community are. It's all about this wad of money that you've given them, and that's what they have to work with. The needs are over here. Well so what? These are the needs. We can meet 50 per cent of the needs or 60 or 70, but we're going to balance the books — the almighty dollar.

(1845)

And that's what the people in Carrot River are up against. They know what their needs are, and they're going to tell you. The question will be, Mr. Minister, are you going to listen to them

and ensure that their needs are met?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, I want to say to the member opposite something that I said when I first started to speak, and that is that he and I philosophically disagree with the direction in which the health care system in this province — and for that matter in this country — is moving and what in fact he believes.

I think it would behove me not to say that clearly in this province today, and in Canada, if you look at the picture, what you see is you see a significant shift from institution to community-based services. It doesn't matter where you go. And I mean it's something that the federal government is advocating as well. So when you take a look at what's happening across Canada today, it doesn't mesh with what you're saying.

I mean if you're suggesting for a minute that we should be building more hospitals in this province when in fact we already are saying . . . and all of the research around the country says that you have too many hospitals and for that many, too many hospital beds. It flies in the face of what's happening across the country. And I think on balance, if you were to look at that, you would have to agree.

And I say to the member opposite that when you look at decisions that were made throughout the political lives of many parties — not just ours but yours and certainly the rampant spending of the previous administration of the Tories — we built facilities all over this province, and to suggest that we didn't build them for political reasons I mean would be the understatement of the year because you can just pick communities across the province today where politicians built hospitals — for that matter schools or recreational complexes — that today don't have any occupancy in them.

And I say to you that this isn't the direction that we're moving in, and this isn't the direction that anyone is moving in across the country. Irrespective of what the administration is — whether it's a Liberal government or a Conservative government or an NDP government — they're moving towards community-based services. And you need to get on board on that direction because that's where it is.

And I say to the member that when you suggest for a minute about the expenditures, \$1.72 billion is what we're spending in this province today. Now you might say it's not enough, but it's 40 cents nearly of every dollar that we spend today that we have charge of in this province. And that's a fairly large contribution I would say to you.

So I think part of what I would like to hear from you from time to time is that in fact the direction in which health care is moving . . . and don't just pick our province; look across the country, and you'll see that that's where everybody's moving. And I think it would be most helpful if you were to recognize that. And it would help us and the people of Saskatchewan, I think, in putting some comfort into the delivery of health care services today across the province because by and large we're well served as Canadians. And certainly in this province — it's my opinion, which you won't agree — we're very well served in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, you can look all across Canada and government after government . . . and you start with our neighbours to the west. They're saying, whoops, we made a mistake. We made a mistake, Mr. Minister. They're all saying it. They're saying it in Ontario. They're saying it everywhere. The only . . . One of the few places they aren't saying it is here and in British Columbia where your B.C. (British Columbia) cousins are running into the same problems that you are.

Now you brag about \$1.7 million, the highest expenditure ever in a Health budget. Yes, you're right, it is. But I wouldn't be proud of it because what have you got? What have you done? You've got 6,600 people on a waiting-list. You've got closures, you've got bed closures, we've got nurse lay-offs, you've got everything. You've got people suffering and dying out there and you're saying hey, we're spending 1.7 million so it must be working. Well it isn't working.

And right across Canada people are saying, whoa, hold the phone here. It's great to say treat everybody in their home. That's wonderful, that would be just great. But man oh man, you've seen the problems created. You can send home care out into a home but you can't do a hip replacement in my home.

Is that what you're advocating? That we're going to come to a point where we're going to have all the hospitals close, and we're going to do surgery, we're going to, you know, move a tent around, and we're going to do all these things. That's what I hear you're saying. That's ludicrous, Mr. Minister, absolutely ridiculous.

And I would challenge you to come out to Craik, Saskatchewan, and tell the people there that their integrated facility was built for political reasons when the thing is sitting there overflowing.

I challenge you to come to Imperial and say, in my community, that this facility was built for political reasons when we can't keep all our people in the community.

I'll challenge you to go to Nokomis and I'll challenge you to go to Watrous and tell those people that you built a hospital in Watrous and you don't need it. Yes, the district, the Living Sky District is cutting beds, not only there but in Lanigan. I've got letters here piled up 16 deep telling us it's wrong when you're saying they're all politically built.

Why don't you come out? Why don't you have the courage to come out in these places and tell that to the local people — that, hey, this was a politically built thing and we're going to close it instead of hiding behind your district health boards?

And that's what you're doing, Mr. Minister. You travelled across the southern part of the province and got an earful this past spring and early summer. Does that mean anything to you? Are those people saying the Estevan hospital was built for political reasons, we don't need it? Simply just because you've cut beds and services, and you're forcing people out of the community to go elsewhere or do without or go out of the province or go south of the border, that they were built for

political reasons.

Mr. Minister, I think you better rethink that position and start listening to what the people are trying to tell you.

Now in Living Sky, we talked about Living Sky and the cuts that you've made. I attended those meetings in Watrous and Lanigan and Wynyard about cutting back, Mr. Minister. People were saying, hey, we have the need. The nurses and the physicians and the local people proved to you that there was a need and yet you allowed the Living Sky board to make some massive cuts in all those agencies.

Since you've taken control of the system, Mr. Minister — and everybody believes that you're the driving force behind it and that you control the district boards — are you going to go to Living Sky District and say, no, you've made a mistake here, fix it, these people need these services.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, I think when you make the comment that there aren't a growing number of services in the province today, you need to look at what's happened in this province in the last seven years. I know that you look at it from different coloured glasses than I do and it's unfortunate that sometimes when you look through yours that you don't see exactly what's happening across the province.

But I say to you when you look at what's happened in home care alone in this province . . . And in your earlier comment you said to me that we need to continue to concentrate in ensuring that we build strong community services, and you asked me what I was involved in throughout my lifetime in health.

Well in 1980 I managed a private social service agency in this province and we had a home care program that was fledgling; never had a nursing service. I think we had one individual staff that was involved in going out and providing some intravenous therapy — one person. Today we have probably one of the leading home care programs in the country — 25 years later — that are doing a majority of home-based services today that we would have never imagined we would ever do 25 years ago. And I say that to you sincerely because I was there when we started some of that stuff.

And today when you look at the kinds of outreach services that are being provided — seven years ago in this province we didn't even have a MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). Today we have one MRI in this province, looking at a second one for a population of a million people.

We have a CT (computerized axial tomography) scanner in Prince Albert today where you would have never found a regional CT scanner anywhere in the province. We're doing chemotherapy today in small communities like Melfort. We have 13 or 15 pilot projects today where people can stay in their own communities and get some of that therapy without having to go to the bigger centres of Regina and Saskatoon.

We have a vast array of drug therapy that we're doing today. Out-patient surgeries today have grown by over 10,000 over what we did 10 years ago. And today in this province we still have more beds per capita than anywhere else in the country,

and you continue to make the case that we have too few beds in this province.

I say to you, Mr. Member, that you just need to examine the kinds of things that have happened in this province not only in the last four years but over the last 10 years in this province of which we've been moving in a major way but under reform in a very methodical way to ensure that Saskatchewan people get services closer to home. And there are few examples that you can find outside of Saskatchewan where that's the case.

Now I have travelled all of the province and I have been to the majority of the health districts as — I think probably four or five that I have yet to meet with — where I tour their facilities and I say to you that in many of those converted facilities, which you say were closed, but they were converted. Some of them are found in your riding and what you'll find when you talk to those people is that they have more expanded services today than they had when they had the conventional hospital. It was under utilized significantly.

And you just need to talk to these people. You just need to talk to them, and they'll tell you that they have things today that they've never imagined they'd have in their community which are coming from regional centres, which are coming from base centres. And people are pleased to have those services.

Now for sure, in the bigger centres, you are going to continue to have to provide the tertiary services like Saskatoon and Regina and some of the regional centres in the province. We'll try to enhance those.

But I have to say to you that you're not on the mark. You've missed the mark when you're talking about the development and enrichment of health care services in Saskatchewan.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, you say we have lots of beds. Then how do you account for 6,600 people on the waiting-list?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say, Mr. Chair, that the 6,600 number does not come from the Department of Health. It doesn't come from any kind of an examination that's occurred between district health boards and the Department of Health. And the number that you're using I believe is from the Fraser Institute that did their research in this province. And that's what you're using.

And I say to you that there is no scientific research that has been done in this province to establish what the current waiting-lists are. But that process we're working on today in conjunction with the four . . . or the three prairie provinces and British Columbia to get a method and a process of how we're going to measure waiting-lists across western Canada because there isn't a scientific one today.

Mr. McLane: — Well that's interesting, Minister that today is the first time I've ever heard you dispute the 6,600 beds. So in a lot of people's minds, the waiting-lists are probably a lot longer than that, or otherwise you'd be screaming and kicking a long time about those numbers. So I ask you then if the 6,600 isn't accurate, what's your number?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well that's exactly the dilemma that I say

to you that we're in . . . is that we don't have a scientific process today that has done an examination fully of what the waiting-lists are across the province. And we're not alone in this situation. When you look at what's happening in other provinces which are our neighbours, they don't have a process either, and that's why today the three prairie provinces and British Columbia are involved in a process where they're going to do a full examination of what system they'll set up to do a better evaluation assessment of waiting-lists.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, we were just talking about the Living Sky District, and the cuts that you made within that district to Watrous, Lanigan, and the concerns that the people in particular those two communities have, as well as Wynyard.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you to comment on . . . I have a letter here that was sent to the Premier, and as well one sent to you. And it's from some people that actually live in the Living Sky District — they live at Lanigan. And they're talking about the concerns that they have to the Premier, and they're talking about the concerns they have to you, about what was going to happen to the Lanigan hospital. This letter was dated back on April 15.

And I won't use the names, Mr. Speaker. I think that's unfair, even though the people from that community said go ahead and use them. In those people's minds the problem with the cuts were all the district's fault. And one of the reasons that they give that some credo, some credibility, is the fact that they say that both Mr. Serby and our daughter have assured us that this is the problem of our district board.

Now their daughter happens to work for one of your cabinet members. And of course we know the role that you play, Mr. Minister.

So I guess my question is to you, since you've laid the blame at the district's feet here, you've stated it in this letter, which could be a public document, maybe you could tell us then, if you think it's all the district's problem, what should the district have done? What should the Living Sky District have done to rectify its funding problem short of closing beds, as they did?

You're saying it was their fault, and they shouldn't have done that. So what should they have done?

(1900)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member. As I've already said, you and I have a philosophical difference in terms of how health services are provided in the province.

We think that we have a partnership with district health boards. District health boards are involved in providing the needs assessment for districts. And we fund based on the needs, based funding formula for all districts across the province. And we take that \$1.72 billion, and we divide it up into the districts across the province. And accordingly they're funded on that basis.

We believe the district health boards are in fact the people who should be determining what the health needs are for districts. We take their recommendations and their decision making very

seriously, and in fact respect it — unlike what you do, unlike what you do — and will continue to do that as the process moves into the future.

We'll be ensuring that Saskatchewan people continue to get an increased level of funding, which has been the case for a number of years now. We'll continue to provide those kinds of dollars for district health boards to make decisions which are really community based.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Minister, this particular incident has nothing to do with your philosophy or the difference between yours and mine. My philosophy is very simple. I want the people in this province to get the medical needs and health care needs that they deserve and require and not to have to sit back and suffer because of the ineptitude of your government to provide the services to it.

This particular instance here, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, is all about you. You're the one that has stated to these folks that it's the district board's problem, it's their fault. That the community should go after them and say no; if you don't want the Lanigan Hospital closed, don't do it; and if you don't want them to cut beds, they shouldn't have done it. You're saying it's their fault.

So I'm asking you as the Minister of Health, what would you have done if you were in the district board's dilemma? What in the world would you have done? What are you suggesting to them that they should have done other than close beds, which they did?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say to the member opposite that I would have done exactly what the district health boards have done, same thing that you and I have done when we served on hospital boards. And I know you have and I have, historically, and we've made decisions over the last 20 years that aren't any different than this one.

And if you've been prudent in your responsibility as an individual who served on hospital boards in this province, as I have, you and I both know that we've reduced the number of beds in this province significantly in our capacities. And I shared with you on a previous occasion that in my community, when I served on the regional hospital board, we had 225 beds in our city. Today we have 107 beds in our city over a period of 25 years.

And so when you make the comment about what it is that you and I would do, we would act responsibly as members of communities that have been elected or appointed to serve to ensure that the best health services in the area are delivered. And we would protect them.

And that's exactly what district health boards are doing across the province today. And that's the same capacity in which I operate today is to ensure that Saskatchewan people get the best services they can.

Mr. McLane: — Minister, I think you're shirking your duty. Let me go back and read a little more from this letter then. This family goes on to say:

I am sure if you were to look into this situation you would find that our board has not been managing our health dollars wisely. I for one thing think it is the fault of the board rather than you, the government.

And I do hope this is the case. And I go on to quote again:

Both Mr. Serby and our daughter have assured us that this is the problem of our board.

How do you justify that statement?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think, Mr. Member, and Mr. Chair, to the member, that you and I both heard — particularly in the last several weeks where you and I have been on the road and have been talking to a number of Saskatchewan people — that there is concern about the way in which district health boards are managing their affairs.

And from what you're reading today, here is an individual in Saskatchewan from the Living Sky District who's concerned about the level of service and the management of the district health board. And there may be issues that from time to time we need to examine.

And you asked me earlier, what's the role of our consultants? Our consultants are involved at that district board level, they would be listening to what district boards are saying, they would have a pulse of what's happening in those communities, and some of that would be shared with us.

And so I'm not in the position today to suggest for a minute that we have a district health board, or agree with the individual there, that's dysfunctional. But I say to you from time to time district health boards are having to make decisions that are difficult, and they might not be perceived in the same light as others who view them from a distance.

Mr. McLane: — But, Mr. Minister, you have you have said to these people that the problem is of the board. You've said it — that the problem is of the board. They're saying that the board is a problem and you are agreeing that they're closing beds. At this time they're worried about closing the whole hospital, but they were closing beds. And you agreed with them that it's a problem with the board.

So I'm asking you as the Minister of Health, what would you, what advice would you have given to the Living Sky District to say that, okay, we won't close beds. If I were you I'd do this or something else. Evidently you must have had some thoughts on this or you wouldn't have said this to these folks.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I don't have the copy of the letter that you're reading from. And I'm finding it a bit difficult to follow your line of questioning in the areas that you're following, because you've now moved from supporting the district health board to saying that I was supporting the district health board and now I'm not supporting the district health board, and maybe you're not supporting the district health board either.

I'm not sure. But it would be useful for me if you were to provide that letter for me that I might follow it.

But I say to the member opposite: when you ask me the question about what I would do, it would be exactly the same responsibility that I would take in my chair today, as you would take. You would examine what the needs of the community would be, and you would then provide for the community based on your ability to provide those services to a district — the resources and the manpower that would in fact meet the needs of those individuals who live in that area. That's what I would do as a responsible citizen of that community if I lived there, and I'm sure you'd do exactly the same thing.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Minister, I can tell you, you can go back and look at your letter. It was addressed to you and a copy to the Premier, and the Premier's letter was copied to you — so you have it.

And we'll move on. So I can tell you very simply what you were doing here was you were sloughing off the responsibility. You were saying, no, no, don't blame the government, blame the district board. That's exactly what you did here.

And all of my question was very simple, very simple, is if you're blaming a district board that says no, I wouldn't be closing beds or I wouldn't be closing this hospital, I wanted to know what your alternative was. But I don't think you had one and I don't think you thought that far ahead. It was simply to get these people off your back and say, no, it's the district board's fault and make them suffer the consequences.

So we've seen . . . you know we've talked about the Carrot River people and what's going to happen there. They're undoubtedly going to lose some services unless you do something to stop it. You weren't prepared to step in the Living Sky. You simply went about blaming the board.

Let's move to the Midwest Health District, Mr. Chairman, which is partly in my constituency and move into Davidson. Most recently, there's kind of a bit of a war going on out there with some of our residents of Davidson. And I know some time ago, you announced a new facility for the town of Davidson, community of Davidson. Of course, one of your members from Regina delighted himself in standing up and making an announcement that day trying to embarrass me to some extent that you're building this new hospital and health centre in Davidson.

However to this date, there's been nothing finalized and you're still talking. And I know exactly what's happening there. It's a way of how you're going to cut acute care beds out of the old Davidson hospital and convince the people that you're going to give them a new facility, an integrated facility, I hope — it's one of the things that we need in rural Saskatchewan. But you're going to cut some beds.

And one of the problems with that is, Mr. Speaker, that right now we've got all sorts of people that are being told that they're going to have to move their loved ones out of the community of Davidson where they were born and raised. Old people, seniors, the people that built our province and our communities are now being told sorry; there's no room for you here. You can go a hundred miles away where you have no family or friends, where your elderly wife or husband can't drive to see you. And if you want to come and stay, we'll throw a cot in the room with

you and you can spend a night or two with your spouse to live out his last years. How do you answer those problems Mr. Minister?

I've been talking to the district board and they're saying, hey, our hands are tied, the government's got our hands tied. We don't have the money. We can't do this. We can't move services.

How do you address people like Mrs. Schneider whose husband is in the Davidson hospital right now, who incidentally has lost both his legs and is old and wants to live in the community where all his family is?

What do you say to people like Mrs. McLaren who they want to move out of the community? Mr. Weighill? You know some of these people are sick and dying. Some of them have only weeks or months to live maybe and they're being told they're going to have to move 50, 60, or 100 miles out of the community, away from their family and friends to die. What do you say to those people, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, first of all, I want to say to you that it is not a common practice for district health boards to make the kinds of decisions that you're talking about. It's not the practice that I've certainly witnessed as I've been around the province.

It is true that from time to time district health boards would make accommodations for people to live and to complete their, sort of, final years of life in a different community from where . . . in which they possibly lived a lifetime. Not unusual. This has happened prior to reform, as you well know.

But I say to the member opposite that in many situations today with the expansion of home care services, which I know that you don't have a full appreciation of and don't support. And I say to the member opposite that today we're finding that more and more people are finishing their final years within their own homes — not only within their own communities, but within their own homes.

If you take a look at the number of respite hours that are provided today through home care, they've increased substantially. If you were to look at the number of palliative care hours that are provided today to individuals by district health boards so they might be able to die in dignity in their own home, those numbers are far higher than they've ever been in this province.

And I would say to the member opposite that prior to making the comments and the statements that services are not being fully provided to a lot of our seniors — and we recognize the hard work that they've done — you need to have a fuller appreciation of the continuum of services, the compendium of services that they have available to them. And in many, many communities today they're using them.

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Minister, I'm sure that Mrs. McLaren will be happy to hear that she has access to psychiatric services when she has a brain tumour and maybe has a month to live or six months to live. It means that . . . Those are empty promises, empty words to these people. This woman has lived there, to

quote her daughter:

She has a brain tumour and her days are limited. Administrator says she has to be moved to Dinsmore for heaven sakes. She could die tomorrow. She could die next week. She could die next month.

All these people that I've talked about in Davidson have met with a coordinator within the Midwest Health District. Now one of the things that came back to me was that they actually — and I was happy to hear that — it laid out some alternatives for some of these people, not for them all. Some of them have said you're gone, we're moving you out of here, and that's it.

So there is appeal process and . . . Maybe I'll stop there, and I'll ask you what that appeal process is for people that don't like what the district board has said to them.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, the quality care coordinators are the people who really do the examinations and evaluations and the assessments of what the needs of an individual might be. And if you have a case that you're working on today in which you want us to look closer at, we'd be very happy to receive that and work closely with the district and our consultant to see how we might be able to accommodate someone.

Mr. McLane: — I appreciate that offer and likely will take you up on that, Mr. Minister, but my question still is, can you explain the appeal process for me?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, the appeal process is really where the quality of care coordinator, in concert with the assessment that's being done in the district, would examine what the needs of that particular individual would be and then would suggest where they might in fact receive their services.

If an individual wasn't happy, of course they would make their appeal back then to the quality care coordinator, who would then re-evaluate or reassess the work that they've done to try to determine where it is that the person should be. That would be the process as I know it.

Mr. McLane: — Simple question: then what?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I need to know what it is that they're appealing. I don't understand the direction that you're asking, questioning.

Mr. McLane: — Well as I mentioned these people have gone through this coordinator, and they've laid out some options for them. One option might be to take the person home. Another will be to send them off a hundred miles from their home. These people are saying that's nonsense and they've been told there's an appeal process.

So what do they do? They go back to the same coordinator and appeal it, and then what happens? If the coordinator says that's the end of it, is that the end of the appeal process, or does it go up the ladder, and does it eventually come to you?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think if, Mr. Chair, if somebody wasn't happy on a decision that was made by the assessment team and

the quality care coordinator in terms of where they would go, they could then — if we use the word appeal — they could appeal their position to the CEO of the district or the senior management staff of the district, or they could go to the board and suggest that they'd like a hearing or an audience with the board.

So they would have those two mechanisms for sure within the district health board to look at what the individual needs might be. If they were dissatisfied with that process, they could refer it onto the department and our district staff would look at it in our department, and it may make its way to me in the process, which happens from time to time.

(1915)

Mr. McLane: — But, Mr. Minister, surely this appeal process that I'm referring to isn't something that's unique to the Midwest Health District. It must be something that's been instituted through the health districts, through your department. And there must be some firm process in place as to where it ends. It has to end somewhere. Will it end up in the Supreme Court, is that where it's going to end, or does the buck stop with you, or what is the process? Surely your department must be aware of this process.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, I just want to say to you that this would be the process. I've mentioned to you that it would go to the district quality care coordinator. Okay, that's the first level it would go to. Then it would go to the board for resolve. If it wasn't resolved there you could put together . . . and you're right, this is inclusive for all the health districts. Then if it can't be resolved there at the district level, a multidisciplinary professional review team may be appointed by Saskatchewan Health, if in fact it doesn't get resolved at our level here or through the ministry.

So that's the process that we would have in place today, that all district boards would be using as policy direction.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you. This particular coordinator — my understanding from the people that have been involved in this process — was quite surprised that these people would want to appeal this process, and said that they have never had an appeal before. And that may well be the case.

However I do recall a couple of years ago that there was . . . and I think it made the front lines, the front page of the *Star-Phoenix* and maybe the *Leader-Post* and maybe some media where there was people being sent away from their home communities 70, 80 miles away. And of course at that time, my recollection, the district backed down and amazingly found a bed. So okay, so we have the appeal process and really the buck will stop with you then.

I guess one of the suggestions that was made — and you keep talking about community-based services — one of the suggestions was made for one of these folks was that well, okay they could either have a respite sort of thing where they're home in the daytime and back into a bed at night.

The second option was — which is one that is totally unacceptable to myself and others and everyone else — is that

they be sent away to some distant place to spend the rest of their life.

Or the third option was that they could take them home and would have 24-hour . . . 24-hour home care. Mr. Minister, can you tell me: can this province afford to have one-on-one, 24-hour home care?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think on an individual basis you're right, that there are a variety of different options that are available for families and individuals. And the ones that you've highlighted are the process that in fact works in many, many instances.

Your question about whether or not we in this province can afford 24-hour home care today, or district boards can, I would say to you that to provide 24-hour home care services across the piece is something that we would need some additional support with.

And so in our discussions with the federal government today, we're talking about the importance of home care, home-based services. And there's a great deal of interest in that by the way on the part of the federal government and all other provinces. And so we'll continue to promote that, look at how we might be able to achieve that.

But certainly that is one of the areas, as you highlight, that we want to spend more time in trying to achieve — not only for Saskatchewan, but I think across the country — because that's where we're going.

Mr. McLane: — Now, Minister, you won't answer the question, so I'll answer it for you. You know full well, not in Saskatchewan or anywhere else in Canada, we cannot afford 24-hour home care one-on-one for the type of people that we're talking about. You know full well we can't afford that.

We can afford to have home care to keep people in their homes, and it certainly works in urban settings. But when you get into the rural settings where people are travelling 30, 40 miles to look after people the . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Whitmore: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Sitting in the Speaker's gallery tonight is a friend from Saskatoon, Ken Roach. And sitting beside someone that I think is known as the Minister of Finance. So I'd like you to welcome the two beside him is another old friend, Marv Schultz, who now resides in Regina. And they're sitting beside people tonight . . . to the Chamber.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

Subvote (HE01)

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, as I said, you know full well that we can't afford one on one home care. And I'll tell you another thing, Mr. Minister. Many of our seniors, if they're living by themselves, that's not what they want either. They like the security and comfort of being in a setting where there's others like them and for security reasons want to be there. So don't give us that.

And I'm happy to hear that you are talking with the federal government. That would be an improvement, instead of day in and day out you standing in this House criticizing the federal government for not doing anything with you. Maybe that's part of the problem; you haven't been talking with them. And this certainly will be something to look at.

However, Mr. Minister, the problem that we have with these people is that they want to stay in their own community, they want to be by loved ones. And that's what they should have, would you not agree?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The majority of people who are living in their communities today want to be in their homes. And it isn't right for you to suggest for a minute that the institutional mentality still persists across the country, because that isn't where people want to be. And you can talk to seniors anywhere across the land today, and they'll tell you if they have the option of being in an institution or being at home, they'll want to be at home, without a doubt.

And so I say to you a couple of things. One is that on a long-term basis we aren't today being able to provide 24-hour home care. But we are talking to the federal government and we have been talking to the federal government for some time, because the federal government recognizes that in Saskatchewan they have an opportunity to partner up with us to provide a national program on home care.

And our emphasis will be the same as theirs, that we want to continue to move out of the institutional direction that we've been in for many, many years in health care, that we want to enrich community-based services. Home care is going to be a leader not only in this province, but also across Canada. And we will be able to do more for the future if we have some additional federal support on this, as you well know.

And that's what I've been saying all along, is that we need to have a greater injection by the federal government in community-based services. There appears to be some commitment in that today, of which we're providing some leadership in on this side of the House. And that will continue to be our emphasis, it will continue to be our thrust so that we can build the strong home-care program not only in Saskatchewan, but provide a model for other parts of the country.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Minister, I think again once again that, you know, in professing your wellness model which it

seems your government is committed to sticking to even though we've got 6,600 people out there suffering and dying. And your government won't admit that you made a mistake in the direction that you took in trying to move into an area that's been unproven. There's all sorts of studies that have been done and have been hid under a large book or a desk some place because they don't bear out what you're trying to preach to the people of the province.

Many people as I've said, relied on home care for many years to keep them in their home — people that were healthy; need a little bit of support. We're getting to the point now where we've got people that are being discharged from hospital with open wounds and all that kind of gory stuff that we hear. We've got horror stories from all too many letters and documentation, Mr. Minister, on that kind of stuff.

And you don't have the courage and won't say to your cabinet partners that, hey we better take a look at this thing and start fixing it before it's really out of hand. And I think it's time that you made that commitment to the people of Saskatchewan and start doing that, Mr. Minister.

A question I would ask you, what would you like me to tell the Schneider family or the Weighill's or the McLaren's in Davidson that they should do? Should they continue the fight? Should they continue to fight the district board and say we want to stay in our own community; we have a right to? Are you going to support them on that? And can I give them that message?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, I think if you're asking me to follow up on the case, then you should provide that information to me and we will, through the department, make a follow-up on that.

And I don't know what you've done, Mr. Member, but if you're asking my direction on what you should do, I say to you that what you should do is you should sit down with the district health coordinator, the quality care coordinator in that area. You should make yourself available to the assessment team that's provided the assessment on this particular individual and have them tell you first hand in terms of what they're determining. And then you'll have the better appreciation of what it is that the district is prepared to provide and whether other options are available for them.

I would suggest that you might do that to start with. If you're unhappy with that process, you should provide those cases to us, through the district coordinator . . . or through the consultant or provide them to me directly and we'll take a look at them.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Minister, I do have that dialogue with the district board; that's not a problem there. And I do know what services they're provided to provide but they don't meet the needs. Here's four examples that I've given you tonight where they're not being met.

My question is very simple. I don't think you need any more information than what I've provided with you tonight, that these people are sick, need to stay in their own community, want to stay in their own community, must stay in their own community. The one old gentleman makes a comment that if I move out of here, I'd just as soon be dead. Now you want that

type of thing on your shoulders?

So to me it's very clear. Either you support these people staying in their community, or you don't. Which one is it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I say to the member opposite, if you're unhappy with the process of the district health board, you have an option of providing that information or those cases to me. Or you should be encouraging the family members who you say are dissatisfied to providing that information to me or to the department, and we'll follow up on it to see what sort of the bottleneck is or what the issue is in helping them deal with it on an individual basis or on a district basis.

Mr. McLane: — Well I have talked to these people, Mr. Minister, and I have worked with them, and I am working with them. And I have suggested that they do what they have done is try and talk to the district.

The district is saying their hands are tied. They can't do anything, that talk to the government. That's what we keep hearing. Go to your MLA. It's the government's problem. I know you don't agree with that because you told these people in Lanigan that it's the district's fault. It's their problem. It's their problem that they're closing beds. You know that's nonsense. You know that your government's in control, that you run the districts. And so that's nonsense, Mr. Minister.

So it's very clear that these people have no other course but to appeal. For Heaven's sake, can you imagine these old people having to go now and hire lawyers . . . what they're doing to ask a lawyer what their rights are to keep their loved ones in their own community. For Heaven's sake, surely that you would have to agree that that's unacceptable, that you don't want to go there. I mean, some of your other cabinet ministers don't share that philosophy.

The Minister of Agriculture said, hey, take us to court, when he stole \$188 million of GRIP. He didn't have a problem with that. Take us to court. It's very simple.

But I don't think you believe in that, and I sure as heck don't believe in that. But this problem should be able to be solved in the local community, and all I'm asking for is your support to do it. And I think you want to do that.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I've already indicated to the member that what he should do is he should provide for me the list of the individuals who in fact he's working with where he thinks he hasn't been able to advance his notion of providing or having them receive the same kinds of services that they want in their community. Provide me with that information; I'd be happy to look at it, and we'll follow up, based on the information that you provide me.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Mr. Minister, I guess we can belabour this for quite a while. And I'll certainly see that you have these names. I'm surprised that you may not already have them on your desk.

I talked earlier about your predecessor, the Minister of Finance, who was just up in the gallery visiting with some friends. And last year when we talked about this, we talked about the doctors

in this province and he gave . . . it's a public commitment as to some of the things that I suggested that would maybe solve some of the problems with the doctors in particular rural areas.

And I haven't seen anything happen with that, Mr. Minister, and so I'll just explain to you what I'm talking about. One of the positive things — if there was — that I thought I saw in districtification was the fact that a district could have a doctor pool. And having said that, what a doctor pool would do would be to ensure that when a doctor needed time off — holidays, weekends, whatever it was, educational time — that there would be a pool of doctors that a district could resource from to fill that need, so we didn't have to have all the problems that we've seen right across Saskatchewan with doctors wanting to go on strike and communities being without service and all those types of things.

Now your predecessor made a commitment on that, Mr. Minister. I'm wondering if you share that commitment to that idea, and if you do, what have you done to further that?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I wasn't knowledgeable that this was really your idea, but if this is your idea and the idea of the Minister of Finance and the previous Health minister, it was one heck of a good idea because, I mean, what we've done in the last year is we've implemented a number of programs which are there to assist rural doctors to practise in rural Saskatchewan in particular and have signed an agreement with the physicians in this province which enhances that.

And certainly the weekend on-call relief program which you talked about is one that we implemented last year and the emergency room coverage program that we have. We've implemented of course the other ongoing longer objectives where we're providing today a grant to physicians to start up in rural practices.

We're encouraging . . . last year of course, 26 additional physicians came to rural Saskatchewan to practise. So there are three or four very visible programs that are in place today that are to ensure and enhance the enrichment of physicians particularly to rural Saskatchewan. And I appreciate your support on this idea and on this concept.

(1930)

Mr. McLane: — Well you strayed a little bit from what I was talking about, and that's the doctor pool. You didn't hit on that, and I'll ask you the question again. What about it? Do you support that concept? Some of the programs that you've talked about is not that. That's something totally different, and it's unfortunate your official passed you the wrong document.

It's simply where a district or even the province would have a pool of doctors that districts can draw from when there's a shortage.

A perfect example of that is in my own community last fall where we lost our doctor, and there was no doctors. The district health board says, hey, we don't have any. Your department says, hey, we don't have any. And so as usual, our community had to fight and search to find a doctor. Luckily we found one. Luckily we found one. Other communities haven't been so

lucky.

So, Mr. Minister, we're talking about the doctor pool, and let's use the Regina Health District as an example. If they had a pool of doctors, that would never happen. When Imperial needed relief or whoever else within the district needed a relief doctor, they could draw from that pool of doctors, and we wouldn't have this problem every time. And every time that this comes up, it's a crisis for you guys, and you bring in some stop-gap measures to try and satisfy it. Most often it's with money. Here's more money, and we'll pay you overtime and all that type of stuff.

We're talking about actual relief by other doctors. And I'd like to know, are you going to support that or are you working toward it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, he's correct. We have a number of associations that we . . . or a number of programs that have been established in partnership with the Saskatchewan Medical Association. And we have a locum pool which SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association) oversees. We have a locum roster which in fact is available then to help recruit, and a provincial recruitment program which is being used today to try and fill some of those areas that you talk about where rural practices might need enrichment or in larger communities like Regina where you might have the need for a specialist or a physician with a particular kind of expertise.

And beyond that, I talked about a whole host of other programs that we've initiated over the last year which I'll just go over very quickly for you, like the emergency coverage program, like the weekend on-call relief program, the rural practices establishment grant that I said a few minutes ago, the undergraduate medical student bursary, the physician recruitment coordinator which is a year old now, the rural practices enhancement training which allows for physicians to come and practice in rural Saskatchewan. I've mentioned the locum services program, the alternate pay in primary health services, northern medical services, support services.

There are a whole host of programs that we've initiated with SMA to help advance some of the notions that you support and we do on this side of the House.

Mr. McLane: — Maybe I'll just explain the doctor pool a little further, Mr. Minister. For example, if the Regina Health District can say at any time we need — we'll pick a number — 20 general practitioners to serve the Regina Health District including outposts such as Imperial where we have a resident doctor . . . So we have 20 doctors. So you need relief time. So let's say what the Regina Health District would need would be 25 doctors on staff so that at any given time there's probably going to be five on relief or holiday or educational purposes or for whatever reason.

So you got a pool of doctors so that Imperial's never without a doctor. The clinic in east Regina is never without their doctor . . . blah-blah-blah-blah— all those types. And it'll work for any district. You can either do it district by district. Some districts are too small to have that, so you need the larger ones to provide the pool.

That's what I'm talking about, Mr. Minister. Are you going to give the same commitment as your predecessor, the Minister of Finance, did that he supported that and would work toward it? And if you do, what are doing to move to that?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, this is some of the work that we're doing today currently with the Saskatchewan Medical Association to try to accumulate a pool of physicians in the way in which you speak. It's part of the discussions that have been ongoing now for better than a year when they were talked about here in the House with the previous Minister of Health and the Finance Minister today.

Included in that process, of course, as I've outlined for you, the locum services program that we have in place. You're speaking about something broader than that where you could get physicians across the province to give of their expertise to a pool so that they would be available to cover off across the province. And that discussion we're currently having with physicians in Saskatchewan.

And some of it you're starting to see occur on its own where physicians are moving from larger centres and doing some rural practice today. We're going to encourage to do that. But the actual physical pool of physicians today, not accomplished that yet. That continues to be our objective.

Mr. McLane: — So I take that as a yes that you support that?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, I don't know why we wouldn't. In this province, you want to get physicians that would help each other, that could function in various different locations across the province. It clearly is our objective and has been in the initiation of the wellness model.

Mr. McLane: — One of the problems with most of your programs for doctors is that it talks about a doctor practice of two or more doctors. That does nothing for communities such as ours or many others in this province where we have a single doctor.

It's been the intention of your government, your department, since the wellness model, to try and concentrate doctors in the larger centres. And us outlying areas, us smaller towns, well we will send you down a doctor one or two days a week or whatever we can. Really what that would accomplish would be more rationing, I think, which has also been a role of your government. So the problem that you have is when you introduce these programs is . . . it's for a practice with two or more doctors. It does nothing for our doctor who says, okay I'm a single doctor. I want to come to Imperial, but I can't access those funds.

Why do you specify it has to be a two- or more-doctor practice in order to access these types of programs?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well we've tried, Mr. Chair, to address that from both perspectives where in fact we might be able to enhance the practice in rural Saskatchewan because there are issues today where physicians are practising in small communities, and they're leaving for a variety of different reasons and wanting to be in larger pools. Practising in a group practice might be the better language.

And we've provided some initiatives at both end of that, at both ends, to see if we can get physicians to come and practise in solo practices in Saskatchewan because we recognize the importance of that and have initiated some programs to do that.

On the other hand, we've also provided some opportunities for physicians to practise what we might call group practices and provided some incentives for them to do that. So our opinion is that we're trying to cover that off on both sides. And so some of the funding that we've put into the base budget this year, or over the last two years, reflects that.

Mr. McLane: — Well, Minister, I could parade you in . . . if I could find them all the doctors that we've had in the community of Imperial in the last 15 years. And there isn't one of them that would say they didn't want to work there, including the one that's there now, that doesn't like the single practice. His only issue is, is that when he wants a weekend off, there's no one to replace him. So we have to make agreements, and we do. In the community of Imperial, we've made agreements out of the Regina Health District and into other health districts to have relief for him. It would be so simple if the Regina Health District or your government had that pool of doctors and said okay, Dr. X in Imperial, you want next weekend off; we're going to have a doctor out there to cover for you.

So you know you're saying . . . you're trying to paint all these doctors and single practices as saying they don't like the isolation. They don't want to be by themselves and all that kind of . . . That's not the issue at all. Most of these doctors like it in small town rural Saskatchewan, even in a single practice. All they ask for is relief.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, all you need to do is have discussion with your leader, who's a doctor. He knows what's been done, and obviously he hasn't had this discussion with you.

But what's happened in Saskatchewan in the last year, and this last announcement, has been that we've got both of the programs that you're talking about in place today. The weekend-on-call is in place today so that in fact physicians can get that kind of respite that their asking for. And in the negotiation of this contract, we've provided it because the SMA said that this was an important piece to the signing of the agreement. So we have it in place today. And we have the weekend relief or on-call relief. And all that they need to do is they need to make the application through your community, if it's Imperial, to the SMA, and this process kicks in, and the supports will be there to provide those kinds of reliefs that you're talking about. They're there.

Mr. McLane: — I don't think it's quite that simple, Mr. Minister. I've been in this business too long, and I've seen it. They make the application. Where's a doctor going to come from? Tell me where this doctor's going to magically appear from every second or third weekend when this guy needs time off? It's not going to happen. And you know it isn't going to happen until we get that pool of doctors. We're short of doctors now, so until we get that pool in place it's not going to happen. And I ask you to work toward that and try and accomplish that.

Mr. Minister, I wanted to ask you if you could explain to me . . .

and I'd like to as well, assuming that you have guidelines for the terminologies that you use for surgeries, you talk about elective. You talk about urgent. You talk about other terms that you need. Can you explain some of those for me, and do you have those documented, so you could send me over a copy of them that will explain those types of terms?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I don't have those with me right now. But what we'll do is we'll make sure that we provide them for you in terms of what the guidelines that are being used in terms of the classification of those three areas that you and I have both been using.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just a few questions for the minister. Again welcome to yourself and your officials.

Obviously health care is of great concern to northern Saskatchewan and in particular Athabasca. And just a few questions we have in reference to an update on the formation of the district health boards, where these people are from, the number of staff they have in place, and some of your proposed planning or the stages of planning.

Obviously, Mr. Minister, we have people that may be watching this program back in northern Saskatchewan. And I guess this would be an opportune time to express to them some of the stages of the development of the board, your staff, and some of the services that are being considered. Would you be able to give us that information please.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well first of all, to the member, I want to say that — and Mr. Chair — that we are going to be working very closely and have been working very closely with the district health boards in the North. And of course part of what the district health boards in the North are going to do is look at the kinds of accomplishments that have happened in the South so that you can develop a broad range of services and a battery of services that you've asked about from time to time during question period, that we want to enhance in northern Saskatchewan.

So in the southern part of the province today we have about 1,500 first responders to start with, that have been trained and are now living in rural communities and soon will be in the northern part of Saskatchewan which the district health boards will be putting in place. They'll be providing training programs for these individuals to ensure that you have first response services as close to the communities in which people live as you can. And I expect that in northern Saskatchewan there will be a large number of those folks that will take advantage of those opportunities.

We know that we need to enhance and work at enriching the emergency services both in air and in some areas of the province, in northern Saskatchewan, road ambulance. And I know that the district health boards are going to be making a concerted effort to develop that.

We know that in the northern part of Saskatchewan there hasn't been a strong emphasis on home care. And the district health boards — I know through some of their visionary planning — are developing a strategy of how they're going to provide home

care services in those communities.

So there'll be new training programs. There will be staff that will be now employed across the North who will be providing home care services similar to what we have in the South today, and growth, I would suggest to you, in terms of job opportunities for people on front lines who are doing home care services. We're going to see of course enrichment in some of your institutional services because you don't have many nursing home services in the northern part of the province. There's going to be a need to provide some additional resources for that through district health boards. Some of that planning will come forward.

As you know, we're developing and soon, hopefully, we'll see a new facility in Athabasca, a new health care facility in Athabasca. So there's a whole range, broad range of services that your district health board is working at developing and putting into place that will reflect many of the services that today southern Saskatchewan people have but northern folks yet don't have.

I don't have for you the list of the board members with me but we'll make sure that we provide that for you. The Keewatin-Yatthe District Board is 12 members and the chair of course as you know is Max Morin. The board representatives include two representatives from Meadow Lake Tribal Council named through the memorandum of understanding between the Meadow Lake Tribal Council of Saskatchewan. And then the chair of the Mamawetan/Munito Uskiy, which is a district health board with 12 members; the chair there is Louise Wiens.

And we'll provide for you more detail or more information as it relates to the board members, because you asked that question. We'll make that available to you; I don't have it with me tonight.

(1945)

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I realize that there is a \$10 million facility being planned for Stony Rapids, the transfer of course being from the Uranium City Hospital that is there now and all the services and the staff and so on and so forth.

As the new facility in Stony Rapids is being built and certainly being commissioned, there's been a lot of questions as to what's going to happen to the community of Uranium City and Camsell Portage.

And certainly, Mr. Minister, we won't argue and neither will I, on terms of the logical choice of location of the facility in the far North. Stony Rapids is certainly close to Black Lake, which is one of the largest communities in the far North. It's relatively close to Fond-du-Lac as well. And they've also got an airport being done up.

And as I mentioned before, Mr. Minister, the communities of the Athabasca Basin, both the mayors of Uranium City and certainly the chiefs of Fond-du-Lac and Black Lake and Stony Rapids, there's a lot of cooperation there and a lot of coordination of that whole region that says, yes — that's the most logical place for this facility to go, therefore we're

supporting it, and so on and so forth.

So I guess my argument being is that we don't want to leave certain communities away from the, you know, from the whole mix of accessibility to emergency health care services and general preventative health care efforts. And that's why it brings me into the question I'm going to ask here in terms of Camsell Portage and Uranium City. They obviously have some challenge ahead of them then, Mr. Minister, and I wrote you a letter about these concerns a number of months ago.

Could you update us tonight as to what the Uranium City facility may look like two years from now? Or what type of services they may have immediately for the 200 people that are left in Uranium City and certainly the adjoining community of Camsell Portage. And when I say adjoining I don't mean a bedroom community much like you have Saskatoon and Martensville. By adjoining I mean they may be as many as 20 to 25 air miles from each other.

So I think if a young person is quite sick or there's been an accident in Camsell Portage, that there be a system in place for these people from the far North to access emergency health care and certainly preventative health care services. Again, could you give us an update as to what you foresee happening in the Athabasca Basin?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you, Mr. Chair, to the member. First of all I want to thank you for your comments in relationship to the support that you're providing, and that's extremely valuable as we develop many of those services for northern people today. And I want to thank you for that support.

In respect to Uranium City, some of the services that will be there will be these — services in Uranium City will not change significantly from what is utilized at present — physician services, lab, X-ray, observation, holding beds will still be available there. There'll still continue to be acute care services to be provided through primary care health centres, which will then be physicians' referrals as they are today.

And the design of the new facility at Stony Lake is nearing completion as you well know. And the Athabasca authority of course will be overseeing that. Now the members of the authority — I think the other piece that's important here that you asked about, Hatchet Lake and Wollaston, has chosen to maintain its historic relationship with La Ronge for hospital and physician services and is within the boundaries of . . . it's now I said Mamawetan/Munito Uskiy but that's been changed now to the Mamawetan Churchill district.

The members of the authorities of course will include — and I think this is important in the planning process which you talked about — will include people from Camsell Portage, Fond-du-Lac, and Uranium City, Stony Rapids and Black Lake to ensure that when you put those services in place that in fact they'll reflect the needs of all of those communities that are there.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Certainly that'll be of interest to the people of the whole Athabasca Basin. And I certainly want to commend the leadership that the Athabasca Basin communities has afforded this whole process of

rationalizing health care and certainly try and coordinate our health care dollar to ensure maximum service and of course affordability, accessibility, and the whole bit.

So I think they should be commended and be understood that there has to be some cooperation and they certainly come through with their portion of that cooperative spirit.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, is the La Loche situation. St. Martin's, as you're probably aware, has been a black eye for health care in this province for many, many years. Dilapidated trailers simply do not a hospital make.

So I guess my argument to you, and has been for the past three years, is we've been harping and banging on this drum, and I certainly must admit that there has been some progress being made by the announcement. And if I can recall the hon. member from . . . the former minister of Health indicating a price tag of \$10 million for the replacement of St. Martin's Hospital.

La Loche serves a great amount of communities, and those communities include Descherm Lake, they include Turnor Lake. They also include Black Point and Poplar Point. They also include the Clearwater River Dene Nation, which is the Indian reserve right next door to it. So the population base that they're serving could be anywhere from 6 to 7,000 people, and certainly they're looking forward to some kind of response and I think they're encouraged, Mr. Minister, at this point in time.

But there's still a question mark as to what amount of commitment are we looking at in terms of the final price tag and when is the actual construction going to start. Because, Mr. Minister, as we've talked about this whole issue in the Assembly time and time again, there is no other health care system that I'm aware of that has dilapidated trailers lumped together for the past 17 years that is considered a hospital.

So I guess in reference to St Martin's Hospital, the people of La Loche deserve equal treatment, they certainly deserve fair treatment, and they certainly deserve to go to a facility that is of equal status to the other facilities in Saskatchewan.

And as I mentioned before, there's a great number of families out there that are waiting. They have older people in their families that need care. They have young children. They have their own health to worry about. And unfortunately the only problem they've had, Mr. Minister, is they've been very patient.

So could you give us an update as to what your intentions are in reference to the St. Martin's Hospital and the La Loche situation?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, to the member, just to indicate that he's correct in saying that there has been a great deal of discussion over the last couple of years about the importance of the health care facility in La Loche, St. Martin's. I want to say to the member that it's been brought to my attention as well as you have corresponded with me. The member for Cumberland has also raised this issue with me on a number of occasions.

And I want to say to you that we're continuing to complete our planning process. Within a very short while, there'll be a letter

going to Mr. Morin who's the chair of the district health board there, and I'll be sure that I copy you in that correspondence which I think broadly identifies what our commitment is to the community of La Loche and the St. Martin's Hospital.

We share the same views as you do, and our correspondence will be going out within short order.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Again the other factor we're looking at — again bouncing around the map a bit here — is in terms of the Stony Rapids situation. As you're probably aware, that's where the new facility is going to be. And I think the Black Lake Development Corporation is also entertaining the possibility of amalgamating housing plans to coordinate your staffing housing needs.

And one of the things that's of some concern out there is Stony Rapids is going to be building a water treatment plant to serve the hospital, the health care centre there? Yet the residents of Stony Rapids will not have the means to access the water and sewer system that will be built there. So it is a health care matter, Mr. Minister, that we have in this day and age a community without properly treated water and properly disposed sewer. All that adds to the health care costs. It all adds to the challenge of living in northern Saskatchewan, as does some of the crowded housing conditions.

So I guess my point to you is, do you feel that water and sewer services to Stony Rapids is a health concern?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I know that there has been a great deal of work that has gone into the decision around the development of the new facility at Black Lake, and I've been apprised by my staff that this project is moving ahead with the kind of pace that we intended it to be.

The point that you make about the incorporated housing needs and the water treatment and the need for ensuring that we have good housing opportunities, I've actually had a discussion with the district health board members regarding — or two of the members from the board — relating to this project. And we're working very closely with them on both of those issues.

As you know, the facility will be on reserve. And so when we're talking about roads and infrastructure, water treatment plants, the discussion becomes a bit more technical because it requires then the participation and involvement of other levels of government besides the province and the band itself.

So we're continuing that dialogue today, keeping in mind that although the health facility is our primary objective, that we understand and appreciate the importance of ensuring that you have good housing needs, because you need people who are going to work there and live in those communities. And it's been suggested that we need to ensure that that's in place for them or to assist them in making sure that both the water treatment process and the housing is available for them.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And certainly whenever my office is able to offer some assistance in some limited capacity, I might add, we'll certainly try and do our very best to impress upon the federal government, and certainly the leaders of the Athabasca Basin, that yes, cost sharing the \$9.5

million facility 50/50 with the federal government is something that we certainly support. And we'd like to see some kind of effort to expand on the housing issue, the road issue, and certainly the water and sewer issue with the corresponding, adjoining community.

And I did have a conversation with the current mayor of Stony Rapids. And I indicated that now is a very essential time in which he begins to work hand in hand with the province to try and coordinate these two projects together. Because if you do coordinate the projects together you're obviously going to get the best bang for your buck.

So I would suggest that the mayor of Stony Rapids will probably be in close contact — if he has not been already — with your office to say, look, listen, how could we coordinate both objectives, maximize the dollar, and accomplish both of these objectives on behalf of the Stony Rapids people and certainly the Athabasca Basin?

The other two comments I have, questions I have, Mr. Minister, before I take my place, is I really do want to recognize some of the efforts of the Ile-a-la-Crosse community. From sitting back in the mayor's chair and certainly viewing it from a young man growing up in the community, I've seen a lot of contribution the community has made as well.

And they have constructed something like seven doctor's residences at an enormous cost. They've also constructed a tenplex professional staff residence which does cost close to, I believe, 7 or \$800,000 including interest over a period of years.

So quite frankly, you can look at the small community of Ile-a-la-Crosse in terms of their contribution to health care — well in excess of \$2 million over the last seven or eight years. So I want to make sure we put a plug in for that community to make people out there understand what they have been doing to support health care and certainly doing their part in demanding that they have fair and equal treatment when it comes to health care.

I guess my question to you is when communities undertake that type of commitment to you, what does that mean to the provincial government and to yourself as Minister of Health?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I think I really appreciate the comments that you make, Mr. Chair, Mr. Member, because this is exactly the kind of cooperation and partnership that we talk about across the province.

I really want to endorse the words that you've given and that is that any time that you can create the type of an infrastructure that you have in Ile-a-la-Crosse — which does a number of things, it ensures that the people who are coming to work in your community are adequately provided in terms of services. It also enhances your opportunities to recruit additional staff, professional people, to come and work in your community.

So I know that much of this work started when you sat in the chair of the mayor in your community. And so I want to recognize that much of that work that was done during that period of time, and to congratulate the community of Ile-a-la-Crosse in being able to put together the kinds of

community plan which we talk about very often when we talk about the importance of enriching community-based services. And this is an example in the northern part of Saskatchewan where you achieve some of that and we endorse it and will continue to support that.

(2000)

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. And I guess the overwhelming example that we have of the far North, the Athabasca Basin communities, I understand that there's got to be some huge levels of cooperation amongst all the communities along the west side, which includes of course Buffalo Narrows and Patuanak and Beauval, Dillon and Canoe Lake, because there's going to be the question of how could we optimize our opportunity to have as many health care facilities in our region as possible to serve our people since we're so isolated from the rest of the province.

And certainly every community wants a facility, as you're probably aware, Mr. Minister. And the key thing that I want to stress to the people out there that may be listening is that cooperation amongst all the communities is so essential and so key that Buffalo Narrows and Beauval and Ile-a-la-Crosse and Patuanak have to work together very closely.

I understand, as you probably are aware, Mr. Minister, that there's going to be a lot of, I guess, mixing of different views and different parties. You have the first nations community also involved.

I understand that Meadow Lake is looking at a new facility. I understand that, you know, there's some communities like Pinehouse that may be amalgamated with the Lac La Ronge health district.

There's all these different scenarios and different players that's going to take an incredible amount of cooperation amongst these communities to try and put together an attractive package, health package I might add, for the whole region to survive and to ensure that they have proper health care facilities for their people. And having the age of our population being fairly young, you can see that there's going to be an incredible need for preventative as well as immediate medical care for our citizens.

The other issue I want to talk about, Mr. Minister, because of the housing shortage, some of the problems or some of the challenges in health care include high rates of TB (tuberculosis). We've spoken about this before. And TB of course as you are aware, Mr. Minister, could easily spread amongst a family, especially if they live in crowded conditions. La Loche is one community that always pops into my mind because it's got something like 150 on the waiting-list. Ile-a-la-Crosse is certainly getting a handle on their housing needs. They've got a bit of a ways to go yet. Buffalo as well. Beauval is also way behind. So housing in general also adds to the health of the Athabasca people.

And the reason why we stand up each day, Mr. Minister, and talk about these health challenges is because for years, when you forget and neglect a certain region of the province and then all of a sudden you get an MLA that wants to speak about the

challenges, many people perceive that request for a whole pile of things to happen as being greedy. The fact of the matter is we're not being greedy, Mr. Minister. We're simply asking for our fair share of what has been happening in the rest of the province for the past 20 years, and we're trying to bring northern Saskatchewan up in terms of some of the infrastructure we need, and we're trying to be treated as equal.

So we hope we don't taint your attitude to the North as us wanting everything overnight. We simply want to be treated equally. We wish to be on par with the province in terms of some of our health needs, some of our infrastructure needs, some of the economic needs, and so on and so forth. So this is the reason why it's very important we get that attitude in check, and very important that we develop a healthy attitude in terms of some of the requests we have.

So if I can get your response to the TB question and the housing needs, I'll then have one more point to make, and then I will close.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, I recognize his comment as it relates to the increased level of tuberculosis in the North, and he's accurate in making in that comment. I know that through the Saskatchewan tuberculosis control program which we now have in place and in a joint partnership with Health Canada and the district health board now, they're looking at increased ways in which we might be able to reduce or prevent the level of tuberculosis that is increasing in the northern part of the province.

Clearly you've identified some very significant health determinants. And when you talk about Ile-a-la-Crosse and the need for enriched housing and the need for purification of your water, good sewer and water systems in the northern part of the province, those are the kinds of issues that both the district health board, mayors in the communities in the North are needing to provide some leadership in.

Those discussions are going on today both with the federal government, the community leaders, and, as I've said to you, the Saskatchewan tuberculosis control program which we believe are the issues that will further advance the assurance of getting a better control on the increase of tuberculosis in the North and also provide some additional health care needs to ensure that we don't see that, us moving in that direction.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And my final point this evening is that while we understand that . . . and I urge all the communities out there, the leaders that are out there to make sure we coordinate our aspiration as a region, especially when it comes to health care. And I think the challenge we have is to try to identify the whole master plan, I guess so to speak, to try and have these communities in this specific area become centres of excellence in certain regions.

Perhaps Buffalo Narrows could become the centre of excellence in economic development and government services. Perhaps Beauval could become the centre of excellence in education. There's so many different opportunities that could happen out there if we were to coordinate all our efforts, as a region, to make sure the government knows that the communities are cooperating with the people in these various communities. And

that is exactly the way to go in terms of trying to maximize benefits for your certain region.

So I would encourage all the Athabasca constituents out there that are working with their leaders, with their chiefs, with their mayors to really look beyond the small confines of our communities and to look at the regional aspect to try and see if there's such an opportunity to look at the regional approach to developing centres of excellence.

And the other factor I wanted to point out, Mr. Minister, is that as you are aware, health is a wide variety of . . . it covers a wide variety of matters. Everything from water and sewer systems, to housing, to mental health, and those are areas that we're all looking at. And as you are aware, mental health is one area that needs a lot more funding.

But I wanted to point out as a disclaimer, Mr. Minister, is we certainly hope that in recognizing these northern problems which you have done so this evening, is that we don't use the health boards to pass cuts on to northern Saskatchewan which would eliminate all the positive things that we have spoken about this evening.

Like I said, we have a whole pile of catching up to do in northern Saskatchewan, and we mustn't apologize. And I certainly won't apologize, as the member from Cumberland does every now and then, for what the North gets. We're here to fight for what the North needs and will continue pushing home that message. So hopefully two or three years from now I won't look back at *Hansard* and say, well I warned the Minister of Health not to use the northern health boards as a scapegoat for planned cuts to northern health services.

So in closing I wouldn't mind hearing your comment on this. And again, I want to thank you and your officials for taking time this evening to hear some of my concerns.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy that the opposition is . . . or the government is very happy to see that I've got up to ask a few questions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — I've been sitting and listening very intently, hoping that I would be able to come up with some questions that would allow the minister to scrum with all his officials in order to come up with the answer.

But what I'd like to do first of all is ask some questions on some unfinished business, questions that I asked about a year ago during estimates when I asked the minister when he was going to prescribe NGOs (non-governmental organizations) providing addiction services as affiliates. Is this in the wind? Is that taking place?

I asked this question a year ago. I was told that the government would be consulting with the health districts. To date I hear from some of our NGOs that nothing has happened. They have not had a definitive reply, and I'm wondering how long they'll have to wait.

They are performing a service to their communities. They've

been asking. They've been very patient. And, Mr. Minister, I guess my first question . . . hard-hitting as it might seem. I need to have an answer because I know that the people that contact me to ask this question will be paying very close attention.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member. First of all, district health boards, as was the case prior to district health boards . . . is that NGOs or CBOs (community-based organization) as they are known today, in fact have contracts to provide a vast array of services of which we see today, providing some mental health services, drug addiction services in some cases. And some areas are providing home care, and some parts of the province they are providing other . . . well they are providing facilities for physicians to house their practices in.

There's a whole host of responsibilities that NGOs take on in the province, and then in some cases . . . in most . . . in all of these cases, they're by contractual agreement with the district health board. We value them in the way in which you speak because clearly district health boards and previously governments couldn't provide those services on their own. And NGOs and CBOs, as we know them today, continue to provide a very valuable service across the province in many, many ways.

Mr. Osika: — So what you're saying, that there is a consultation process in place, or they have been already prescribed as affiliates?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, they're not affiliates, and they never have been affiliates, and there's no intent or interest, I don't think, for neither CBOs or NGOs to want to be affiliates and/or district health boards to have them in that capacity.

The contract agencies that provide a vast array of services to districts . . . in this case we're talking about health services; as I say, it could provide mental health services, drug addiction services, and the list goes on. In some areas, they provide some home care services. They might contract for somebody to provide physiotherapy. There's a whole array of services that are provided by the NGO, CBO community, but they're not affiliates. They're contract agencies, as they have been in the past, and continue to be that way.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, in order for them now to obtain any financial assistance for all the work that they do with addiction treatment and counselling services, how are they to go about obtaining the very valuable financial resources that they need to continue to operate and to help the people in the communities?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, what they do is they negotiate a contract to the district health board in terms of what the value of that service they believe should be, and they contract that and they negotiate that agreement with the district health board. In the past, they would negotiate that with the Department of Health, and the Department of Health would then determine at what level they would fund them based on a delivery plan, and we would provide them with the money.

Since the establishment of the district health boards, those

community agencies now go to the district health board and negotiate that agreement on an individual basis with them. And we provide the funding in all of those cases, I expect, to the district health boards who then pass it on to those third parties.

Mr. Osika: — I believe that that is one reason that the issue is raised once again, is that because when they do go to the district health boards they say, look, we're so financially strapped; we can't cut anywhere else. Our resources have been diminished, and we're not able to share any of our hard-found resources for your types of services. And they are struggling like all the district health boards are struggling for finances.

And so when you say it's easy and as your colleagues are saying, hey it's easy, just get a contract, well it isn't that easy when you go to the people you're doing a service for and they don't have the money, and you can't just say well, to heck with the people that require the service. They are very caring people. So they go ahead, and they do it. But they do need some financial assistance. And if it isn't forthcoming . . . that's one of the breakdowns. That's one of the problems with district health boards and the lack of adequate funding to provide care for all those people that are in fact in need.

And I'm going to pursue that a little later. But I'd like to really nail this down, Mr. Minister, about these NGOs who are providing this kind of service and yet not having access to finances from the district health boards to help the people in need in those small communities.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member. First and foremost, I want to say to you that there hasn't been a reduction of funding to district health boards across the province. And so for you to make the statement is inaccurate because district health boards have continued to receive growth across the province in each and every year over at least the last four years. So you shouldn't be saying that there has been reductions in health care funding to district health boards because that's not accurate.

And I want to say to the member opposite that when you talk about CBOs . . . and we can provide this list for you because I think it's important for you to have it as you speak about it. When you look at the increases to CBOs across the province, community-based organizations, you'll see when we pass the information to you, that in each of these programs across the province that provide a vast range of services, you'll see increases in their annual allocations as well which has come from the district health boards and which we funded from the department to those boards.

(2015)

Mr. Osika: — Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Minister. If I said that there has been a reduction in financing to the district health boards, that was not what I meant to say. There is an inadequate amount of funding to the district health boards in order to provide the services to the people that they serve. That was the point I was making.

Before I ask any further questions, my friend and colleague from Athabasca wants to clarify something. He was awaiting a response from you to his last dissertation. And if I may, Mr.

Deputy Chair, I'd like to allow him to pursue that with the minister now. Thank you.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the question, Mr. Minister, just in case you thought for a moment that I didn't need a response, the question I asked you is that two years from now, if I were to research *Hansard* and I would ask you is there any way, shape, or form, are you planning on using the district health boards that you have now established in northern Saskatchewan to blame for some of the cuts that you have planned or otherwise will be planning, in terms of the health care services for northern Saskatchewan.

And I would like your response, a very simple response of no; we will not be using them as scapegoats . . . at the same amount of care if not better care and better budget dollars will be allocated to these northern districts and certainly not be used to hide any cuts from the people.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, I didn't comment because for a moment I thought you were a member of our party and were on this side of the House because you made such a wonderful dissertation about the level of health care services. You talked so eloquently about the model of health care in northern Saskatchewan that I thought for sure that you were advocating a great deal of the wellness program that's already been established in the southern part of the province. And I just adopted that as being the way in which you'd like to see it occur in the North, and that is the case.

And the examples that you used tonight -- in terms of the communities that have come together to develop the district health plan to initiate the kinds of strategies that need to occur into the future so that you have good comprehensive health care programs in the North -- are exactly what we've been doing in the southern part of the province. And I want to commend you and those people who are providing leadership across the northern part of the province, and we'll continue to work together in ensuring that that happens.

I want to say to you that it has never been the position or the opinion of this government or the ministry of those who have served in it or the communities where district health boards have served . . . And I've heard this again at the SAHO convention not more than four months ago where they don't view themselves as being sort of the front-runners of the government in terms of making the hard decisions. They view themselves as being partners of this government. This is what the district health boards . . . and this is how they view themselves.

We've never used them, and I say to you sincerely, district health boards are men and women like you and I. And you know who they are in the northern part of the province in your community today. And these people in fact are going to be providing, as you know, in developing the best plans for northern Saskatchewan that northern Saskatchewan has to offer because they're like you and I. And we know that into the future, when we reflect back on to the next couple of years, you'll see a whole host, a battery of services that have come together because of the kinds of partnership and cooperation that you talked about in your comments.

Mr. Belanger: — So the simple answer is no; you will not be. And I'd like to hear you say it -- no they will not be used to hide cuts.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well boards have never been used for that purpose, and that won't be their role in the northern part of the province either.

The Deputy Chair: — Committee members, before I recognize the hon. member for Melville, I would request respectfully leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Trew: — I thank all members for that. Seated in the Speaker's gallery are two good friends of mine, George Hainsworth — give us a wave, George — and Fred Kress up at the back. I ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming these two very good friends of mine.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Health Vote 32

Subvote (HE01)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, over the last days that we've sat here in the legislature, and we've talked about health care, and we've brought up issues from all over the province that point towards a deteriorating system. It concerns me.

You talk about more money being spent, and that's great. But the problems are not subsiding, and that's troublesome to me. Each time I hear that things are getting better . . . And I have constituents that call, and we hear about the issues that we brought to the legislature from people who are actually victims of waiting lists, bed shortages. We've talked about folks riding around in ambulances for hours because of lack of beds in the system. I guess that's really troublesome for me.

As a matter of fact I don't know whether the member from Estevan and I . . . and perhaps others that are getting up to my age range have the same fear I have . . . because the people that contact me that need to wait lengthy waits for surgery are told that it's too bad. We'd get you in sooner, but we just don't have the beds. We don't have the wherewithal. We don't have the means, and we'll have to prescribe you with medication. The doctors out there are doing the best they can.

We've had the example that I brought to your attention with the situation from Yorkton. That was something reported by a doctor that actually happened, Mr. Minister. You can't deny that. And I hope -- and I would like your sincere commitment here tonight -- that this doctor will no way, shape or form be taken to any kind of task for having spoken out and saying what he did about, I did everything I could. The condition of this

patient was such that he required immediate treatment. And yet it was not available. That's the scary part.

And I'd like to think that, yes, we are . . . Perhaps the whole country is moving in the direction that we need to move. However not unlike projects that need to be well thought out, was there perhaps a haste in all of this? And haste makes waste. And perhaps everything happened too quickly: the whole shutting down of all the facilities and the closure of hospital beds and the reduction of services, the process by going to district health boards and wellness models and wellness programs and home care.

Perhaps that is a way of the future with all our technology. However it was perhaps done too rapidly, too quickly. And now there are a lot of people caught in the middle that are experiencing the brunt of these massive cuts and this rapid movement towards something that may perhaps be within reach.

But folks are sort of caught in the middle of all this now. When I read things like "Health cuts hurting staff," that's pretty frightening. When you hear it from the district health board, when you hear it from the front-line workers and the doctors and the nurses. I guess that's what boggles my mind is nobody else seems to care. I don't know. Don't the people in the district health boards hear that? Do not the people in your department hear that, Mr. Minister? Are we the only ones that are reading this? Is the public seeing this, experiencing this, and reading this but not the people that are under your umbrella? I don't understand this.

It's hard, the head of obstetrics and gynecology for the Regina district continued, you can sustain extraordinary work for a short term but there's no indication this is ever going to end. Nurses, doctors, X-ray technicians, nursing assistants — they're all feeling the brunt of the cuts, and health care workers are burning out with no end in sight to the long hours and bed shortages.

I realize and appreciate that once government makes a commitment to a project, they would find it devastating personally — perhaps for the sake of arrogance — to at some point realize that, you know something, perhaps we did make a mistake. Perhaps we have gone too far too fast and we need to slow down. Perhaps we need to take a look at this project again and back up a bit. Maybe we should sustain, retain some of these precious health care facilities that we have without destroying them, without tearing them down and rebuilding them. Let's just maintain that for a little while further until we get caught up to these lengthy waiting-lists, to these burnt out front-line health care workers.

Mr. Minister, it's not only . . . And I'm talking about the whole health care system throughout the province, because whatever shortages exist here in the cities, not only in this city but in Saskatoon, impacts and affects the precious hospital beds and the care facilities in our rural communities.

And some of the rural communities with some of the decent health care facilities that they do have and are able to sustain, are concerned, are fearing that they will lose those facilities because people . . . there's an exodus of folks that are unable to

access the specialized type of treatments that they need . . . specialized care.

So where do they go? They go to the cities. So guess what those health districts are told. Well there's more people going out of here. You know you're not using the facilities to the extent that you should be. But how can you use it if you don't have the proper kind of services there.

"Shortage of doctors growing." And these are all recent and they continue. This is not something that just started, just happened; this has been going on for the last three, four years. It seems to be accelerating; it's not decreasing; that's the troublesome thing. If it was something that started six months ago and people could see some improvement, some light at the end of the tunnel, 6,600 waiting list or 6,000 — whatever. It's far too great. If they could see it three months ago, four months ago when it was brought to people's attention that they cared and something was done about it and then you, Mr. Minister, could get up and say: I'm pleased to announce in this House that our waiting list for care facilities, for operations, for surgeries, in our hospitals is down to 2,200. That would be fantastic, but nobody sees any relief. It continues.

A recent study by the Association of Canadian Medical Colleges published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal tabulated the total number of 1989 graduates from each medical school across Canada in 1966 — out of 1,722 students that were tracked to see in which province they ended up practicing, British Columbia and Ontario were the only provinces that gained in numbers of those students. Nearly 200 others flocked to jobs in United States.

We talked about that earlier in the House during different debates, the number of doctors from this province that exit it, that could hardly wait to get out of here when they saw all these rapid transitions taking place to our wellness models and our health care models. Alberta and Quebec had moderate losses of students and most of Atlantic Canada had losses between 20 and 50 per cent. Saskatchewan clearly had the greatest problems retaining its medical students that year. Of 62 medical grads at the University of Saskatchewan in 1980, only 17 were still practicing in the province seven years later. Still the net loss of physicians to Saskatchewan was a staggering 60 per cent. Why is that?

We have to start looking at answers to questions like that. And I know you're going to tell me that yes, there have been some negotiations with doctors, some incentives, some bursaries, but is that working? Is money the only thing? Is that what we're talking about? Is the bottom line here dollars and cents instead of caring about people and people's needs? The two can perhaps be tied in, because it seems that it's dollars and cents that we're concerned about rather than adequate, proper health care.

If it was not the almighty dollar that we were worried about, Mr. Minister, then, then perhaps you might reconsider. You might reconsider this mentally — a health care facility that's served the people of this province well, continues to serve it well and may be pulled back on the continuing expansion of the Regina General Hospital — a 100-year-old building that you're spending millions of dollars on. And we still don't see the end

of that. There'll be more money needed to be spent so people can have access to it by way of parking facilities. The member from Rosetown-Biggar wouldn't even go down there at night, Mr. Minister, after dark. I know that and he's a tough guy.

(2030)

But I guess the point I'm trying to make is can there not be any, any sort of compromise if you wish to at least say well perhaps maybe instead of spending that additional 20 or \$30 million over and above, over and above the overruns, the cost overruns, let's back off for a year. Let's put some of that money aside. Let's put it back into the Plains Health Centre. Let's put it back in there. Let's try it out for another 6 months, or 10 months or 12 months. And perhaps by that time, Mr. Minister . . . I used to be involved in a process that required a presentation of new programs and changes to a variety of people in the province. And you know the greatest thing that is frightening to people is the rapid change that takes place. If they're eased into it, if they're eased into it, then they can accept it, it can be better explained.

Right now people can't understand, can't understand all the great things you're saying about — and the government is saying — about the best health care in Canada. They don't understand that when they're faced with not being able to get in to see a specialist; having to go to the Mayo Clinic in order to get an MRI; having to go to British Columbia to get surgery; having to go to Alberta to get eye surgery, otherwise wait three months, four months, six months. People don't understand that.

And I don't know if there's any hope, any hope, that you sir, as the Minister of Health, could talk to your cabinet and talk to the Premier — who's heart seems to have turned to total stone when it comes to the problems that people are facing in health care — and suggest that maybe, just maybe we should wait another six months before doing anything to the Plains.

I know, I didn't mean to get . . . ramble on quite that long because I do want to hear some of your responses. And I know you're going to say we've still got the greatest health care anywhere in Canada. But I'd like you to, but I'd like . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — You have convinced yourself, you've convinced your colleagues, but you have not convinced the people that are caught up in this disastrous health care system — in this new wellness model, in this new home care program. Those people don't understand that. You try and convince them of that.

The people that were at those town hall meetings that you and I attended, those are the people that you have to convince, and they're not convinced.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I want to say to the member opposite that in Saskatchewan and in Canada today there has been a tremendous movement in the reform of health care. And you only need to look around all over North America, and particularly in Canada, and you can see the change. And the only people that are stuck and can't see what's happening across the country are you people over there, are you people over there.

And I say to the member opposite, how is it, how is it that all of Canada, how is it that all of Canada can be wrong and you're right? It just doesn't make any sense, in my opinion.

And I say to the member opposite, when you say to me, Mr. Deputy Chair, that this was done in haste, it is six years, seven years now that reform has been on its way — it's been moving along in this province. And I say to you and I said a couple of moments ago to the member opposite, when you said that we have not enough beds in this province, I've been saying to you in your town hall meetings and to the people of Saskatchewan that it's my view that we have enough hospital beds in this province.

And I say to you . . . And recently in a report that's just come out, as you know, Mr. Member, we've cut and reduced and seen fewer reductions in beds in this province than anywhere else in Canada. Everybody else is taking acute care beds out of their system at a higher percentage than we are, and you stand up in the House and say you shouldn't be taking any beds out again. And I say to you it's happening across the country.

All that we've done in Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Chair, is that we've ensured that we do that in a fashion that doesn't disrupt the health care system and protects the communities to ensure that they've got good acute care services. That's what we do.

And I say to the member opposite, today in Saskatchewan we have services that we've never had before — never had before. We have enhanced home care; we have first responders in the tune of 1,500 today that we didn't have in the province before. We have enriched ambulatory services and emergency services across the province, all over the place.

And I say to the member opposite, a while ago I said to you that we have in Saskatchewan now a MRI. Seven years ago in this province we never had one. Soon we are going to have two MRIs in this province, which was all part of health care reform.

We didn't have CT scanners in some of the communities outside of Regina and Saskatoon. Today we have more of those in this province.

And we're doing chemotherapy in small communities so patients don't have to leave their homes and they can have it done in their own community. We talked about expanding our renal dialysis program.

There are a whole host of programs today that we're developing across the province to enrich and enhance the opportunities for people to get health care services closer to home, in their own communities.

And the only people that don't see that in this province are, by and large, you people. You don't have it yet, and you can't see it anywhere. And so I say to the member opposite, into the future our initiative will be to continue to grow that.

And I just want to make a couple of comments in closing to the member opposite. You say that all over the place people are opposed to reform. And I say to you I have a copy of a health inside, an "Inside Health" here that comes from a Kyle resident. And this is their brochure that they put out on a regular basis.

And this is a nurse who's speaking here, and this is what she says — Ms. Lowe is her name — and this is what Ms. Lowe recalls as a registered nurse. Lowe herself says that she fought the changes tooth and nail, but has since changed her mind. "People in Kyle and area are better off today. We're offering a lot more services and helping more people in our community than we ever did," is what Ms. Lowe says.

And I say to the member opposite, there are many stories like that. We have a physician here that was from Moose Jaw, and it's a long, long dissertation of what he says. And I'll only say to you, in an interview that he did just recently from when he was in the United States, and he says, the doctor from Moose Jaw says, that he has returned — returned back to Moose Jaw after having been in the United States for a couple of years. Why? Why? Because . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It isn't Dr. Lewis Draper. I mean I think he writes for you; he doesn't write for us. And I say to the member opposite, here is an individual, here is an individual like others who have gone to the U.S., returned to Saskatchewan, is practising medicine in the province.

And I say to you, Mr. Member, that you need to get on the program, because the program in Canada is that we're going to have fewer hospital beds, more community-based services, more involvement by communities in making decisions, and you need to appreciate that and understand it and try to be a part of it.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I found the remarks by the Health minister most interesting when he's telling others to get on the program. Well I'll tell you there are thousands and tens of thousands of people in this province that are afraid to get on your program. And why?

We take a look at the *Leader-Post* on April 4. I don't remember what problem you were in that day, but obviously you had to figure out some way of getting out of a bed crisis. And you're quoted in here in the paper as saying, and one way to deal — well that's a quote so, "And one way Serby plans to deal with that is by discharging some people from hospital sooner."

Is that part of the program, Mr. Minister, by booting people out of the hospitals sooner, before they're ready to go? And how many times have you run into a problem by doing just that.

We raised the case not too many days ago about a lady who was booted out of the hospital too soon and had a stroke a few hours after she got home. Is that part of the program? Because if it is, the people of this province aren't buying into your program . . . So perhaps you could tell us it's axed the program.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I've said to the member on many occasions that the decision about who stays in hospitals, when they come, and when they leave the hospital facilities, those decisions are made by physicians; they've always been made by physicians; they'll continue to be made by physicians.

Mr. McPherson: — But, Mr. Minister, they're only made by physicians when in fact they have to prioritize the sick that are coming into their facility. And if there are not enough beds and if there are not enough staff, then in fact it's not their decision.

It's one that really was created by your government, was it not?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I've always said in this House and to the people of Saskatchewan, say to the member again, that when people arrive at medical care centres for treatment, the physicians will make those decisions. If in fact there's a concern about the level of service that individuals have, the physician will ensure that the appropriate facilities will be . . . well the appropriate services are provided for them if it's a serious medical treatment.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, with that in mind, what you're saying then, how do you explain the fellow, the doctor from Yorkton who you just recently I guess passed his name on to, what, college of physicians and surgeons to have the case reviewed?

Now this doctor has stated that I think on more than one occasion he could not get a bed here in Regina, and the specialist that he was phoning could not free up a bed. And so how can you say it's either of those doctors' decision what happens to that patient. If there's no beds, there's no beds, and people are not living to see the end of that day. Now how do you dispute that? The letter was sent to you.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I've said to the member opposite and to the people of Saskatchewan that it was raised in this House by your party, by the member from Melville that somebody has lost his life. And the system apparently, as you put it, has failed them. And what I've done is acted on the responsibilities that I have as the Minister of Health. And you know what that position has been, and that process is currently under way.

Mr. McPherson: — You see, Mr. Minister, we have went I don't know how many days this session and how many times we've raised cases, people that couldn't get beds, people that are on waiting-lists, and you're still saying it's up to the medical staff.

Well, Mr. Minister, you yourself, you know that's not correct. The fact of the matter is our system — in the way that your government has designed it — does not meet the needs of people of Saskatchewan.

I'll give you a case right here. This is a lady from Shaunavon, Eileen Justason. On February 11, she had back surgery at the Plains; re-injured her back two weeks later. She went back to her doctor and the doctor booked her for a CAT (computerized axial tomography) scan and was told it would take about four to six weeks. After she went past that period of time, hadn't heard anything, she was told it would be another further six months. So the doctor phoned Medicine Hat and she was able to get in for the CAT scan in less than one month.

So how then can you say this is a decision of the doctors? Obviously there aren't beds. The equipment that's used to do the tests is not there. How do you explain it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, if the member would mind sending me that piece of information, we'll pursue it and have a discussion with the individual and see what we might be able to do into the future to assist her with her future treatments, if

that's what the member would like to do.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, I appreciate that, but as you should have heard me tell you, this was taken care of in Medicine Hat because it couldn't . . . it wasn't taken care of here in Saskatchewan. But I appreciate the offer.

And I'll raise with you later the woman's . . . I'll give you her phone number and perhaps you could or one of your staff could explain to her what went wrong.

Another case that I raised recently, Mr. Minister, and you in this House said that you would check into this, Mr. Donald Jones. Mr. Jones went through about a nine-hour ambulance ride from the time of his injury till the time that he was actually admitted into a hospital. Shipped all over south-west Saskatchewan. I think it was started in Coronach to, you know, on the way to Regina, and over to Weyburn, and back to Bengough, then to Assiniboia, on route to Regina once or twice I think, if I recall, in that process.

And you made the statement that you would get back to us as to what went wrong. Have you discovered what went wrong?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, what I've said to the member is this, is that we appreciate the information coming to us. We acknowledge that there was a mistake made in the process here. We have brought some information currently on what's happening with this case. We've met with the family. We're not completed our work yet, but as soon as we have completed that we'll provide that information to Mr. Jones, and suggest to him that he might share the detail of that information with you. Only because of ensuring that we protect the confidentiality, we'll need to respond directly to Mr. Jones and suggest to him that it was raised by you and he can then share that information with you.

We hope to have that done in fairly short order.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, not so long ago you had made some statements about making use of other health care facilities in the province. And I think the example . . . and I'm not sure who first raised it. But you know, specialists could go from Saskatoon out and use the operating theatres at Humboldt, make use of those facilities and operating theatres.

Could you perhaps expand on that as far as your point of view as to how this creates any efficiencies in the system?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I think what I've said and continue to stand by is that if there are opportunities for itinerant surgeons to travel outside of the larger tertiary centres -- Saskatoon and Regina -- make their way to larger community hospitals like a Humboldt or a Melfort or a Tisdale, of which in large proportion is happening today, or regional centres across the province, that will do two things. If they can provide those surgical services closer to home and keep people in their communities so that they don't have to go to the larger tertiary centres, it relieves some of the pressures that they have there.

So I'm supporting that kind of a concept and would like to see us enhance that in a broader fashion with greater regional

participation. And that's part of the strategy that we've been working on. I know that in the questions that I was asked by the Saskatchewan Party, they also raised the same issues with me and to a large degree support that process, which I expect you do too.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, not to a large degree but entirely the Tory Party supported you on that point of view. But that does not mean at all that it's accepted by the people of this province.

The fact of the matter is . . . and we'll use the Humboldt or the Yorktons as the example. You've got people going from -- say -- Humboldt to Saskatoon to those tertiary centres to have their health care needs met. And you're saying it's just as efficient to go the other way? What are these people passing on the highway?

Where is the efficiency, Mr. Minister, in having . . . Think about it. Specialists in Saskatoon, when they're booking their surgeries, how many are they booking? Four, five, six in a block so that they can actually perform a number of surgeries that day. So what's going to happen if they're going out to Humboldt? Do you think they're still going to have four, five, six surgeries booked in a block?

And what about the operating room technicians, the support staff? Can you assure us that that support staff is as well trained in Humboldt or any of those other communities for whatever kinds of operations that they're going to be facing? And do they have, do they have the same equipment as those people in Saskatoon?

(2045)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, the comment that I make and continue to support is that if you can get itinerant surgeons to come from the tertiary centres to regionals and/or large community hospitals, keep people in their own communities, provide those services closer to home and so that they don't to travel. And certainly you can't be opposed to that where you would have people from local communities who would be served by itinerant surgeons who would come to their communities and provide those services all across Saskatchewan in the larger communities, in the regionals. I can't believe you'd be opposed to that process.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, what you're saying then is it's fine and it's a good use of our specialist's time when they're in such short supply in this province to have them on the road for one or two hours in one direction. Do one operation, maybe two operations, and then one or two hours back. That would be efficient use of a specialist's time.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, the surgeries are done over blocks of time, and so today if you took the time and went to communities like Melfort, you'd find two or three specialists that are practising in that community that come there and stay for a couple of days, do a block of surgery with a number of individuals who live there. Go to Tisdale; they do the same thing.

We were there for the opening of the dialysis just a couple of

days ago. The ENT (ear, nose, and throat) guy is there. He stays overnight for a couple of days, does a block of surgery. People from Tisdale and the northern part of that communities don't have to travel to Saskatoon. It's a wonderful piece of service that's being done today in a variety of locations across the province, and all I say is that we want to advance and enrich that practice.

Mr. McPherson: — You see, Mr. Minister, you, and definitely the Premier of this province, in selling health care reform, made sure that everyone felt that in this province if they needed these surgeries they were going to have state-of-the-art everything. If they would just come into the Reginas and the Saskatoons, that things would be the best that they could be.

And now you're saying well no; our plan is somewhat changing now. In fact we don't need to use these larger centres with the equipment that they have. So what are you going to do -- say -- if there's a problem in a surgery where perhaps they need a CAT scan or an MRI, you know, and you've shipped not only the patient but the specialist out to a place like — you know, pick a community out there in rural Saskatchewan. You then ship the whole crew into Saskatoon to use the equipment and the professionals that run it.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, you and I both know that for highly-specialized surgeries today or diagnostic testing, they'll continue to be done in the larger tertiary centres. Nobody's advocating against that. In fact we promote that, and we're going to continue to advance the best technical equipment in the larger tertiary centres into the future.

But we want to see some other advances like you now have a CT in Prince Albert which has just opened this past winter. We now have renal dialysis sites across the province. Now we're going to have . . . and we have the chemotherapy sites across the province, and we're going to expand if we can as we work with the district health boards, SAHO, the Saskatchewan Medical Association, to promote the practice of physicians in rural Saskatchewan but where they might be able to do that in a safe and equitable fashion.

Clearly you're not going to be moving MRIs out all over rural Saskatchewan. You're not going to be taking the highly diagnostic services all over Saskatchewan. You're not going to have a cancer clinic in every location and every regional centre in the province. You're going to have those in locations where the public will come to and are continuing to do that. And we'll promote that.

But from the other broader perspective, we'll want to ensure that people have services closer to home, and we'll be promoting and encouraging the practice of some specialties and some services in areas of the province where they can meet the need of those individuals.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, then what do you say to people like Hope Sawin, who I've raised her case here in the legislature, where she laid in a hospital in rural Saskatchewan out in the Wood River constituency. She's from Coronach . . . laid for about six, seven days with a broken hip. You know, I think really Hope Sawin could have used the beds here in Regina, so she could have had her problems taken care of

immediately. I mean, don't talk about the rebuilding you're going to start to do now in rural Saskatchewan after all the tearing down and people are laying out there for six, seven days with broken hips.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I just want to say to the member that from time to time people wait for surgical procedures. From time to time they wait in Regina in observation rooms, and those decisions are made by physicians because there needs to be an opportunity to observe the level or the state of the individual before they perform a particular procedure.

It's not unusual for people to wait for some of that. And I would suggest to you that will continue to be the practice, irrespective of where they are in rural Saskatchewan or here in the tertiary centres. People will continue to wait for some of their procedures for a variety of different reasons.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, do you have an update on the number of people on waiting-lists here in Saskatchewan. I know it was at one point some 6,600. Can you give us some indication what it's at today?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I answered that question earlier to one of your colleagues. We don't have a scientific accounting of the number of people today who are waiting for surgeries or procedures across the province.

And we make the commitment, as I have on several occasions, that we're going to be doing a full and broad examination on that with our partners on the prairie provinces and British Columbia because they find themselves in the same situation as all of us do . . . is that we don't have an appropriate, full accounting of what those waiting-lists are across the province or western Canada. And so that process we're undertaking today and hope to achieve that over the next several months.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, it sounds like the same thing happened, I guess, with the senior care, long-term care. But in fact you've made changes where people can't get a sense of what the waiting lists are at today because you say you don't have waiting lists. And yet we talk to people out there in the medical field that say, you bet there's waiting lists; you're just not sharing them. I'll assume that's happening again now.

Could you give us, Mr. Minister, an update as to the dollar value and the amount — perhaps you have it broken down — which surgeries are performed out of province and where?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, we can provide that information for the member. We have that, and we'll send it to you. We don't have that with us currently, but we'll make sure that the member has that information.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. On the hospitals in the city, now there was, as I recall, your project '98 cost estimate already had an overrun of some \$25 million more than first projected. I believe it was started out at I think some 83 million, and it's now up to \$108 million to renovate the hospitals.

Can you tell us if that's still on track? Now the previous Health minister -- I think it was 33 times in one scrum -- said it was on

time and on budget. Are you prepared to say that and mean it?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, you've heard me on a number of occasions at the rallies across the province where I've said to you that the \$83 million that we've committed for the conversion of the two facilities — the General and the Pasqua — is exactly where we said it would be. We've made a commitment.

I think now we've paid out about 78 million of that, of the 83 that was committed to it. We've also included in the upgrade of the two facilities, in the Pasqua the \$8.8 million for the enhancement of the Allan Blair cancer clinic. And I think there's \$2.2 million that we've committed to the site preparation for the MRI.

And so to date I think that number runs to right around \$94 million of which a portion of that has already been paid out. And there will be continued work in progress as the district health board develops its overall plan and strategy.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, it sounds like perhaps we're already not on budget or on time because some of the estimates that you were just giving to me aren't on this sheet that I have from the Regina Health District. You're saying the \$83 million is still on track. But the Regina Health District's own document, which you've had for -- oh -- November 13, 1996 -- is already \$25 million out. And the things that you mentioned aren't even on the list, so perhaps we're more than 25 million out.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I think that the ... and I don't have a copy of the information that the member's reading from, but what I would say to the member is that there's likely things included in the overall capital project that are work in progress, and additional project investments that they're going to make in terms of enhancing their broad based needs for both their physical needs within the district and improving some fire and safety issues within the development of the project.

So over a period of time that's beyond the \$83 million that we committed. There likely are additional investments.

Mr. McPherson: — So obviously you're not aware of where their spending is right now. You admit to that. But would you be 25 to \$30 million out?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I want to say to the member opposite, Mr. Deputy Chair, that if you want to talk about the project that you started out talking about, which is the investment in the consolidation of the two facilities, \$83 million, and the addition of enhancements to the Pasqua for the Allan Blair centre and the MRI preparation, we say to you that our schedule is as we have told you on many occasions.

As a district health board prepares its strategy and its planning for enhanced services for Regina, they're providing those capital projects to us for the future. And we're examining them and working closely with them. And over the next couple of years, we'll be developing or assisting them in the developing of their plans to make those investments for what the overall health care needs of Regina and southern Saskatchewan will be.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, you know you're a year and a half out from this district budget document. And perhaps really that's where some of your problem lies, is that you don't have a good handle on what's happening in Regina or perhaps Saskatoon. That's why, when we raise day after day in this House health concerns of people that come to our caucus to ask that we raise them publicly so that they can be dealt with, I don't doubt for a moment that you genuinely don't understand how serious the situation is out there. Especially in one document, you're out 30 million bucks.

Maybe it's time you got a handle on the Regina Health District. That's your problem. You can take a look at that document and then later if you'd like to comment on your own board's document. We can get into it again.

Mr. Minister, now I know we've raised waiting summer slow-downs with the hospitals. And of course the response has always been one of, well it happens every, I guess, Christmas holiday, Easter, and summer.

But, Mr. Minister, and I don't want to belabour this because we have raised it so many times in the House. Do you think it's fair when you have so many thousands on the waiting-list waiting for elective surgery ... and I know, I know, Mr. Minister, that you have those numbers because we get them from the districts. I can tell you. In fact I have the document here, and you've seen these yourself: 370-day wait for elective surgery in Saskatoon. I know you have those numbers.

(2100)

But do you think this is fair to the people in this province that you would shut down -- what? -- some 80 beds, 79 beds, during the summer months? And I know your answer, Mr. Minister, is one that, well, the medical staff want their holidays, and on and on. You've said that several times.

But is it fair to the people, the 6,600 or the 7,000 on waiting-lists in this province, that you would have them wait that many months for their health care needs to be met?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I've said to the member opposite or to the House or to the previous questioner about -- some other member -- about what we're doing in the province today. We're doing far more procedures. And if your concern is about surgical procedures in the province, we're doing far more out-patient surgeries today than we have in the history of this province.

We're doing almost the same or slightly more surgeries in-patient today than we did in the past. We have the same number of docs by and large in the province today than we had prior to reform within a couple ... within a handful of difference in that period of time.

And I say to the member opposite that when you asked the question about why it is that we have slow-downs during periods of time during the year, Christmas, Easter, holidays, this is historical. As I've said many times over, not only relevant to Saskatchewan, but it's relevant to all of Canada and North America.

What happens here is that the system slows down during those periods of time. And it's done to provide, as we're told and you're told and the member previously who asked me this question are told, it's to provide opportunities for people to take those vacation breaks: physicians, nursing staff. And in many cases it's patients, where they make a decision that they don't want to have their surgical procedures occur during the summer months.

And so it's a variety of reasons for why that happens, and it's been consistent historically in this province, in this country. And I say to the member it will continue to be that into the future.

Mr. McPherson: — All right, Mr. Minister. From the Saskatoon District Health Board we have some numbers here. You're saying even the patients want the summer off, that they're not so interested in getting their surgery. But if I take a look at some of these, I don't know that these people would agree.

For general surgery, elective, the average days to wait is 370. Well elective surgery, I guess if you want to make the statement on behalf of these people that they would just as soon wait, fine. What about the urgent, Mr. Minister? We have a 30-day wait for general surgery. For urgent surgery? In fact when I look at each and every one of the services provided in the hospitals, they're all around the 30 to 34. Do you think those urgent cases are people that find it acceptable to take the summer off?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well some of the numbers that I've seen, Mr. Member, is that when you look at the elective surgeries . . . You used the waiting period, 365 days, and dependent on the specialists. So between specialists you see the variation that runs anywhere — and I think it might be in the document you're looking at — that varies anywhere from 28 days to 365 days. So there's a large disparity here in terms of what the waiting times are, and it really depends on the specialist.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and good evening to the minister and his officials.

I have a few questions here this evening concerning where your government may be at in terms of responding to the over 8,000 communications that the Liberal opposition received concerning the closure of the Plains hospital. Those 8,000-and-some-odd communications representing probably a conservative guess — I shouldn't use that word; I've been caught using it before — but conservative guess of at least 16,000, probably more likely 20,000 individuals, but certainly 8,000 households that communicated with us on the very topic.

I know at the Plains rally in front of the legislature on May 29, the minister and his officials were good enough to receive those on behalf of the Premier. It was unfortunate the Premier didn't make himself available at the time to receive those directly. Do I have the assurances of the minister that those communications have been passed on to the Premier's office because after all they were all individually and directly addressed to the Premier on the very topic of the Plains hospital closure?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, if the question was, did I receive them, I was there when we took them in I believe. So

if the question is, did I receive them, I was there when we carried them into the Assembly.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Deputy Chair, the question was: did the minister pass these communications on to the gentlemen sitting to his right? Did you pass them on to the Premier's office, and can you just confirm that or not?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, my understanding was that those petitions were for me; that's in the spirit in which I received them, that they were directed to me, and so I received them and took them into the building with my staff and certainly have communicated with the Premier that in fact, we received the petitions.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Deputy Chair, I would have hoped that the minister and his staff might have given a little bit more consideration to the communications that he received. After all, I pointed out that some 1,500-odd letters had an attachment directly to the Premier from myself requesting individual responses on the issue, and, as well, there was a number of additional concerns that a lot of my constituents expressed. They wanted the Premier to respond individually to those. So I guess we're to take it that they're still sitting in your office as we speak. Could I have your commitment to transfer them over to the Premier's office yet this evening?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'll be sure that the communication that you share with me tonight is complete in its fullest. I don't know what stage it's at today. I don't know what stage it's at. It may already be at the Premier's office. I can't say that fully, but I'll ensure that that process continues.

Mr. Aldridge: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, we've went back and forth with the minister and the government on the issue of deficits in the health care districts and how to address the chronic underfunding that this government forces on health care in this province. And certainly I was interested in, well, the Minister of Finance in his responses when Finance estimates were up last night. Where it was a somewhat similar response to what he had given as the member from Wood River referred to earlier on the issue of being on time and on budget with respect to the Plains or the amalgamation of hospitals in Regina. We heard a lot similar rhetoric where the finances of the province were on target, you know the budget's balanced, and all of this.

Now we saw just in this past fiscal year where the government did take the opportunity to spend a lot of additional monies under special warrant where required. I know the Tories took exception to the additional spending attributed or provided to health care. There is some — I believe, and correct me if I'm wrong — is there an additional 30-million-some-odd dollars under special warrant last year? It didn't, it didn't, as we pointed out at the time, it didn't go far enough in terms of trying to even erase the deficits that had been rung up in terms of the health districts at that point in time. But certainly, we didn't take any fault with the government about the additional spending in health care.

What do you intend to do, given that the Finance minister is saying everything is all coming up roses. We're on target? Are you prepared to go the extra distance and relate to the rest of your cabinet colleagues that if need be there should be some

additional money spent in health care to help meet these . . . what we've already pointed out are some mounting deficits again within the health districts?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I think what I want to say to the member opposite, that we know that we've made a huge investment this year in health in this province, as the member knows. And we've said on many occasions, and I've said on many occasions, that as the district health boards continue to prepare their strategies, as they continue to prepare their plans and redesign delivery of a system across the province, we'll be there to assist them in that process in whichever way that we can. And from time to time we provided transitional funding to districts to help them through those periods of time, and we continue to make that commitment.

But I want to say to the member opposite that there will be change in the health care system all the time — it's not stagnant — and you'll see different scenarios occurring in various different districts across the province, where you're going to see some growth in some areas, you're going to see some reductions. And that will change from one year to the next and that will be reflected in the district health plans. And the funding will also reflect exactly the same kind of . . . it will reflect the same kind of a change.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Deputy Chair, during this session the Liberal opposition introduced a Bill, The Tommy Douglas Memorial Hospital Bill. I'd be curious to hear what the minister's comments might be with respect to that Bill. Did he see some merit in a Bill of that nature?

I understand, you know, that Mr. Douglas's daughter will be in the province shortly. I wonder if you might take it upon yourself to ask Mr. Douglas's daughter what her opinion would have been . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order, order. Order, order. Order, order. Order. Understandably this question has generated some feelings on members of both sides of the legislature. However, for the . . . we are in Health estimates, the hon. member for Thunder Creek has the floor.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, to the minister, you know what our position is on the Plains hospital. I think we've made that perfectly clear.

We've taken the concerns of some 8,000-odd individual responses to our office alone, well over 100,000 people's names on petitions in this province concerning the issue. And you've been a witness too because, credit to you, you've attended our meetings across the province, and some 8,000-and-some odd, or several thousand anyway, I'm sorry, odd people that have attended these meetings as well.

We don't have to tell you, in terms of the politics of the issue, what a slippery slope you've embarked upon when you've stuck to your guns against what is all the common sense that can be provided to you with respect to this issue. It won't be that far off until you will have that message loud and clear, I'm sure.

We've asked for you to put a moratorium on the closure of this Plains hospital until after the next provincial election. All

indications are from your side that you're not giving any active consideration to that. We would just urge you for your own, for your own sakes that you should be considering the merits of that.

I would maintain to the Minister of Health certainly that there is one man opposite sitting amongst him that certainly could, certainly could change that decision at the snap of his fingers. One man who could do that.

(2115)

And, Mr. Minister, I just can . . . Before I take my place, you've been warned. It will be the issue that will defeat your government. I've heard the Premier say before, the Premier said before, it's his own words: that governments defeat themselves. And that's the route that you're headed on. That's the route you're headed on and you're doing it for the wrong reasons. You're doing it for the wrong reasons, because you had the opportunity, you had the opportunity to show that you really cared about the people of this province, and you didn't avail of yourself of that opportunity.

I'll give you this much, that all the years that you battled the deficits, the debt that the Tories left you in, in this province, I'm sure it put a hard edge on your government as a result, but it was time to take that hard edge off. It was time to start caring about the people of this province. It was time to start putting human need ahead of strictly dollars and cents and let yourself be guided. But you're on the wrong route and I would only urge you again to reconsider this whole decision.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, I appreciate the comments that the member opposite has made. He and I have been on the same platform for several months. And I want to say to the member opposite that we value the decisions that district health boards make in this province. We support the democratic process in which the district health boards do their work.

And I want to say to the member opposite that the decision that they made around the Plains Health Centre was really made in 1995, or 1993. And I say to the member opposite that I appreciate the passion in which they have taken this issue on and understand the number of issues that Saskatchewan people in the South have raised as concerns. But as we've said on many occasions over, that in southern Saskatchewan today and in Regina you're going to have better health care services at the end of the day with the new additions that have gone onto the General and to the Pasqua. And the decisions around the Plains Health Centre are really behind us, in my opinion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And good evening, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could give me an update on the status of the redevelopment project at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. I heard today that you had in fact met with town council officials and . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. Now committee members

will come to order on both sides of the House. Now . . . Order.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and thank you for bringing order to the House. It's really beneficial when the minister can hear me and when I can hear him, so thank you.

Mr. Minister, could you please give me an update on the status of the redevelopment project of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt? I understand that you have spoken with town council and I'm hoping that some decisions were made that were favourable to the redevelopment taking place immediately. And if you could be so kind as to inform me of that decision.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member from Humboldt, just to say to you that there has been an ongoing discussion and dialogue right now that's going on with St. Elizabeth's, with the municipalities that are around the Humboldt area, the town of Humboldt themselves, and the physicians, in terms of looking at what the broader strategy and the broader plan for the community is.

And that work is in progress today, and I can report that we're hoping to see in fairly short order some conclusions to that issue that you raise and are familiar with, that we're also concerned about and want to bring it to resolution.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I was, I guess, expecting to hear a little bit more than that. But I will accept what you have said for now and will be looking forward in the days ahead to finding resolution and certainly to doing it as best for not only the community, but for the wishes of the people as far as what kind of a facility and basically who manages the facility, etc., in Humboldt. So I thank you.

Mr. Minister, there's also another issue that has been brought to my attention by some Regina doctors and the issue surrounds the need for a DEXA scan which is in fact used for diagnosing the extent of osteoporosis in patients. Now it's my understanding from the doctors that this DEXA scan would cost about \$60,000. It would really serve them very well in not only diagnosing but in prescribing the right sort of treatment for osteoporosis patients.

And I understand that there is nothing like this in Regina at this time, and so it leaves the doctors in a bit of a quandary as to detecting to what extent osteoporosis is taking place. And I know that they want to be able to prescribe the best treatment for their patients.

So is this something that your department has been considering? Are you looking into getting this kind of technology here? If you'd comment on that please.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'm informed that my deputy minister has been meeting with the society and he's very much involved in these discussions. They're ongoing right now.

My understanding is that the osteoporosis society is going to be providing a plan to the department within the next couple of weeks and that plan will be looking at some of the issues you've identified — the type of equipment that is necessary to provide this work that you're talking about, and sort of the

broader issues as to where this equipment might be located and the types of services that we need to build around it in order to provide them. So this is where we are today with this discussion.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to address you with one more question. Last week in the House you and I spoke, I believe during question period, about the necessity for senior citizens of the province who are physically and mentally incapacitated, to have somewhere to go.

With nursing home beds being strapped for cash due to deficits, with private care homes costing these people a great deal of money, much more than many of them have coming from their pensions, I believe the suggestion that you brought forward was home care. And we both know that home care does not provide, certainly not in all districts, 24-hour care. And so that leaves these people in this impossible position of not having the care that they really do need.

So do you foresee in the near future, in the next budget or whatever, having more funding going for home care so that in fact people can have 24-hour service and have it without question.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, just to say to the member that we're working very closely, in particular with the federal government, is some of where our discussion is going today because community-based services are what we want to enhance and enrich across the province. And when you ask the question about whether or not we intend to enrich or grow home care dollars in this province for broadening those services, the answer to that is that we are.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. It is a pleasure for me to be able to ask you questions this evening, Mr. Minister. And the reason for that is we don't really get very much time to address some issues in question period since I'm often limited to two questions at a time.

I wish to begin to make one specific comment before this Assembly and anyone who doesn't have a life and is watching television this evening, and that is that I want to express my level of appreciation to you for your willingness to listen to me any time I have approached you about particular issues, especially with regard to individual cases in the province of Saskatchewan or where people have required your understanding and assistance.

The other thing is to make comment to those who care to know that you are a minister, I would say, of compassion. And I think people need to know that as well.

Given the interruption that you are experiencing, I'm going to repeat that. I think you are a man of conviction and someone of true compassion. And I want you to know that that is appreciated by those who I have represented to you.

I have different areas of concern this evening. And I shan't keep you long because I quite frankly think that I have some understanding of what this session has been like for you. I'm just guesstimating, of course, but it hasn't been the most easy of times.

I, as you know, raised questions regarding medical research funding on different occasions at the beginning of this session. And one of the great concerns that I had and I expressed was not only the difficulties that were raised with federal policies regarding their funding of medical research, especially through the different funding bodies, the different granting agencies, and the decision made at the federal level to address the huge deficit that the government was facing, and some of the decisions they made that had serious implications with regards to the funding of medical research throughout the country, but the one thing that did make, I think, inherent sense was to get some comment from your government and from you as the minister about the decisions made by the province of Saskatchewan regarding medical research funding.

So I'm on record as far as the concerns that I . . . some of which were addressed in the federal budget. But I still remain confused by, and perhaps bewildered by, some of the decisions of the provincial government with regards to medical research funding.

One of things that I raised was to ensure that there would be a targeted amount from the Health budget that would go to medical research funding. And as you know I, as an example, raised tuberculosis. We have a far greater occurrence of tuberculosis in Saskatchewan because of our aboriginal population and it's of grave concern. And now of course I've heard that this will not be funded. It has not received any sort of resources and it's just really confusing how that could be the case.

I'm wondering what your plans are as far as your budget is concerned with medical research funding. Is there going to be some hope in the future that the province of Saskatchewan will give a targeted amount? I know that there has been a request from the medical research community that Saskatchewan consider what other provinces have done, with 1 per cent of the budget going to medical research funding. That has not happened to date and I'm wanting to know what your plans are, if you have any.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I first of all want to thank the member for her earlier comments in terms of some of the issues that we've been able to attend to over the last several months. And I know that they brought resolve which I think have been satisfactory in a number of fronts, and appreciate your comments very much.

I want to say to the member that I know that you have been a strong advocate for growing the research funding in this province and have reiterated that on a number of occasions. And we share the same view as you do. Currently today we're investing about \$4.6 million and we know that that's not enough and would like to do a lot more. And as our resources get richer in this province, and as we move along, our intent is to make a larger investment in those areas.

And this year, when the research funding was capped to Saskatchewan, or when we had our 26 projects that were submitted and none were approved, we went to the aid of those projects and invested an additional \$200,000 to try to make sure that they get out of the chute and we could hold them until such time as the additional funding was made available if it was.

And as you know, the federal government funding on MRC (Medical Research Council) has shrunk to about \$266 million or from \$266 million back up now to \$215 million. We're starting to see some growth in that again, and to a large degree our research community here really depends on that funding into the future.

So our commitment to you will be, and is, that we're going to continue to try and grow that throughout the future. We know that the quality of health care in this province depends on good medical research. Often you don't see your rewards immediately. You capture them several years down the road and in many ways Saskatchewan has been a leader in health development, in health strategy, only because they've had good research in the past.

And so like you, we're going to continue to work at growing our provincial budget, work closely with the federal government in ensuring that the MRC funding grows and try to provide some kind of avenue of support to the research committee.

(2130)

Ms. Haverstock: — I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, with regard to this, before I leave this topic, one of the things I had raised with your government earlier in this area was if you would consider taxation incentives. And the reason I raised that was because I actually phoned some companies that had made a decision to invest in other provinces. And I asked them, why was it that you chose to go to Alberta? Why was it that you chose to go to Ontario?

And their explanations were quite explicit and clear, and that was because, even though there's a higher incidence of certain disease in our province where they could have access to tremendous data collection and an opportunity to exercise their particular product with probably more promising results, was because of the tax considerations given to them by other provinces.

Now I guess what I'm hoping to hear from you tonight is that when you are undergoing consideration of the 1999 budget year that in fact what you will make as part of that . . . and I know, I know that you're asked to think about and give monies to everything, okay. But I most certainly hope that what you will do is to examine what the ultimate return will be to this province, not only the beneficiaries being those people who have a particular illness but the beneficiaries in terms of investment, the beneficiaries in terms of those people with extraordinary talent who will come here and pay the high income tax levels that we have here, and so forth. In other words, contributing to our economy.

Would you comment, please, on whether or not you believe that there will be a targeted percentage given of the health care budget to medical research funding, and whether or not your department is examining tax considerations.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chair, to the member, we've had considerable discussions with, as you know, Dr. McLennan. And we've had those discussions around trying to look at how we might be able to grow the research value in the

province. We have a research council today, are exploring some of those very issues that you talked about today in terms of tax opportunities.

Now I know that you've raised, from time to time, sort of the base level of trying to put in 1 percentile of your overall expenditure. Those are the kinds of issues that we're discussing today with the Research Council, and are looking at bringing about a set of measures that we would have in this province in comparison to what's happening across the country and try to make those investments in research.

Ms. Haverstock: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister. I'm realistic enough to know that you can't make any specific commitments. I most certainly would be heartened by you saying that this is going to be a priority for particular sorts of reasons.

You know and I know when we lose certain personnel, when this province forfeits some of the most talented people that have come here because they have an interest in and a commitment to an area of research that could have profound impact on some of the people in our province in huge numbers, that we don't simply replace those people directly. I mean this is something that is a loss for a long time.

And research, as you've stated and well stated, is not something that is a short-term investment. That's part of the problem. I know from a political point of view that there aren't quick kind of results from something like this.

And I think it's about time that perhaps for a change we could put some partisanship aside here and truly give the sort of support to government that's necessary in giving a strong message to the public about how important this is for us to identify those areas in which we can be best, those areas that would benefit the people of Saskatchewan most, those areas in which we already have expertise and where investment would make a profound difference. And we would have short, long-term, I think, results that would be so terrific for everyone.

I would most certainly be a part of the message. I would be a messenger if that would help in this case. And I just use tuberculosis again as an example. What a tremendous opportunity we had and what a tragic set of circumstances that this research is not funded in the province where it would make the greatest difference.

I will give you an opportunity to respond to that before I move on. I have no intention of belabouring this.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well I just want to reiterate one more time that we recognize like you do the importance of growing the research funding in this province. We know that in Saskatchewan we've been leaders over the years because we've made the investment in ensuring that we can provide the right technology at the right time.

And we want to build centres of excellence that you talk about like tuberculosis, MS in this province. Of course we want to do more around cancer. We're leading in many ways. And so your comment certainly begs the response that we'll continue to provide the resources that we can as we move along.

We've bridged a couple of programs this year with the investment of the \$200,000 to try to save some of those projects that were in some jeopardy. But the discussions need to continue with the federal government, with the MRC, with the College of Medicine, to identify which priorities are going to be ones that we want to enrich, where in Saskatchewan we can be leaders into the future. And that will be our commitment and will continue to be our effort.

And we appreciate your comments about your involvement whenever it can be taken to help enrich and develop this in a better fashion for Saskatchewan people.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much. I have a really straightforward and simple question and I just simply don't have the answer for it. I understand in Regina there's going to be another MRI — not another one in Regina but another in the province and it will be in Regina. I'm wondering if you can tell me when that will occur, if it has in fact occurred, because I simply don't know.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Deputy Chair, our hope is that it will be in place early in November or mid-November, and hopefully operating by possibly the new year, is what we're hoping would be the case here.

Ms. Haverstock: — If I may, I'd simply like to go on record for letting people who are observing tonight know the significance of that second MRI.

Unless people have participated in some direct way in the need for having this kind of diagnostic procedure, I don't think they know, have any comprehension of the incredible stress that this puts people under to not simply have access to something that, if they would pay directly for it, they could receive within 24 hours in Calgary or North Dakota.

I most certainly hope that what this will do by having another magnetic resonance imaging machine in Saskatchewan, that it will alleviate some of this extraordinary pressure on the system and some of the great difficulties that people have had as a result of not being able to access it.

Earlier today, Mr. Minister, during question period I got through only half of my questions, so you are now going to be able to answer the rest of them. As you know, I was talking earlier today about the treatment of multiple sclerosis in Saskatchewan. And given its high, high incidence in our province, it makes sense that our provincial government should take a particular interest in this disease.

I asked you at that time about the procedure that's involved in approval for treatment. And I do know that we have taken some steps that other provinces had taken earlier, in terms of treatment for people primarily with relapsing, remitting multiple sclerosis. I know that other provinces are still at the waiting stage, which is incomprehensible to me, and I want to commend the government for taking some action.

However I think there are some burning questions and I think they really deserve some response. The one I asked you earlier today really came from — and I will give credit where credit's due — some of the neurologists in Saskatchewan who believe

that the criteria that are used by the panel are as they quote, and I will from earlier today, “too arbitrary and utterly ridiculous.”

And what I posed to you was the fact that one of the criteria was to — well a criterion — was to have to walk a hundred metres unassisted. And I posed a question from them, so what if they can only walk 99 metres? It is bewildering to a lot of people that the very individuals that they have to treat who are the most disabled, who have the greatest challenge in life, who need the most hope, are the ones who are receiving virtually nothing.

And I really do feel quite strongly about this because people have said to me, how can they know? How can they understand, this panel that makes these decisions, about me as a person and make decisions that can affect my quality of life when they’ve never laid eyes upon me?

Now earlier today you indicated that this is a standard procedure. If you will, it’s a standard protocol of different panels throughout the country. And I can understand where there has to be a line drawn in the sand, okay. I do understand that. But what I posed to your government — not days, not weeks, but months ago — were some potential alternatives. And that’s really what I want to ask about now.

There is no other treatment of any other disease with such absurd restrictions. Like let’s just get that on the table now. And what has happened, not just with your government but other governments who have established these kinds of panels, is that they have chosen to discriminate against this kind of disease, this particular disease, and the patients who have it.

And I guess I feel strongly about this because I think that it flies in the face of not only compassion, but it flies in the face of the concept of medicare. For the cost of \$1.2 million — are you ready for this because probably I sound like a broken record tonight — for a cost of \$1.2 million over four years, you and I know that there could be a clinical researcher hired at that expenditure which is minuscule compared to the 18 and \$20,000 per year per person who is on Betaseron and slightly less for Copaxone.

For \$1.2 million over four years, there could be dollars targeted to an individual who would be charged with overseeing people not just with relapsing, remitting MS but those with chronic progressive MS. Where there are companies who are not only willing, able, but champing at the bit to have their new products brought forward for trial . . . and these trials would take four years. And they would supply these products for nothing to the province of Saskatchewan . . . one of which would cater to potentially the needs of both of the primary groups of MS — relapsing, remitting, and chronic progressive . . . one one-thousandth of the dosage of Betaseron, potentially with virtually none of the side effects and very, very little of the expense, costing people nothing in this province and potentially giving great hope and possibilities to people with multiple sclerosis.

And I ask you, since you have said to me that you don’t believe that your government can simply target monies like that — you target money every single day. You target money when you create a budget — why, sir, would you not target \$1.2 million

over four years for such unbelievable potential?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well just to comment on a couple of issues that you’ve raised with me. For sure, the criteria that’s been developed . . . and I say to the member opposite, that criteria has been developed by physicians, by professionals across the nation, and we’re using that criteria today.

Now part of the issue, of course, is that when the material gets submitted to the panel and it comes in different forms, sometimes it comes fully prepared, and the panel has a good appreciation of the case and of the status of the individual. In other cases, the material doesn’t come very well prepared, and so the panel struggles to make a decision. And from time to time, that’s why you get some of the inequities in the decision-making process.

But I say to the member opposite that the plan will continue to unfold as we move along, and the panel is often prepared to send a case on for yet another examination by another neurologist or maybe a general practitioner, or they’ll send the information back for broader detail prior to making a decision. And I would hope that a physician who does the test on an individual, who says that they only walk 99 metres as opposed to a hundred, that they might actually say that they’ve walked a hundred metres because I’m sure that if you’re within that kind of range, physicians are probably giving the benefit of the doubt to the patient. And what you’ll see on the form is the hundred, and so you need to make the cut-off somewhere.

In respect to your comment and your question that you raised about making an investment in a project in Saskatchewan that would make us a centre of excellence, I think is one that we’ve been exploring from when you raised it with us and one that I’ve had a personal discussion with now with the individual who we have in mind who might be able to lead some of that into the future. So it’s very much on the burner. It’s not disappeared, and we appreciate the kind of ability that I think this project would be able to provide.

(2145)

It requires a commitment, of course, from a variety of different people including the manufacturer of the drug, as you talk about, who would be anxious to be involved in the trials. You need a community of people who would also be involved in that, and so we continue our work and dialogue with the people who we think could be instrumental in helping to move that ahead, and that’s the commitment that I continue to make. But although the wheels look like they’re moving slowly, the answer is that they’re still continuing to turn.

Ms. Haverstock: — Well gosh, you’ve almost made me happy. I mean anything that gives me a sense where you’re not giving me sort of political babbleness is making me happy. That is a positive statement that it’s still in the works. Whatever I can do to move that along, I will most certainly assist.

You know, one of the amazing assets that we have in Saskatchewan is data, and as you know, knowledge is a tremendous asset. And one of the things that . . . I don’t want to get into SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network) tonight, or we’ll be here for hours, but data is tremendously

valuable because of the knowledge that it provides. We have almost . . . I would say the most invaluable asset on data collected on multiple sclerosis that would exist on the North American continent. And the person who of course can be given credit for that is Dr. Hader. He really has done an admirable job in collecting information on people.

And there are groups, some of whom I've actually brought to this province, who want to access that data to be able to prove that the product they have is the answer. And the few things that stand in the way I think can be fixed. I would like to be around when they're fixed. I don't want one more person to go blind, one more person to be incapacitated in not being able to walk, one more individual not to be able to speak to their loved ones, not one more person who has to stop work, not one more individual with MS who can no longer care for their children. I don't want any more of this to take place than has to.

And really if there's anything that should spur on decision making in the bureaucracy, it should be knowing that each and every day there are people whose lives can be changed by thoughtful decision making and efficiency within the system, just being expedient about coming up with a plan. Really this is about looking at what the objective will be and committing to it.

And I most certainly hope that you will do that because you hold far greater power than I think you know. I don't believe that it simply is in your lap, but I do know that if this were a priority for you, with your cabinet colleagues and with your caucus, that there isn't a person who sits on the government side who wouldn't say, since we're the Mecca of multiple sclerosis, we should be the best at fixing it. I hope that you will do that.

Now I'm not going to keep you any longer because I actually made a promise to your Government House Leader. But I do have one final question. And this is going to provide I think a reassurance to people in the province. I know that there's a give and take in this Assembly which oftentimes leaves human frailties and human realities out of the equation. And that is everybody is spending so much time playing politics that we ignore the important things at hand.

It's far more simple to simply lay the blame at the feet of other people, either past governments or present government in Ottawa or whatever. The truth of the matter is that your government came to power in 1991. It made a decision then to commit itself to what was called the wellness model.

The federal Liberals did not come into power until 1993. Decisions made regarding the federal budget and what they would do to address the federal deficit were not made until after that time. There were at least three to four and potentially five years before any dollars were seriously affected in the province of Saskatchewan. Fifty-two hospitals were closed before the federal government had any influence on what was happening potentially.

And I don't want to say for one moment that the federal government's decisions have not an impact on the kinds of decisions that your government has had to make. I completely concur with that. I don't want to diminish the importance of that because the decisions that your government has made have

seriously affected every municipal government in the province of Saskatchewan.

And if anybody has to live each and every day dealing with their own personal budget, they know that if they're in the hole, tough decisions have to be made. And the federal government had to make those decisions regardless of who was in power. You had to make the decisions you did regardless of who was in power. The municipal governments have to make the decision they make. And the people are the only people with dollars that provide for all of these different levels of government because governments have no money. It's just the people's money.

One of the things that people need reassurance about . . . because as you know every single person with whom one could speak in the province of Saskatchewan concluded one thing: things in health care had to change. Decisions had to be made. There is a paradigm shift. Whether we want to agree with it or not, whether we feel that's it's difficult or not, it is inevitable, and someone had to take the bull by the horns. However one of the things that I have heard over and over again consistently is that they had no sense that there was an overall plan. And I believe that people now need to know what the priorities are of your government.

You've been governing from 1991 to 1998. It isn't about the Devine Conservatives anymore. And the plan that you have, the direction that you're taking the province has little to do in terms of the overall plan for where you want to go, your objectives -- okay -- the timeline in which you want to meet those objectives, whether or not those objectives are measurable which I would hope that they are, when you're going to report on absolute versus your projected results. All of those things, sir, are your government's responsibility.

And what I would like to be able to hear from you, to provide reassurance to the people of Saskatchewan, is that there is a plan. Are we going to be the best in multiple sclerosis? Is there a plan for elder care in a province where we have such a high dependency ratio? One part of that dependency ratio has to do with elders in our province, the seniors in our province. I mean, what are we going to do about areas of specialization that we want to be focusing on?

I mean, I want to know, for the sake of all the people who deserve to know, where is it that you're taking the province of Saskatchewan in health care?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the member, the question that you raise is a very important one and one that we've been talking about for some time, and certainly I've been talking about.

When you ask where we're going in terms of health care and the direction that we're taking into the future, I want to say to you there are probably three or four areas that are highly important for me that I think the people of Saskatchewan would expect from us.

What we want is to provide some balance within the province to ensure that we can have both comprehensive services in rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan to ensure that we have

that kind of a balance so that people can receive services as close to home as they possibly can. And so we want to try to provide that balance across the piece. And so you've seen across the province over the last several years an enhancement at the community-based level where you have community centres, health centres. And you've seen a strengthening of the tertiary centres across the province to a large degree.

And we continue to talk about how we might enrich into the future, regional centres, community hospitals, larger community hospitals. And that process we're continuing to address and to look at how we might be able to meet those demands. We talk a lot about community-based services where we've moved from institution to community, which is not only a Saskatchewan model, but is one that you see across North America today, where we're depopulating, deinstitutionalizing, and providing a stronger community level of service.

So you're seeing growth in home care, respite care, palliative care, and enhancing all of those community-based services: community-based mental health services, drug and alcohol addiction. So we see that as being a stronger influence into the future where we're not having people needing to be in institutions for in order to get the kinds of quality care services that they receive.

We talk a lot about, as sort of a third bullet, of being able to sustain what we have into the future. Today we talk a lot about investing \$1.72 billion. It's the amount that we have today, and we think that we'll need to grow into the future, that level of funding. And we'll need the dependency on the federal government to help us through that process.

And as much as we often banter and debate about the investment that federal governments make in health care across the country, the reality is, as Allan Rock said at a meeting that he was at this last summer when he was talking to the Canadian Medical Association in Vancouver. He acknowledged that in Canada today the federal government has relaxed its investment in health care across the nation, and when I sit and meet with him on a regular basis he reaffirms that.

And so in order for us to enhance and grow health care in Canada and in this province and sustain it, we need to have the larger participation on the part of the federal government. And so we talk a lot about sustaining health care into the future by making a sufficient financial investment which is a partnership in my opinion.

And I think finally on two other points, we want to build a strong human resource system so that you have adequate staff within the community to do the work that we need to do -- physicians, nurses, support staff -- in such a way in which Saskatchewan people would benefit from the value of front-line staff and good primary care services, good research staff, specialty services. And we're challenged, at the same time committed, to ensuring that we strengthen the human resources piece within the delivery of services.

And finally, I think as much as we need to have good facilities, we need to develop and strengthen our technology. And in order to provide services closer to home, to people, we need programs and projects like SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information

Network). We need to advance the opportunities of renal dialysis sites, the cancer chemotherapy sites in rural Saskatchewan. We need to be able to make the linkages with the specialties here in the larger tertiary centres through technology. So the investments would be really in those five areas is what we see into the future.

So when people ask about what my vision is or what our health care plan is, that would be it sort of in a nutshell in terms of context, and of course there are a whole host of other issues that spill out from that, but those would be the five primary areas.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister. I don't know if most of the public realizes that when your officials are here that you rely on their expertise and their comments, and in particular the sorts of specific information that they have at hand that you can't be expected to know.

But one of the things I most certainly think that they should know is that you didn't ask for any advice on what you just said, and you most certainly outlined more than I can say that I've heard in a very long time about what your priorities are for the government in health care. And I want to thank you for that.

You mentioned something which has twiggged my memory, and I do want to raise this although I most certainly would be perceived as digressing from what we've discussed at hand. And I'll be not asking much more after this although I have a comment following this particular thing. I very much want your comment about it. I don't expect you to know the details, and I would be probably satisfied if what you could do is get back to me on this issue.

Data is being collected. I don't know if you know this, but there is one condition to approval by the panel that decides on whether or not people receive Betaseron and Copaxone, and that is providing data on the effects of these drugs. I don't know if you knew that or not. And I'm wondering if you can find out for me, is this research approved by an ethics committee because, as one who has done research in the past, I most certainly know when you're dealing with individuals such as this, it's not only imperative but it's required.

If so, I would like you to tell me who the members are of the ethics committee that has made this decision. I also wish to know if the patients are made fully aware that they are in fact participating in research that has not clearly had its objectives, its methods, the reliability, and validity reported. Indeed some are wondering why this data is being collected, given that the researchers have already completed the studies on Betaseron.

And so it does leave, I think, a plethora of questions here, and I'm wondering what you could do this evening in terms of placating me and telling me what the intentions are of this data collection, if you know.

(2200)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The process is subject to an ethics review. The patients are aware. And I'll need to get back to you on the membership or the make-up of the individuals who are on the committee.

Ms. Haverstock: — Well that's very reassuring. I've actually had not so many patients, but neurologists raising this with me, so they'll certainly be pleased that this has gone through approval.

I have a final comment to make. You most certainly can respond, Mr. Minister, if you wish. Well I think comments are rife in this Assembly about the fact that one side wants a two-tiered system, and the other side says that we don't have one. I think most people would concur that we most certainly do have one. I can speak from personal experience that if one has the resources you can get a lot of not only diagnostic but prognostic information from elsewhere. If you don't have those resources you may have to wait two and three and sometimes four months for very, very important diagnostic information.

I don't want to argue about this case in point. I do want you to comment, if you will, about whether there comes a time when we have to operationally define what medicare is and be very thoughtful about . . . these are the things on which we will make no kinds of exceptions but that there are other areas in which we must because they're already occurring.

And I know that I don't want a simple political answer on this because I know that it would be not an intelligent thing to do, to say that well of course on certain kinds of items we should allow people to pay for their services. But the truth of the fact is that there are not simply dozens. There are not simply hundreds. I think that there are thousands of people in Saskatchewan who have been forced to do this and are willing to do it.

I'm wondering if you would please just state to me, is there going to be a time where we can . . . maybe we can just as a group of 58 people sit down and say, lookit, this is the way in which we are going to define what medicare means in Saskatchewan. We're going to acknowledge these certain realities, and we're going to also allow for some of these kinds of exceptions.

And I'm not saying having private care, you know, or private people come in and open up hospitals and everything else. I'm just saying that some things are happening in spite of everything. And if we want to have thoughtful direction given and a sense of control, then we most certainly have to have this conversation. And I don't think it simply has to be debate; I think it has to be conversation.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Just to say, Mr. Chair, to the member, that I appreciate your comments as it relates to the broader issue of medicare and how we might preserve that in Canada. This is a long, philosophical debate that we are going to have, and you'll be a partner in in the future, but this is broader than just the province.

This is a discussion that needs to take place and is at the federal-provincial tables today with Health ministers, is with first ministers across the nation, and as we work I think collectively. And I appreciate your comment that sometimes we need to set our politics aside and then develop a strategy that looks at how we're going to maintain and sustain medicare in Canada.

We're committed to it on this side of the House and as this

government. I know the federal government is, and we'll continue to work together in partnership to try to develop that in the future.

Ms. Haverstock: — What I will do, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, is just simply thank your officials and you for your candour this evening, and I look forward to our continued discussions behind the bar and in your office. That's not in the bar; that's behind the bar. As well I do reserve for future reference discussions about SHIN which I hope we'll be able to have in your office because I've had numbers of concerns raised about it. So with that I thank you for your time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, and to your officials, a few quick questions. I'd like to pose questions that were brought to my attention that I need to raise.

Number one, Mr. Minister, a letter from Waldon . . . or Weldon, I believe, was brought to our attention talking about a co-operative care home. The concern that even going with the co-operative care home, the care home is difficult to pursue because of the fact that what they need from clients — and most of the clients they are dealing with are on pension — and wondering whether the province has any assistance for co-operative care homes in providing some assistance for individuals in order to make these a viable proposition.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, there aren't any incentives or financial packages that we have in place today that would be of any assistance in those areas.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I was quite well aware of it but I was wondering if you were looking at some. I know you probably had a number of concerns raised in this area.

Mr. Minister, I just received another — an issue from an individual who had the home that they were running be certified. And rather than getting into detail, I will certainly get a copy . . . I will get a letter over to your office and ask for a response in regards to that.

Another issue I'd like to raise, and this issue came from a couple that I met at Val Marie at one of the Plains rallies, in regards to oxygen supply. And as I look at the, look at the need and the amount of oxygen supply that this couple is going through, we're looking at in the neighbourhood of 4 to \$500. And for a couple on a fixed income that gets to be fairly expensive.

As I understand it right now, there isn't any financial support through the Department of Health for individuals who may need oxygen, oxygen supplies. Is that true? If not, what amount of assistance is there available?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, in the SAIL (Saskatchewan Aids to Independent Living) program there is no deductible, I'm told, for the program. And also if there is an upgrade of the equipment, then the individual is expected to pick that up — the difference.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, as well when we talk about oxygen supply, the couple that I chatted with who were raising this,

they mentioned something about air machines being available. And it looks to me like they would be much more economical than filling up bottles is. Do you have any knowledge about these and is there anything like that available for individuals who might have to rely on extensive use of oxygen?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Chair, there are some options I think that are available here. I wonder if you might provide me with the detail on that particular case that you're working with and we'd be happy to try to help you sort through that. And it would also help me sort through it as well.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, certainly I'll send a bit of information that I have, and name and the phone number of the couple as well that raised this concern with me, and actually took a fair bit of my time at the meeting raising the issue and bringing it to my attention, which I'm quite well aware of having dealt with some others in the past.

Mr. Minister, a quick question, and here's another issue that I'm not sure how far we can get into. But back in February, a young woman died and there's currently . . . I believe there's a bit of an investigation. It came as a result of an injury sustained through chiropractic service.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if your department has had this issue raised with you or what you are pursuing at this time — I believe it was a stroke that resulted as a result of a chiropractic procedure — and what kind of concerns have been brought to your department and what your department is doing to review this type of issue that may arise.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — My knowledge of this is that you're correct, Mr. Chair, that there is an inquest that is being held. Once the inquest is completed, the professional association will then be looking at it and then will be dealing with the matter after they receive that information.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, as well, will your department then be taking a closer look at it or sitting down with the chiropractic association to discuss this concern. It seems to me . . . I believe there was a program on TV regarding it as well. And there are more. This just basically was the tip of the iceberg and, as I understand, a number of cases have come forward as well.

It seems to me it's the type of thing that your department will have to certainly take a closer look at, and I'm sure that the chiropractic associations are very concerned as well. So I would hope that you would take a look at it and, Mr. Minister, I'd be pleased as well to receive a bit of a background once you've got some more information and they've reviewed that.

Mr. Minister, three other questions just quickly. A question I received regarding palliative care. We've been informed that if a person who's staying in a palliative care bed in a health care centre, such as the one in Langenburg, they pay a daily fee of \$25, but if they're staying in a palliative care bed in a hospital there is no charge. Is that true?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, we're reviewing that policy. We recognize the anomaly in it and are currently reviewing that policy.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, and certainly we'll be waiting to hear how the department is addressing it because, here again, it almost would come back to this two-tier comment. That certainly appears like where there is a definite two-tier use of the health care system.

Another question, in regards to advanced clinical nurses, where are we today? What stage are we at in pursuing the program? Are you still looking at that program as something that may be of benefit in the province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, to the member, we're continuing to train advanced clinical nurses. They continue to be placed in places across . . . or positions across the province. They continue to work with districts to ensure that some of these advanced nurses are finding a home in some of the environments across the province.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, as well, just an update on the SHIN program. Number one, the legislation has been pulled. I know there have been a number of concerns raised especially in regard to confidential issues.

And a couple questions I'd like to ask. Where is your department today in regards to the Saskatchewan Health Information Network programing? What process did the department follow through in hiring Mr. Nystuen to manage the program? How many people were short-listed for the position?

And, Mr. Minister, how was this arrived at? Was this decision . . . at the end of the day, did it come about as a result of your involvement, or who made the decision to finally hire Mr. Nystuen for this program?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, I might just say to the member that the master agreement is now in place; it's been signed with SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation).

The question about the development of the project, SHIN, itself, we have the board in place today. And they're examining all of the opportunities that will be out there across the province, and we're in fact . . . and how we're going to be providing the actual technology to wire the province in such a fashion that we can do the interlink that we want to provide. And so the board is working on that process today.

Your question about how Mr. Nystuen got to the position that he's in today, as I said, in the past, there were 43 applications for this job short-listed down to five. The board had a committee of people who were involved in that hiring process. The ministry or the department was not involved in that process; he was short listed, I believe, then to five, and then was selected as the suitable candidate by the board to provide those services on behalf of the board.

(2215)

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, can you give us a list of the board members for SHIN as well as the board members who were on that short listing, the applications for head of the SHIN program?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Chair, there'd be no difficulty with

that at all. We'll provide the list for you, both lists for you that you've asked for.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, over the past few months, we've been raising a number of concerns in the area of health. Mr. Minister, you've been giving us the assurances that everything is moving along as well as it should be. You've basically said that wellness model is working.

I chatted with a lady today — and this comes up as a result of some of the door knocking in Saskatoon — a Mrs. Constance McRobbie. And she said I can use her name as much as she wants. In fact, she wants you to know that she is not pleased.

For your information, Mr. Minister, however, she had indicated that she was at the opening of the City Hospital and she said that when Ms. Simard stood up and talked about wellness, her comment was, this is not wellness at all. And that was back in, I believe, 1993, '94 . . . Or I forget the date.

But, Mr. Minister, what she's saying what happened in her case and the reason she brought it to our attention was back in September 1997, just last fall, her husband was admitted to City Hospital and in October was moved from City to University, or Royal University, was moved at 11:30 a.m. At 10:30 p.m., he had still not been moved from the gurney in emergency to a bed in Royal University, which really created a problem for her. In fact, she finally screamed out and said if it happened to be Mr. Romanow's wife or somebody else in government, he probably would have a bed, and shortly after, someone came running and he got into a bed.

And, Mr. Minister, if you want to talk to her, you're certainly welcome to give her a call because I know she said she would love to come down here. I had to tell her though that she could not . . . she could come to the gallery, but she couldn't speak from the gallery — she could certainly talk to you outside of the gallery.

Mr. Minister, when you talk about the fact that . . . And then to add insult to injury, her husband passed away in October; she received a letter in February from the hospital indicating that her husband now had an appointment to meet a specialist. You begin to wonder about the vital statistics program we have. I think maybe your officials are now recognizing who I'm talking about.

But, Mr. Minister, I think what we have here and what you're saying, that is just one case of a number of issues and concerns that have been brought to our attention. While you're saying on one hand health care and wellness is working well, while the Premier I think made a comment about more acute-care beds in this province per 1,000 population than any other part of Canada. Mr. Minister, as was reported most recently, in fact Saturday, June 6, Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, the comments:

Time to abandon two-tier myth.

If there is no crisis in health care today, there is certainly a crisis of confidence. Hardly a day passes without someone raising questions about the quality of care available and its human cost.

Polls regularly show that Canadians believe health care in this country is getting worse, not better.

And if you're saying it's just some fictitious comment, I run into that on a daily basis, Mr. Minister, when I'm in my constituency. And it says:

This perception is borne out through lengthening waiting lists and operating room shutdowns.

So, Mr. Minister, when you look at people, and I think one of the editorials most recently where it talks about your government losing compassion, Mr. Minister . . . whether you have 6.1 beds per a thousand population, somebody's got 5.34. I'm not exactly sure if we measure health care based on the number of beds available. The public themselves look at health care, look at the dollars they're putting into health care. They look at their tax dollar and they view health care on the ability to receive quality care when they need it, not a month or a year down the road.

Another interesting article I was just reading, "Nothing 'elective' about waiting in pain". I think your comments most recently where you say that some surgeries are not emergencies. Yes, that's true, Mr. Minister, not everyone needs immediate or emergency surgery. But however, Mr. Minister, persons who need surgeries are not always in an emergency situation, may not be life-threatening, but can be certainly hampering to a quality of life that they may be going through at this stage in their life. And that operation may be important to them.

But to wait for a year to receive that operation is certainly a long wait. I would suggest to you that anyone sitting in this room today, if you had a complication that may not be life-threatening but you are under constant pain or having to take painkillers, and I'm not sure about other members or other individuals. I myself don't really enjoy taking painkillers all the time. I've been blessed, I haven't had to. To be honest with you, I haven't had to. But I run across people who have to live with this.

Mr. Minister, to say that we've done everything right, I think you have to admit that no matter how hard you work and how hard you try there are occasions and unfortunately many occasions where there are individuals that have to deal with, if you will, waiting-lists.

And just a comment here:

Whoever came up with the term "elective surgery" was a genius. (This is what the article was saying.) Not a medical genius, but a devious, political genius. It is creative use of language at its worst.

Mr. Minister, I think you and your Premier and your government need to acknowledge that maybe you're on the road to what you've designed and called a wellness program. And maybe down the road at the end of the day you'll finally achieve a point in time where this program is indeed meeting the needs of the public who are looking . . . through their tax dollars believe they have paid for the service. And maybe we'll achieve that.

But Mr. Minister, when we see people waiting on long waiting-lists for health care services, to say that we've achieved the Utopia, that we have the best health care system that's available, maybe that's true, with the current dollar levels you're working with. I don't know.

But I think, Mr. Minister, it's certainly important to recognize the fact that, yes, there are people who have to deal with difficult circumstances in their lives and the health system we have today may not be meeting all of those needs.

I believe, Mr. Minister, that you and your government need to realize that we have to go further, we have to work harder. And I'm not necessarily saying we have to just start putting more money into it. We can blame the federal government — as you do on an ongoing basis — about the lack of funding that has come for health care. Or you can talk about the . . . you can blame somebody else. You can blame governments of the past about the lack of services.

But, Mr. Minister, I think it's time your government accepted some of the responsibility as well. Responsibility for some of their decisions and recognize that, while you may have a vision, that vision may not always go along with how people perceive they're receiving health care.

Mr. Minister, I could go on at length, but I think it's time for us to recognize that whether change takes place today, tomorrow, or in the future, somebody comes along . . . another government will be elected in the future that may have a different vision, and then people are going to be put through another process.

Mr. Minister, all the officials in the department today may not be in their position . . . the same positions tomorrow. I see a rotation. Even in the last eight years I've seen a significant rotation in departments.

And so we need to acknowledge that while we have visions, somebody else is going to come along that may have a different vision.

And I think, Mr. Minister, as was mentioned by the member from Saskatoon as well, at some point in time we all have to reach a point — what do we want to achieve in health care? What services do we want to have available?

I know in talking to people on the street, everyone has got a different view. Someone talks about the fact: why don't we have an insurance premium? Well maybe if that person wants an insurance premium, maybe they can look at . . . I believe one article I'm quoting from here talks about the fact that even if you go out of the country now — people are beginning to look at going out of the country and finding services available to them.

And I've actually chatted to some local constituents who've decided that that might be an option. In fact one individual, rather than waiting till last October for a MRI, went across the line back in May and by June had their operation and were living a quality life. And they went to Minot, North Dakota for that MRI scan otherwise they'd have been waiting till January 1 of this year.

So, Mr. Minister, rather than going into an extended debate on the issue I would suggest to you, Mr. Minister, that it's time you acknowledge that wellness, while that's a vision your government has, that there are a number of areas we need to work through. And don't be afraid to accept the fact and acknowledge it rather than just blaming someone else all the time, let's accept the fact that health care affects every one of us.

It affects others differently than you or I may face health decisions right now but acknowledge the fact that there are concerns and issues out there and begin to show some of the compassion that the media are indicating you are not showing.

Mr. D'Autremont: — A couple of really short questions, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could tell us what the exact number of acute care beds are in Saskatchewan presently and the exact number of long-term care beds.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Number of acute care beds is, Mr. Chair, 3,117. And, Mr. Chair, 9,203 long-term care beds. So 3,117 acute care; 9,203 long-term care.

Subvote (HE01) agreed to.

Subvotes (HE02), (HE03), (HE04), (HE06), (HE08), (HE09) inclusive agreed to.

Vote 32 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1997-98
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Health
Vote 32**

Subvote (HE08) agreed to.

Vote 32 agreed to.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, just to say thank you. I realize the officials are not present but the minister can express our appreciation for their time and thanks to the minister and his officials for having taken the time to respond to the questions. And we look forward to responses to the questions we've asked for and the minister has given his assurances that he will get back to us later.

Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — . . . express my appreciation to the members opposite for the questions that they've asked. I know that they've been very informed on the issues of health care across the province, and through this kind of dialogue, I know we can build a better health care system. And we'll share with my officials your comments.

Thank you very much for your informed questions.

The committee reported progress.

(2230)

THIRD READINGS

**Bill No. 57 — The Education Amendment Act, 1998/
Loi de 1998 modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation**

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill No. 57, An Act to amend The Education Act, 1995 be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The Chair: — Before we start I would ask the minister to introduce his officials please.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. To my right is Dan McFadyen, ADM resource policy and economics; to my left is Bruce Wilson, executive director of petroleum and natural gas division; behind him is Myron Sereda, the director of engineering services branch; and behind me is Gerald Tegart, Crown solicitor, Department of Justice; and Trevor Dark, director of energy, economics branch.

Clause 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I'd like to welcome you and your officials here this evening — late evening.

Mr. Minister, perhaps you could give us some indication of what The Oil and Gas Conservation Act is about and why it exists.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is moving to allow for the suspension of gas removal and gas-use permits so then by that it will no longer require natural gas permits. And what we are attempting to do is eliminate what we see to be unnecessary regulation.

It also establishes penalties for late or incomplete submissions of drill core samples, because those are the records that the department needs to carry on its long-term business. It was felt by the department and in discussion with consumers, people who purchase gas in Saskatchewan, that deregulation appears to be working and the market is supplying in an adequate way. And it was felt that the permits were an unnecessary process that would be best suspended for now.

I might add and say, Mr. Chairman, that this is not a deletion of course of the permits. We're merely suspending them in case some unforeseen action would require permits to be used again.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, there must have been a purpose for the permits at some point in time. You're suspending them now, saying that things are working good. Well what has changed in the system since they were first put in? And if it's working without the permits now, why not just

simply abolish the whole permit system instead of just suspending it for awhile?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, natural gas permits were put in place to facilitate the transition to deregulation. These were put in place in 1987. I think the fact that consumers are confident that the market-place works, they suggest that permits are no longer permitted, but in the event . . . that they're no longer required. But in the event that permitting would be required, the option is still there for government to move. I mean we could have taken the step to abolish, but that would have created perhaps an unnecessary delay in putting the process back into legislation again.

The suspension I think is a reasonable interim measure. We would want to use the suspension and I would foresee somewhere down the road that that would be carried for the next step that you suggest.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, why would you argue that there is a need to have the ability to issue permits again? What do you foresee happening in the future that would allow or require that those permits be put in place? And what purpose would those permits serve? Do they serve a purpose sort of as a quota system that says there's X amount of gas available and you're permitted to sell this much to A, this much to B, and this much to C? What is the purpose for having the permit in there? Like what service does it provide?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well I want to say, Mr. Chairman, and to the member opposite, that initially I think the purchasers, consumers were concerned that there would be, under a new system that hadn't been tried here in Saskatchewan — that being a deregulated market-place — there was some concern that perhaps there wouldn't be a secure supply. Discussions in consultation with industry and users of natural gas told the department and told us that there was some security and that they were comfortable that if we were to suspend the unnecessary process, the permits, that that would be a step that they would feel comfortable with.

And as I said before, the suspension will eliminate the need for the regulations to be used and if at some point in time the market-place wouldn't be providing a secure supply, then they could be reinstated. Consumers have told us that they're willing to assume the responsibility for securing their own supply so I think this just makes common sense what we're doing here. It's just cleaning up and eliminating unnecessary regs.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well, Mr. Minister, we're always in favour of the elimination of regulation where and whenever possible. That's why I wonder why you didn't go the whole step and simply abolish the whole permitting system.

I believe one of the other areas involved in this Bill deals with the . . . provides for penalties for late or incomplete submissions of drilling cores. Is that the case? And is that becoming a problem? I guess probably the most famous case we've heard of in the last number of years of faulty drilling cores is with Bre-X. I don't think we're anywhere into that league at all, but is faulty drilling cores, are they a problem?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I want to say, Mr. Speaker,

Saskatchewan firstly has taken I think a proactive move. We are the first province as I know it to eliminate the need . . . to suspend the need for the regulations. We don't foresee frankly an instance where penalties for late or incomplete submission of core samples would be a problem. We just don't think it's going to be a problem.

Most companies are very much in compliance with the requirements and understand the need for the core samples, and so we don't see that as being a major problem. But in the event that there would be, we would like to be able to deal with it, and I think it's a prudent approach.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, how much of the core sample do you require? Do you require 50 per cent of the core sample, a split down the middle and you get half and the company keeps half? Do you require a core sample that encompasses the entire pay zone that's being drilled through? Just what do you require for a core sample?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, we require all of the core sample, other than a small component that goes to do the analysis of the core sample.

Mr. D'Autremont: — So you don't get a split core sample, you get the entire core sample. And what does the company do if they want to keep a core sample? They have to re-drill alongside, or how does that work if you're taking the entire core sample minus a very small sample?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I'm told by the officials that the drill of the companies have free and open access to the core sample. We have storage facilities in the province here in Regina and other areas, where the core samples are stored. And if anybody wants access to them they're there for that purpose.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Are those core samples available for inspection by anyone, or by the company that submitted them to you?

(2245)

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, kept confidential for one year, but after that anyone has access to them.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to thank you and your officials this evening for answering our questions.

I guess the only question I have left for you is, The Oil and Gas Conservation Act, does that encompass more purpose than what's been stated here this evening, the permitting? Does it deal within the oilfield of the necessity to contain and to shift the production of gas off of oil production?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, the Act is very much a broad base and all-encompassing. It deals with the drilling and the drilling requirements. It deals with abandonment. It deals with environmental issues and it deals with production issues. So it's very broad based. These are just amendments to a part of that Act.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 5 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

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

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read a third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave of the Assembly to move to revert to motions for returns (debatable). There are seven motions there which I hope to dispose of in short order.

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Debatable)

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I request leave of the Assembly to issue an order for return, for returns no. 1, 6, 8, 12, and 13 presently on the order paper.

The Speaker: — Just for the information of the Chair, to make sure I heard that correctly, that was items 1, 6, 8, 12, and 13?

Let me just check again in the interests of accuracy that the Whip has indicated the desire to provide returns no. 1, 6, 8, 12, and 13.

Mr. Kowalsky: — That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Then returns 1, 6, 8, 12, and 13 are provided.

Return No. 7

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 7 showing: (1) the number of women and men in total that graduated from the University of Saskatchewan, College of Medicine, (a) in 1990; (b) in 1995; (c) in 1996; (d) in 1997; (2) the number of these graduates who are men; (3) the number of these graduates who were women; (4) the number of male physicians and surgeons who are currently practising in Saskatchewan; and (5) the number of female physicians and surgeons who are currently practising in Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — Does the hon. member have a seconder for the motion?

Ms. Julé: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, the seconder will be the member from Athabasca.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker: — Hon. members, if I may just revert with the cooperation of the members of the Assembly, to the previous item. The Whip requested leave, and the Chair presumably did

not confirm that of the House. And if with the cooperation of the House, can we go back to the previous item, and may I put it to the House as to whether leave was granted to provide returns nos. 1, 6, 8, 12, and 13. Is leave granted?

Leave is granted. And those returns are provided.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:58 p.m.

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