

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan from the southwest part of the province. The petition calls on the government to reject proposals of any forced amalgamations of municipalities, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon the government to reject proposals of any forced amalgamation of municipalities.

And the signatories come from Gull Lake, Maple Creek, Ponteix, Saskatchewan, as well as Shaunavon, Tompkins, and other communities in the southwest.

Thank you.

I so do present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions that deals with the attempt by this government to confiscate reserve accounts in municipal offices. And I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

And these are signed by good people from the communities of Watrous, Guernsey, Drake, and all over Saskatchewan.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to stop the municipal reserve account confiscation.

Whereby your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Anaheim and Muenster.

And I do so present. Thank you.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, I as well have a petition with regard to municipal amalgamation.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

I'm pleased to present on their behalf from the residents of Lanigan and Guernsey.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about enforced municipal amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of St. Brieux and Melfort.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by individuals from the good community of St. Brieux.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also stand today to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned about the confiscation of municipal reserve accounts, and the prayer reads as follows.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And this is signed by folks from Lanigan and Guernsey.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of the people in Swift Current and area concerned about the Swift Current hospital. The prayer of the petition can be summarized by saying that the prayer calls on "the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current Regional Hospital . . ." It's signed by people from Swift Current as well as from Jansen, Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present to do with the reserve account, the confiscation. The prayer reads:

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

abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

The people that have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Lanigan, Guernsey, and Drake.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition with citizens concerned that the government may be planning to freeze or confiscate municipal assets. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

The petitioners are from Guernsey, Lanigan, and Drake.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition opposed to enforced municipal amalgamations. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

This petition is signed by the good folks of Birch Hills and Kinistino.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring forth a petition regarding forced amalgamation. The prayer reads:

Whereas your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And I have petitioners from Spiritwood and Rabbit Lake.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned about forced municipal amalgamation. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to halt any plans it has to proceed with enforced amalgamation of municipalities in Saskatchewan.

And this petition is signed by individuals from Regina, Pense, and Stony Beach.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to abandon permanently and rule out any plans it has to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

This petition is signed by the good citizens of Carrot River.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

To cause the government to abandon plans to confiscate municipal reserve accounts;

To halt any plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital;

To cause the federal and provincial governments to reduce fuel taxes; and

To continue Court of Queen's Bench services in Weyburn.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, it has been our privilege the last few days to have a number of distinguished visitors to this Assembly. Earlier this week it was the ambassador from Germany, and today it is his next-door neighbour in Ottawa, the ambassador from Japan.

And I'd ask that our distinguished guests rise to be acknowledged. His Excellency, Mr. Katsuhisa Uchida, Ambassador of Japan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — His Excellency is accompanied by Mr. Kazuhiro Nakai, the first secretary of the embassy.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — He is also accompanied by Mr. Kiyoshi Shidara, the consul general of Japan in Edmonton, which has responsibility for this province.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — And two other individuals who are no strangers to this Assembly, a long-time friend of many of you, Mr. Arthur Wakabayashi, honorary consul of Japan in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — And our own Debbie Saum.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, His Excellency is in Regina on his first visit to Saskatchewan. He has met with the Lieutenant Governor, the Premier, the Deputy Premier, a number of ministers including myself, and I understand he was the honoured guest at a luncheon hosted by yourself.

So I'd like to thank all members for welcoming His Excellency to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, I too would like to extend a sincere welcome to the ambassador from Japan — Mr. Uchida. Mr. Uchida, I apologize for stumbling on your name.

In my earlier life with the Canadian Grain Commission, I had the honour of meeting you in your country and we surely wish to welcome you here and hope that your stay in Saskatchewan is most pleasant.

I would also like to welcome Mrs. Uchida accompanying you. I would like to welcome Nakai, the first secretary, the embassy of Japan. Thank you very much for coming to see us.

I would like to also welcome Mr. Shidara and Mrs. Shidara from the consul general of Japan in the Edmonton, and also of course Mr. Wakabayashi. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in the Legislative Assembly the Children's Advocate for the province of Saskatchewan, Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen, will be tabling the *Children and Youth in Care Review: LISTEN to Their Voices*.

Dr. Parker-Loewen is present in your gallery today, Mr. Speaker. And with her are the Children and Youth in Care Review team that conducted the review; members of the multi-sectoral review panel, which includes young people, natural parents, foster parents, First Nations and Metis Nation representatives, social workers, and other professionals. Also in attendance today are representatives of the Saskatchewan Council on Children and the provincial youth delegation.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask Dr. Parker-Loewen and all those with her to stand, be recognized, and I would ask all members to extend our visitors a very warm welcome.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the minister and, on behalf of my colleagues, extend a special welcome to Ms. Parker-Loewen.

And certainly, as we had indicated in the past, we have been

looking forward to a report that Ms. Loewen has been working on and we look forward to reviewing it this afternoon. And we want to thank her even personally — before we get to look at it very carefully — for the work that's been done by her and the committee and each and every one who's had a special interest in the children of this province.

Mr. Speaker, another warm welcome for Deborah Parker-Loewen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy today to welcome to our legislature the students from Centennial grade 8 class. Centennial School is within the constituency of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. My two children attended there.

And I would like to also welcome their teachers, Jean Flett and Jim Harrop. And a special welcome to Jim who was a classmate with me in high school at Thom Collegiate.

I would like to invite all who are gathered here to show warm welcome to this class and to their teachers.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, of course from the audience I would like to recognize Don Bird who is originally from La Ronge who is working with the advocate.

And I would like to say this, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all the people in the North and for Aboriginal people.

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

In translation, Mr. Speaker, as we work with children . . . you know, to work with children is indeed a tremendous aspect of our lives, and for those people who work with them it is a tremendous honour.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Hon. members, and colleagues, if I may, there are special people in our lives that from time to time we have an opportunity to introduce publicly. And I would beg your indulgence in allowing me to introduce to you my wife Barbara who is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and my daughter Rhondalee who is here for a very brief visit with us. I'd like you to welcome them please.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Also, hon. colleagues, one of our pages, Rachel Birns, has the privilege of her mother being here in the gallery this afternoon with a friend, Linda Longfellow, just to ensure that Rachel is in fact carrying out her responsibilities as her mother would expect her. So please welcome them as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Expansion of Natural Gas Production

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to talk about some of the good news which is happening in our province's economy. As you likely know, Saskatchewan is Canada's third largest producer of natural gas.

The newspapers this morning are talking about the great expansion we are seeing in our natural gas fields. In fact most of the producers are talking about expansion in the neighbourhood of 5 per cent over last year.

1999 was an excellent year for natural gas production. We saw approximately 229 trillion cubic feet produced out of a thousand new wells. Mr. Speaker, it is even more important that 700 people in this province earn their living from working in these natural gas fields.

This is excellent growth that we are looking at; this is an excellent sector of our economy. And I'm sure that the member from Swift Current would join me in appreciating the good work which is happening in his area and throughout our province in natural gas expansion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Court House

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to respond to the government's announcement earlier today that their decision to close three Queen's Bench court houses, including the one in Weyburn, has been reversed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, this is good news for Weyburn, and we all know rural areas are in need of good news right now. While I am delighted by this reversal, it appears that the original decision was simply not well thought out. After more facts were presented, it became increasingly clear that there was not a valid reason to proceed with these closures.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the legal community, the members of the city police, and the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), and the mayor of Weyburn for their help. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to especially thank the citizens in and around Weyburn for making their voices heard. Thanks to those people who signed petitions and to those who ripped the covers off their phone books in protest. If they would like their covers back, they can just stop by my office.

This reversal shows that when you are right, it is important to stand up and fight for what is right. And, Mr. Speaker, finally I would like to thank the government and especially the Minister of Justice for reversing this decision.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Prebble: — Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to some of the positive environmental initiatives contained in the provincial budget. First, as part of the new centenary fund, there

is a \$5 million per year fund specifically earmarked for environmental cleanup, transportation, and rural roads.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — This will provide important resources for work such as cleaning up problematic landfill sites that threaten aquifers in our province.

Second, Mr. Speaker, the Environment and Resource Management department receives a 15 per cent increase in this budget, including two and a half million dollars to meet our tree planting commitments in northern Saskatchewan; \$350,000 for a forest regeneration survey in the eastern forest; and \$250,000 dedicated to cleaning up abandoned radioactive tailings at the Gunnar and Lorado uranium mine sites.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to draw attention to the resources the budget allocates for fighting Dutch elm disease. Dutch elm disease has now struck in more than 20 Saskatchewan communities and will pose a major economic, ecological, and aesthetic to our province unless it's contained. This budget increases spending to fight Dutch elm disease from \$300,000 a year to \$500,000 a year, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, these budget initiatives are a clear sign our government's actively working to make progress . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Humboldt Court House

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with my colleague from Weyburn in congratulating the people of Humboldt for pressuring this government to reverse its decision on the closure of the Queen's Bench Court in Humboldt. And incidentally, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to add congratulations to the people of Assiniboia since the member from Wood River has not raised the issue in the legislature.

Mr. Speaker, if it weren't for the hard work of the legal community and citizens throughout the Humboldt area, I'm sure this decision would not have been made. But interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, one civic leader who refused to sign the petition against this closure was the mayor of Humboldt who was incidentally the NDP candidate in the last election.

Mr. Speaker, I am very elated with this decision and I would ask the government to think through their future decisions a little bit more thoroughly — because, Mr. Speaker, decisions of this type have a real impact on real people, Mr. Speaker.

When the government goes ahead and makes decisions to remove services from rural areas they would be well advised to have evidence to justify it beforehand. In this case they did not, and therefore could not proceed with the closure of Queen's Bench court in Humboldt.

But I thank the Minister for recognizing his mistake that his department has made, and for reversing his decision. Thank

you.

Community Volunteers in Regina Sherwood

Mr. Kasperski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and, this being volunteer week in Saskatchewan, to also recognize and ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing community volunteers in the constituency of Regina Sherwood.

Mr. Speaker, every year the Normanview Shopping Centre in my area has an unveiling ceremony for its community volunteer wall of fame. And, Mr. Speaker, the . . . three citizens in my area were recognized very recently.

They are: for the outstanding community leader in the area is Mr. Norm Chadwick, who lives in the Dieppe area of my constituency. Norm has been active in his local community association, community sporting, and recreation efforts, and is an active canvasser for the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Cancer Society.

The outstanding community volunteer, Mr. Speaker, was Louise Yaremchuk who is a founder of the Dieppe Community Association, and also Louise was very instrumental in the original establishment of A.E. Wilson park in my area. Louise has spent many years as a volunteer and with very many charities and other good works.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to congratulate as well Rick Heidt as the outstanding youth volunteer in our area. Rick is a grade 12 student at Riffel High School. He is very involved with his school and community, and also on his SRC (student representative council).

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask all . . . you and all of us to congratulate these fine, outstanding volunteers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Comments from *Estevan This Week*

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read an article that appeared in the *Estevan This Week* newspaper written by Gerry Fichtemann, and I quote:

Well, here we go again. It's budget time in Saskatchewan. It looks like the provincial NDP government is running out of things to tax as they have taxed nearly everything on the face of the earth to fill their coffers which are already overflowing by many millions of dollars. They have now taxed trees, shrubs, perennial plants, and annuals. Also on the hit-list are seeds and bulbs. They've even taxed the sod you put in your yard. They've even taken the joy out of Christmas by taxing you on Christmas Trees.

On the bulletin mailed to us from the provincial government, the only item left that is not taxable is manure . . . an (article) that . . . this government is full to the brim of this stuff!

I thought we'd get a good tax break on the income tax but these guys just took our tax break away from us and stole

more money than ever! Say good-bye to your income-tax break!

If they ever come up with a scheme to tax the vegetables that you grow yourself, they'll be doing that too! Nothing surprises me anymore when it comes to this provincial government.

I must change the subject to lighten my mind and start putting some thoughts into my brain that are a lot more pleasant than taxes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Z99 13th Annual Radiothon

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, C.C. and Lorie Lindsay with a supporting cast of Z99 listeners have really done it this time.

In their 13th annual radiothon — the third of a very successful partnership with the Hospitals of Regina Foundation — that has focused everyone's attentions on Regina's neonatal unit, they raised \$171,000.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — This year, Mr. Speaker, a three-probe ultrasound unit is the latest technology that will provide accurate diagnostic information. The more accurate information will help doctors treat and prevent life-threatening problems even before birth.

C.C. and Lorie gave 30 hours of themselves . . . Z99 listening public gave of themselves. The \$171,000 raised this year brings the three-year total to more than \$320,000.

Mr. Speaker, Z99 listeners, C.C. and Lorie Lindsay are all truly beautiful people who care about our community and who do their share to make it better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Svoboda Ukrainian Dance Festival

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to talk about all the wonderful things going on in the Battlefords. And I know that with all the great things going on in North Battleford, the members of this Assembly just can't get enough of hearing me talk about my constituency.

Well this weekend, Mr. Speaker, is the 10th annual Svoboda Ukrainian Dance Festival at the Don Ross Center in North Battleford. This is one of the largest and most widely respected dance festivals of its kind.

The Svoboda Dance Festival is a grand celebration of Ukrainian culture and a brilliant display of both costume and talent.

Spectators of the festival will have the pleasure of watching 300 entrants and 800 competitors. The Saturday session will feature large group dances from six different regions of Ukraine with

performances from novice to adult.

I want to extend congratulations to the organizers and competitors who have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this spectacular festival on its 10th anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join with me in the Battlefords this weekend to enjoy the festival. And may I close with these words: go North Stars.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again my questions are for the Minister of Municipal Government. Mr. Minister, yesterday in this House you said there's no plan to force amalgamation. Then you went out and told reporters you plan to introduce legislation that will set the number of municipalities in this province. That sounds a lot like forced amalgamation to me. You obviously take flip-flop lessons from the Liberal leader.

So now, Mr. Minister, the next question is what is the number? Are there going to be 125 municipalities like Mr. Garcea's recommending? Are there going to be 17 municipalities like Mr. Stabler is recommending? Which one is it, Mr. Minister? How many towns, villages, and RMs (rural municipalities) do you plan to wipe out?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the member opposite by saying to him that I listened very carefully yesterday when he was making his speech in the 75-minute debate, and he went on to say a number of things, Mr. Speaker. And I've listened to what he said around the province when he's been talking about what's going to happen to municipalities, and this is what he said.

If we proceed, this is what will happen. We will double the number of RMs and we'll double the number of office staff. People will . . . there will be less volunteers in the RMs, and councillors will take on a larger amount of responsibility. Your councillors are not going to know their neighbour. They will have to make long-distance phone calls to local councillors, and amalgamations means higher taxes.

And I ask the member, how does he know all of this information? Have you decided what this is going to be in this province? Have you decided what the amalgamation process is going to be in this province? Because nobody has talked about this at all except you, Mr. Member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, if you'd quit sending your staff to these meetings and attend them yourself, you might know exactly what's being said out there. It's time to go. Tonight's a good opportunity — Regina's on right now.

Mr. Minister, you're not even listening to your own task force. If you were, you would scrap forced amalgamation plans altogether because that's what everyone at these meetings are telling them. Of course you wouldn't know that, again because you aren't attending — not even the one today in Regina, I understand.

Mr. Minister, it's clear you've made your mind up. This is not the kind of legislation you can draft in just a few days. It's probably already written. So why don't you tell us how many municipalities will be left under your forced amalgamation plan. And again, how many towns, villages, hamlets, RMs, do you plan to do away with?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to say to the member opposite and to the member from Indian Head-Milestone, who asked me a question yesterday too about what's happening with amalgamation, and I would say to the member opposite . . . and they're offering me rides to the various different meetings across the province. And I say to the member from Saltcoats, today you should get in your car and you should take with you Mr. Reg Downs, and you should take him to the front of the committee and you should have Mr. Reg Downs read to the committee. You should have Mr. Reg Downs tell the task force exactly this: he should say that there should be a call to action of municipalities in this province. You should have him read this.

And you should say that this process should begin immediately. And you should say that it will never be a perfect time. And you should . . . he should then go on to say that if all of these . . . that all of those conditions will never, ever exist. You should take him to that meeting and have him make that presentation of the report that he's got.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, I took time to read that report. Not once did I find forced amalgamation in that report.

Mr. Speaker, urban people are also very concerned about your forced amalgamation plan.

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

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Urban people are also very concerned about forced amalgamation. Yesterday the member for Indian Head-Milestone read out letter after letter from Regina-based area businesses opposed to forced amalgamation.

Since then, we received a number of faxes and letters. Botkin Construction — the list goes on — Sherwood Multitech Estates; Village RV; Premay Equipment; Maxwell's Amusements and water park; Insulation Applicators; Okamoto Canada Limited; N I S Contractors; Sakundiak Equipment. It goes on and on — Remai Construction.

Mr. Minister, at this minute and this hour many of these business owners and their employees are at your task force

meeting speaking out against forced amalgamation. Mr. Minister, are you listening? Will you cancel your plans for forced amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I know that the member and many of the members on the other side of the House are familiar with a lot of those businesses because from what I'm hearing, when I'm speaking with a lot of those businesses, in fact they're picking up their phone and they're phoning them themselves.

And what the Saskatchewan Party is saying to many of those businesses, if in fact you don't oppose amalgamation, this is what's going to happen to your business — tax rates are going to go up, there's not going to be an opportunity for you . . . (inaudible) . . . community, you're going to have to move out of the province because there isn't enough opportunity for you there.

Every one of those members . . . Just recently the member from Humboldt phoned a couple of the businesses and said exactly that. The Saskatchewan Party is busy phoning businesses across the province, fearmongering, and that member from Saltcoats is leading the parade.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, you have an opportunity this afternoon, you have an opportunity tonight, to go tell these businesses that taxes aren't going up. Tell them exactly what you just told us.

Mr. Minister, Premay Equipment says, this could mean relocation of our company back to Alberta. Village RV says, our small business provides jobs for 25 people which could be jeopardized by amalgamation. Bodkin Construction says, your plan will result in increased taxation and business closure.

Not my words — their words, Mr. Minister. They are the words of Regina area businesses that employ Regina people with Regina families.

You might not want to listen to me or SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) or SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), but will you for once listen to the thousands of Saskatchewan people telling you that they don't want forced amalgamation. Will you listen to Saskatchewan people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite he's right when he stands up and says I don't have to listen to him, because that's absolutely true.

The member opposite, Mr. Speaker, has been going around the province and he's been holding his own little group of meetings, and he's been telling business people and individual community leaders that there's going to be a disaster across this province if in fact there's going to be amalgamation.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, of course, Mr. Speaker, if they're advocating amalgamation, which I hear them talking about all of the time — and the only people in this House who are talking about amalgamation, forced amalgamation, are right over there — of course people in Saskatchewan are going to be concerned about it.

And I say to the member opposite, why don't you tell us what your plan is about amalgamation. Because on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we haven't put forward anything that talks about amalgamation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Health Information Network

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, on last Friday we asked the Associate Minister of Health to update us on the Saskatchewan Health Information Network. Unfortunately, we really didn't get very far so I'm going to try again.

Madam Minister, the Government of Manitoba has pulled the pin on their automated health information network in their province. An independent review concluded the system was too expensive and wasn't going to work. Unfortunately, Manitoba taxpayers spent \$35 million before the project was scrapped.

Madam Minister, does the Government of Saskatchewan share the same concerns about SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network)?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said last week when I was answering the question about SHIN, we do have a commitment to information technology in this province. We understand that we need to have good information to make evidence-based decisions.

We have committed \$40 million and we are meeting that commitment this year. We will have an infrastructure that we will be building on and continue to build on as we can afford to do it. We are looking across the western provinces for partnerships to share our expertise, and other provinces are interested in how we've done this because we've done a very good job very responsibly and we do have an information service that we'll be able to sustain and build on.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, I heard you indicating your commitment by this government to this project. I heard you indicating that you have already spent some \$40 million on the project.

My question is this then, Madam Minister: if you indeed spent 40 million, how much more is needed to be spent before this project is completed and when will the network be operational?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Actually what we've spent to date is about \$34 million, and the money that's in this year's budget will meet the \$40 million commitment.

As I said last week, when we first assumed this portfolio we offered debriefing about SHIN to the opposition Health critic

and the deputy Health critic that answers all those questions in detail — what we have, where we have it, how we're building it, and where we're going. I still offer that to you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, what we really need is for the public to understand what's going on here, particularly in light of a very similar network in Manitoba is being bailed out from at a cost of \$35 million. At the end of this fiscal year I understand you're spending \$40 million.

Madam Minister, are you completely sure that this project is going to be sufficient? And will you undertake a review of this project so the people of this province aren't going to be facing a pull-out like Manitoba taxpayers have done?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Actually, Mr. Speaker, what happened in Manitoba was under a Tory government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — This government has a commitment to information technology. What we want to make sure we do is that we build it where we need it and put into it what we need from it. And that is what we were doing. And that's why we're building it slowly, and that's what we'll continue to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Battlefords Health District Review

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, Dickson Robin was the North Battleford man who died Christmas Eve. The ICU (intensive care unit) at the North Battleford hospital was closed and he could not be stabilized for transfer to another centre.

The health district has conducted a review of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Robin's death. His son Dickson Robin Jr. has been told, and I have been told, that this review is now complete. Dickson Robin Jr. has asked for a copy of this report but so far has been denied access to it unless he meets with the health district first.

Madam Minister, have you seen this report and will you release it to Mr. Robin's family?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. I want to thank the member for the question. As you know, the North Battleford Health District requested of the provincial government a process that would put together an external review to address community issues. The Department of Health, along with the college of physicians and surgeons, and the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, conducted the review and that review was shared with the health district board in the beginning of April.

I understand that the family, the immediate family, is away until April 15. The review will be shared with the family. And I understand that the health district will release the results of the review to the public once the family has the results of the review.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, the Robin family has been put through enough. They lost a husband, father, and grandfather on Christmas Eve and the circumstances are questionable.

This is not a game. This family has a right to know what the review says. They do not want to meet with health district officials. Mr. Robin's family wants to have the time to review this in privacy and to look at the report on their own. All they want is the report. They want to decide what to do with it.

Madam Minister, what is in this report that the health district and your department refuses to openly release it to the family. And when will you give this to the Robin family?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the health district is quite willing to share the report with the family. They're waiting for the spouse to return. I understand the spouse will return by April 15.

But I do want to say to the member, and I know that she has been busy contacting the health district and contacting the world, I would say to the member that we know that there was a very difficult circumstance for the family.

The family asked for a review. They contacted me, Mr. Speaker. The review has been conducted. The results will be shared with the family, Mr. Speaker. And I don't know what else to say, other than that member is strictly playing politics with this very sad death, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, this is a member that believes in private health care and quite frankly it's time . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Budget Implications

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Finance. Today, interestingly enough, the Premier was in Saskatoon and he was giving his annual apology for the state of the province.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that this year's apology was especially lengthy. It was rather lacklustre and it was not even interrupted once by even weak applause. His apology dumped most of the blame on the Finance minister, on his doorstep.

Well for once, Mr. Speaker, we agree with the Premier. Mr. Minister, your budget is in fact a disaster. It's a disaster according to school boards who say your budget has forgotten children. It's a disaster according to SARM because of your government's forced amalgamation plan, the hill on which they have chosen to die.

Mr. Speaker, it is a failure because according to the CFIB

(Canadian Federation of Independent Business) your budget is going . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order, please. I'll ask the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to go directly to his question please.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the minister. Will you admit the state of the province is a disaster thanks to nine miserable long years of NDP (New Democratic Party) government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the only disaster in this province is the Leader of the Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I want to say that the disaster here, Mr. Speaker, is that this opposition has no vision for the future and cannot keep its eye on the big picture. And the big picture is this, Mr. Speaker. We are going to deliver as a result of this budget to the people of Saskatchewan, a \$440 million cut in personal income tax. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? They voted against that, Mr. Speaker.

And we're going to deliver a \$260 million net tax cut taking PST (provincial sales tax) into account. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? They voted against that too. And this year, Mr. Speaker, we're going to deliver \$44 million in tax relief. And guess what, Mr. Speaker, they voted against that too.

Well the people of Saskatchewan know, Mr. Speaker, that we have a vision and we have a plan and we're going to stick with that . . .

The Speaker: — Order, next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance in that answer has just admitted that he's in a fantasy world. He has no idea what is happening in the province of Saskatchewan. It's not hard to understand listening to that answer why the Premier was compelled to apologize for the state the province is in, in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, the minister doesn't know that educators are saying that your budget is terrible and they're reaching for the panic button. Municipalities, Mr. Minister, are holding emergency meetings. SARM is holding an emergency meeting. Mr. Speaker, our population is shrinking — is shrinking — people are going to Alberta for opportunity. And the Health minister says, the Health minister says that our health care situation is on the ropes.

Mr. Minister, it's time to admit that whatever you're doing is not working other than to drive people from this province. Will you admit that your mismanagement is driving businesses, people, and — most importantly — hope from the province of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — You know, Mr. Speaker, I have such difficulty figuring out what is the position of the Leader of the Opposition. Because some days, Mr. Speaker, he's opposed to the PST (provincial sales tax) expansion. Then he leaves the House and they ask him, are you opposed to it; would you change it? He said no, he wouldn't change it.

Some days he wants less tax on used cars. The other day he wants more tax on used cars. Some days he says he wants to help the consumer. Other days he wants to help the car dealer. Some days, Mr. Speaker, he's complaining about a \$700 million surplus. Other days his party is talking about a \$396 million deficit.

But I say, Mr. Speaker, each and every day the position of this government is the same, and that is we're going to cut taxes for ordinary people in this province. And that's what this budget does, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the minister made an interesting comment — he said he couldn't figure things out. I think the people of Saskatchewan know that he can't figure things out. And they're very worried about a Finance minister who cannot figure. And I believe that the Premier shouldn't be taking all the blame for the mess that the province is in, as he was in Saskatoon today.

And I also know, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberal leader deserves at least half of the credit for hidden taxes, higher taxes, fee increases, crumbling highways, a failing health system — you'd think he'd be concerned about a failing health system — businesses closing, people leaving, municipalities on the verge of revolt.

Nine years, Mr. Speaker, of NDP mismanagement, and six months of help from the Liberals in the coalition. That's the NDP record.

My question to the Minister of Finance: will you follow the Premier's lead? Will you apologize to the people of Saskatchewan for nine years of gross NDP mismanagement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about what people are saying about the budget, I'll tell him what people are saying. The *Biggar Independent* says the government listened. *The Melfort Journal* says the budget delivers what people wanted. The *Moosomin World Spectator* says sound fiscal policy is paying off for taxpayers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In the rural municipality of Buckland, the reeve says property tax rebate will help.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — . . . says farmers happy with some of the measures in the budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Saskatchewan Wheat Pool — agrees with budget. Gary Thompson, economist, says it addresses major issues for farmers.

Farmers say they're happy. The Saskatchewan SEACAP (South East Area Concerned Agricultural Producers) spokesman says farmers feeling good, tax on farm fuel is gone. Dwight Percy says Cline's budget is right on the money. The only person confused about the budget is the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

No-fault Insurance

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well today's the day that we're going to have delivered, hopefully, a list of all those fee increases that this particular government has given across the province. And that's why the population, as of today, is dropping in this particular province as well.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance). Mr. Minister, this last weekend over 200 victims of your no-fault insurance scheme gathered in Regina for their own review of the system. They're convinced the government's review is nothing more than a mere whitewash.

Mr. Minister, no-fault victims had the opportunity to hear from Dr. Michel Freeman, a renowned expert on injuries and on no-fault insurance schemes. You'd know this had your government bothered to attend that particular meeting.

Mr. Freeman, Mr. Speaker, reported that the research that SGI used in 1995 could justify no-fault insurance, which was based on the task force in Quebec . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. I would ask the hon. member to go directly to his question please.

Mr. Heppner: — To the minister responsible for SGI, Dr. Freeman said that research was nothing but junk science. Mr. Minister, why do you continue to defend a system which this expert says is based on nothing but junk science?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I very much appreciate that question because one of the reasons that this legislation has a review built right into the legislation is to deal with all of the comments that people will have about how it's working.

But I think it's very important that we listen to all the people and I encourage all people to be part of our review, because that review is going to assist all of us in this legislature to make our system even better.

I think it's very difficult to sit here and listen to the Alberta-envy party, because I think that they do not envy the car insurance rates that are in that province. We have a good system here and we need to continue to make it better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 26 — The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Bill No. 26, The Tabling of Documents Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Hon. colleagues, before orders of the day I would like to table the report entitled *Children and Youth in Care Review*, submitted by the Children's Advocate.

I so table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, over the past few days the members have submitted 57 questions to the government. Mr. Speaker, you know what . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I'm fairly close to the whip and I was having a difficult time hearing what he had to say. Kindly allow him to make his presentation.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the opposition members have asked over the last few years, 57 questions. And today I'm asking the Assembly to give leave to submit 57 responses to these questions.

I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that there are no conversions in these questions. These questions are about fees and charges to the public. And when the members look through the answers to the questions, they will find that the majority show that there are no increases in the majority of the departments.

And, Mr. Speaker, these answers are complete and clear showing that the government is open, accountable, responsible, and I want . . . And, Mr. Speaker, I'd have to say that I'm very happy — happy — to submit these answers. And I know that the government members . . . the opposition members will be happy to receive the answers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. The Government Whip has asked leave to supply the answers to the 57 questions.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask you to rule on a point of order whether the presentation of questions is a debatable motion.

The Speaker: — The whip has asked for leave of the Assembly which, my understanding out of the rulings, is not a debatable matter; it's a matter of the House to either allow the whip to respond to all the answers.

Is leave granted to allow presentation . . . responses to all the questions?

Leave granted.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Have the answers then been provided?

Mr. Kowalsky: — Answers are provided for questions 69 to 126.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Responses to questions 69 to 126 have been tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 15 — The Department of Justice Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Department of Justice Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan has over the past several years developed an efficient and effective working partnership with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan regarding the delivery of the Saskatchewan Aboriginal courtworker program.

This program is a 50/50 cost-shared program with the federal government, Mr. Speaker, that is managed by the Saskatchewan Aboriginal courtworker program advisory board. The board includes one member from the Saskatchewan Federation of Indian Nations, one member from the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, two members from Saskatchewan Justice, and an independent chairperson. The decision making of the board is consensus-based and the services are delivered through Aboriginal agencies called carriers.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this vital program is to help ensure that First Nation and Metis youth and adults charged with an offence or before the criminal courts receive fair, equitable, and culturally sensitive treatment. Court records provide information and assistance to clients in an effort to ensure that the process is both understood and respected by all.

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, and the Government of Saskatchewan have identified the need to ensure that the courtworker program

staff are protected from liability in the ordinary performance of their duties pursuant to their contract.

They've also identified the need to ensure that clients accessing Aboriginal courtworker program services enjoy confidentiality with respect to those services. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, this Bill provides for amendments to implement protection from liability for Aboriginal courtworker program staff for actions taken in good faith in the execution of their duties pursuant to their courtworker service contract.

And the Bill also creates a confidential solicitor-client type relationship between a client and his or her courtworker with respect to courtworker services. This will ensure that information provided to a courtworker is considered to be privileged, confidential, and cannot be subject of subsequent court proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, in making these amendments at the request of the Aboriginal courtworker program advisory board, we're making some fine-tuning adjustments to a program that is working extremely well.

Communication and understanding is central to building respect for the justice system in the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people are a significant stakeholder in the development of this province and must be included in both the development and delivery of justice programs.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to join with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, and the government in supporting this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of An Act to amend The Department of Justice Act.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to address Bill No. 15, The Department of Justice Act. This Act brings into place, as the minister was saying, a new type of venture within the justice system. I think it's a type of venture, Mr. Speaker, that is well worthy of some consideration, and hopefully, will provide the necessary benefits that people in this society can use, particularly those that are facing court actions in an area where they're not necessarily familiar, Mr. Speaker, with the whole procedures.

It certainly is intimidating when a person who is unfamiliar goes into a new setting and everything is happening so quickly. They need to have an opportunity to gain understanding and to feel confident that the system is working for their benefit as well as for the benefit of upholding the laws of this land. Hopefully, the courtworker provisions can provide that to the people that can utilize its services.

But I do have also some concerns, Mr. Speaker, about some of the things in this Bill. And it is only one page, but nevertheless, there is a couple of points in here that I think the minister needs to clarify before the Bill is passed. And there will be opportunities for the minister to do that later when we reach Committee of the Whole.

In particular, I have two points that I think need to be clarified. Part of the Act under confidentiality talks about an individual

who has been charged with an offence, and it talks about an individual under the age of 18 who was alleged to have committed an offence. And I wonder why the differentiation for a person who is of adult status being charged and a person who is not of adult status simply being alleged.

Shouldn't a courtworker also be available to explain to someone who is an adult and has been alleged to have committed a crime? In dealing with a confidentiality circumstances, I'm wondering why the minister has differentiated in the . . . between alleged for people under the age 18 and charged for people over the age of 18.

No place in here does it state under confidentiality though that the information that they may be holding confidential — in a solicitor-client type of privileged condition — was acquired in the performance of their duties. Earlier it talks about performance of their duties but in the confidentiality section it does not refer to in the performance of their duties. Perhaps it's in some other part of the Act in reference back to this particular clause; perhaps it's been missed.

So I would ask that the minister take a look at that and ensure that the information that these people are to keep confidential is acquired in the performance of their duties. And I would hate to think that they gained access to some information through some other method and then weren't allowed to utilize that information simply because this Act gives them confidentiality privileges; that if they overhear something that they should be able to deal with it in the proper manner; that the only confidentiality should be the information that they acquire in the pursuit of their duties as a courtworker.

I think that there is a need though, Mr. Speaker, that before this Bill proceeds onward that the third party people involved should have an opportunity to review and contact both the opposition and the government to explain and outline those areas that they feel are strong and need to be supported, and whether or not they have any concerns in any particular area. So I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 16 — The Justice Statutes (Consumer Protection) Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Justice Statutes (Consumer Protection) Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will clarify the legal framework for the long established practice whereby the registrar of the consumer protection branch under each of the amended Bills may arrange for the distribution of the proceeds of a bond to a claimant. The practice of forfeiting the bond for such a payout would only occur after conducting a full investigation to establish that the complaint is valid and the financial loss to the purchaser remains unsatisfied or outstanding.

Mr. Speaker, our concern is that without these amendments the result of a court decision would be that consumers would be required to initiate court proceedings and become judgment creditors of the person or corporation named in the bond before

becoming eligible to receive payments.

Our consumer protection branch advises us, Mr. Speaker, that their clients often find such proceedings, court proceedings inconvenient or intimidating, and that the cost, time, and effort required are disproportionately high. This Bill therefore would ensure that consumers under these Acts, and I'll name them in a moment, are able to receive the intended protection of the bond without undertaking full court proceedings in order to establish technical entitlement.

Mr. Speaker, to achieve this purpose each of The Motor Dealers Act, The Direct Sellers Act, The Collection Agents Act, The Sale of Training Courses Act, and The Credit Reporting Agencies Act are being amended. The changes will set out that the registrar may direct that any money recovered under a forfeited bond, or realized for the sale of collateral security, may be paid to such persons as deemed by the registrar to be entitled to these moneys.

This would typically include, Mr. Speaker, victims in a criminal fraud conviction, claimants in the same position as someone who's already received a judgment, or former clients claiming under a bankruptcy situation. It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that the decision of the registrar, with respect to the bonds, is subject to appeal which will ensure that it must be reasonable and resulted from a fair investigation.

Mr. Speaker, the government remains committed to the consumer protection goals that each of these Acts promote. And I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in supporting these amendments to ensure that consumer protection clients receive the financial protections that the bond provisions were intended to provide.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of an Act to amend The Justice Statutes (Consumer Protection) Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is, I'm sure, a very important piece of legislation. But it deals with also a very complex area of the law, and a very complex area in dealing with consumer affairs — and that is of bond, bondholders, and who is entitled to recover compensation from bonds.

It's clear in this Act that there are some significant changes taking place that people across the province need to be given an opportunity to understand, to learn about, and deal with before this legislation passes — before it becomes into law and affects their lives and they way that they as individuals and as companies deal within our business society.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, because this particular Bill is so important, I think it needs to be given more time and held off before we actually do pass it.

There's also a number of other pieces of legislation on the books, Mr. Speaker, that we need to be dealt with, need to be debated, need to be heard.

Therefore at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we move to Bill No. 231, The Fire-fighter Protection Liability Act.

The Speaker: — Order. It is the intention of the member to adjourn debate on the . . . It has been moved by the member from Cannington and seconded by the member from Swift Current that we move to Bill No. 231, The Fire-fighter Protection from Liability Act.

The division bells rang from 2:42 p.m. until 2:52 p.m.

Motion negatived on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 21

Hermanson	Elhard	Heppner
Julé	Draude	Boyd
Gantefoer	Toth	Eagles
Wall	Bakken	Bjornerud
D'Autremont	Weekes	Brkich
Harpauer	Wakefield	Wiberg
Allchurch	Stewart	Kwiatkowski

Nays — 28

Trew	Hagel	Van Mulligen
Lingenfelter	Melenchuk	Cline
Atkinson	Goulet	Lautermilch
Thomson	Lorje	Serby
Belanger	Nilson	Crofford
Hillson	Kowalsky	Hamilton
Prebble	McPherson	Jones
Yates	Harper	Axworthy
Junor	Kasperski	Wartman
Addley		

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well consumer protection is a thing of great interest to us all and particularly to the consumers. And I think when we look at this particular Bill we're not particularly sure exactly where it's going and how large it's involvement is.

When you get a Bill from this particular government, Mr. Speaker, that purports to sort of stand between the consumer and business, you're pretty scary where they're at and they're probably aren't anywheres. We'll have to take a much closer look at this particular Bill than we've been granted so far.

The issue of things such as bonds and some of the items that were listed in the Bill are things we have to look at a whole lot closer. And I think, as we well know, there's various consumer organizations throughout the province representing different particular aspects. Each one of those needs to be looked at carefully. We need to talk to them and see exactly where they stand on these particular issues.

And because of that need for a lot more information before we can deal adequately with this particular Bill, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 5 — The Parks Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit on Bill No. 5, The Parks Amendment Act, 1999.

As everybody knows, the parks are very important to everybody in Saskatchewan. And all Bills that pertain to them, no matter how small, they may appear uncontroversial. There's a lot of things cannot be said about some of the issues surrounding the parks.

We have very beautiful parks in Saskatchewan. We've very blessed to have the parks here. And I think they should be looked after by all members here. And that's why we should take time to examine each Bill, to look through it.

I believe that is our job in opposition, to examine each Bill, each item that's with it, to slow the process down just a little bit. Because this government, what I've seen of it, has a tendency to ram things through. Yes, tries to ram things through. Maybe it doesn't tell the whole picture, doesn't tell the whole picture. And I believe it's been pointed out, the Minister of Finance has said it was our job to point out a lot of fees, to look at stuff.

The opposition member . . . the Minister for SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) said when he was asked about fees, well that wasn't asked. Well today with this, let me ask him some questions about different things and maybe I will get some answers about this Bill.

One of these things I would like to talk to begin with is the licensing fees. Now this can pertain a little bit to this Bill because according to this there will be some more money possibly spent on some land being purchased, and I would like to know if the fees increases are being used to maybe . . . for that part of the budget.

I see that the daily park fees are going up 40 per cent; three-day fees are going up 42 per cent; weekly fees 39 per cent; annual transferable, 40 per cent; motorcoach daily, 33 per cent; motorcoach annual, 43 per cent; full service site per night, 9 per cent. Electrical site per night, 11 per cent. Non-electrical site per night, 15 per cent. Non-electrical spring-fall discount, 22 per cent. Electrical group per site, 11 per cent. Full service site, seasonal, 20 per cent. Non-electrical site, seasonal, 20 per cent. Electrical monthly, level 1 park, 16 per cent. Non-electrical monthly, level 1 park, 17 per cent. Electrical monthly, level 2 park, 17 per cent. Non-electrical monthly, level 2 parks, 15 per cent. Electrical site per night going up 13 per cent. Non-electrical site per night going up 18 per cent. Economy 22 per cent. Electrical spring-fall discount is going up 17 per cent. Electrical group, 13 per cent. Electrical site, seasonal, going up 20 per cent. Non-electrical site, seasonal, going up 20 per cent. Equipment capping fee per night is a new fee.

And there's others. The fishing licence have gone up, other things. But one of the things I want to mention, a lot of constituents over on that other side . . . or a lot of the members

or their constituents live in the cities. The only time — the only time — they get to see nature is when they go to parks.

A lot of them, I believe, the Minister of Finance has pinpointed roughly 55 to 60,000 people as low-income wage earners. They may not be able to go, to afford it, may not be able to enjoy these parks as much. I find that a concern, and I think some of the members should find that a concern because it does deal with a lot of their constituents. And I believe that they would be, you know, very interested, and they should be looking at the park fees — maybe cutting back some of the increases. Because it's for the children out there, for some of them, that's the only time they ever get to see nature, in the cities.

(1500)

I grew up with nature, and there's an odd member over there that did grow up in the rural. But most of the members over there grew up in the cities, and their children are growing up in the cities. And I think our parks need to be looked after, and they should be made accessible, made accessible for all people, made affordable so all people can enjoy them. That's what we're here for.

I see the Bill deals with acquiring some land. I believe it's 97 hectares — which I don't know if a lot of the members over there know what that means — but to convert it, it converts into 230 to 240 acres. And I see some of them, and I see some of them — the members over there maybe don't even know what an acre is. So maybe I'll tell them.

A quarter section is a quarter-mile long, wide; a mile long. This takes almost a half section.

An Hon. Member: — How many city lots would that be?

Mr. Brkich: — I'm not sure exactly how many city lots, but it would take quite a few.

The members over there are . . . they seem to take this a . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, they seem to be taking this a little lightly, but when . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, well like my member said, and I believe . . . what is that?

An Hon. Member: — Eight and a quarter feet wide and a mile long.

Mr. Brkich: — Eight and a quarter feet and a mile long.

An Hon. Member: — How many beer in a dozen?

Mr. Brkich: — Not sure.

An Hon. Member: — Only the members opposite would know the answer to that.

Mr. Brkich: — Yes. But getting back to that piece of parcel land that deals with this Bill, it is adding quite a bit of chunk of land. And this Bill does not quite go into how, if there was an environmental impact done, assessment done on this, how will it affect the people that may be residing on the land? How it affects the neighbours.

How was this land taken? Was it voluntarily given? Was it government land? Or was it just . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes. Or did the government just amalgamate it?

What kind of land was it? Was it marshland? Was it forest land? Was it grassland? . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes. Maybe there were coyotes on it — we don't know — that need protection . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, yes.

But the government over there, they might not be protecting. The government has put another licence fee — \$45 licence fee — to shoot coyotes. Maybe this is a protected area for them. I'm not sure on this.

An Hon. Member: — They're trying to tax our coyotes.

Mr. Brkich: — Yes. But getting back to that, that part of the end. I believe it pertains to Christopher Lake. And we're not sure how that is going to affect the people at Christopher Lake. Is there cottages on there? And, like I say, maybe it is grassland.

There's also the issue of fire protection. Has that been adequately looked at? Any time you add . . . Maybe it's a prairie wool area. When you take a piece of property, it affects the system around there.

But there's some . . . there's a few other issues I have with this Bill. And I will read the part that . . . the part of the land is taken . . . maybe some of the members will recognize it. Maybe they've studied this Bill and they can inform me exactly where this is, how big this is.

At Christopher Lake, the portion of land they're going to take is a:

. . . portion of the south-west quarter and south half of the north-west quarter of Section 6, Township 53, Range 26 west of the Second Meridian, lying north and east of the northerly and easterly limits of Highway No. 263 as shown on Plan No. 87PA02701 in the Land Titles Office for the Prince Albert Land Registration District and west of the westerly limits of Turner Street, Ward Street and Ambrose Avenue as shown on Plan No. 87PA07588 in that same office . . .

Now has the minister looked at this? Does he know this piece of land personally? Does he know . . . has . . . does he know how that's going to affect the people in that area?

Also there's going to be . . . there's other areas, some areas that are affected at Buffalo Pound:

those lands taken for road widening as shown on Plan No. 71PA13814 . . . the Land Titles Office for the Prince Albert Land Registration District.

Also:

. . . lands taken for public improvement as shown on Plan No. 73PA00893 in the Land Titles Office for the Prince Albert Land Registration District; and

all that portion of the south-west quarter of Section 6

bounded on the west by the lands taken for public improvement as shown on Plan No. 73PA00893 in the Land Titles Office for the Prince Albert Land Registration District, on the east by Turner Street . . . on the north-east by Ward Street as shown on Plan No. 63PA07588 in that same office.

Looks like they're amalgamating parks possibly; I'm not sure here. At Buffalo Pound they're going to be:

. . . striking out "Plan No. BR 4578" and substituting "Plan No. 87 MJ 12524-2".

Subclause . . . of the description of Buffalo Pound Provincial Park in Part B of Schedule I is amended by striking out "Plan No. BR 4578" and substituting "Plan No. 87 MJ 12524-2".

Part C of this Bill:

Subclause . . . of the description of Good Spirit Lake Provincial Park in Part C of Schedule I is amended by striking out " , as shown on Plan 74 Y 10855 in the Land Titles Office for the Yorkton Land Registration District."

Talking about Good Spirit, I've been there once and it is a very nice park. And there is no . . . we want more description, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of what this entails. How this will affect the local landowners? Is there quite a bit of land being taken or is it just some boundaries that are being changed?

Are the local landowners being notified of this . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . have they have stuff on that land that could be appropriated? Anytime you adjust a boundary anywhere, there is always impact on it. There is always a neighbour that your neighbouring . . . neighbour or joint landowner that should be consulted. And I'm hoping that they have been, but you never know with this government if they have been. And we will be asking more questions about this further on and doing some checking.

And another thing, as you say, is getting back to the fees, there are also businesses in there. Will this hurt businesses in there with the fees and also with the changing of property there?

I've read that there is a few people saying with the increased fees the business will be down. That they figure they're not going to open their ice cream stands. Which also means fewer jobs and less student employment.

But I believe the explanation on some of this Bill would . . . (inaudible) . . . some of this with some legal errors. In the legal land description of the Clearwater River Provincial Park. Now when them legal errors, when they were made, were they just typos? It doesn't say in here — that's another question I have — or when they were surveyed, were they surveyed wrong. Because if they were surveyed wrong, that means that that whole area should be resurveyed. If it has to be resurveyed it's going to affect every owner in that area, plus all the neighbouring people that border on there.

And why were these errors made in the first place is another question. How much is these errors going to cost? That's

another question with this Bill.

As I say, there's many concerns with this Bill that maybe at the surface it seems uncontroversial, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But as you look into it, I think you can see that it could affect a lot of people, a lot of cottage owners.

It doesn't say the land that they're taking, if it's right along the lake or if it's further back. If it's right along the lake, is it protected area? Is it area that's going to be used for public use or is it protected, where let's say there's an endangered species on it, which possibly could be coyotes, as the members over there are hollering. They seem quite worried about coyotes, which I'm glad that they're willing to protect them.

Excuse me for taking a little bit of time, but I'm kind of listening to the banter back and forth of the members. It's interesting. They keep hollering about coyotes. But one of the other problems in a lot of parks I believe is gophers. They've I believe caused a lot of trouble. So maybe they'll start taxing them, or issue a licence to kill them in parks; I'm not sure.

Another thing is, getting back to the fees and the people that are going to use these parks, are they going to be able to enjoy them, is the main thing. Will there be improvements to these parks? We don't know.

I know the licensing fees, the Saskatchewan for residential annual fishing licence has gone up 56 per cent. Saskatchewan resident three-day fishing licence has gone up 50 per cent. Canadian resident annual fishing has gone up 150 per cent.

That's another question that a member just raised over there, burrowing owls. Is there any . . . has this land, 97 hectares, 230, 240 acres, has it been assessed by environmental assessment? Is there any endangered species nesting on it? Burrowing owls are an endangered species and are protected under the Canadian Wildlife Act I believe. And I don't know if they were approached, if there was assessment done on that. And that should be taken . . . it should not be taken lightly, any wildlife on the endangered species list, or is this land being used because there is endangered species on it?

Another one is the swift fox, whooping crane, and coyotes . . . No, I . . . (inaudible) . . . keep joking about that but we won't mention that any more. But there are many, many different sandpipers . . . there are many different. There's shorebirds, there's nesting birds.

And I think this Bill has to be looked at a little more closely. People that deal with the parks out there should be consulted, environmentalists, to make sure that this Bill is to do what it says it's to do. Because any time a Bill is passed, all the people that it affects — and this when parks affects everybody in this country and in this province affects everybody — should be looked at and examined very carefully.

(1515)

So that is why I'm up talking about this Bill. And if I get time I would even like to go and take a look at this area someday. But I can't . . . but unfortunately I can't today, or in the next few days . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Possibly tonight. But I think

we're going to be tied up tonight, maybe here.

But no, it's one of these issues . . . this is an issue that needs to be looked at, these Bills. It comes with the parks and recs and natural resources, which are very important, like I've stated before. And I don't think we can state this enough — that our parks and natural resources are very important to the people of Saskatchewan, and they should be protected in the right way.

There shouldn't be any controversial or even the people that live around them — they're the ones that really look after these parks. These are the people that ensure the wildlife thrives around them. And as long as any Act that goes through, any Bill, they should be consulted with that Bill to make sure that it fits into, also, into their needs. Because without the people that living beside these lakes, in these cottages, in these parks, or even landowners in the surrounding areas, they should all be consulted because without them the wildlife in the parks would find it a very hard time to survive.

Mr. Speaker, right now I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 9

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen that **Bill No. 9 — The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2)** be now read a second time.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to add to some of the comments I made the other day in regards to The Child and Family Services Act (No. 2), Bill No. 9, that we have before us this afternoon.

As I indicated to the minister the other day, I was appreciative of the fact that the minister has begun to realize that there are some areas that were really lacking in the area of the Department of Social Services and how we look after children and look after — in this case — we're talking about young adults. Young adults who would, by the age of 18 would not be considered a ward of the state in many cases, be left on their own to find their way in life.

In view of the fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we've just had a release from the child advocate in regards to the department and how young people are treated in this department, I think there are some issues in regards to this specific piece of legislation that certainly are appropriate.

Considering the fact that on page 56 of the most recently released report we do have suggestions coming from that report, suggesting that the department has to do more to assist the needs of young men and women as they reach adulthood and as they look forward to a future; as they look forward to what they are going to make of themselves and the job opportunities that may be available.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and I know that if anyone is

going to find a quality job it doesn't necessarily mean that having your grade 12 matric is all that's needed anymore. I believe what we're finding is people need more and additional education — whether it's through a technical institute or whether it's through a university.

And I think and I believe that over the past number of years we have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have found that many young people, especially in foster care, have found themselves in a very difficult situation. And what do I mean by that?

I mean a situation where they are now off of the rolls of the department and they are expected to continue — if you will, if they are seeking further education — they are expected to on their own try to find the assistance or gain the assistance that would be needed to help them and assist them in finding and pursuing further educational services in order to enhance their job capabilities.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the concern I have with that is the fact that an individual by themselves at 18 may be physically able of doing a number of things but in some cases may not be mentally capable of being able to really provide for themselves, and may not have all of the abilities, the wherewithal, or the mental capability, to make some of the choices or to understand exactly where they should be going. And so it certainly appears that this piece of legislation intends to assist in that regard.

And having said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a parent who now has two young lads who are currently pursuing further education, I have for the longest time felt that parents need to offer some assistance and need to be there, not only with financial assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but to offer words of encouragement as well and to help meet the emotional, the mental needs, of their children, of their teenagers, as they now kind of leave the security of the home environment and pursue their goals, Mr. Deputy Chair.

As I say that, I suggest as well that many times . . . and I'm concerned about the fact that we seem to have many parents who feel once a child reaches 18, as the Department of Social Services seemed to indicate prior to this legislation or up until this legislation is actually enacted, many parents seem to feel that once your child has reached 18, it's their responsibility as to how they pursue their goals and their work, the work or the lifestyle they would like to achieve as they become a young adult.

My view has always been as parents — and I guess I take it personally — my personal view is that as a parent I still have some responsibility. And I view the fact that if our children choose to pursue further education, I don't want to leave them saddled with a major debt load at the end of their . . . when they receive their educational degree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we find so many young people today.

They receive a university education and they find themselves sitting with 25, 30, or \$50,000 loans before they really have an opportunity to find a full-time job, a job that would really pay the types of dollars that are needed to now build a home if they plan on doing that, or provide for themselves, provide for their material needs, even the purchasing of a home. They're already finding themselves having to pay off loans, loans from their

schooling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So what we have in this piece of legislation today is a recognition by the department that it has a responsibility as well to the needs of young men and women that have been entrusted into their care. And I would suggest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this piece of legislation was certainly needed, and it's long overdue. And it's certainly welcome to see.

And I'm pleased to see that the department is beginning to recognize some of the responsibilities that it has to individuals in this province. That they can't just look to people and say, well if you have a problem, come see us; we'll provide you with care, we'll look after you. And then once you reached a certain age, well sorry, we don't have the resources any more to provide for that care.

What this Bill, as I understand it, is doing is indicating and telling us that the department is beginning to understand that responsibility it carries.

And I'm certain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after the minister and his officials go through the report that was just tabled in this Assembly this afternoon, they will begin to recognize even more that they do have more of a responsibility than they have had on how they look after young children.

It's not just looking after children and their little babies, or under six years old or under 10 years old, but it's looking after individuals, if they're entrusted into the care of the department, up until the age when they really have the ability and they have the life skills to move forward and to find the employment and to put into practice the training that they have received in order to find the job that they would really like to . . . or find the vocation that they would really like to move forward in, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think those are just a few of the comments I would like to leave before this Assembly in regards to the piece of legislation that's before us. I know some of my other colleagues would like to make some remarks as well, would like to make some comments, but I will look . . . I look forward to further debate and actually in-depth review of the piece of legislation when we get to Committee of the Whole.

At this time, Mr. Deputy Chair, I'm pleased to take my seat and allow other members an opportunity to enter into the debate.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to be able to comment on the proposed amendment to The Child and Family Services Act.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as the member from Moosomin has pointed out, and the minister has pointed out, and the child advocate has pointed out, an extension of care and services to youth who are in care of the ministers is extremely important at this time, and I am really pleased that the child advocate has pointed out some necessary provisions, extended provisions for youth in care.

Mr. Deputy Chair, just for the benefit of the public and the viewing people out in Saskatchewan that are viewing today, I would just like to read an explanation that the minister has for

wanting this amendment and putting it forward.

According to the minister's explanation, this amendment will allow the minister to continue to provide support for permanent or long-term wards whose plans and needs for transition to adulthood are legitimate but do not fall within a typical definition of education.

Such plans would include youth who require preparation for employment or youth with disabilities who require support for their mental or physical development.

The amendment also clarifies that support may be in the form of payment and/or services and must be provided through an agreement between the minister and the youth.

And further, in the minister's second reading of the Bill, he points out a further clarification and expansion on this explanation, and the minister — I'm quoting from *Hansard*, December 17 — indicates that:

The amendments would extend support to those who are continuing their education; do not plan to continue their education immediately but who require interim support to help them prepare for further education; (who) are intellectually challenged and require constant care or day programming such as sheltered workshops, that does not fall within the usual definition of education; or, plan to enter the workforce but require additional support to find and keep a job.

As is currently the case, the minister may provide shelter, care, counselling, treatment, family services, or any combination of these, based on the individual need. For example, a young person may want to go back to complete high school but first needs to get counselling and treatment for his substance-abuse problem.

And I end my quote there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have certainly some thoughts about some of the statements that the minister has made. It is always very important, in my interpretation, that when a Bill comes to the Table that there are certainly the means whereby the benefits of this Bill can be carried out for the benefit, in this case, of youth and children.

I am not convinced that everything is in place in this province in order to have this amendment come into full effect for the youth of our province for those over 18 or over 16. Because, Mr. Deputy Chair, the minister points out that some youth may require addiction counselling, that some youth may need drug and alcohol counselling services and rehab.

And I think that all members of the Assembly, and many people throughout the province, would recognize that there is right now inadequate services for youth who are in need of drug and alcohol counselling and rehab. And many people believe that the place, for instance in Saskatoon through the Calder Centre, is an inappropriate place for youth to be treated. So that is one of my concerns, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Another one is that if this Bill takes effect, it is necessary to

ensure that we have social workers in place that can assist in the monitoring of the plans that are in place for any individual youth. And we all know, as has been brought to the attention of the minister in the House a number of times, that there are such heavy caseloads for social workers. And that has already resulted in a lack of their ability to follow up on their cases. And it has resulted in them not being able to give the support that they so do want to give to children who are receiving protection or who are in foster homes.

So the monitoring of any program or any initiative is very, very important. And I recognize that the social workers of the province would certainly be in agreement with extra assistance for our youth over 18. But I know that they would be equally concerned that their staffing, their numbers, are certainly adequate enough to address the need here.

And so, Mr. Deputy Chair, I would like to adjourn because I do think that this Bill is very, very important and I think that it's important that there is some further review of the contents of the amendment. And I also am hoping that there will be forthcoming information from stakeholders that would probably be helpful for us in leading us to give our consent to this Bill or not.

And so with that, Mr. Deputy Chair, I do adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

(1530)

Bill No. 13

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Melenchuk that **Bill No. 13 — The Education Amendment Act, 2000/Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation** be now read a second time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. First of all, please let me say that we are questioning the decision of this Act to amend The Department of Education Act. We are questioning the decision to move all sections dealing with post-secondary education into a separate Act.

We're not all that optimistic on this side of the House that this will make education more accessible or that it will save money or that it will provide more benefits for students. However, we do know that it will provide the opportunity for more ministers and their NDP and/or Liberal hacks to be hired. You can be sure of that.

The amendments as laid out in this Bill cover off a number of areas and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those areas should be addressed on an individual basis. More specifically, the section that deals with setting up a separate school division based on minority faith and the rules and regulations surrounding this, require added input.

Mr. Speaker, there is also a section that deals with providing education for students with disabilities, as well as a section that deals with the tendering process for school divisions. It is our understanding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a number of consultations were held in the drafting of this Bill. Among them were the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association; the

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation; the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents; and the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials.

It's our hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the recommendations and suggestions as set out by these organizations would be taken into consideration and, where possible, included in the proposed legislation. After all, Mr. Speaker, it is those very organizations who represent and work very closely with teachers, administrators, and school boards. These organizations would know first hand how well current legislation is or is not working, and how the process might be changed that would see a positive effect on all those involved.

Before I get into these areas, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express our concerns about the status of education in the province today. Whether it be a separate or a public school, there can be no doubt that many issues must be addressed, Mr. Speaker, and these issues would certainly reflect on any proposed legislation dealing with education in the province.

We would like to point out that the amount of money available for K to 12 education this year is just slightly better than half of what the Minister of Education says it is. He contends that funding was \$29 million. In fact, actual fact, education funding for this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was a paltry 18.5 million. That will hardly cover off any negotiated raise in teachers' salaries, should there be one.

This amount also severely restricts the funding available for special programs and services.

We must question: is increased funding for special programs and services addressed in this Bill? Well no, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not. Capital funding has been essentially frozen. And we're wondering just how far that \$5 million coming from the Centenary Capital Fund will go, given the number of school divisions waiting for capital approval.

There are many schools across the province who are waiting, and some of them have been waiting for a number of years. They are waiting to hear that their requests to have improvements done, repairs made, or additions built have been approved.

School boards have seen their government grant money drop substantially in the past number of years. In fact, more than \$380 million in funding has been cut by the NDP government since 1992.

So what does that mean for the taxpayers of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker? In short, they are the ones — the taxpayers are the ones — that the school divisions have turned to for help in topping up their education money. Taxpayers have seen their property taxes increase to the point that tax revolt meetings are not now so much a rarity as a general occurrence.

The general operating grant formula, Mr. Speaker, is widely accepted to be a 60/40 split where the government should be providing 60 per cent of the money and the local tax base is to provide the rest. Well that formula is hardly the norm any longer.

In numerous school divisions, the local tax base provides for over 70 per cent of the funding. In some school divisions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, operating funding for education has been completely eliminated. This means, Mr. Speaker, that the taxpayers in those districts are completely funding the education in those areas.

Does this Bill address the current lack of operation grant funding from the government? No, it doesn't. It does not, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Also, as a result of lack of funding we've seen program cuts. We've seen some schools closed and teachers have either left their profession or left this province altogether.

Who would want to work in the conditions that the teachers have to work in? The teacher-student ratio has increased dramatically. Many teachers now find their classrooms so large that they are concerned about providing quality education to all students.

And I ask the Minister of Education, I ask him to bear in mind that the ratio in his office might be 1:10. In many classrooms, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the ration is 1:25 or 30, or sometimes even higher. With cuts in funding many teachers have begun to buy their own materials for use in the classroom. We're not talking about a special kind of paper or a felt marker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're talking about books, and videos, and those things that a teacher thinks are important learning aids.

We would also like to point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in February of this year the Minister of Education sent a letter to school divisions across the province urging them not to sign on with the Youth News Network. The Youth News Network, or YNN, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a highly controversial network based out of eastern Canada that provides monitors, computers, lab equipment, and other necessary items to those schools that agree to broadcast their commercially sponsored, youth-oriented news programs.

Well the issue for us, Mr. Speaker, is not so much the issue of exposing students to commercial content during school time, a total of two and a half minutes, Mr. Speaker, which when you compare that to what the average student might watch at home seems not all that high a number. No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue for us is if there is no money for capital purchases, and if there is no money for special programs, and if there is no indication that any money will be available in the future, what choices do schools have?

It should come as no surprise that seven schools in the province have already signed up with YNN, and we can only imagine that there will be more to come. It concerns us to hear the Minister of Education say that if school boards aren't happy with their current fiscal situation, that they should just simply raise the mill rate.

That's very easy for him to say, Mr. Speaker. He should remember that he too is being funded by taxpayers' dollars. In fact there are two ministers of Education being funded by taxpayers' dollars. One of them is K to 12, and the other of course is post-secondary.

Mr. Speaker, in addressing the section dealing with setting up separate school divisions based on minority faith, I would like to point out that we recognize and respect that many religions are practised within the province. Those residents practising in the Catholic or Protestant religion are recognized as being a minority faith. Current legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allows residents of a minority faith to set up a separate school division. However, this is based on old boundaries as set out a number of decades ago.

The proposed amendments will change the boundaries that currently exist to reflect a more modern approach. Although given the hon. members opposite latest project — and I use that term very loosely, Mr. Speaker — regarding setting boundaries in rural areas; we are obviously less than optimistic about what might happen to school division boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, we would ask that any changes to boundaries should be voluntary and should have the complete agreement of the communities affected. Again, not something that the members opposite would know much about.

In keeping with the fact that school divisions are allowed to set their own assessment rates, we find it necessary to raise the issue again — that assessment rates, as set by current board officials, hardly go far enough to cover off funding in those districts.

School boards have been left with no choice but to keep raising the rates to maintain the education status quo. Again this Bill does not address the issue of the lack of funding for education, Mr. Speaker. Whether it be a separate school or a public school, and to meet education demands, the assessment rate will no doubt be ever increasing.

There is also a section that deals with providing education for students with disabilities. It is widely recognized that today's practices see individualized programs and integration into regular classroom settings for students with disabilities. Mr. Speaker, our major concern here is that the teacher-student ratio is very high, no matter how the student numbers break down.

While student aides are available for those teachers with special needs students, the fact remains that teachers today are very worried about providing a solid, quality level of education for all students in their classroom.

Again, this Bill does not address the high teacher-student ratio, Mr. Speaker.

The final section that I'd like to discuss is the section dealing with school division tendering. The old amounts have been replaced with new figures. And that should reflect a more modern and workable set of numbers. In the past, the amounts allowed before tendering was to be done was so low that schools found themselves tendering on everything no matter how small the transaction.

We're concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that tendering in rural areas may not necessarily be the best way to do things. Mr. Speaker, in order for the rural communities to survive, local labour markets must be utilized.

We are told that school divisions would have preferred that the tendering numbers be even higher than what is set out in this Bill. This would allow for greater flexibility. In fact, the school divisions would have preferred that the same numbers used in interprovincial trade agreement be the same numbers used in the local tendering process.

This would simplify things greatly for the school divisions, Mr. Speaker. School divisions would only have one process to work within, and as I just mentioned it would allow for greater flexibility when it came to capital purchases and the tendering process.

As everyone knows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the tendering process does not allow for a lot of leeway. School divisions know best how to handle their own local decisions, especially when that comes to major purchases or capital projects. They have their own local base of suppliers, and they have their own local base of contractors. And I say again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rural areas need to access and utilize their own labour market to survive.

With all this being said, school divisions are still held accountable for all their expenditures. They must answer to their taxpayers, the local people who fund the education in that area.

Mr. Speaker, we are concerned that there remain some issues in this Bill that need to be addressed further, and to that end we ask that we be allowed to adjourn debate. And I do that very thing — I adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

(1545)

Bill No. 6

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 6 — The Mentally Disordered Persons Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to stand today to speak to the Act to amend The Mentally Disordered Persons Act. I have . . . we have had a number of calls to the office regarding this Act, and actually a number of people who are asking what the changes will actually mean. So I'm going to run through the changes in the Act before we give our ideas on it to date.

This Act is talking about the most vulnerable people in our society, and the proposed changes upon amending the Act state that upon appeal the Court of Queen's Bench can ask the individual in question to submit to a medical or psychiatric exam. The court will then make a decision as to the person's competency, and the certificate will remain in effect or can be revoked.

The Court of Queen's Bench decision can be appealed to the Court of Appeal but only if they have permission from a judge to do so. The appeal can be made by the individual in question,

his or her nearest relative, a public trustee, a chief psychiatrist involved, or any other person the court directs. The Court of Appeal must be convinced of the merit in proceeding with the appeal, and the amendment also gives immunity from liability to the review panel, and this was previously not provided for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we're talking about people with mental disorders, it is definitely the most vulnerable people in society we're talking about. And when we approach and amend the Act dealing with them, we have to be very careful that all aspects are covered.

Certainly it is important we take care of those who cannot take care of themselves, and at the same time we must recognize and respect the rights of all individuals.

If someone has been declared competent by either a psychiatrist or a judge, we have to question: why wouldn't that decision be binding? How many times do we have to go back to find out if this is actually the right decision or not?

Instead, with proposed legislation to amend the Act, that decision can be appealed to the Court of Queen's Bench, either by a psychiatrist, a family member, or another individual who may be involved. It seems like almost anyone could appeal that decision. Then a medical or psychiatric exam, or both, can be ordered. The individual must submit to those exams as ordered and it would seem that the individual in question doesn't really have any choice in the matter.

Again we have to ask: are their rights being recognized and respected? Based on the decision of the Court of Queen's Bench, competency or incompetency will then be declared.

And if someone doesn't agree with that decision it can be appealed to the Court of Appeal. And we have to ask how far these cases will be taken? And who really loses in these situations? The individual, the family and more importantly, society as a whole.

We acknowledge that there may be cases of financial abuse going on at all times. But we're wondering about the true extent of this type of abuse and how wide-spread it is and how much evidence there is that this is prevalent?

Expediency seems to be the major concern with everything these days. With the ability to appeal a decision on an individual's competency more than once, how long will the cases go on. Can it take months? Can it take years? If a case is before the courts and if there really is financial abuse occurring, does this really address the problem of stopping the abuse from happening further.

Mr. Speaker, today we saw the government change their mind on the closure of the three court houses in Saskatchewan. They did recognize that there was definitely not going to be a . . . it was definitely not going to be to the benefit of the people of this province to have these court houses closed. They would . . . We knew that the court lists in this province are larger, the waiting lists are extremely long, and when we have court houses closed it's definitely not going to help the caseloads and the court houses.

And we have to worry about the individuals too. They already have to do a tremendous amount of travelling to get to the court houses, especially in rural Saskatchewan. We look at added expenses, we look at the travel, the lodging, and the food it takes before they can get to the court houses. And we have to remember that the needs of the people are the most important. We have to keep their needs in mind at all times. They are the ones that are most affected.

And given the current state of our health care system, we have to ask how easy it will be to get a medical or psychiatric examination. The waiting lists for all examinations and surgeries and health care needs is extremely long. And when we have people waiting to have an examination done before they can go ahead to the court, it's definitely going to create a problem. People will have to wait weeks or even months.

And again what if these individuals, and his or her family, has to travel and stay somewhere else and eat out at restaurants? Who's going to cover those expenses? And again we are afraid that this is going to do nothing more than drag out the whole process.

We have to remember, Mr. Speaker, that these cases use taxpayers' dollars. And every day in this House we talk about taxpayers' dollars and wonder if we're spending them wisely. And we have to be prudent as to how these dollars are being spent. And this legislation will add some more burden to our already overburdened court system.

The people that were consulted in this Bill were the chief psychiatrists, the official representatives and chairs of the review panels from all eight mental health regions. The regional directors for mental health were also consulted.

And I know that anyone that works within the health system recognizes that the money spent on mental health in this province is not very much. We forget to remember that mental health has a lot to do with people's physical health as well, and we have to recognize that these dollars have to be spent wisely.

This Bill also takes care of the liability and immunity clause in all cases. But we have to ask what about the law society. We have to ask if their input was sought for this Bill. It's quite possible that they would have some interesting facts and ideas and suggestions as to how efficient this Bill is going to be. They are the ones who actually know the court system and they would know how best to handle these types of cases.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that any one of them would be able to speak at length about the amount of time these cases will take and how long they're going to hold up the court system. They'd be able to speak about the cost to the individuals and to their families. And they would be able to speak about the toll on the court case it takes on . . . the toll it takes on everyone's mental, physical, and financial health.

Were people who've gone through this type of situation actually consulted? Have they been talked to? And was their input considered? Perhaps the family of the individuals who have gone through this might have some interesting facts to point out. And I believe that we should be looking at their suggestions and ideas and be ready to look at their ideas and the

input when we address this legislation. After all, it is the people that these Bills will be affecting the most and it is the people we represent.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at all the questions that we have regarding this Bill and the impact it's going to have on the people that it's supposed to be protecting, we ask that this Bill be adjourned and the debate be adjourned on this Bill. Thank you very much.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Health Vote 32

The Deputy Chair: — I'd like to ask the minister if she'd . . . wishes to introduce her officials.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. With the associate minister and myself today are the deputy minister, Glenda Yeates; the associate deputy minister, Steven Pillar; the assistant deputy minister, Carol Klassen; assistant deputy minister, Marlene Smadu; executive director of finance and management services, Rod Wiley; and the executive director of corporate information and technology, Neil Gardner.

As well we have other officials at the back. So we're prepared for you.

Subvote (HE01)

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair of Committees, Deputy Chair of Committees, and certainly minister and associate minister and all your officials. Welcome this afternoon.

As you are all collectively and individually aware, the whole area of health care and the delivery of health care in the province is a very massive undertaking. And I can appreciate where you need a good number of officials to be here for these estimates and to be able to be knowledgeable on the various components of the health care program and budget.

I intend today to focus on one item and, for the record, I intend to in the course of these estimates focus on one item rather than bouncing all over the place. And I will endeavour, if possible, to give the ministers and your department as much lead time as is available in terms of what that direction is.

I think you can appreciate though, today I only knew that Health was coming up at the last minute, and there were other programs. So as much as possible I certainly will endeavour to give you some lead time in terms of the focus at least that I endeavour to be on.

Madam Minister and Assembly, of course the whole challenge that we all face as politicians and as officials and professionals working in the health care system is to try on an ongoing basis to improve the system and make the delivery of health care both effective and efficient as possible, but also timely and of a

nature that the people of this province can indeed rely on it in a timely way.

And I think that certainly as a general rule since we're starting this — and as the minister would know, I'm the new critic in the health area, as and compared to the tasks that I had in the past — but I would endeavour to take some of the general direction that I had in the past. And certainly in my past life as critic of Finance and Economic Development particularly, I did ask questions that were not only for my edification, but also for the people that are interested in the process and interested in what the responses are. So I think there's an importance in not only informing this Assembly and this House, but also people that are watching it.

And so for the record I do appreciate the fact that the associate minister offered the opportunity for me to be briefed about SHIN. But I really do believe that this is a more appropriate forum, if you like, to have that information shared not only with myself and the official opposition but also other members of the Assembly and the people that are watching or are interested in information that they might pick up through the Internet or other sources of information.

So with that general comment, Mr. Chair, and, Madam Minister, I would ask you to, if you would, is to give an overview of the SHIN project in a general sense as to what its background was, what progress has been made to date in a very general sense — we'll work on some specifics as the hour progresses — and also what your vision is and direction and commitment that you see your government's direction for the SHIN project.

(1600)

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. SHIN was established in 1997 and the objective at that point was to develop an information system for the province's health system. And SHIN to this date has developed a basic infrastructure. We started off — and like I said before to the member opposite that I was on the original board of SHIN — and what we started off with was a very intense round of stakeholder consultations because we had to . . . we were starting to build something that people were not familiar with.

The health sector is the last major sector to move into the information age and it's . . . there's varying levels of competency and skill in using computers and technology. So what we had to do was start to talk to the stakeholders, and we spent a great deal of time as a SHIN entity talking to stakeholders in that first year in '97-98.

And from there one of the key things that people told us was, their interest was in confidentiality and privacy protection. So from that The Health Information Protection Act developed and was passed in this House last session.

The SHIN entity itself has developed a basic infrastructure very slowly as we looked at what we could do for \$40 million. We wanted to make sure that we built what we could actually use and that would stay here no matter what we did in the future — that we'd still be able to use this and we would get good value for our money.

To date we have the infrastructure in place; we have a help desk for all the districts can use. We assisted the districts in Y2K preparation so that what they bought was compatible with the whole provincial infrastructure of information technology, and have since then added to the basic infrastructure, added projects as they came.

The interest was there as the ability to do it was there, and those projects have been added on as bricks to a house. We have the basement, we have the infrastructure which will always be in place; and we have then built the projects on top of the infrastructure, which is why we have been successful in comparison to our neighbouring province and why other provinces and ourselves are working in a collaborative way to share our resources and the things we've learned. Because we have been successful in getting good value for our money.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I'd like to focus on some of the comments that you have made in your answer.

You said initially there was a great deal of consultative work that was done with stakeholders across the province. Was that done in light of reviewing what the existing manual or paper system, if you like — I don't know what the right technological word is — I mean a non-electronic system, if you like.

For example, I understand that the college of physicians and surgeons has a program in place where there's checks and balances for duplicate prescriptions on narcotics or things of that nature, so it's a double or triplicate system that is in force to try to, you know, make sure there isn't double prescribing and double utilization.

So was that consultation process first of all then to identify what was happening right now, and then to identify what opportunities there were for the electronic system?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The original consultation was with a broad, broad group of stakeholders. And basically there was a great deal of concern among the stakeholder groups that, what were we going to do, like what were we going to do with the money, how we were going to bring it into place in their workplaces.

The biggest concern that came out of the workshop, the two-day workshop that was held, was the privacy issue and how we were going to . . . So people weren't actually concerned about so much what was in place — although that came out loud and clear, that what we had now was not secure, our paper system, that what we had now was not efficient for an integrated system — but people wanted to be reassured that what we were going to do would be cost-effective, that would benefit the system as well as them as stakeholders and workers, and that we would actually be able to see results that would put the system in a better situation.

The consultations about different projects as they come up now, that consultation is almost continuous; groups know about SHIN and they know the ability to add on to the project . . . or add projects on to the infrastructure. So the doctors with the triplicate prescription thing have come forward and said, we could use something, can we get in, can you help us.

The CAT (computerized axial tomography) scanner, transferring images on that technology now — the districts, they want that. So wherever we've got a CAT scanner that we need to have that technology, we can hook that up for them.

So people are constantly being consulted and are constantly coming forward and saying, could we do this, can you send somebody out and we'll talk to them about this. Prince Albert, with their maternal child program and other districts that have come forward with different things that they want to see piloted, it's starting to now . . . you can now see the building that's going to happen. It's quite exciting now.

In the beginning it was very complex. It was very difficult to see what you were doing, like to actually hold the project in your hand, to go out and see a site. But that infrastructure is now in place and now you can start to see actually the projects that can be demonstrated to be of extreme value.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. You mentioned that one of the issues that were raised as a great concern at the initial time was the issue of confidentiality and privacy. And I believe it was in the last session there was the legislation passed, the confidential and protection Act or patients' protection Act. Has that Bill been proclaimed?

I understand that there had been some issues raised around it in regard to law enforcement and some of those issues, about a need in some instances for certain agencies to actually have access to files other than a strictly medical communities' requirement. Can you update us on where that whole process is?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The Health Information Protection Act which was passed last year has not been proclaimed as yet. We're still developing the regulations. The issue about the media and access of police is not the biggest issue that we're dealing with; but there are some regulations that are still being developed and we'll be bringing that forward as soon as possible — the proclamation.

Mr. Gantefer: — Can you share with us what the issues are? I mean I think there were concerns about, you know, who has access to the system; you know, what is the security system that would be in place on the electronic system. I know there are great advances in encryption technology and things of that nature that are occurring. In terms of the actual electronic transfer, I don't think is much of an issue. It really has to do probably with levels of passwording, who has access to those passwords, what level of protection and access does each level of passwording occur?

Would you brief us on what are the other issues and the access of media and the legal community that you're dealing with and trying to cope with under these regulations?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you. Some of the issues . . . there's some issues around prescription drug, access to . . . it's basically access to the information. The Act was put in place with some pretty clear indication of who collects the information and then who has access to it. But the details of how that works through a whole health system are pretty complex. So that is what's being dealt with now.

But the encryption is very important, so that is what we're focusing on — the security of the information, including encrypted and secure e-mail, as well as audit trails. So people who are on . . . who access the system — we have a check to see who's been in there and you can follow back and find out if that person was actually authorized to do so. And then there are penalties to follow.

But the basic, the answer to your question about what's taking the time with the regulations is the complexity of the system and how to apply the Act through all of the system.

Mr. Gantefer: — Madam Minister, I appreciate that and it undoubtedly is fairly complex. Do you have a timeline when you believe you will have the regulations in place and consequently will be able to proclaim the legislation?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — We anticipate having the regulations ready, the draft regulations ready by the summer of this year, and then the draft regulations will go out to the stakeholders for consultation, so we could come back next spring with the proclamation from the regulations.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Minister. Going back to a bit of the network itself and its current status you said that — I believe you said and I was trying to take notes — but you indicated that the districts were at some level of . . . on the network or is there just local notes set up or are you building the basic technological framework for the districts?

Could you go into a little more detail as to where the districts are now in regard to the whole project?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you. There's approximately . . . there's 22 districts that are connected now to the system, and as the districts come forward with different programs that they want to have, we will build those connections for them. For example, Prince Albert within their maternal child one. They came forward with that so they now come into the system.

So it's basically building blocks of programs, but the infrastructure is there so that we have the capacity to put every district on that has something that they want to add to the system or be connected to the system in any way.

And so we've got the college of physicians and surgeons on, we've got pharmacies on, and those basic connections in the districts.

Mr. Gantefer: — Madam Minister, and I'm not a computer whiz, but I have a little bit of understanding how they work. Does each of the local districts then have a local network that would then have a number stations, etc., that would then, you know, sort of connect as a hub to the major network. And at the district level then, have you provided the direction and guidance and the criteria, like, so there's complete compatibility with the hardware and software that they're buying. I would like to understand what's in the system a little clearer.

(1615)

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Basically what we do have in place is standards so that each district is able to connect into the

network, and then we assist them to do that when they're ready, when they have a program ready.

I don't know if that answers your question exactly. But they don't all, like, they don't all have the same capacity. They don't all have the same technology yet, but as they get it we supply the expertise and the help.

We have a provincial help desk so that they can come and test programs out in an area where they don't have to put it into their system first. They can bring it into the help desk, try it out, see if there's any problems, run it, and then take it back and put it in place and get it going up in their district.

Mr. Gantefoer: — So the SHIN's budget doesn't include the capital cost of providing hardware at the local district level, as an example, that allows the district then to access the network. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Basically what we're doing, the districts purchase their own computers but we supply the infrastructure and we help them connect. But they actually buy their own stations and computers; we don't buy those usually.

Mr. Gantefoer: — By the infrastructure, Madam Minister, do you mean the software, the cable connections, or those sorts of things — is that what you mean? So that there is the ability to dial into the network?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Basically we're getting into computer language now. So what we've got are the big computers, the big databases, the servers, what they call the integration engines. This is something that we supply centrally and then they are able to connect in so that they can actually . . . everything can flow through.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Are the districts then . . . well at this stage I understand they're not connected. But the protocols, if you like, are established, and things of that nature. So that when they do connect or want to connect, that the standards and protocols and all the rest of it are in place.

Is this work I'm sure being done in conjunction with SaskTel and are you looking at standard Internet or high speed access, or are you looking at cable or fibre optic? What are the criteria or the general things that you're looking at, how sophisticated?

I guess what I'm getting at, for a district, are you working in conjunction with SaskTel for an example. Because in my community, for example, there isn't a general provision of high speed Internet yet. Is that the kind of provision we need that works hand and glove with this system as these protocols are developed?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Basically SaskTel has been a partner since the beginning of SHIN. And that's exactly what they are supplying, is the fibre optics. And as the technology changes, then we need to develop new things. And that's what we'll be doing with our partners.

Mr. Gantefoer: — So is the protocol set up that it requires, for example high speed Internet? And my concern is, like where are the general level of protocol levels or system levels? And does

SaskTel have to do a fair bit of work in order to meet the standards required for districts, in rural areas particularly, to access the system appropriately.

Hon. Ms. Junor: — In the districts that have the Internet access, we're using that of course. And otherwise, we're using . . . the system is using the 56 kilobit lines, kilobit lines — yes, exactly.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Madam Minister, we'll get into the breakdown of the budget a bit later, but I understand that there was a contract that was undertaken to quarterback, or to spearhead or project management on this, if you like, by Science Applications International Corporation. And that this was a three-year contract and it is due to expire fairly shortly. Can you confirm that that general understanding is correct?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The contract with SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation) is up this year; it was a three-year contract. And we're in discussions with them now, where we go from here.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you tell us what the basic tenets of the contract were, and for what dollar figure it was for the three years?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The basic contract for SAIC, which is administered by the SHIN board, it was for \$38 million. And that \$38 million flows through SAIC as the lead contractor, and they subcontract the work also to other partners. So the money, the 38 million, is what SAIC is using to build the network, to build the programs, etc.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Madam Minister, I believe the information in general terms is, by the end of this fiscal year the commitment to SHIN is something around \$40 million. Is that correct? And of that \$40 million, if I understand what you're saying, \$38 million is to the general contractor. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The \$38 million was to actually build SHIN. So at the direction of the board, SAIC is the partner that is the lead contractor to build what we had given to them, what our vision was. And so they subcontracted to other groups, like SaskTel, and the money, the 38 million which hasn't all been disbursed, flows through SAIC to fulfill those obligations.

Mr. Gantefoer: — So as I understand it, there's detailed statements of work that are required in order for this contract . . . And I won't use the acronym if you don't mind; I get crazy with some of these things. But the statements of work are then the breakdown . . . or the individual total of all the statements of work, is that going to add up to the \$38 million? Or is there general provisions over and above what the detailed statements of work are?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Basically the statements of work are what the board saw that how SAIC was moving the project forward. It divided up the project into pieces that the board could actually look at and say this is what we were getting; this is where we were going. And that's how I understood it even as a board member.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Gantefoer: — Well that's getting closer. What I wanted to know is that you've indicated the total contract to SAIC is \$38 million, and you've indicated as well or acknowledged that some component of that \$38 million would be the statements of work.

Now what I'm getting at, can you table for us what the statements of work are and how much individually were each of them, and will they total \$38 million? Or is there a contingency or an umbrella amount over and above that, over and above the statement of work total to get to the \$38 million?

What I'm looking for is like a statement of expenses and detail of where you've spent the money.

Hon. Ms. Junor: — We will get the breakdown of the \$38 million for you.

Mr. Gantefoer: — And will that include . . . that will include then the subcontracts for example with SaskTel. And could you include some description about what service was provided? If for example there was a contract with SaskTel for X number of dollars, for what services did SaskTel actually provide services in order to qualify for that? And if that was under the statements of work or outside of them, I'd really much appreciate that breakdown.

My understanding is that the contract is going to expire in June of this year, which is not all that far off. Can you update us in terms of is there going to be a continuity to the project. Or are you discussing with other deliverers of services to potentially be the people that will be in the subsequent contract? Or where are we at on the contract?

(1630)

Hon. Ms. Junor: — I think given that we're in discussions with SAIC, I don't want to prejudice our negotiations with what we're going to be doing.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Okay. Madam Minister, I guess where I was heading on that is, given that you're going to give us this information on the details of the \$38 million that you've spent, where would you rate the completion of this project? Is it a quarter done; a half done? Do you envisage that?

In order to get it fully meeting the expectation that you and the stakeholders set out and that SHIN describes as where they want to go as a fully integrated and electronic system of information sharing, how much money do you see is going to be required in order to get this project meeting those expectations?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — It's difficult to estimate what a system like this would cost at the end, and we don't know where the end is either, since technology changes so rapidly. What we're trying to do is build it incrementally so that we get what we need now, and we have a basic system that we can continue to add onto as technology advances, and as our needs demonstrate, and as our stakeholders ask, and as our finances allow.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Madam Minister, certainly, you know, we've talked about in question period that a province to the

east, Manitoba, and many other provinces — and I believe states in the United States and various jurisdictions — are proceeding along similar broad direction, if you like, as what we are with SHIN.

And as you are aware undoubtedly, that really it sounds like they're pulling the plug on the whole project in Manitoba, or indeed have done. Or they're not sure maybe what's going on here, but the information that we received is that they did an audit of the system and had some grave concerns about the cost-effectiveness and how the money was spent. And certainly that's where we want to see, is where the \$38 million has been spent, and have some expectation for how much is going to be spent.

These kinds of electronic networks can become real black holes of expenditures. And in light of the fact that a neighbouring jurisdiction is expressing grave concern about what has happened in their jurisdiction, what I'm concerned about is what are the checks and balances that you're putting into place to make sure we don't get into the same situation?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — I think that's why you're seeing this system being built so slowly. That if we quit now, we'd still have what we have to date. We would still have the infrastructure. We'd still have the programs that are on already. We'd still be able to say, here's what we spent our money on and here's the value we got for it.

The Provincial Auditor has audited SHIN and has approved the financial statements. So we do have value for our money. And we've done it very carefully and very slowly because of just the problems that our neighbouring province had. That we saw . . . I mean you could spend a fair amount of money on technology but not knowing what you actually need, and in doing it this slowly, where you're going to go with it. You can end up in problems like we have seen.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Well, Madam Minister, without having the information that you've undertaken to give me in terms of how the \$38 million has been spent, it's difficult to give an assessment if we've gotten good value or not. But in a general sort of sense, I . . . You know from what you've described of the system there isn't a whole lot really in place. A lot of it sounds as if it's research, it was discussion, it was that sort of information. And you know I think that we'll want to have a good look at those sorts of things because value is a very relative thing. I mean \$38 million is a lot of money, and I'm concerned about where we're going.

Madam Minister, where does your government see the long-term direction of SHIN in terms of . . . is this . . . Like are you committed to it? Is this an important thing for the health care system in Saskatchewan? Is this something that is one of the important building blocks of building a better health care system in the province?

I would like to give you an opportunity to really sort of share where your government is going in this whole SHIN project.

Hon. Ms. Junor: — You asked sort of two questions, so I'm going to do the first one — the one about the money — so that'll give you some example of what's been spent where. And

some of this is going to be the names of the projects. So like Care Vision Electronic Health Record, we've got 300 licences at a cost . . . for the configuration of the software for \$3 million.

The network design including the deployment of network services for our pilot project in the southwest, which is connecting the physicians, health district offices in six communities and the scheduling in office software is 1 million.

Network infrastructure, architecture security design and interface engine and encryption is \$3 million. The test lab production data centre and support centre is \$3 million.

A cost for the projects implemented to date include staff training and deployment of 34 work stations serving 120 health providers, physicians, and district health staff in the southwest for \$2 million.

Physician registry, drug network, e-mail, and triplicate drug system deployment is \$2 million. Year 2000 support and advice to districts, 1 million; operation of the network and central infrastructure, \$3 million. And the list goes on and on.

And the second question about commitment to the system, or to information technology, the health system, as I've said, is probably the last system — the last major sector — to become involved in information technology. As a health system you can't function without good information. We need to make evidence-based decisions to where to spend our money, the best value for our money; we need to talk about admission discharge systems and transfer systems.

We're talking about an integrated system with . . . if you're going to talk about an integrated system, you've got to have an information system in place to do that. So SHIN is not just a stand-alone project that is a frill on the edge of the health system; it is integral to where the health system is going.

The information technology is absolutely crucial to having a system integrated properly that will work properly. And the flow through of people and information will give us the best decisions that we make and for deployment of staff, services, resources, all those things. We need that information.

So it is a strong commitment to an information system.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. And I'm hoping in your commitment to give me this information that you'll put some detail to it. I'm sort of looking at how the thing was broken down and those sorts of things.

A further question. In some of these . . . in the statements that are released at the end of the year or whatever, there it actually shows that contracts that are awarded; anybody in the province that receives a contract over X number of dollars is listed.

That's the kind of detail I guess I'm looking for. You know, the same standards of public disclosure as there would be under those sort of terms. I'm not looking for anything that's confidential or sensitive beyond that, but basically to the same criteria of detail because I think it's important.

Madam Minister, I appreciate your comments about where you

see this system. And from what I hear you saying, I really detect that you're saying it's the underpinning of how the system is going to work together really. It is the vehicle or the tool that's going to allow for integration into the system of communication and sharing of information.

What do you say to the detractors that are out there that are saying that not only is the total commitment unnecessary — and it may grow to twice or more total dollar cost than what we have right now — but there are those out there that will say that the \$38 million is really wasted, that the system wasn't broke, and the \$38 million could have been spent much more appropriately. How do you answer those critics?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — I think basically much of that is included in the answers that I've given before about how the system will work and how necessary it is to have it work that way.

When we look at admission discharge transfer, you need to have an integrated system in a district, and in a province even, for some of the specialized services that are maybe particular only to Regina and Saskatoon.

And for an emergency response system you need to have good, solid information and good, solid technology to hook you up. And I think that people that . . . the stakeholders certainly now know that there is value to this. The SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association), the college of physicians and surgeons — they are very keen on having more of this done. The districts are quite keen on doing it. There's opportunities for now hand-held computers for health providers. So you can see the benefit of this in home care and in long-term care.

There are some things that are coming, you know, that are quite exciting for talking about the amount of work and the time spent doing charting or unnecessary paperwork that people are trapped in.

So I think that basically people that would look at the system may see that it's extremely complex to try and put an information technology system in place. And what we've done with our \$40 million, or what we've done with what we've spent so far, is to build the infrastructure which is hard to tell people that here's a good thing you have because you can't see it.

Now that the projects that are coming on stream people are seeing those; the stakeholders are seeing them; and people will see them more as clients or users of the system when they start seeing, say, the CAT scans being transmitted between Saskatoon and Prince Albert and that you don't have to come back to Saskatoon from Prince Albert and have another one done.

These are the sort of things you'll see once people start . . . as clients start using the system. And providers are seeing already the benefits to the system, and districts that are seeing in how they can plan and better integrate their services.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. I believe that the estimated amount in last year's budget provided for SHIN was \$10 million. That's been reduced to 5.4 this year. Is that just the normal cycle or is that an indication of a decreasing

commitment to SHIN?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The 5.4 meets our basic commitment of \$40 million. And as we said, we're negotiating the contract again and we're talking to our partner. So that doesn't indicate anything except that we've met our commitment.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. As I understand it, the pharmacy system has their own or a network that they can call up and access central registry of drugs and things of that nature. Is that system currently on line with SHIN, or is it going to be integrated into SHIN at some point in the future?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The pharmacy system now is running on the SHIN network. When we went with the Y2K (Year 2000) overview of the province, we've now . . . the pharmacies are now on, and when the Y2K work was done, they're now compatible with SHIN and they're on the SHIN network.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Minister. Does this include then a registry of clients that are receiving prescriptions and a registry of their history? Or what level of detail is there now in this whole system in regard to individual clients that are accessing the drug plan?

(1645)

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The system the pharmacies connect to now is the same system that was before only it's now through SHIN. It's now on the SHIN network. So it's faster, it's cheaper, it can access different things like the *Formulary* now. That's what has helped.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Okay, so what it really is, is an upgrade of their existing system in terms of better network, and so that allows it working a little more effectively and efficiently.

Where is the project then to actually start? And I recognize that there are outstanding issues of patient confidentiality and those sorts of things. When will the system be integrated in terms of when the pharmacist calls up the fact that I need a prescription of some sort, that then shows what my history is, and it's interconnected to the health districts, if they like, so that this duplication isn't in place?

Is that one of the statements of work that are ongoing, or is that envisaged, or is that all part of these further negotiations that you're undertaking?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Currently the system does not allow pharmacists to get very much information that . . . like the confidentiality issues. They don't get access to a lot more information. There is the possibility of that but that would be a policy decision of how much we actually allow pharmacists to access. Right now there is the ability to flag that if you've had the same prescription within the last three days, that will show up.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Would that deal with the issues that the college of physicians and surgeons were concerned about in terms of the double or triple . . . you know, not billing but prescribing and receiving potentially dangerous or controlled substances?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The triplicate program you're talking about to deal with narcotics is a separate program that the college of physicians and SHIN have worked on so that they can flag the use of narcotics.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Okay, thank you, Minister. While I've heard you say that the patient information is not available to pharmacists, and it's a policy decision that may be made in the future, is the information on the network now or does that need to be put onto the network yet?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — All the drug information for a person is on the central . . . is in the central drug data bank. But it's not accessible by the pharmacist.

Mr. Gantefoer: — So there is, in essence, a database of individual citizens of the province and their basic medical profiles or in regard to their drug usage or prescription usage? Okay. And you don't need to answer because I hear . . . see enough heads bobbing in the affirmative to accept that as an answer.

We're certainly not going to be able to complete this. And I look forward to the information you're going to get, but I'm just a little bit concerned about where you're going to go in light of the decision that was made in Manitoba.

My information indicates that Deloitte & Touche recommended that the program be dropped, and that the Doer government has indicated that they are now contracting to have the system wound down after the expenditure of 30 to \$35 million.

Is there discussions in terms of where this is heading? Is there discussions between Manitoba and Saskatchewan for them to access or to get some information? You seem to be very, very confident and proud of the stability of our system.

Are you thinking of sort of selling it or having people access it or . . . It strikes me that there's quite a difference from one province to the next, where one government — a new NDP government that is criticizing a former Conservative government's work — is bailing out of the program and you seem to be going ahead very confidently with it. Would you care to comment?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — The bottom line in the study in Manitoba I understand is that they should not give up on information technology, but they need to do something different. So we're involved in the Western health information collaboration that has the . . . for Western provinces. And we are sharing our information with our neighbouring provinces.

And we are proud of what we have done. And they are looking to us to see how come we are successful with what we've done.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. It says that the *Winnipeg Sun* reports that in November, health . . . SmartHealth — which I guess is their acronym for their SHIN — was being scrapped by the Doer government, and the Health minister is in negotiations with a firm to wind down operations.

It sounds like they're shutting the thing down, where you sort of seem to indicate that that isn't so. But this seems to be very

specific. And indeed the project seems as if it is, is indeed going to be completely shut down. I'm sorry but it seems as if this information which came from the *Winnipeg Sun* would, I would expect, be accurate.

Hon. Ms. Junor: — I can't speak for Manitoba, but I know they're interested. And I mean, as I've said, we cannot function as a system moving into the 21st century . . . or in the 21st century, we cannot function without information and information technology. So they have probably reached a point where their system is not doing what it was expected to do, and now have to rethink what they're going to do.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Madam Minister, it seems to me from this information that Deloitte and Touche were commissioned to do an assessment if indeed the project was living up to its expectations. And that may be a normal course of events when there's a change of a government, I don't know. But certainly it seems as if that when this review was done, the recommendation was that it should be scrapped.

Have you got the checks and balances in place on an ongoing basis so that you're not going to run into that kind of a problem that has happened in Manitoba? And how can their system have gone so far off the rails, and you seem to be so solidly confident that this is a good project here?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Well, like I said, I think some of my confidence comes from being involved in this from the very moment it started. So I have been on the SHIN board; I've been through the discussions about where are we going with this and how do you actually put a project in place that has such a broad vision of where you could go.

And I think that those are the things that the SHIN board discussed and came to the conclusion we have to do this very slowly. We have to have really solid value for our money — we have to be able to show where we've spent it and what we got for it. And the Provincial Auditor, as I said, has audited the SHIN corporation and has given them very good marks.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much, Madam Minister. I think we're drawing to an end today so I look forward to this detailed information that you've committed to give us. And I certainly would like to thank you and your officials for the information you shared with us this afternoon.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, I am going to ask the committee to rise and report progress, but before I do that I wanted to introduce in the west gallery a good friend of Saskatchewan farmers, the former national president of the National Farmers Union, Roy Atkinson, who is joining us here today. Welcome, Roy, to the Assembly. And with that note, I wish all members join with me in welcoming Mr. Atkinson, the father of the Minister of Health, here with us today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.