

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I rise to present a petition requesting the reduction of fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And this petition is signed by citizens of the Cypress Hills area — in Eastend, Gull Lake, Shaunavon, and Climax, Saskatchewan.

I so do present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by the good folks of Tisdale.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It won't surprise you this morning to know that I am rising on behalf of people in Swift Current who are concerned about their hospital. I'm presenting a petition on their behalf. And, Mr. Speaker, the prayer calls on the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current hospital.

It is signed by people in Swift Current; people from Pennant, Neville, and Wymark.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present petitions too on behalf of citizens from Saskatchewan regarding the fuel tax — reducing the fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. The prayer reads as follows:

Whereas your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

And this petition is signed by the people from the Sifton area.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition to reduce fuel tax.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

Petitioners are from Davidson, Bladworth area. I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to bring forth a petition regarding the reduction of fuel tax.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And as is duty bound, your petitioners will humbly pray.

I have petitioners signed from Southey and Cupar. I so present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about enforced municipal amalgamation. 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.

And this petition is signed by individuals from Moose Jaw, Pense, and Belle Plaine.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital;

To reduce fuel taxes;

To abandon plans to confiscate municipal reserve accounts.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the rest of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce

the grade 2 class from St. Dominic Savio School with their teacher accompanying them, Ms. Dionne. I hope you enjoy the proceedings today.

A special introduction to my son, Craig, who is sitting in the gallery, in the Speaker's gallery. A bit of a show-off maybe, like some people say his dad is. I'm not sure.

But anyway it gives me great pleasure and I would like the rest of the Assembly to welcome this grade 2 class from St. Dominic Savio.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to welcome the group from St. Dominic Savio School in the constituency of Regina Wascana Plains.

As is mentioned, there are 23 grade 2 students in the gallery accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Marge Dionne, and chaperon, Ms. Linda Geni.

We're going to be able to meet after their tour. I hope they enjoy the proceedings of the morning and I'll look forward to a visit with them later this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask all members to warmly welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly, a group of very hard-working constituency assistants sitting up in the Speaker's gallery.

They're here from our offices today to observe the proceedings of the House and to learn how procedures and Bills move through the House. I'm hoping that they appreciate just how hard each and every one of us work in this Assembly on their behalf, and I would ask that all members in the House welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce today somebody who is joining us in the government gallery, and that is my father. He has come down from Shellbrook. My dad, David Thomson, lives in Shellbrook. He's down accompanying his wife Pat who's at a conference of English teachers I'm told.

And so with the Sask Party constituency assistants here and my father here, it should be a very quiet day in the House.

So if you'd join with me in welcoming my dad.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House, the air cadets from the Wilkie area, Air Cadets No. 399 and there's 17 students . . . 17 cadets, sorry, and four chaperons.

And the chaperons are Terry Massett, Carol Delainey, Betty Evason, and Trent Walton. Welcome them there. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House, the other good-looking fellow up in the west gallery there, and that's Bob Ivanochko, who's . . . If all people were as interested in democracy and the democratic process as Bob Ivanochko, we would have a much better society.

So I just thank Bob for joining us today; he's been a visitor before. And ask you to help me welcome him to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to also with the member opposite welcome his dad here. His dad is from Shellbrook and I want to thank you for being here. And also for voting for me. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And to you and through you I want to introduce a couple of guests in your gallery. With us today is one of my staff members, Vicky, and she has her father visiting from Alberta. And his name is Wayne Heinemann.

So I'd like to take this minute here just to ask the Assembly to join me in welcoming Mr. Wayne Heinemann, who is visiting his daughter, Pumpkin, who works in my office. So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Plant Breeding Group Moves to in Saskatchewan

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to those who say that Saskatchewan's economy is suffering and to those who say that Saskatchewan cannot attract any new business, and that we have a lacklustre record of job creation, I offer some good news. More good news for the people of Saskatoon and for the people of Saskatchewan.

Svalof Weibull Ltd., one of the largest plant breeding and seed groups in Europe, has relocated its Canadian headquarters from Ontario to Saskatoon. So much for the supposed out-migration of all high-tech jobs.

Svalof Weibull is one of the largest plant breeding and seed groups in Europe. Svalof Weibull of Saskatoon conducts and coordinates all North American research trials, variety registrations, and registering varieties for protection under the plant breeders' rights.

This company has over 50 varieties registered in Canada and has bred some of the most successful varieties of canola, peas, and forages.

The new Saskatoon headquarters will be located at Innovation Place where numerous other high-tech projects are also located.

Mr. Speaker, this relocation speaks to the vitality of the Saskatchewan economy and to the opportunities the Saskatchewan economic climate offers.

I wish to congratulate Svalof Weibull on their new business venture here in Saskatchewan and also wish to welcome him to Saskatoon and to Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Sales Tax on Used Cars

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to inform the hon. members about an ad that appears in today's *Leader-Post*, an ad that indicates the growing level of frustration that many in the province are feeling over the government's March 29 so-called historic budget.

The ad from an independent used car company called Car Corner reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Because of the recent budget by the NDP and Liberal Government, we are forced to collect PST on vehicles we have already paid PST on. We are now forced to sell these vehicles at a loss.

Mr. Speaker, these independent car dealers have nothing to hide. They are simply stating the fact — they will lose money because of this budget. They are considering other business options because of this budget. The Saskatchewan association of independent auto dealers have two main issues, Mr. Speaker. One is the \$3,000 exemption given to unlicensed dealers. Why wasn't this amount applied to licensed dealers? Why were they not given the same exemption?

The other concern, Mr. Speaker, is that these independent car dealers have a very large inventory of cars purchased. Business decisions that would have been made on the basis that there would be no additional taxes to be paid. Now they find the inventory subject to 6 per cent increase. Some pass on to customers, some will absorb these costs — either way no one wins, Mr. Speaker.

These are good business managers making good decisions. Thanks to this government budget, these business owners are now looking to look at other options.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gail Bowen's Work Aired on TV

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, more good news for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — As everyone knows, my constituency of Regina Lakeview has the most creative talent per square metre of any in Saskatchewan. Further evidence of this fact is on the front page of today's *TV Times*, published in *The Leader-Post*

and *The StarPhoenix* and all across Canada.

The first two mysteries set in Regina by Lakeview writer, Gail Bowen, have been transformed into made-for-TV movies and will be shown on the CTV (Canadian Television Network Limited) network this Sunday evening and next Sunday evening.

The movies star Canadian actor Wendy Crewson as reluctant sleuth, Joanne Kilbourn. Members will remember her as the star of the recent *Sue Rodriguez Story*. Other well-known actors include Victor Garber from *Titanic* and Simon Callow from *Shakespeare in Love*. The films are directed by George Bloomfield, director of the TV series *Due South*. I'm told that the movies bear some small resemblance to the books but are fine TV viewing nonetheless.

Members will remember that Joanne Kilbourn has stalked the halls of our legislature, finding more than one still warm MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), or in her case, recently former MLA.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, these movies are good news for the Canadian movie industry, for Saskatchewan literature, and for Regina. We're proud to have Gail in our midst and eagerly await the next movies based on her work. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tele-Health Project in North-East Health District

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to report some more news for health services in Saskatchewan.

The North-East Health District is showcasing its new and innovative tele-health technology. Tele-health technology allows for diagnosis of patients in remote parts of Saskatchewan by specialists, and these patients can receive health services without leaving their own communities. This technology also supports continuing medical education for health services staff located in these areas.

In the North-East Health District this link will be used as a patient-to-family physician application from Cumberland House to Nipawin. Residents of Cumberland House will now be able to avoid the long trip to Nipawin to consult with family physicians. Ultimately it is planned to link Nipawin and Cumberland House with other communities such as Beauval, Ile-à-La-Crosse, La Ronge, Meadow Lake, North Battleford, Pinehouse Lake, Prince Albert, and of course Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Health, seeing the benefit of this technology, has supported this project with over \$100,000. The member from Melfort-Tisdale will be pleased to know that this tele-health project is fully complimentary and compatible with SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network), providing modern and innovative health care.

Projects like this one show the innovation and determination of this province to meet the challenges of changing health care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Winner of National Earthwise Video Contest

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a story today that I think will be of particular interest to some of the students in our gallery today because this story is about a student.

I'd like to congratulate Dawn Corbeil of Loon Lake on winning the National Earthwise Video Contest. Dawn, a 13-year-old student at the Ernie Studer School, produced a three-minute video focusing on the amount of garbage that people produce.

The Earthwise National Video Contest is both a competition and a learning experience for Canadian school students. The contest focuses on environmental concerns and encourages better understanding of today's complex relationships between society, technology, and the environment. This year's theme dealt with the importance of resource conservation — using less and leaving more.

Dawn's video was selected by judges from the government, environment, and educational communities, and even the media.

As a result of her win, Dawn will be very busy this spring attending environmental conferences. She has already attended the Global 2000 Conference in Vancouver. Then she will represent Canada at the United Nations Conference on the Environment for Children in Eastbourne, England.

And in late May Dawn also — in late May I should say — Dawn also receives a \$1,000 scholarship and a \$1,500 award for an environmental trip for her school's recreational . . . or for her school's environmental recreation club.

Congratulations to the national winner, Dawn Corbeil from Loon Lake, Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ranchers and Farmers Coming to Saskatchewan

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan. In my short time in this legislature, I have discovered one incontrovertible fact: if the opposition says something is so, then most likely the exact opposite is true.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — It's good to have them around, because you automatically take the opposite position, and you can be pretty sure you're right.

And, Mr. Speaker, a case in point — everyone is going to Alberta they say. Well I saw a story from an opposition riding, from an opposition constituency in the paper titled: "Saskatchewan: Land of Opportunity." Land of opportunity, Mr. Speaker. It talks about Alberta ranchers coming here — not the reverse.

One ranch couple says we're surprised and delighted to find

exactly what they were looking for in southwest Saskatchewan, near the town of Frontier. They're not alone.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, the article goes on to say that not all the new Saskatchewan ranchers and farmers are from Alberta. They're coming from England and Scotland. They're coming to Saskatchewan because the opportunities are great, the bureaucracy is less, and — get this, Mr. Speaker — there are fewer subsidies.

On this side of the fence where the grass is truly greener, we welcome these new contributors to the Saskatchewan economy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Amendments to The Irrigation Act, 1996

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister responsible for Sask Water.

Mr. Speaker, first the NDP (New Democratic Party) gave us no fault insurance. Now they invent the no fault potato policy. The NDP government lost millions of taxpayers' dollars on SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company). They single-handedly destroyed the potato industry, and they left hundreds of unpaid creditors who are out \$35 million.

And now, Mr. Speaker, instead of taking responsibility — what do they do? They bring in legislation to protect themselves from legal action.

Mr. Minister, why is this necessary? Why should you get immunity from legal action?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, many of these questions we'll be able to answer when we deal with the legislation in committee, but I'd be happy to respond right now as well.

The amendments that are being recommended, Mr. Speaker, deal first of all only with the functions and duties of The Irrigation Act, 1996. In 1996 when The Irrigation Act was passed . . . this legislation, I should say, is going to replace The Water Users Act, The South Saskatchewan River irrigation district Act, and The Irrigation Districts Act. And what we're attempting to do is provide uniform legislation and in the best interests of the irrigators of Saskatchewan who have been very intimately involved in development of this legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, what the minister failed to mention is that some of the SPUDCO fiasco was financed under The Irrigation Act, 1996 and that's why he's trying to cover his tracks.

This is exactly, Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with the government in injecting itself into the economy. They pass

legislation like this and they have nothing to lose. They wheel in and they blow millions of taxpayers' dollars; they destroy the potato industry; they destroy dozens of businesses and leave hundreds of creditors out millions of dollars. And then when someone decides that they have a right to take them to court to recover some of those losses, they bring in a Bill to give themselves immunity.

Mr. Minister, you're just trying to protect yourself. Why is this necessary? Why won't you take responsibility for your actions?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I need to tell the member that a similar provision under The Saskatchewan Water Corporation Act has existed since 1984 and there's nothing new under this legislation.

Also, ironically, Mr. Speaker, we included all 28 irrigation districts and 2,400 individual irrigators were involved in the consultation.

And I also want to point out to the member opposite, ironically — I don't know if he knows this or not — but several of the members who sit behind him, including the member from Arm River, Mr. Speaker, was at the meetings involved where the amendments were discussed with all of the irrigators.

So they individually had ample opportunity for input as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I say to the minister, we know you have these clauses in other pieces of legislation, but why do you have those clauses?

Mr. Minister, it shows what hypocrites the NDP are. You know, they're always talking about big business and how irresponsible they are. They're talking about how business owners operate without a conscience. But there isn't a business in Canada today that could get away with what you're trying to pull in this Bill.

If this was some private business that had wheeled into Saskatchewan and ruined the potato industry and left millions of dollars of owing, you'd be leading a charge, Minister, to take him to court. But when it's you — then you just pass a law — wash your hands of all responsibility.

Mr. Minister, how is that fair? Why do private businesses have to take responsibility for their actions, and you can walk away scot-free?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Again, Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that a similar provision exists under The Water Corporation Act that was passed in 1984.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to remember right now which government was in power in 1984. It seems to me that Mr. Devine and the party that he is associated with — and many of the members present, across the floor — were involved in passing the very legislation that he's being critical of right at this moment today.

I also want to again say that as I recollect . . . because I was at the meetings where we discussed the amendments with many of the irrigators, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the member from Arm River, as I remember, was also there and had ample opportunity for input on these amendments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, again we see the NDP refusing to take responsibility for anything. They've destroyed health care, they've destroyed the highways, they've destroyed agriculture, they're trying to destroy local government, and now after meddling in the potato industry and destroying it, they want to walk away just like nothing's happened and bring a Bill in to absolve themselves of any blame.

Mr. Minister, your meddling in the potato business hurt hundreds of people in the Lucky Lake area: farmers, business owners, people with real lives, people raising families who made the mistake of trusting your government.

Mr. Minister, how is this fair? Why do businesses have to be responsible for their actions but you don't?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, all 28 irrigation districts and the 2,400 individual irrigators from the area that the member opposite represents, many of those irrigators themselves were involved in the development of these amendments. Many of the amendments they themselves requested.

So, Mr. Speaker, how he can be critical of this defies logic from my perspective.

As well again, I remind the member that in 1984 when The Water Corporation Act was passed, similar legislation that deals with exactly what we're dealing with here under this legislation was passed at that time. There's nothing new in this legislation that doesn't already exist in The Water Corporation Act, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Children's Advocate's Report

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Social Services.

Mr. Minister, after the Child Advocate's review was released Wednesday, many questions were raised about the comments from the people who participated in the review. The comments and quotes from foster parents, children, and social workers really emphasize a great number of problems within the system and your department.

Mr. Minister, yesterday you said your officials would be investigating some of the specific allegations made in the report. The Child's Advocate says her office has already investigated these cases.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, were you or was your department

involved in investigating any of these allegations?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, just to let the public know that the report is based on a review of files from the Department of Social Services, and after that review the Children's Advocate makes a number of recommendations.

Interspersed throughout the report are a number of quotations that are attributed to individuals. Some of those quotations are statements of opinion and we can accept those, whether we agree or not, and some we do agree with. But having said that, there are also some specific quotations that raise questions about the professional conduct of individual social workers, Mr. Speaker. And bearing in mind that the advocate wants us to concentrate on the recommendations in her report, we nevertheless feel that we must find some way to resolve those specific allegations that have been made.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the people who participated in this review process did so on the condition of anonymity. They spoke from the heart in the interest of improving the foster care system in this province. But in speaking out, they raised issues of deep concern, and all of these concerns point to poor policy, mismanagement, and neglect within your department.

Mr. Minister, the first day this report came to light you didn't want to give the comments much credibility, but you've done an about-face saying investigations are underway. The lives of the children in your care and improvement of foster care system is more important than a manhunt.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, it's obvious these problems within your department are deep and disturbing and have been ongoing for years. Why are you so concerned about the individual statements when you should be concentrating on repairing the system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I want to point out to the member that we asked for this report because we have concerns about the system that we have for children in care. We wanted an independent third-party perspective on how we might improve that system.

We have the advocate's report. The report contains a number of very good, substantial recommendations that we look forward to implementing to improving the system in care.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, there are some specific quotations in the report that reflect poorly on the professional conduct of people in my department. And we would like to see an opportunity to resolve that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, there are some serious allegations suggested in the report. And your comments this afternoon aren't making people

feel very comfortable.

The Child's Advocate says they've suggested or already investigated some of the situations described. And she's very concerned about protecting the foster parents, children, and social workers who participated in the review process.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to a social worker who's worried about, and more concerned with, the fact that you are looking to punish social workers for raising the concerns than actually trying to fix the problems.

Mr. Minister, can you guarantee there will not be disciplinary action taken against the people who have spoken out in this report?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Again, Mr. Speaker, our primary concern, our primary concern as a government, as a department is with the needs of children in care. This is the reason that we asked for in independent review, Mr. Speaker, of the system that we have.

We look forward to implementing many of the recommendations that the Children's Advocate puts before us. And we look forward to doing so, Mr. Speaker, because we are convinced in doing so, we will improve the system of care for children in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, yesterday the official opposition asked if you and your Liberal colleagues support the NDP government's plan of forced municipal amalgamation. But as usual you hid under your desk and let the NDP speak for you.

So let's try again. Mr. Minister, your own Liberal Party president says you've got to stand on your own two feet. Liberal Party President, Greg Gallagher, says you should publicly — publicly — oppose the NDP plan for forced amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, do you agree with your party president, do you support the NDP government's forced amalgamation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — First I want to say to the member opposite, that on this side of the House — on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker — we've always talked about a coordinated approach, a co-operative approach, when working with municipalities to reach a resolution on municipal reform in this province.

But I'm extremely interested in the member opposites quoting of Mr. Greg Gallagher, because Mr. Greg Gallagher is the Liberal president for the riding in the province. And Mr. Greg Gallagher had a number of discussions with the member opposite, when he said to the member opposite, you know what,

you shouldn't force amalgamation of the two parties. And at that time the member opposite was a member of the Liberal Party.

And Mr. Greg Gallagher says, Mr. Member, don't force amalgamation of the Saskatchewan Party — of this new Saskatchewan Party — of the Conservative, and the old Liberals. No, he didn't listen to that because, Mr. Speaker, where we see, where we see amalgamation and forced amalgamation is over there led by the king of amalgamation . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the parties over there amalgamated, they must have also stapled the Liberal leader's lips together because he can't speak for himself. Mr. Speaker, once again the Liberal leader crawls under his desk and once again he's allowing the NDP government to speak for him.

But fortunately it looks like the Liberal leader did find his tongue for the media yesterday. Mr. Speaker, according to the Liberal leader, municipal councillors can't think for themselves. He says municipal councillors are not capable of having a rational conversation about amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, how would you know? You haven't been to a single task force meeting in this province. You haven't answered a single question on amalgamation in this legislature. Would you explain why you think municipal councillors aren't capable of understanding forced amalgamation?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to just take a moment to say to the House and to the member opposite, because I'm reading with great disturbance what's happening across the province these days, Mr. Speaker, reading with great disturbance . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. Order. There's an awful lot of noise on both sides of the House and we're unable to hear. Either the questions are difficult being heard and the answers as well, so please, hon. members.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the House and to the member opposite that I hear with . . . I read with a great deal of disturbance what's happening in the province today as people travel and meet with the Garcea committee.

And I read from an article, Mr. Speaker, in the Melfort review just of a couple of days ago, and it really troubles me, Mr. Speaker, about what I hear. And here, Mr. Speaker, a number of people are saying that Mr. Garcea who leads the committee is in fact a puppet of government, is a puppet of government.

And then I hear, Mr. Speaker, the member from Carrot River standing up, Mr. Speaker, the member from Carrot River and he goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Garcea is in fact, is in fact has no ideas, that he's confrontational, that he's stubborn. And this, Mr. Speaker, comes from the party opposite because what they do, Mr. Speaker, is they go to these meetings and what they do is they attack, they attack the chairperson.

Mr. Speaker, this kind of behaviour is completely, completely intolerable . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Liberal leader, the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, the debate over forced municipal amalgamation has been going on for weeks and the minister hasn't lifted a finger to say where he stands. Well that's not right, Mr. Speaker. He did lift a finger yesterday at one point.

But according to the Liberal leader, the Saskatchewan Party and rural councillors are whipping up opposition to forced municipal amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, what rural councillors and the Saskatchewan Party MLAs are doing is representing the views of most people in Saskatchewan. If the Liberal leader would actually be bothered to attend one of the public hearings on amalgamation, he'd know that.

Mr. Minister, it's time to stop hiding. Will you come out from behind the NDP and will you clearly state where you and your Liberal Party stand on forced amalgamation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I think what we need to keep in mind here, Mr. Speaker, is that throughout the province, over the last couple of weeks, what we've seen is we've seen some leadership provided by the opposition party in riling all of rural Saskatchewan people.

In fact, the article here says . . . the article in the front page says: Opposition riling the RMs, Mr. Speaker. That's the . . . (inaudible) . . . and all over the province today is what they're doing. They're going to the individual meetings, and they're fearmongering with the business community. They're fearmongering with the individual counsellors. They're telling the communities what they're going to lose.

This is about you dividing rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan, which is what your party is synonymous and famous for — dividing and conquering people. That's what your party is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, the Saskatchewan Party didn't have to rile up SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association). You're the guy that riled them up with what you're planning to do to rural Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order please. I would ask all hon. members to please, please allow members on their feet to be heard. I thank you.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, yesterday the Education minister told *The Leader-Post* that rural councillors were incapable of understanding amalgamation. You said these rural leaders were not capable of

having a rational conversation about the NDP's plan for forced amalgamation.

I guess that's because they're opposed to your NDP government's plan. Well does that plan also apply to dozen of city businesses that are also opposed to the NDP's plan of forced amalgamation? I list some of those people: Village RV, Botkin Construction, Maxwell's Amusements, IPSCO, Brandt Industries, Wascana Greenhouses, Precision Industries.

Mr. Minister, are these city businesses also incapable of having a rational conversation about forced amalgamation? Tell us, Jim.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I watched the member ask the question, and the behaviour of the member hardly seems to be rational, in my view. And he uses the term rationality.

I would say to the House and to the member opposite, Mr. Member, this is your quote that comes out of the paper of *StarPhoenix*, April 14, Friday of April 14, 2000, this morning, where you, where you say, Mr. Member, that hysteria, hysteria doesn't happen on its own. It was a wonderful speech.

This relates to what you're doing across the province — going out to the community, whipping up the RMs (Rural Municipalities) — whipping up the RMs, telling communities and telling business that they all should be moving to Alberta. Soon I see the member putting up his Alberta flag and you'll be going with him, you'll be going with him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Nursing Shortages

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, ever since the NDP's don't ask, don't tell budget was released, we've been hearing about what a disaster your Finance minister has cooked up. The latest group to condemn your budget is the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses.

Madam Minister, it's been a year since nurses went on strike to protest your failed health reform process. But according to the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, nothing has changed — same brutal working conditions, same shortage of nurses, same disrespect from the NDP.

Madam Minister, SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) says your government has not done enough to improve working conditions, conditions for nurses. What is the holdup? Why hasn't the NDP taken action to address the brutal working conditions that are driving nurses out of the profession?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I want to say to the House is that since February, 1999, Regina has attracted over 200 nurses. But I also want to say in the city of Saskatoon, they've attracted over 100 nurses to the health district.

Mr. Speaker, we are taking steps to recruit and retain nurses. We've increased the numbers of seats in the nursing education

program from 180 to 260. And, Mr. Speaker, we could now see qualified nurses completing their degree in a three-year period.

As well, we have Lifestream which is going across the country and into North America and across the globe to attract nurses to the province. And in fact, just last week, Mr. Speaker, more nurses arrived in Regina from New Zealand.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it seems strange that we have more nurses in Regina, yet we've just closed an operating room at the Regina General because of a shortage of nurses. It doesn't sort of add up.

Mr. Speaker, another question for the Health minister. Madam Minister, according to SUN, one of the problems is that you are not telling the truth about the health budget. The head of the nurses' union says you are manipulating the health budget.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Just to remind all hon. members to choose their words judiciously with respect to members of the House. Please withdraw that.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, it was a quote from the head of the nurses' union, Rosalee Longmoore. And she told the SUN that your government is cutting health care funding.

Madam Minister, that doesn't square with your comments that health care is a major priority for the NDP. How can that be if the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses is saying your government is cutting health care?

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. The hon. member, you indicated that was a quote that you were using. You didn't indicate that as a quote initially when you read it. And . . . okay.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to, I want to answer the question on behalf of the government.

Last night I had the distinct privilege of being in Weyburn, speaking to about 200 people or so at a public function . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, probably more than 200 people. And at the time somebody pointed out to me that on October 20, 1999, in the *Weyburn Review*, under the headline, "MLA Bakken given critic duties in shadow cabinet," that the following story was written.

And I'll read it to you, sir. This is the answer of our government to the question:

One option Bakken put forward during the course of her campaign was the privatization of health services.

"I think it should be an option."

Now the hon. member from Weyburn says in her question to the Government of Saskatchewan, in effect, that her solution and her leader's solution is privatization — Alberta style, Bill 11, two-tier, private for-profit hospitals.

I tell you and the nurses union — we're for medicare.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, please. I can understand the exuberance because members are anxious to get to the home constituencies, however . . .

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government, being an open, honest and forthwith government, we would like to table the answer to question no. 127. And we're happy about doing it, Mr. Speaker — very happy about doing it.

The Speaker: — The answer is tabled.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 19 — The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to rise today in the Assembly to speak to the proposed amendments before us to The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the impending regulation of SaskTel by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, which begins on June 30 of this year.

SaskTel is the last telecommunications company in Canada to become federally regulated. In 1992, Mr. Speaker, the province negotiated a moratorium from federal regulations. This moratorium was to last for a period of six years and was then extended until the end of June 2000.

Saskatchewan resisted federal regulation and negotiated the moratorium due to its concerns with the federal regulatory model. That model required the subsidization of new competitors which didn't make sense for a province such as Saskatchewan with a large percentage of rural and northern customers.

It is absolutely crucial, Mr. Speaker, that service to these areas remain affordable. The actual cost to provide communication services to rural and remote areas is quite high, but SaskTel has always been committed to partial subsidization of telephone service to these areas. However the federal regulatory model would have meant that in addition to SaskTel subsidizing rural and northern areas, it would also have been required to subsidize AT&T.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, that just didn't make any sense to the people of this province. With these points in mind, SaskTel and the government agreed to use the moratorium period to meet national policy objectives, but to do so in a distinctly Saskatchewan way, a way that would ensure that access to communication services is equitably achieved throughout the

province.

So over the past eight years, Mr. Speaker, SaskTel has essentially been following rules that mirror the federal regulatory framework but without subsidization of new entrants. And over the ensuing time period, the federal regulatory model has changed and subsidies of new entrants have been virtually eliminated by the CRTC.

In the preparatory years and months before regulation, SaskTel and its employees have worked diligently to help ensure that the transition is a smooth one. Their goal was to ensure that they could continue to quickly and adequately respond to market demands and pressures.

They have been working to ensure that the more than 450,000 people around this province who are SaskTel customers see little difference in how quickly SaskTel provides them with products and services. As a corporation whose number one priority is its customers, SaskTel is committed to continuing to provide the best level of service and the most innovative products available.

Section 43.1 of the Bill eliminates the necessity of the Government of Saskatchewan approving interconnection agreements between SaskTel and its competitors. This also includes any limitations there are on competitor's equipment that may be attached to SaskTel's network. When SaskTel becomes regulated by the CRTC, this regulatory body will oversee the interconnection of SaskTel's communication system with those of other long-distance companies. The Government of Saskatchewan will no longer play a role in determining which outside companies interconnect with SaskTel's infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of a Bill to amend The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a very, very important Bill for all of the people of Saskatchewan, especially for those who lie further from the centre, further from Regina and Saskatoon.

We've already seen a significant shift in basic service costs to people residing across Saskatchewan. In particular, to those people residing outside of the major metropolitan areas.

The people of Saskatchewan have been contacting us, as I'm sure they have been contacting the government members, with a great amount of fear and trepidation with the rising costs of telephone service.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in my own constituency and across the southeast, the Southeast Regional Library based out of Weyburn — and I believe it's the Isabelle Butters library that it's out of . . . in Weyburn — were extremely concerned that the cost of telephone service being provided to the people of rural Saskatchewan in this particular case, to the libraries across rural Saskatchewan, was going to amount to a base price of \$130 per telephone line. This would have virtually shut down every library in every small town across rural Saskatchewan, had this

happened. And there is no assurances yet that that is not going to happen from SaskTel.

Mr. Speaker, hopefully this piece of legislation will ensure that the prices paid by people for their basic telephone service will be realistic, will be affordable to the people of Saskatchewan.

But it's not just your basic service, Mr. Speaker, that needs to be concerned. It's also long distance, access to long-distance services, and access to all of those other services that telecommunications now provides for us.

One of those services is the Internet service, Mr. Speaker. A resident in Regina can access unlimited Internet service for \$20 a month. A resident of rural Saskatchewan accessing Internet services through SaskTel has to pay a minimum of 80-plus dollars to access 180 hours. And that's for a residential service, Mr. Speaker. For a business service the maximum allowable time is 120 hours.

Mr. Speaker, we are entering into a very, very competitive age in telecommunications. Part of that telecommunication service, Mr. Speaker, will be satellite communications. And SaskTel must prepare themselves for that competition; a competition where there is no need to be tied to a land line. You can pick up your cellular telephone and contact anyone in the world at any time and not utilize a land line and not utilize SaskTel.

SaskTel has to place themselves in a competitive position to be able to meet that competition head to head. They have to be able to meet that competition when it comes to Internet services. It will only be a matter of weeks, if not days, that Internet services will be provided to the people of Canada, to the people of Saskatchewan, to the people of rural Saskatchewan over their TV satellite dishes. It's only a matter of weeks before that happens.

Is SaskTel then prepared to compete? That's a good question. I don't know that they are. They certainly haven't been giving any indications yet that they have a service in mind to provide to the people of Saskatchewan.

So if this Bill is providing protection for SaskTel, it also has to provide protection for the people of Saskatchewan . . . that the services that are available to people both in rural and urban Saskatchewan are compatible. And that the services available to the people in Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario, Newfoundland, or the Northwest Territories is also available in Saskatchewan.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it's very critical that we talk with the third parties that are interested in this telecommunication Bill to determine whether it serves the needs of the customers of SaskTel, whether it serves the needs of SaskTel, and whether it serves the needs of all the people of Saskatchewan. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 20 — The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise again today in the Assembly to speak to the

proposed amendments before us to The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act. SaskTel Holding Corporation is the corporate entity responsible for the assets of SaskTel Mobility and the wireless services that it provides.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan opened its doors to long-distance telephone competition in 1996. Competition has been good for Saskatchewan consumers. It's provided people with choice and it's helped make SaskTel stronger and more competitive in the marketplace.

While operating in this highly competitive environment, SaskTel developed various long-distance plans that were built on a foundation of value and service. During this period, SaskTel has continually lowered its long-distance rates, has reinforced its commitment to excellent customer service, and has maintained more than 90 per cent market share — the most of any telecommunications company in Canada.

During this past four-year period, SaskTel familiarized itself with CRTC guidelines by operating in a manner similar to federal regulations. This gave the company ample time and experience to prepare itself for June 30 of this year when SaskTel becomes fully subject to the regulation of the CRTC.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that SaskTel's shareholders, the people of this province, have benefited from this environment; and when SaskTel becomes fully regulated by the CRTC at the end of June, it is imperative that customers continue to receive the best possible service and value from SaskTel and SaskTel Mobility.

The current version of this Act does not contain any provisions that would create a framework for a legally binding tariff — a tariff that would form a contract between SaskTel Holding Corporation and its customers.

I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the impact of these changes on customers are minimal. The majority of SaskTel Mobility's customers already have written contracts. As well, when necessary, the terms and conditions of the contract are provided to the customers at the point of sale.

There are only a few customers with SaskTel Mobility services who do not have long-term contracts such as some wireless data customers who receive their service on a month-to-month basis.

Mr. Speaker, we must make provision for a tariff governing the relationship between SaskTel Mobility and its customers, just as a tariff is provided for SaskTel and its customers. These amendments will allow SaskTel Mobility to fully comply with the terms and conditions of federal regulation as set out by the CRTC.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of a Bill to amend The Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation Act, 2000.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another one of the moves that is necessary because of the changing

environment that we live in with telecommunications today. The minister is talking about bringing SaskTel Mobility into line and meeting the requirements of the CRTC regulations.

That's very important because even the province of Saskatchewan, however reluctant they may be, must live under the laws both of Canada and of this province, although it's certainly does seem at times that they are most reluctant to do so and habitually change the rules and deem them not to have been in place when they actually broke the law that was there.

(1100)

So I think it is important that this government recognize that they can't continually do that kind of thing — retroactively change the laws so that they suit what the government has already done.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is also talking about tariffs, tariffs on telecommunication services and service to customers. One of the things that needs to take place in this province when we're dealing with tariffs of monopolies, when we're dealing with tariffs of Crown corporations is that there be a review process put in place that allows for input and allows for information to be gathered and disseminated as to the actual requirements of the corporation to have those tariffs at (a) the level that they are at, and (b) at a level they may wish to adjust them to.

So far, we have not had a meaningful review process put in place. The government has tried their 45-day sham process where they would allow the Crown corporations to propose rate adjustments. Very few times that I can recall have they ever gone down, if any. They have always been rate increases. And the sham process would go out and hold public hearings at which no one would attend and come back and say, yes, they all need to have these rate increases.

Well they finally recognized — even Jack Messer when he was the head of SaskPower . . . Jack Messer, who was the campaign manager for the NDP in 1991, the provincial campaign manager, recognized that there needs to be a review process in place. There was a Crown corporation task force that toured this province back in 1994-95. I attended one of the meetings in Regina here, which Allan Blakeney, the former NDP premier of this province, stood up at that meeting and said, there needs to be a public review process put in place.

And so far the government has failed to provide a public review process that is independent of the government. They have made a small move in that direction, dealing with telecommunications, with the last rate hike. Again though, it's extremely limited and has not proven to be effective.

The government — since this government is not capable of doing that — I think the next government, the Saskatchewan Party government, will provide people with an independent review process to judge the value and the service being provided to the people of Saskatchewan by the Crown corporations.

This particular Bill, when it comes to bringing Saskatchewan into line with the requirements of the CRTC is important and,

also though, we should be looking at how this reflects with the tariffs and how those will be adjusted.

There again are, Mr. Speaker, a number of third parties involved in this particular piece of legislation. They need to be consulted. They need to have their views heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Therefore, I would move adjournment of debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 15

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 15 — The Department of Justice Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak on this Bill today, Bill No. 15, The Department of Justice Amendment Act, 2000. And I think it's . . . for the most part, the amendment is mostly housekeeping in nature. They've added a few clauses that would deter any action being taken against carriers or court house courtworkers.

This is a good thing, particularly when it protects someone who is operating in good faith. And so as to that, like I say, as I mention, it's mainly a housekeeping Bill.

There are a couple of things, however, that do cause some concern that we want to talk about. And some concerns of the Act are the part of the Act under the confidentiality when it talks about confidentiality about an individual who has been charged with an offence, and it talks about individuals the age of 18 who was alleged to have committed an offence.

It makes me wonder why there is a differentiation for a person who is an adult status being charged, and a person who is not an adult status being alleged. And so there are some concerns with that. A courtworker should also be available to someone deemed an adult to explain to them all of their rights.

And I think the whole thing of the Bill and certainly with the whole justice system is to try and achieve some equality and achieve fairness. And I think that is the biggest point. And I think with some of court cases that have gone on today and things that have happened through the court system, whether it's the Milgaard case, whether it's . . . whatever case, it's an extremely important issue. And the whole intent of it is to achieve some sort of fairness and justice . . . fairness in the system.

And the Aboriginal community has identified the need for complete confidentiality in court cases to ensure that the trial is completely fair. And as I mentioned before, that is the whole intent of the justice system is to make sure that it is as fair as possible. And the confidentiality is a huge part of it.

As soon as there are leaks and problems with that, with confidentiality, you're going to have problems with trying to

get the truth out. Because they're unsure that they can state what they want to state without some sort of problems.

I was watching the news the other day when the person . . . which a person was . . . it was a murder case, and it was all through the fact that according to the news, that the person was killed because he had testified in a case many, many years prior. And so that whole confidentiality part of it is so important.

As an official opposition, we appreciate the fact that there needs to be some special needs or requirements regarding the Aboriginal and Metis communities' specific cultural aspects. And it is good to see that the government is acknowledging this. And I agree with that.

But as I mentioned before, there are some concerns with the whole . . . the part — and I mean the Bill is only one page long. There's a lot to it, but there are some concerns in one or two areas and that's what I want to address today.

It is also important to note that any of the information that courtworkers . . . that a courtworker does receive is kept in accordance with their duties. In too many instances we have seen some damage . . . some dangerous offenders left to do . . . let go through technicalities. And that's a concern.

So as I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, there's not a lot in the Bill, but we do have a couple of concerns and I've raised those concerns. And that's about all I guess that I'd have to say, and I will adjourn debate on the Bill for now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 16

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 16 — The Justice Statutes (Consumer Protection) Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege this morning to enter into the debate on Bill 16, an Act to amend miscellaneous consumer protection statutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've had some occasion as the Justice critic for our caucus to discuss this Bill with some people in the legal profession. And for the most part, the minister's remarks that were made on April 12 in the Legislative Assembly during second reading accurately describe the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and also highlight the fact that, for the most part, the provisions in the Bill are reasonably non-controversial.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill does clarify the legal framework for the practice whereby the registrar, the consumer protection branch under each of the amended sections of this Bill arranges for the distribution of proceeds of a bond to the claimant.

The case I guess could be made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is perhaps a positive development as it will ensure that consumers under these Acts are able to receive the protection afforded in the Act without having to go through a lot of court wrangling to get that protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are some concerns though that have been raised to me by people from the profession with respect to the powers that are given by this Bill to the registrar. For the most part, the Bill takes power previously held with the Lieutenant Governor in Council and places it in the hands of the registrars in these various Acts.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so people understand — we're talking about a Bill that actually amends The Collection Agents Act, The Credit Reporting Agencies Act, The Direct Sellers Act, The Motor Dealers Act, and The Sale of Training Courses Act. And so the registrar in each of these instances is given some significant sweeping powers under the Act. And to the extent that a registrar of course is either an official, an unelected official fundamentally, of each of these areas with the Department of Justice, I think it's reasonable to have some questions about the powers that will be vested with these officers.

Under each of the sections and under each reference to the various Acts that are affected by this particular Bill, the Act lays out the power of the registrar to — and I quote from the Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

The registrar may pay any money recovered under a forfeited bond or realized from the sale of any collateral security to:

(a) the local registrar of the Court of Queen's Bench . . .

So in other words to the court.

(b) (To) any trustee, custodian, interim receiver, receiver or liquidator . . .

But finally though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's worthwhile noting that the final provision is that:

(c) any person that the registrar considers entitled to the money for a claim . . .

In other words anyone that the registrar deems fit. And I think it's going to be interesting in committee, when this Bill is in committee for a very, very long time — perhaps the member from Elphinstone will want to know — but when this Bill does go to committee I think we'll want to, I think we'll want to talk a little bit about that third power given to the registrar in each case of the Act.

We'll want to talk a little bit more about the amount of authority given to the registrar to pay the proceeds, redistribute the proceeds of a bond, apparently that would have been defaulted on to any person that the registrar deems fit. I think it'll be an interesting discussion, we'll have many questions for the minister in committee.

In principle of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side of the House have absolutely no problem at all with any particular piece of legislation from the minister or from the government, the intent of which is to afford greater protection for consumers.

And if indeed the Bill does make it easier for consumers and the general public, creditors in general, to collect on the proceeds of

bonds that have been defaulted on, then I think you'll see this side of the House support those kinds of changes completely and wholeheartedly.

I think though it would be irresponsible if we didn't ask some of the questions about the power given to the registrar. Because in accomplishing this, in accomplishing this added protection, or at least the ease with which people can now move through this process, the Act does vest considerable power with the registrar in all five cases of these Acts.

And so we're going to spend a very long time in committee, the member for Regina North will like to know, we'll spend a long time in committee discussing the intricate details of each of the Acts that are affected and the powers that the registrar has to now make some decisions in regards to bonds that have been defaulted on.

And so with those comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and with the assurance that I will continue to consult with people in the profession on this particular Bill and the changes that it's going to make to various Acts, I would again move adjournment of debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

(1115)

Bill No. 1

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter that **Bill No. 1 — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1999 seems to be a bit of a misleading title. I'll read from comments made by the minister by way of explanation of this Act.

He says, Mr. Speaker:

These amendments are required to strengthen the procedures where producer associations are winding down or where guarantee has been paid by the government to the lender. We want to authorize a producer association to be able to deduct from the proceeds of sales, the amount a producer owes to that particular association.

And he goes on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to say:

... by strengthening the procedures, the risk to the association, the lender and the government are reduced. These amendments were developed in consultation with lenders.

He doesn't mention anything about producers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Most importantly, from across the province, and of course the Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association, these groups are in agreement with the amendments that I have mentioned here.

As I understand the minister's clarification of this Act, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, it appears on the surface that this Act incorporates some principles that we may be able to support. Generally, it appears that the Act is designed to enhance creditors' powers in dealing with producer associations, and this could also be a positive thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if not taken too far. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it will be up to us in this Assembly to make that judgment.

Quite a title, Mr. Deputy Speaker — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1999. You know, farm financial stability seems to be elusive under this administration. I look at the situation on my own farm — a fairly substantial, diversified, grain, oilseed, pulse crop, specialty crop, and cattle operation. This government seems to be operating under the delusion that the farm financial crisis is something that popped up in 1999.

I can say, as someone who has farmed since the early '70s, that the farm situation has been growing steadily worse in this province since 1980 ... (inaudible interjection) ... When Mr. Wall was in grade 1. When the European Economic Community began subsidizing export sales. And the situation grew worse in 1984 when the United States began to subsidize their export sales in retaliation for what the Europeans had been doing already for four years.

I've seen my bottom line deteriorating gradually, particularly over the mid-to-late '90s, and this is not something that came up as an emergency in 1999, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and everybody knew it except for the then minister of Agriculture, Mr. Upshall.

Up until ... or for a few years preceding 1992, we had had a program called GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) which was possibly ... it was, it was a revenue guarantee, insurance-type program, which may have been a little too rich. I'll be first to admit that.

But this government cancelled it, tore up the contracts that had already been signed. They cancelled it in the spring of the year — about this time it was, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and they tore up those contracts that had already been signed leaving farmers absolutely in the lurch, took hundreds of millions of dollars out of that program, used it to balance the budget; promised to replace it with a new program, and never did. To this day there has never been any kind of a long-term safety net program developed in this province. And we see no evidence that there ever will be, quite frankly, as long as this government's in power.

Under GRIP — GRIP was a program that you could, you could take to the bank. It was a bankable program. That means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you could take the GRIP forms to the bank and the banker could understand that you had a guarantee of a certain minimum income for that year. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that gave the bank a solid basis on which to base operating money loans and so on. This government destroyed that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And now they talk about farm income stability.

I noticed about 1996 that although the farm industry had been getting more and more difficult all along since — as I mentioned, 1980 — but I noticed about 1996 a tremendous drop in my bottom line as a farmer. And '97 was worse, and '98 it

continued. And of course '99 was a disaster with even lower commodity prices and all sorts of weather problems like flooding in the southeast and even in my area.

And in the spring of 1999, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when farmers were looking for a little guidance from this government and maybe a little help . . .

An Hon. Member: — What'd they get?

Mr. Stewart: — They got . . . I'll tell you what they got. They got Mr. Eric Upshall saying that there was no farm crisis.

An Hon. Member: — No farm crisis? And Eric got tossed at the polls.

Mr. Stewart: — That's right. And I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the taxpayers of this province are supporting Mr. Upshall in some obscure appointment in the style to which he'd become accustomed?

I think this government has lost touch with rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I don't think . . . There's not one member opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what I would call a bona fide farmer — including the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The minister says he's more of a bona fide farmer than I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I take issue with that. I live on my farm. I check cows. I checked my cows this morning before I came in here and it looks like one of them is going to calve. When's the last time I wonder that the Minister of Agriculture was actually on his family's farm? Christmastime . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You live . . . the minister seems to live on an acreage, adjacent to a golf course north of . . .

An Hon. Member: — No, I live on a farm, there's 1,500 acres on my farm.

Mr. Stewart: — Yes, a hundred acres I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, adjacent to a golf course north of Regina.

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: — On a point of order, I recognize the Deputy Premier.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't normally do this but the member's information, the information that he's saying about my farm, which is north of Regina where my family and I have about 1,200 acres of land, which we own and operate, where I live, I would like him to correct the record because he's giving out a series of misinformation about my family. And I would also ask him to apologize.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — What we have here is, frankly, is a disagreement between two members and not a point of order. I know that the hon. member feels aggrieved but we have no technical breach of process here.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I've breached the process in any way, I apologize.

But I did that to strengthen my point that most of the MLAs on this side of the House are active farmers — and I certainly am myself — and I feel that there's precious little of that on the other side.

All agriculture received from the former Ag minister and this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was a federal program called AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) with some provincial contributions. AIDA has been an absolute disaster, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as a newly elected MLA, AIDA complaints have taken up a great deal of my time and I'm sure everybody on this side of the House, all members, can say the same thing.

Rural people in Saskatchewan, in fact the whole province, sent the government a clear message on September 16 that they wanted a government . . . they wanted a government that would be responsive to agriculture. And unfortunately, the voters elected three Liberals, and they believed at the time that those three Liberals would hold the balance of power.

And of course they joined with the NDP government and they promised — the Liberal Party — had promised during the campaign, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have money in the hands of farmers immediately. I think it was within two weeks of the election.

Actually, within two weeks of the election, they signed an agreement with the NDP to form a coalition. And that's the only thing they did in two weeks, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — They had money in their hands.

Mr. Stewart: — Yes, exactly.

In the fall, immediately after the election, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we called upon this government to initiate an emergency debate on agriculture, to try and resolve some of the problems that were causing the agricultural crisis.

They refused at first, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we thought it was quite an urgent matter, and we pushed it as hard as we could in the media and in every forum we could get. And finally, in December, we had our emergency debate on the agricultural crisis. And it brought the issue to the attention of the public and that's what we wanted out of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We only regret that it took so long to get there.

And now, Mr. Speaker, this government has granted . . . has removed the cap on the farm fuel rebate program. Of course that only applies to gasoline, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a fuel that's pretty much only used in grain augers and pick-up trucks on farms these days. And there was already a \$900 exemption for each farmer per year, and now the cap's been removed, so if a farmer used more than 900 . . . or paid more than \$900 worth of tax on his gasoline, he can now have that rebated. And that's a positive thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I commend the government. But nobody in the farming industry thinks it's a big deal.

Also, this government has announced a rebate on education tax paid on property — \$25 million a year for two years. That amounts to about 400 or \$440 for the average farm. And again I commend the government on that. That's a fine thing. We've been to many tax revolt meetings, and people agree with this government that they're paying too much education tax on property.

However the other side of the coin, and this is where the other shoe falls, the government underfunded education in this budget again. And education tax increases on property will likely more than eat up that 400 or \$440 on the average farm.

Right now school boards are setting their mill rates for the year, and they're virtually all . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. I've been listening very carefully to the hon. member from Thunder Creek and I just wish to remind you . . . I know the hon. member will want to tie his comments on the situation in rural Saskatchewan into The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1999, and I look forward to the member addressing the Bill before the Assembly.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Farm Financial Stability Act is the subject of my discussion and I'll tie it in again right away. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, the fact that school boards are going to have to increase the property tax mill rate, on the education portion of property tax of course, is undermining to farm financial stability. And that was really my point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have received many petitions on tax relief and municipal amalgamations. And the people of this province wanted this government to reduce gasoline and fuel taxes 5 cents a litre, and the federal government offered to match that. So we could have had a 10 cent a litre reduction in fuel tax in this province and it would have only cost the revenue of Saskatchewan 5 cents a litre.

And that would have been a stabilizing factor for agriculture as well as the rest of the economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But this government wouldn't do it. I don't know if it was because they didn't think it was a good idea or they thought it was too expensive, or because they just didn't think of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But this government to date has done precious little to assist farm financial stability.

I believe the farmers in this province held out great hopes for the Liberals' influence on this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as it affects farm financial stability . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it seems that if the Liberals have any influence in this government and they've forgot what they promised in the election campaign, which is to get money in the hands of farmers quick.

The farmers of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to enhance farm financial stability, need a bankable, long-term safety net program and short-term policies that will help to reduce taxation and increase their bottom line. That's what's needed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to promote farm financial stability, not a lot of rhetoric about how to assist lenders in dealing with producer groups.

(1130)

Farm financial stability. If anyone should not be addressing this issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's the members opposite. Their record on it is absolutely appalling. This NDP government has been having problems dealing with agriculture and farm financial stability since it was elected to power in 1991, breaking GRIP contracts with producers and taking hundreds of millions of dollars to balance their budget.

When the farm financial crisis started to become full-blown over two years ago, where was this government? The Saskatchewan Party was bringing up the issue on a daily basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, offering solutions and suggesting meetings while the members opposite sat on their hands and did nothing.

Comments by now defeated Ag minister Eric Upshall last spring that there was no farm crisis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a sign of just how out of touch this government is on rural issues.

Then along came AIDA. We all know how popular and how successful this program has been. It's a bureaucratic nightmare that didn't help most producers at all. And in fact many producers had a huge bill at their accountants to show for their participation in the AIDA program and that is all.

The people of rural Saskatchewan and in fact all the province sent this government a clear message on September 16. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the election the Premier called in the middle of harvest to keep farmers away from voting. Well the farm population came out in droves to vote against this government and everything it stands for. And now it has failed in helping producers.

Almost every rural MLA is gone from that side of the House. And you know what's going to happen in the next election, which probably isn't too far away, judging on how things have been since the coalition was formed, the people of Saskatchewan will indeed watch and participate with interest.

The members opposite were starting to listen, you would think, when an emergency debate on the farm crisis was finally called in December. And it seemed like there might finally be some attention paid to farm financial stability. Actually, our party, the Saskatchewan Party, proposed such a meeting two years ago.

And history was made in this Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when farm group after farm group came forward to the floor of the Assembly to present its case on how the crisis is affecting the entire province, and particularly agriculture and specifically your own operations.

Do you think the government listened, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It doesn't seem so. We get yet another flavoured program with barely enough cash to help farmers get through spring seeding. This may be in fact the last spring for many of our farmers, thanks to this NDP government and its failed programs.

Much of the money farmers might actually get will go towards increased fuel costs. This NDP government had every opportunity to help farmers by voting in favour of a motion put forward by the Saskatchewan Party to cut gas taxes 10 cents a

litre. The federal Liberals were willing to meet us halfway.

This government is sitting on a huge slush fund, but when it comes time to help people by giving immediate cash relief, nothing is there to help. There's no real farm financial stability when it's needed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government announced in its budget a program to rebate farmers \$50 million in property taxes. Where will they make up this money? More hidden taxes? Oh, they let the school trustees do it by downloading on them.

The establishment of the Liberal-NDP coalition has done nothing to help the farm situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or farm financial stability. The leader, now Education minister, could have called on the Liberal Prime Minister for help but all farmers ended up getting was a headache called AIDA.

The member from Saskatoon Northwest also suggested if school boards don't like what they got in the budget they could raise taxes. This will lead to further erosion in services in rural areas, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and cause more headaches for those of us who are interested in farm financial stability.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the Government House Leader on his feet?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the promotion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask leave to present notices of motions for private members' day.

The Deputy Speaker: — My first task is to apologize to the House for the inadvertent promotion to the Hon. Opposition House Leader as opposed to the Hon. Government House Leader.

The Opposition House Leader has asked leave to present notification of motion. Is leave granted for private members' day? Is leave granted? That's carried.

Leave granted.

Bill No. 2

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter that **Bill No. 2 — The Animal Identification Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to get up to address a few concerns on Bill No. 2.

Deputy Mr. Speaker, any time this NDP government brings forth legislation pertaining to agriculture, people in rural Saskatchewan are always somewhat hesitant. They wonder if there are any hidden agenda or what plan the members opposite may have to further erode rural Saskatchewan.

The proof behind this is how this government has treated the farmers of this province since coming to power. The first sign we saw, how the GRIP contracts were broken and that money was used to balance a budget.

Farmers' mistrust of this government started from almost day one. A further sign of this government lack of commitment to agriculture in this province is the state of highways that farmers including livestock producers have to drive on.

This NDP government has also been off-loading education taxes onto rural ratepayers. This has been disastrous for farmers, although in the budget the government has now some form of a rebate. Farmers wonder if they'll actually follow through or some sort of hidden tax will be introduced to offset that income.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, many livestock producers have concerns with the direction this government is taking in regards to Bill No. 2. They have serious questions about animal identification, and what they're seeing is the possibility of ear tags. The unfortunate part of that is anyone who has been involved in the livestock industry through the past years knows we still haven't come up with a good, sound program.

We're wondering about a system that has tags that do not get lost. There are lots of issues with producers regarding this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In his speech addressing the Bill, the Minister of Agriculture talked about people's safety concerns and where the food they eat come from. The packing and feedlot industry shares these concerns as well. Many feedlot operators are doing all they can in setting up a system where they are thinking about the consumer at the end of the day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was also a lot of questions from farmers about whether this system may even help at all. There are also questions about system enrolment. What happens if the livestock producer chooses not to. Will he be treated unfairly in this system? Will he be able to buy or sell in the marketplace? Will the producer even be able to continue raising livestock if he chooses not to enrol?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are also questions that many producers may not even be around to see this proposed amendment if it passes. The flawed AIDA program is the first example of what could be the beginning of the end for many farmers, thanks to this socialist government.

This program is a nightmare; many producers didn't even see a penny from it. Then came the recent announcement of more money for farmers, which in the end amounts to a drop in the bucket. Many farmers will use this money paying for high gas prices, higher fuel, higher fertilizer costs, and an ever-increasing tax burden.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government had a chance to make things right and get back on the right side of the voter. Ottawa offered a program to match the province to drop gas taxes by 10 cents a litre. That would help immediately and maybe even help some of the farmers survive.

This government chose to vote against it and instead raised taxes for farmers. What makes matters worse is the fact that there's no longer no long-term safety net in place. When will it come? With this government, probably not.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I have several letters from cow-calf producers but I will only read one. They have many concerns about this. This is from a cow-calf producer from the Kenaston area, Mr. Lammie Pavelich.

This cattle ID system was brought in with very little notice to producers. I learned of it in January, and other producers I've talked to know little, if anything, about it. Must I join every association to cast a vote not to "fix what ain't broke." Leave the cattle industry alone.

A tag for \$1, come on, look how much affordable gun registry is over budget. It won't be long until we may need a "cow acquisition permit" to deal with cattle. Maybe even a cow safety test will be taken before one gets a license. Will we need a license, or permit book, because quota's are coming. How can more rules, regulations and fees heaped on cow/calf producers be vital to the future of the cattle industry?

As for the United States implementing a registry, sure, just like they were changing to the metric system 25 years ago. The "John Wayne's" in Texas, who produce more cattle than all of Canada, are not going to back this impotent plan made up by "do gooders", "university cowboys" who need research money . . . An article in the February 2nd issue of *The StarPhoenix* said a cow was found with Tuberculosis when slaughtered. That means it was tracked down with the resources we have now. But hang on, what if that cow was bought and sold a dozen times, and lost it's tag half of those times? The new owners would just retag it so it could be sold again and the original owner would be lost in the shuffle of tags. But even worse, what if that cow kept it's original tag and somewhere between owners #2 and #12 it was abused or picked up a disease? The original owner could be liable for something he or she knows nothing about. It's like the AIDA program, are you going to be picked, or not? Also, an article in the March 2nd *Star Phoenix* stated half of all cattle in U.S. feedlots have the Ecoli bacteria on their hides. (And that) . . . can be removed (easily) with a hot water rinse. Should I be accountable for the diseases on a calf that left my farm a year ago or because Larry, and his brothers Daryl and Daryl didn't wash the meat after it was dropped on the floor of the packing plant. I could go on about this scheme but space is restricted.

This system cannot be run for the price quoted or monitored properly for any practical purpose. Mr. Block and others like him in this "democracy" have already made up my mind for me on this issue, (supposedly) it's law. The last true free enterprise system is about to become another government regulated agency that used the gun registry, AIDA, and the CWB for their guidelines.

And that was from a cow-calf producer. I have other letters, but I will refrain from reading them.

(1145)

With this Bill No. 2, Mr. Speaker, what we're seeing right now is the idea of possible ear tags. And the unfortunate part in that regard, Mr. Speaker, anyone who's been involved in livestock industry through the years has found that we still haven't come up with an ear tag system that is fail-proof. And what I mean by that, Mr. Speaker, is a system or a tag that does not get lost. And whether it's an ear tag or a brisket tag or a larger tag or even just a small metal tag, there are still some issues that arise from that.

And, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about consumers wanting to know where the product that they're eating or consuming is coming from, the minister is quite correct — the consumer is becoming more demanding and certainly looking for someone that would identify the food that they're eating is coming out of a base, that they are a lot of additives in the product, and that it's coming out of an environmentally friendly atmosphere.

But I know the packing industry and the feedlot industry in this province, certainly in Western Canada, are quite concerned about that as well. And that's why I believe you'll find many feedlot operators are doing everything in their power to establish a feeding system that really treats the livestock in their care with a lot of regard and respect. They are thinking about this consumer at the end of the day.

Another issue, Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise about it is the licensing of these tags. Where will they be bought? Where will they be distributed?

And if they're only going to be out of the cities, I mean a producer has to drive 60 or 100 miles to get these tags. And the costs of them. Right now, they're saying \$1 a tag but we know when government says anything, it can always go up. I propose that since this government brought this forth, if at least . . . if they're going to push this through . . . they should at least pay the price of the tags to the producers.

Because cost is another thing. If I may read a little bit of another letter about a wheat producer . . . or a cattle producer from Alberta where that system is already in. He says:

Cost is one reason were each tag now, tags only costs \$1 but it adds up to 1.8 million a year for Alberta beef producers and 5.7 million for Canadian beef producers. That's a lot of money taken out of the producers' pockets.

Said Wheat who runs a 250 cow-calf herd in eastern Alberta. As a producer who must buy the tags he objects to the cost when large feedlots will reap the benefit instead of buying their own ear tags.

Feedlots can save thousands of dollars by using the existing agency tag for identification to feedlot.

Said Art Wheat. He also believes, which many cow-calf producers do, we have a system out there — a branding system — which has worked quite efficiently for the last 100 years that you can trace animals.

There are many concerns basically from a lot of the cow-calf

producers about it. When you're shipping cattle, if the tag is lost, if it shows up at the market, will that calf be refused or will the government maybe just take it? They're not sure about that. Will that be a cost or will it be sent back which is extra cost in trucking.

It is also . . . I don't know if this Bill even addresses the exotic issues of animals that . . . does that mean when they're shipped for meat do they have to be tagged? I know personally, Mr. Speaker, I have never run a full-grown buffalo into a chute and tagged it. And personally, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I had one over there, and I've got one of two buffalo producers in my constituency and I will contact you when he needs, when he needs help.

I'm glad that the members on the other side are volunteering to help with this program since they're implementing it. And I hope when I am running cattle through my chute this year, I hope I can call on a couple of you to come out and help tag them. But the big cost is passed on again just like everything in the farming issue is back to the original producer, to the cow-calf person, the guy that's originally raising them.

Although I say this Bill may not be 100 per cent wrong, but I think there's issues that should be addressed especially at the cow-calf industry . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no, Mr. Minister, I'll agree that there . . . but it should be maybe voluntarily. It should be worked at the feedlot where the cattle are tagged, where they're shipped right from there to the meat not when they're leaving the farm.

Because like the one person wrote in a letter, an animal can be traded 2 to 12 different times, a yearling, as it goes along. If a disease shows up years back, years ahead, will that producer be originally come back for the costs on them? And that concerns a lot of producers out there, and I hope the minister will address these concerns as time goes on, as he looks maybe a little more closer at this Bill.

And if anybody that has worked with cattle, it's not easy to run them through the chute. It causes them a lot of stress and this is just another added stress to the animals when you're shipping through . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Members over there are giving some suggestions but obviously they've never worked with cattle.

You just don't exactly walk into his chute. You don't exactly . . . they're not like . . . some of the members over there, the only thing they've probably ever tagged is rung a little bell or put a little bell on their cats. Well this isn't quite as easy — I can guarantee you that. That's probably the most experience of all the members on the other side of the House have ever had to deal with.

But when you're dealing with a 4 to 500 pound yearling calf and you're trying to put a tag in it, it causes it a lot of stress and it is just another added feature to it. And also when you're shipping something to the meat packing plant, just one cow, does that mean that it has to be tagged before the meat packing plant will take it?

Mr. Speaker, I would like to review this Bill somewhat more carefully to indeed to make sure that all farmers' concerns are

looked after, which I'm sure that the members on the other side will totally agree with me on that, so, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Highways and Transportation Vote 16

The Deputy Chair: — I'd like to invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated to my right is Ron Styles, the deputy minister from the department; to my left is Barry Martin, the assistant deputy minister of operations; seated directly behind me is Carl Neggers, the assistant deputy minister in charge of policy; and Don Wincherauk, seated behind the deputy minister, is the assistant deputy minister in charge of corporate services.

Subvote (HI01)

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister and his officials for coming to the House today. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to them about the Highways budget and to ask them some questions for our elucidation and some clarification that might result because of that.

I noticed with interest that the budget figure this year is \$250 million, claimed to be the highest amount ever for the Department of Highways. And while that figure is an impressive figure, the fact that we've reached that, that height of expenditure for the Department of Highways is not without its critics. And I would just refer quickly to some of the things that were said by the critics in *The Leader-Post* edition of March 30, at which time Neal Hardy, the vice-president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, said that the province still has a lot more work to do. And he said:

The highways are in terrible shape. If the highways deteriorate, then they start using more and more municipal roads.

And he said that resources for road repair in rural municipalities are already scarce.

And of course our deputy commenting about the budget said that at \$2.5 billion over 10 years, this is the first year we've actually achieved the average for that period and that we're falling behind.

So I think that we need some clarification in this particular area. And I would like to start our questioning this afternoon by referring to the budget's most glaring feature. When I, when I talk about glaring, I'm not necessarily using a pejorative term or a negative term, it's just that it jumps out at us when we look at the highways and transportation estimates for the coming year.

There is a significant reduction in money allocated to new road construction, but an additionally significant increase in money allocated to preservation procedures. And I would like the minister to explain the rationale for this decision.

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Since I didn't actually have the opportunity during the budget debate, I hope you'll indulge me a little bit because I want to do a little bit of a summary as well, and then get to the question specifically. And I do this more for the people of Saskatchewan than anyone.

First of all, I want to talk a little bit about the \$250 million investment that the member referred to for this coming budget, 2000-2001. At a quarter of a billion dollars it is in fact, as he describes it, the largest highways and transportation budget that we have ever had. That's an increase of 6.6 per cent or 15.4 million from the previous year's spending level, and it's an investment that I think meets, to the best of our ability, all of our commitments.

It's also about balancing and meeting priorities within transportation. As we enter a new century we are particularly aware of how important it is to transform Saskatchewan's transportation systems to meet new challenges and opportunities. We are setting our focus on strengthening the economic development, Mr. Chair, and in strengthening the North, and creating a safer and more reliable transportation system for all Saskatchewan people. And we think by maintaining that focus we'll serve the social needs of our province even better.

Because I think it is important, I want to review some of the accomplishments from last construction season as well.

We saw twinning efforts on both sections of Highway 1 and on Highway 16. Obviously the highest profile twinning effort was the opening of 27.5 kilometres, I believe in that member's constituency, along Highway No. 1 just west of Gull Lake.

Grading started also on Highway No. 16 between Lashburn and Marshall. There was progress on the rural TMS (thin membrane surface) highway system with 280 kilometres improved at a cost of nearly \$27 million.

We opened the Athabasca seasonal road. This was a significant achievement for northern community access. And we've also improved . . . improvements there were, I should say, to 45 kilometres of other northern roads which helped the forestry industry considerably.

In the rural road strategic initiatives fund, the department partnered with 25 municipalities and First Nations last year on 20 different projects in addressing 250 kilometres of highway. Resurfacing was done at a cost of 21 million on 265 kilometres in 28 projects.

(1200)

And I'd also like to talk a little bit about the commitments our government has previously set out and that we are meeting in this budget. Our government is committed to maintaining and improving Saskatchewan roads and highways. In so doing, we

are committed to improving safety on our highways for the people of Saskatchewan. Part of that commitment was to spend \$2.5 billion over 10 years on such improvements.

We have been increasing our transportation spending every year in order to meet those commitments. Since the 1995-96 budget, Mr. Chair, our investment has risen by 48.7 per cent — that's 48.7 per cent — or \$81.9 million. And as I said earlier, this year we've reached the \$250 million mark. Our budget level will continue to grow to meet the \$2.5 billion commitment that we made.

We will also access other sources such as the Centenary Capital Fund that was referred to in the budget. And we have increased our transportation spending while meeting, I think, our needs and obligations in health care, education, and social programs. And I think all of this while remaining fiscally responsible during an agricultural crisis.

We've done this in . . . We have done all of this, I should say, while putting forward a balanced provincial budget. We've not imposed a debt on the future of our province.

At this spending level, this is also the first step in meeting our election commitment from last year that said . . . where the Premier said that we would spend \$1 billion over four years in improving transportation. The Canadian Automobile Association of Saskatchewan in its annual highway funding review has acknowledged that we will in fact fulfill our commitment.

There's another commitment that is being met in this budget, and that's our commitment to twinning our national highway system in Saskatchewan. We promised, as I referred to earlier, to twin all of Highway No. 1 — that's the Trans-Canada Highway — from the Alberta border to the Manitoba border.

And we promised to twin the Yellowhead highway — Highway 16 — from the Battlefords to the Alberta border as well. In all, that's a total of 379 kilometres of twinning and we promised to meet that commitment by 2012. It is in order . . . it is in the order, I should say, of \$200 million to complete that work on our national highway system.

We've lobbied the federal government hard on this, as recent as yesterday actually, for over a decade to share responsibility for that work and as of yet that obviously has not happened to any large degree. To date, all of the twinning has been done without federal government assistance. Their help would free up money for us to tackle other issues and it would help speed the twinning process obviously. This year we will be spending \$13.3 on twinning on our national highway system.

Also we will . . . Our twinning efforts, if I didn't allude to it earlier, represents efforts on two sections of highway — 1 and Highway 16. I think I did refer to that.

At the start of my remarks I also spoke about a balance of meeting our goals and achieving our priorities.

Our construction schedule includes for the coming year, 101 major road projects on 53 different highways with 13 bridge-improvement projects as well. That is 101 projects at a

cost of \$88.4 million and 13 bridge-improvement projects at a cost of 5.6 million. There are also 17 grading projects valued at \$19.1 million and 5 grading and paving projects valued at 9.4 million, and 11 paving projects for a cost of 16.1 million.

We'll undertake 30 surfacing projects at a total cost of 27.6 million and there will be 22 strategic spot-strengthening projects valued at 14.3 million. We will also be spending almost \$99 million on highway maintenance. That shows a balance I think, and that's how we came up with the biggest budget for Highways and Transportation in our province's history.

We are also addressing, Mr. Chair, traffic operation and safety on high-volume highways. To that end, \$4 million will be spent to complete the Pasqua Street interchange at Highway 11 here in Regina; and \$6.5 million will be spent to complete the twinning of 8.5 kilometres on Highway 16 just east of Saskatoon.

The department will spend about \$600,000 to start construction on the second bridge over the North Saskatchewan River just at the Battlefords. These projects will help address our concerns of high-volume highways.

We are investing in the restoration of our rural highways as well. We'll spend 18.4 million to improve our rural thin-member surface highways, and in total there will be about 430 kilometres of highway that will see resurfacing and strategic spot-strengthening.

In partnership with the province of Alberta, Mr. Chair, we will start the construction of 11 kilometres of Highway No. 17 from the Meridian bridge to Onion Lake. We will construct . . . I should say we will complete surfacing at Fond-du Lac and Wollaston Lake airports as well.

There'll be 4.2 million safety improvement project at the La Ronge airport under the federal government's Airport Capital Assistance Program. And La Ronge airport is owned and operated by the town of La Ronge and is operated under the partnership agreement with Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation.

This budget is seeing us create opportunities in the North as we improve access to northern communities and as we improve the efficiency for the timber industry.

A financial investment in our transportation system of a quarter billion dollars is considerable, but there certainly are things that we have to do beyond that. And though I proudly stand here to talk about this \$250 million budget for Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation, we must all understand that in Saskatchewan we will need prairie ingenuity and innovation to meet our transportation challenges.

And our policy objective is to achieve substantial transportation infrastructure to work for transportation efficiency as well as to improve the safety in transportation. We will pursue the greatest economic opportunities for our primary highways system.

On our local system we will maximize the potential of partnerships. We will capture the local knowledge and insights through the area transportation planning committees. And, Mr.

Chair, I'm very excited about the good work that they have done.

In 2000-2001 our policy initiatives will work to improve transportation efficiency and effectiveness in road, rail, and air. Our pursuit of federal funding will be to benefit both the primary and the local systems.

We are looking beyond money as the only answer in transportation. And we continue to build transportation partnerships, we continue to assist short-line development, we continue to build on the concept of area transportation planning. It is only through initiatives like these that we can meet the challenges that face us in transportation in Saskatchewan.

We have, Mr. Chair, 20 per cent of our nation's roads and only 3 per cent of the population of Canada. That is a simple fact and that requires us to work and achieve strategic solutions.

I'd like to talk briefly yet about the area of transportation planning committees that are working along with our department to come up with innovative ways to develop, manage, and plan the transportation systems in their areas. We have nine right now, area transportation planning committees in our province, and two most likely forming fairly quickly.

Area transportation planning committees are building local consensus as they study the needs and priorities of their areas and as they consider the important and tough issues like grain handling and transportation.

Saskatchewan faces two major issues related to federal funding of Saskatchewan roads. The first issue is the federal policy changes in grain transportation which have resulted in branch line closures and increased grain hauling on our local highway system. We have called on the federal government to share the cost of these policy changes and provide funding to repair these highways.

The second major issue is, as I mentioned earlier, the twinning of Saskatchewan's portion of the national highway system. The federal budget provided for \$100 million in this fiscal year and that was for a wide-range of infrastructure projects, not simply roads and highways. And that was not for Saskatchewan, but for the entire country.

Federal Transport Minister, David Collenette, has indicated to us that when a grain reform package came forward it would have an accompanying road compensation package. However, our conclusion has to be that since the federal government hasn't made up their minds on the grain reform yet, then that the road package is still coming.

That conclusion is supported by the reference that Finance Minister, Paul Martin, made, Mr. Chair, to grain roads when he delivered the federal budget speech.

So I want to, again, thank the members for allowing me to just give a rough overview of what took place last year and what we are anticipating for the coming year, since I did not have to do that. And again I say I do that as much for the people of Saskatchewan as anyone.

Now, in response to the specific question, the . . . if you just give me just one second, please.

Okay, thank you for that indulgence. First of all the reduction that you had referred to is actually a federal reduction. It's a reduction to the ACAP (Airport Capital Assistance Program) program and of about \$3.3 million or 3.5 million I should say. And also when the province constructs roads. I mean as we continue to construct roads as I alluded to earlier, the 27.5 kilometres of divided highway in your constituency, obviously the amount of maintenance that is required on new roads also goes up correspondingly. And so logically we're going to reach a point where there'll be, I suspect even though not in the near future, there'll be a time when the maintenance will always be in excess of the capital construction.

Mr. D'Autremont: — We're just going to make a little comment.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. I wish we were in a position to pursue this line of questioning, but I've just been advised that there's been a horrific accident in my constituency on the No. 1 Highway, involving loss of life.

And I would ask that we discontinue this procedure so that I can look after the issues that might arise out of this.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, I want to join with my friend from the constituency of Cypress. I understand there was a tour bus, a fiery bus crash which has just happened, just very, very recently.

And with that in mind, and so our colleague can go and make proper calls and that, I would move the committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Speaker: — Please have an enjoyable and pleasant weekend, ladies and gentlemen.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:14 p.m.