

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of people throughout the province who would like to see a reduction in fuel tax. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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 the signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt and from Regina, Martensville, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition today regarding 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.

The people that have signed this petition are from Fosston, Wadena, and Hendon.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the high price of fuel. 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.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Melfort, Tisdale, and Chociceland.

I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present petitions regarding the fuel tax. 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 individuals from

the communities of Nipawin, Aylsham, and White Fox.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition in regards to the high cost of fuel, and 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 the signatures on this petition are from Unity, Wilkie.

I so present.

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

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

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

And this is signed by citizens of Preeceville and Kamsack.

I so present. Thank you.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition opposed to forced municipal amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

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

And it's signed by citizens of Beatty and Melfort.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I also rise to read a petition opposed to enforced municipal amalgamation.

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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

Signed by the people of Abbey. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here 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.

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

The petitioners' signatures are from Saskatoon, Dundurn, Holdfast, Rapid Lake, Regina.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition of citizens concerned about the high price of fuel. The prayer reads:

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 humbly pray.

The petitioners are from Lanigan, Humboldt, Fulda, Annaheim.

I so present.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here concerning exemption of private sales. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide a \$3,000 exemption for dealers in addition to private sales, therefore providing a tax break to the consumers of this province wherever they choose to purchase a vehicle.

And the petitioners have many, many signatures from the city of Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present today that deals with the confiscation of municipal reserves. The prayer reads as follows:

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

And the petition is signed by citizens of Runnymede.

I do so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with high fuel prices. And the prayer reads:

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 individuals from the communities of Nipawin, Pilger, and Ridgedale.

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.

Your petitions of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

To overrule the Parkland Health Board's decision with regard to Blaine Lake Medical Centre;

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To reduce fuel taxes;

To provide a \$3,000 exemption for PST (provincial sales tax) for vehicle dealers; and

To cause the government to grandfather vehicles that were tax paid on budget day.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

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

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

The petitions are for the Regina Golf Club, the Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan Inc., and the Archbishopial Corporation of Regina and the Episcopal Corporation of Saskatoon.

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moved by myself, and seconded by the hon. member from Arm River:

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Day of Mourning

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, today's flags on the Legislative Building and provincial government buildings are flying at half-mast as we commemorate Saskatchewan workers

injured and killed on the job.

Back in 1988 I was approached by Nadine Hunt who was then president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, to ask if I would introduce a private members' Bill to have April 28 made a statutory day of mourning for workers killed and injured on the job.

I was very proud of this legislature, Mr. Speaker, when that Bill passed unanimously, making Saskatchewan the first jurisdiction in Canada to legislate the day of mourning.

Mr. Speaker, April 28 is the day chosen because it was on that day in 1914 that Canada's first workers' compensation board Act was passed in the province of Ontario.

This is a day to share the grief of workers injured on the job and of families who have lost a family member on the job. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately young people and first-time workers are more likely to be injured in the workplace. More than 8,000 young workers, age 15 to 24 are injured each year. Since last April, 28 people have died on the job in Saskatchewan, five of them under the age of 24.

Mr. Speaker, for ourselves as legislators, this is a day to recommit ourselves to legislation and action in support of good occupational health and safety practices and programs. We do this for those who make up the backbone of the Saskatchewan economy, Saskatchewan workers — for them and for their families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to recognize all Saskatchewan workers killed on the job last year and in past years. Under any circumstance it's just as difficult to deal with but if we lose an elderly loved one or an individual who has suffered for long periods of time, their length of life or removal from pain may solace us. But one can only imagine how horrifying it would be to lose a loved one in a sudden work-related accident.

On average, 30 people are killed at work each year. Mr. Speaker, on this day of mourning we should all remind ourselves that it is everyone's responsibility to make sure their workplace is as safe as it can possibly be. As legislators we must be vigil of occupational health and safety regulations. Employers must maintain a safe work environment and procedures and employees must take that extra life-saving . . . (inaudible) . . . to protect themselves.

I would like to take a brief moment to remind all workers who have been fortunate enough to avoid a work-related tragedy whether they are working in Canada or overseas to exercise caution — take care and come home safely to your children and loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important day, and I would ask all the members in the Assembly to join with me in remembering all workers killed on the job in Saskatchewan and around the world. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Radio Interview About Upgrading for Former Nurses

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every now and then, Mr. Speaker, the media gets it right — perhaps more often than we like to admit. In public life we're quick to criticize when we think we have been treated unfairly. I think it's only fair that we equally be quick to commend a story that is balanced, fair, and accurate.

A case in point, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday morning on CBC's (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio *Morning Edition* acting host Garth Materie interviewed two former nurses who are taking advantage of our program of a half million dollars dedicated to upgrading former nurses so they can re-enter the profession.

Mr. Matherie asked them if they were prepared for the heavy workload of the modern-day nurse. Fair enough. He then asked them what they hoped to accomplish, and one explained that today there is much greater scope of nurses positions available in the community and a lot more nurses can do than 12 years ago when she left to raise her family.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, and I quote one of the nurses:

(This program made the difference in letting me go back to work.)

. . . it made me feel like Saskatchewan . . . There is hope and there is help and the people understand and we want to go back there and work and that they're willing to support us in our studies and it's great.

I'd like to thank . . . whoever set this through, whether it was . . . the Health Minister or Mrs. Longmoore . . . whoever made (it) . . . possible, and the people of Saskatchewan. I want to send them a big thank you.

That says it all, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Prince Albert Housing Starts

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to speak on an issue of grave concern in regards to the province of Saskatchewan and most certainly to the city of Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, this Assembly was informed recently that housing starts in the city of Prince Albert were up slightly and, Mr. Speaker, in a small way this is good news. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it has fallen on my shoulders the responsibility to inform this Assembly of the rest of the story.

Mr. Speaker, the city of Prince Albert's real estate board has released its figures for the calendar year of 1999. These figures, Mr. Speaker, allow us an open window into the devastating effect this NDP government has had and is having on this province and the city of Prince Albert. Although sales of higher priced homes have held their own, real estate sales are down by the astounding number of 7 per cent — down, Mr. Speaker, 7 per cent.

What is even more astonishing, Mr. Speaker, is that overall housing sales are down by more than 12 per cent. This figure includes the new housing starts, Mr. Speaker. A dismal reminder of this NDP (New Democratic Party) government's economic policy.

Fortunately on September 16, 1999, the citizens of Saskatchewan were given a glimpse of the future. A future, Mr. Speaker, that would be led by the next premier of Saskatchewan, the member from Rosetown-Biggar. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Member of Parliament Les Benjamin Celebrates 75 Years

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, today's good news-bad news story has been ongoing for about 75 years now. I say good news-bad news because Les Benjamin was good news for the people of Regina-Lumsden Lake Centre for the 25 years he served as their MP (Member of Parliament). He was bad news for the Liberal government and Conservative governments of the day as he stood up for his constituents.

One of Les's speeches began, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, things are so dry and so windy in southwestern Saskatchewan this spring, not only is there no point in seeding, but the gophers are eight feet high and digging.

Les Benjamin was quite a character. First elected in 1968 in Regina Lumsden-Lake Centre as I mentioned. Many of us remember 1968 as a year of Benjamina. We also recall another MP elected that year — what was his name; he went on to be prime minister — I think, Trudeau. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, Boxcar Benjamin outlasted Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the House of Commons. As mentioned, he served for 25 years.

Mr. Speaker, friends will be joining Les Benjamin and his wife, Connie Friesen on Saturday, April 29 at Tommy Douglas House from 2 to 5 p.m. Everyone is invited to help celebrate 75 years with a great Canadian and a compassionate socialist — Les Benjamin.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Emu Oil Plant to Open at Carlyle

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to inform the House about more good economic news coming out of rural Saskatchewan and I'm sure the member from Cannington will support.

Carlyle, Saskatchewan will be the new home of an emu oil manufacturing plant. The plant, which is relocating from British Columbia, is expected to be operational by the end of this month.

The Shirley farm, just north of Carlyle, will be home to the new operation. The plant will be operated by Jim and Carolyn Shirley with the help of their daughter, Jessica. The Shirley's raise and market emus and emu by-products.

Emu fat is condensed into oil. The oil is bottled for sale to 35 health food stores. Emu oil is known for its anti-inflammatory agents. Perhaps the opposition members should consider using this product to reduce their recent inflammatory remarks on a number of subjects.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — It also helps with eczema, cuts, burns, and arthritis. The plant was able to move to Saskatchewan with funding and assistance from the industrial research assistance program, Agri-Food Innovation Fund, and the Canadian adaption rural development study.

Mr. Speaker, this is yet another example of the hard work and ingenuity of the people of this province to help ensure the Saskatchewan economy continues to thrive.

Thank you very much.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Regina Public Library Film Festival

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Mr. Premier, from May 8 to May 13, the Regina Public Library will host a film festival. It's called Queer City Cinema.

Mr. Premier, how much money is your government contributing to help fund this event?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the question being of a very specific nature — funding of a particular program — I take notice of the question.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Deputy Premier, I have a brochure here promoting this event. It says Queer City Cinema gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Saskatchewan Arts Board, SaskTel, and SaskFILM. These are all government Crowns and agencies funded by Saskatchewan taxpayers. So I'll ask the Deputy Premier again, how much taxpayers' money is being used to fund this event?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I want to say first to the member that in this year's budget what the provincial government did provide is provided an additional funding to the Arts Board as we have across the piece for culture and recreation and municipalities.

The function today that's going on in Regina, Saskatchewan, that the member makes note of would be a decision that would be made by the Saskatchewan Arts Board. Now if there's a question or concern that the member has of the expenditure that this board of individuals, that's made up of people from across the province, if there's a understanding . . . or a concern by the member that there's a misappropriation of the fund or a misexpenditure of the fund, she should direct that question to the Chair of the Arts Board who's now Ms. Colleen Bailey.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the brochure goes on to say that

on May 13 at 1 p.m. there will be a panel discussion entitled Community Porn featuring visiting artists, activists, porn filmmakers, and porn actors. This little porn discussion group will be held in conjunction with screening of some of their movies.

So, Mr. Deputy Premier, it seems we have a bunch of porn stars coming to Regina to promote porno movies sponsored by SaskTel, SaskFILM, and Sask Arts Board.

Mr. Premier, how much money are you giving to this little porno film festival? And do you think this taxpayers' dollar should be used to promote pornography in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that in this province today this government sets aside a chunk of money that we put towards the Saskatchewan Arts Board. The Saskatchewan Arts Board this year is getting about \$3.7 million, Mr. Speaker. And the Saskatchewan Arts Board will be making decisions about a whole host of different events or activities that it's going to participate in.

If the member opposite . . . And as I said earlier, that the participants on the Saskatchewan Arts Board are men and women who are made up from across the province who in fact are well-recognized individuals, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the member opposite, if she's concerned about the kinds of functions and activities that the Saskatchewan Arts Board today puts on in this province, she should contact the Saskatchewan Arts Board; she should make it known to the Saskatchewan Arts Board what her preference is for further funding because, Mr. Speaker, it's their decisions in which the Arts Board provides its direction.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — This government can't hide behind another board. They're responsible for money that they give out in this province — every single penny of it. And I think they've lost sense of what's happening in this province.

First of all we raise the PST and we find out some of this money is used to promote pornography in this province. Then we raise SaskTel rates and you use some of that money as well to promote pornography in this province.

And you know what's even worse? It's not just the province; you've got the city of Regina and Canada Council also spending money to promote pornography in Saskatchewan.

So I want to ask you: do you really think this is a good use of taxpayers' dollars?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, today we have a number of third parties in which the government provides funding to. There are health boards, Mr. Speaker. We provide money to school boards in this province. We provide money to cultural boards. We provide money to Saskatchewan Arts Board. And these are men and women, Mr. Speaker, who are elected and

appointed throughout this province who have a vision or a view on what a particular area of expertise should be expanded or developed on.

Here today we have the member opposite saying that she doesn't have any confidence in the third party members who are elected men and women, who are appointed men and women in this province, who come from . . . some of them come from your part of the world.

Now if you have a problem, Madam Member, with the individuals who serve on the Arts Board — you think that they're making inappropriate submissions or determinations on taxpayers' money — you should provide a letter to me and say to me that we want those people removed. And you should provide a letter to me saying you should remove from the Arts Board . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'll just remind members from both sides to direct their comments through the Chair.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is: do you have a problem with spending taxpayers' dollars on pornography? That's the question.

In about an hour from now we're going to have educators on the steps of the legislature and they're here about the lack of funding for education. And yesterday the Liberal leader said that they didn't have any more money for education because there was other government priorities.

I want to go out on the steps and say one of your priorities is supporting pornography in this province — one of your priorities. You don't have enough money for education, but you do have money to bring porno film and activists into Regina.

So, Mr. Deputy Premier, my question is: what kind of message are you sending to the children of Saskatchewan? You don't have money for education; you have money for pornography.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that when you take a look at all of the organizations and all of the men and women today who are serving in appointed positions or elected positions to make a broad range of recommendations in terms of how we spend money in this province, we think that those are responsible individuals who are appointed to those environments.

And I say to the member opposite today, if you have a problem, Madam Member, if you have a problem with the men and women today who serve on the arts council, what you should be doing is you should be saying and writing a letter to the Arts Board and saying: member of Chair of the Arts Board, you in fact should remove yourself from the Arts Board. And you should be saying that to the Arts Board.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is we have a government . . . a member and we have an opposition party today, Mr. Speaker, who wants to intervene in all of the issues in the public affairs of what men and women who are appointed on our behalf . . . (inaudible) . . . to do. This is an intrusion by

this group of men and women into the functioning of appointed and elected members of this . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Deputy Premier, I can't help but wonder what would Baptist minister Tommy Douglas think of this little development. His party — his party — using taxpayers' dollars to promote pornography. You must be very proud, Mr. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Deputy Premier, this is absolutely sickening. Pornography is one of the most degrading, dehumanizing activities that human beings lower themselves to, and here we have your government using taxpayers' money to promote it.

Mr. Deputy Premier, will you immediately, immediately cancel all Saskatchewan government sponsorship of this event?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the members opposite very, very clearly that the issue of pornography and the issue of . . . the whole issue of morals that these people talk about, and I would argue, are no better or no worse than other people in the province.

One should remember this. When it comes to the issue of pornography, we want to check and see what the issue is that is being dealt with at this meeting that is being planned. Because believing the member opposite, believing the member opposite that this is something more than defining where pornography starts and ends and trying to make it sound like the Arts Board in this province is involved in promoting pornography, I would question the member's words.

But we will check. And we will go to meet with the Arts Board and find out whether they're promoting pornography as you say. But I trust this. I trust Colleen Bailey who I know from Yorkton, who is a member of the Sask . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the Deputy Premier I will today table this card which explains the promotion of pornography by this government in this province. I table that.

Mr. Deputy Premier, your government does not have money to fund transition houses to help children trapped in the sex trade. But you do have money to bring porn stars to Regina to promote their porno movies. Mr. Deputy Premier, where are your priorities? How can you possibly justify using taxpayers' money to promote and sponsor this event.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say again as

clearly as I can to the members opposite and through the Speaker and through this Assembly to the people of the province, that I will be checking with, and we will be meeting and the minister will be meeting with the board, the independent board, to see whether your accusation, that they are promoting pornography, is accurate. Because I don't believe it.

I think that if there is a discussion going on about pornography, it's the definition of pornography. And as you know, in provinces in Western Canada, we have a film rating agency in each of our provinces that look at where pornography exists and where it doesn't.

And for you to say and accuse, I say again, members of the board, Colleen Bailey, of promoting pornography in this province is a serious accusation. And I challenge the member to go outside of the House and say to Ms. Colleen Bailey that she's promoting pornography.

We'll check into it, but I don't trust what you . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Deputy Premier, on Monday next the all-party committee on the child sex trade will be holding a special meeting. They will be holding that meeting to discuss sending members to a conference on healing sexual exploitation.

Meanwhile, we have your government promoting pornography, one of the most destructive forms of sexual exploitation. So what sense does that make, Mr. Deputy Premier?

Immediately after question period today, the Saskatchewan party will be moving an emergency motion to immediately cancel government funding of this event and to redirect into programs to help children being exploited through the child sex trade.

Will you support this motion, Mr. Deputy Premier?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, what I do support, and I ask the member opposite, is whether she took time to phone Colleen Bailey this morning before she came and asked and made these accusations? I want to ask you that. And I challenge the members of the press, when they talk to you . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I will ask hon. members from both sides to please allow the answer to be heard, the questions to be allowed to be heard, and the answers to be given. I ask you, please.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I say again to the member opposite and I ask her in a sincere way whether she checked with the Arts Board and the chairperson, Colleen Bailey, whether or not they were promoting pornography before they came in the House and made these outrageous, outrageous statements.

And I would ask her when she leaves the Assembly that the first thing she do is talk to the Chair. And also I believe what's happening here is an attempt to get a cheap headline, a cheap weekend headline and then correct her statement on Monday which they've done a number of times. And I challenge them to withdraw the accusation of Colleen Bailey and the Arts . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Health Care in East Central Health District

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, there is a serious situation underway right at this minute at the Yorkton Health District. We have learned that due to a water main break, the dialysis unit has been shut down. The Yorkton District Health is doing what it can to cope and help the patients involved.

Dialysis patients who normally receive treatment at the Yorkton centre are being driven to Regina by volunteers and district health vehicles. This situation is called a backup for patients requiring dialysis care at the Regina General and are putting excessive pressure on the staff at the dialysis unit.

And more worrisome, if the Yorkton unit is not up and able to run by Monday, the Regina unit is telling us that they won't be able to handle the load without getting extra machines delivered into Regina.

Madam Minister, are you aware of this situation and what are you doing to cope with it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the situation. My understanding is the Department of Health officials are dealing with the East Central Health District on this issue. I understand that preparations are underway to repair the water line. We're optimistic that the water line can be repaired in short order.

I understand that if that isn't possible, and we should know shortly the length of time it will take to repair the water line, that arrangements will be made to ensure that people get dialysis in the east central area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, nurses who called me are saying that they're at the breaking point in terms of overtime and workload already in the Regina dialysis unit. They're getting incredible amounts of overtime hours already, and they're saying that the increased pressure is almost to the breaking point.

But more importantly, Madam Minister, there are qualified dialysis nurses who are in Yorkton who are not going to be working this weekend because of the breakdown of the unit there.

But why can't they come and help the Regina nurses do their job? We understand it's because of an inter-district contract situation. Does this make sense, Madam Minister? Why can't you bring nurses from Yorkton to help the Regina nurses provide the necessary service?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I won't ask the member if he's asking for health board consolidation in the province; but I will say this, that the Department of Health is aware of the situation. The Department of Health is working with the East Central and the Regina Health Districts.

There are other health districts in the province that provide dialysis services to people, as the member may know. Up until recently, we only had two centres in the province that provided dialysis care. We now have a centre in East Central, in P.A. (Prince Albert), in Lloydminster, and one is soon going to be operationalized in Swift Current. And we're planning on announcing another centre.

But I can assure the member that the department and the health districts are working as closely and co-operating closely in order to ensure that the people in the East Central area have access to dialysis services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the kidney dialysis unit isn't the only unit that's closed. As of 9 o'clock this morning, the Yorkton Health District ICU (intensive care unit) has been shut down. Why? We've been told it's because there are no doctors available for the weekend. And the district could bring in other doctors, but there's no money to pay for the overtime.

And also apparently, the maternity ward at the Yorkton district hospital only will have one registered nurse on duty today.

Madam Minister, you have a major regional centre in this province that is virtually shut down on a busy spring weekend. What are you doing to make sure that there's quality care for the people in eastern Saskatchewan serviced by the Yorkton Health District?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of that situation in Yorkton. I'm advised that the three specialists that usually provide services in the Yorkton area are away for the weekend. I understand that arrangements are being made to ensure that anyone who may get into difficulty in the Yorkton area will be transferred to an appropriate service in another part of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, this is just incredible. Here's a district that you've assumed responsibility for because you said the district board was incompetent and couldn't do it themselves.

And here under your direct responsibility we have the dialysis unit shut down; we have the ICU shut down; we have the maternity ward shut down. Madam Minister, this isn't exactly what I would call living up to your responsibility.

What's next? Are you going to send out a press release saying don't get sick in eastern Saskatchewan this weekend? When are you going to live up to your responsibility and do a review of the system so it can be fixed?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I didn't go out to Yorkton and break the waterline — the waterline broke.

What I can, what I can tell the member is that the Department of Health in Yorkton and the Regina Health District are working to ensure that dialysis patients have access to dialysis services in this province if the waterline cannot be repaired quickly.

A second point I want to make is that every Friday in the province of Saskatchewan all of the regional districts get together with the Department of Health and look at intensive care units and cardiac care units to make sure that we know exactly what is happening in the province so that if something happens we can move patients quickly to the appropriate service.

We're going to continue that kind of coordination. We've done it in the past, and we're going to continue it today, and we're going to continue it into the future, Mr. Speaker.

Parolees at Regina Community Correctional Centre

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday we asked the NDP why criminals from Alberta were being moved into a half . . . into halfway houses here in Saskatchewan. And what was the NDP's response? The Minister of Justice just said he would use more tax money to build more halfway houses. And the Justice minister assured us, and I quote the minister:

. . . all necessary precautions have been made to ensure the safety of the community here in Regina.

Mr. Minister, today we find out that two criminals sent to a Regina halfway house — criminals who were supposed to be monitored daily — were somehow able to escape from supervisors, get a hold of some guns, rob two stores, and commit a sexual assault.

Mr. Minister, is that what you meant when you said all necessary precautions have been made to ensure the safety of the community?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition had got his facts straight, he would have realized that this was a federal facility, that the transfer was from a federal facility in Alberta to Saskatchewan, that the facility is administered by corrections Canada, not by

Saskatchewan corrections. Mr. Speaker, he would have realized that this was a federal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I've taken steps to raise the issue with the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, please. I was not able to hear the answer being given by the Hon. Minister of Justice. Please co-operate.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've contacted the Solicitor General in Ottawa to express our concern and to express the need to respond to this problem by ensuring that there are adequate halfway houses in Alberta. And I've ensured the Solicitor General, Mr. Speaker, that we should have a meeting as soon as possible to discuss the situation of halfway houses across Western Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I don't think the minister recognizes that he's responsible for the safety of the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Minister, last winter Vernon Blaker and Harvey Cote were sent to the halfway house here in Regina. But the National Parole Board said that these two guys were a risk to society. Both men had serious problems with alcohol and the Parole Board said they should be constantly monitored.

But the NDP Justice minister assures us that all necessary precautions have been made to ensure the safety of the community. Mr. Minister, one of the robberies that these men committed took place at 11 p.m. Apparently that was made possible because their curfew wasn't until 1 a.m.

Mr. Minister, is that your idea, and these are your words, is that your idea of taking all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of the community? What steps are the government taking right now to address the serious threats that some criminals in these halfway houses pose to Saskatchewan residents?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this comes from a leader of a party who campaigned, Mr. Speaker, on not one single extra dollar for criminal justice in this province. That is not the way to keep our communities safe.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind — I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, that this is the Saskatchewan legislature, not the House of Commons. This is a responsibility of the federal government; we know that; he knows that; and he's just playing games with the Saskatchewan public.

We have ensured that there will be more police officers on the street, Mr. Speaker, in this province than ever before. We have ensured there'll be more RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officers across the province. And, Mr. Speaker, the crime rate in this province, as he well knows, is coming down; it is not going up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask leave of the Assembly to make a statement of importance to Saskatchewan workers.

Leave granted.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Day of Mourning

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker and all the members. Today, April 28th is the National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job. While we take time today to remember those workers, it's particularly important to remember young and first-time workers. We know that young and first-time workers are more likely to experience workplace accidents than other workers.

In Saskatchewan more than 8,000 young workers, age 15 to 24, are injured each year. This is about one-quarter of all injured workers. Since last April, 28 people have died on the job in our province. Five of them were under the age of 24. Each of these tragic accidents is needless and completely unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, it is vital that all of us — government, labour organizations, educators, employers, occupational health committees, and working people — reaffirm our commitment to the prevention of accidents, injuries, illness, and death in the workplace.

We must continue our support for prevention programs and the enforcement of health and safety laws.

Mr. Speaker, I will now read into the record the names of the 28 people who died in Saskatchewan workplaces this past year, after which I would ask all hon. members to rise and in this way convey our thoughts and deepest sympathy go to these workers' families and to all those who have been injured in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker the names I wish to read into the record are:

Thomas Newlove, Young Wong, David Parslow, Jody Churko, Lionel Stephens; Ken McCoy — who was just 15 years old — Michael Anderson, Gary Marion, George Wickenhauser, Louie Woloschuk, Walter Bender, Eric Kurz, Murray Jeffrey, Gordon Merrick, Raymond DesRoches, Elmer Bernard, John Nelson, Allan Fleck, Leon Wolowski, Don Schweitzer, Daryl Baier, Patrick Kerr, George Fern, Frank Hepp, Donald Martin, Gordon Kristoff, Lyle Yurach, and Brenton Eikel.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all hon. members rise for a moment of silence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Assembly observed a moment of silence.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 30 — The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 30, The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and ordered to be

read a second time at the next sitting.

Bill No. 233 — The Democratic Unionism Act

Mr. Weekes: — I'd like to move first reading of Bill No. 233, The Democratic Unionism Act.

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

Bill No. 234 — The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2000 (Freedom of Speech in the Workplace)

Mr. Weekes: — I'd like to move first reading of Bill No. 234, The Trade Union Amendment Act, 2000 (Freedom of Speech in the Workplace).

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

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

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, prior to orders of the day, I ask for leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46.

The Speaker: — I would ask the member to kindly explain briefly why it is urgent and necessary to debate this matter immediately, please.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Funding to Combat the Child Sex Trade

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that many people in Saskatchewan, as well as many members and almost all members of this Assembly, have agreed prior to this day that funding, taxpayers' dollars in this province be used towards prioritized initiatives such as taking care of our children, helping our children that are suffering on the streets through the exploitation of themselves in the sex trade.

We in the Saskatchewan Party believe that the government must take account of this very pressing need for these children and examine carefully how they are using their money and the taxpayers' money in this province.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put forward a motion:

That all funding provided by the provincial government that is being used to promote pornography be immediately cancelled and redirected to programs to combat the child sex trade.

And I put forward this motion, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member from Moosomin.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leave not granted.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, with leave to

move a motion dealing with memberships on committee.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Substitution of Member on the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

That the name of Carl Kwiatkowski be substituted for that of Ken Krawetz on the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Environment and Resource Management Vote 26

The Chair: — Before I call the first subvote, I'll invite the minister to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to my immediate left is my deputy minister, Stuart Kramer. To my immediate right is Tom Harrison, the director of the West Boreal EcoRegion. Directly behind me is Dennis Sherratt, the director of fish and wildlife branch. And to the left of Dennis is Lynn Tulloch, the executive director of corporate services. And we also have other officials in the galleries, Mr. Chair, and we're certainly looking forward to any questions that the opposition may have. Thank you.

Subvote (ER01)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'd like to welcome the minister's officials here this morning as well, and it's particularly nice to see Mr. Kramer. In my previous life as president of SARC (Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres) and SARCAN, we met on numerous occasions to work out all of the details around the legislated container program. And I think in the end we developed a very, very successful program with SARCAN and one that is a model I think for the rest of North America. So welcome to all of you this morning.

Perhaps we could start, Mr. Minister, if you'd like to take an opportunity and provide us with what you feel may be some of the highlights in your department through this budget, and where some of the new areas of spending are going to be, and what types of new projects, initiatives that may be involved this year as well.

(1100)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just very briefly, SERM's (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) budget for 2000-2001 was 116.924 million — an increase of 15 per cent from last year, which is a fairly hefty increase.

And certainly some of the costs that we have incurred, and some of the initiatives run we are undertaking in 2000-2001 include \$6 million to ensure forestry industry development is done in a sustainable manner, and that's also inclusive of a \$750,000 fund for a four-year forest strategy. We have \$2.5 million for the carbon sequestration agreement that SaskPower and SERM is able to put together.

As well, we have set aside \$2.2 million to further our efforts to reduce damage caused by the spruce budworm; \$350,000 extra for forest regeneration survey; \$200,000 to help prevent and reduce the ravages of Dutch elm disease in our forests; \$532,000 will be invested into the provincial park system.

As well, we have committed \$321,000 to fund work on land use and renewable resource planning for the Athabasca winter road; 250,000 will help launch a multi-year federal/provincial project to decommission the abandoned Gunner and Laredo uranium mine sites in northern Saskatchewan; and as well, \$100,000 will be used to meet increased contractual costs with SARCAN.

And certainly, Mr. Chair, there's a lot of other expenditures that we would like to certainly brag about, but SERM is on track to have a very, very successful year.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And as you indicated, there are definitely a lot of areas to talk about in this budget with respect to the Department of Environment and Resource Management. There are a couple of specific areas I'd like to touch on today, particularly in the area of the forest fire contingency fund.

But I also noticed in your response you talked about the increase in the spruce budworm program, and I'd just like to have one question in that area first before we proceed to the forest fire contingency fund.

What type of request for proposal process does SERM use when calling for proposals on the budworm spraying program? If you could please let me know.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The proposals come from the FMA (forest management agreement) holders; and as mentioned previously there's \$2.2 million in that fund. And certainly the FMA holders have an option to approach SERM to put forward the proposals in reference to their battle against the spruce budworm problem.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — As I understand it, the requests for proposals are lent by the department, and there's a proposal evaluation process that is weighted as follows: 50 per cent technical, 15 per cent productivity, 25 per cent cost, 10 per cent references.

So it appears that we have a process here where cost only accounts for 25 per cent of the decision or evaluation process. Even if you add in the 15 per cent on productivity there, costs in

productivity aren't even half of the evaluation process.

And I had a specific example given to me of where two tenders could be . . . or two proposals could be submitted; one at \$164,000 higher cost, but it could be given to . . . and it could be given to that higher tender because of this weighting process where 50 per cent, as I say, is on technical and 10 per cent on references with less than 40 per cent on productivity and cost.

I'm just interested in that cost for a department that you've indicated, Mr. Minister, is very interested in maintaining costs and staying on line and holding the line, is such a small, almost irrelevant factor.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out that certainly the criteria that you use, we're not totally aware of that particular criteria. We would ask that you would forward information to us and we'll get back by way of a letter or verbal correspondence to you to advise you the details of that particular program.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you. Well I would very much appreciate that, Mr. Minister, as this particular process and the I guess subjective nature of the various parts of it have caused a great deal of concern amongst a number of potential contractors. So I would be more than prepared to follow this up with you.

If we could just move on to the forest fire contingency fund. Firstly how is this fund to be administered? Is it administered separately? Will it be part of the overall administration of the department? And what types of mechanisms are going to be put into place to administer the new \$50 million forest fire contingency fund?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for the question. And certainly from the perspective of the forest firefighting budget, many of the FMA holders in the forestry companies and the people living in the forestry fringe area and in northern Saskatchewan are quite pleased that SERM has taken the active step of trying to put a contingency fund in place in the event that there is a serious forest fire problem in the upcoming season.

What I would indicate is that the amount that we have budgeted for the forest firefighting season is \$28.7 million. Now if that money is expended, this new \$50 million contingency fund would then kick in. And if the money is not used, then of course that will be returned to treasury. It's very clear that the money is not to be used for anything else except forest firefighting practices. Thanks.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — So then if the money is set aside, did it come out of the General Revenue Fund? Is it allocated? Are there certain portions of it that have been allocated in certain areas, or is it allocated to any specific purpose around firefighting, equipment, personnel? Is there any type of specific purpose for any parts of it?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to point out that in reference to the question of how the money was allocated, that'd be a question for the Minister of Finance. But in terms of the operation of the \$50 million contingency fund, what I say today is that all costs associated with forest firefighting, if we're above the 28.7 million as I talked to you, would be then derived from this particular fund. Any funds not

used from this \$50 million contingency fund would be returned to Finance.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Your department has said that the average annual fire suppression costs have been nearly 45 million over the past 10 years. The regular fire suppression budget has been around the \$29 million. Now why wouldn't the department just simply have topped up the regular portion of the budget by another 16 million. If you already had an idea of what those costs would be, why the need for the extra 34 million?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The question in reference to why didn't we just go to the \$46 million average instead of having to claim the full 50 million in the contingency fund is quite frankly there's many years that the fire season is low. There's many years that the fire season is extremely high. And some of the facts we have: in the year 1995 we spent \$90 million in forest firefighting; in 1998 we spent \$90 million; in 1999 we spent \$70 million. And these figures are always very hard to predict. And so the question that we answer back in terms of your particular question is that it's very difficult to determine the amounts and many times the forest firefighting budget is way over and sometimes it's under. And that's why the \$50 million contingency fund is necessary for us to be able to handle the fluctuating costs of fighting fires in northern Saskatchewan and the province as well.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister, and he alluded to this just briefly a little earlier, if the \$50 million is not used in its entirety this fiscal year, what would happen to the balance, the unused portion. Or is that . . . does that accumulate or is it returned to the General Revenue Fund.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — As I've said, any amount not being used would be returned to the Treasury Board, and obviously for next year this same scenario would be asked for and whether we get it is certainly for next year's budget to find out.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister you talked about it would only be used for firefighting purposes, forest fire costs associated. Could you briefly detail what those costs are and how they break down in terms of equipment, personnel, administration and the other costs associated with the overall firefighting.

(1115)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for the question. Just very briefly on the current budget that we have, and again it's difficult to talk about the \$50 million contingency fund, but on the current budget we have, generally our costs range from . . . for the \$28.7 million that we have allocated, our estimated expenditures would be broken down in salaries at \$12.5 million. And supplies and other payments, which include helicopters and food supplies and so on and so forth, runs about \$16.2 million. So roughly speaking again, it's a very rough guesstimate. We're probably spending 45 per cent on salaries and 55 per cent on other costs associated with forest firefighting.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister . . . We've all been hearing a lot recently about the

forest fire danger this year. It's expected that we may have a very, very severe fire season.

Aside from the \$50 million contingency fund, what other measures, if any, is the department taking in order to handle what could be a very severe fire season this year?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you know, it's very, very difficult to us to continue to watch how the forest fire season is going to come about. All we've done over the last several years is we've done extremely well compared to some of the other neighbouring provinces. And Alberta, for example — we have had half the cost of fighting just as much, as many of the fires that they have fought. So Saskatchewan and SERM is really leading in the forest firefighting efforts.

And right across the nation, many people have come to Saskatchewan to try and see how we prepare for the forest firefighting season, and the different strategies that we implement, and certainly the manner in which we fight fires.

So far this year, we moved one month ahead of our schedule to make sure that we're prepared for the forest firefighting season. We've had 41 fires that have started — no escapes. And again I go back to the fact that Alberta has followed Saskatchewan's lead. They also moved their crews up a month early to prepare for the season. So in essence there has been a great amount of work being done by many of the fine men and women that are involved with firefighting.

And throughout time, throughout the years, Saskatchewan has built a very solid reputation of the manner in which they fight fires, the budgets in which they're able to fight fires with, and certainly some of the preparedness that they have undertaken over the years to prepare, as I mentioned before, for a tough perceived summer of forest fires in northern Saskatchewan and throughout the province as well.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Well, Mr. Chair, the minister actually anticipated a couple of my next questions. Some of them had to do with some of the technological changes that are coming around firefighting and that kind of thing and some of the reviews that are in fact going on in other provinces as well. But we perhaps will leave that for another day.

In terms of some of the additional efforts, is the department planning to step up its education campaign and to educate the public and do a little more awareness around fire safety, this kind of thing? And if so, would that money be coming out of the \$50 million contingency fund? Or is there a part of the budget where those types of awareness programs can be developed from? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, there's no question that we have to have more awareness of the issue — you're absolutely right. But the situation is that all the costs of trying to promote awareness by the people in Saskatchewan, in terms of how some of these fires are started, is certainly covered by our operational costs and not from the \$50 million contingency fund — if that was the question.

And the other point I want to raise is the 41 fires that we spoke about, the 41 starts this year, almost all were caused by human

error. So there's no question about it that we have to make every effort to educate the people on the dangers and the potential threat to our forests when it comes to fires.

So there's no question that the point you raised today in reference to awareness is very, very key. And I again state that of the 41 fires that we spoke about, almost all were human caused. So there is a need for an awareness campaign, and we're undertaking to do that from our general revenues.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. You had talked about having stepped up . . . being one month ahead of last year in terms of preparedness. If we could just go back to last year for a minute, would you be able to provide the official opposition with a breakdown of the costs associated with all of the firefighting program last year, and the contractors involved, individuals involved, and the contract amounts and salaries of those individuals?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you know March 31, 2000 was our year end. It's going to take us some time to get all the information but if there's some specific information that you'd like we'd certainly make every effort to find the information that you wanted. Public Accounts . . . it's going to take us some time to get all the information in place, but certainly consistent with our government's theme we're open and accountable and transparent, and we'll certainly provide you with information.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — I thank the minister, Mr. Chair, very much for his offer and we will certainly take that up . . . take him up on that and if he can provide that we would be more than pleased to have it.

Just specifically with respect to employees for a second, obviously if there is going to be a heightened need this year with respect to the severity or the threat of fire this year, where typically are the firefighters recruited from? What types of training are provided to them? And what is the cost of that training?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The money for training the forest firefighters does come from our operating budget within SERM. And all the people that we train for forest firefighting are from northern Saskatchewan. On occasion, many people from southern Saskatchewan do go north to create or to get some of these jobs. And it doesn't happen at a wide-scale basis, but certainly the majority of people that we train are from the North. And we train them in how to fight fires and safety and first aid and so on and so forth.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, after having discovered the way in which proposals are asked for with respect to the spruce budworm program, spraying program, I am curious as to how the contracting of water bombers and other types of equipment that is used in forest firefighting is done.

Does the department own a lot of this equipment? Is it contracted? If so, what is the procedure for contracting equipment for forest firefighting?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to let you

know that in terms of the water bombers we own the basic aircraft. It's owned by the province of Saskatchewan.

In the aircraft — I don't have the exact numbers — we have trackers and we have bombers — and on many occasions when the forest fire situation is serious, we have the different jurisdictions that share. Last year we had some trackers and bombers from the Territories. And often, we also ship some of our trackers and bombers to Alberta, to Manitoba, and so on and so forth.

This has all been done and co-ordinated throughout all the jurisdictions. And certainly from our perspective, it works well. When one jurisdiction has some major problems, then the other territories and provinces certainly help them out by affording them the use of the aircraft at agreed upon rates.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, in the situations where the services and equipment are contracted out, are those typically notwithstanding the agreements that you have with other provinces on sharing equipment, are those contracts typically let in Saskatchewan or are there interprovincial agreements where the tenders will be let across a number of provinces?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that in the case of helicopters we often have difficulty in finding enough helicopters in the province because there isn't that many here. But we make every effort to try and employ some of the local helicopter companies that are available.

And again, when you look at trying to forecast the forest firefighting season, it's often a very, very difficult task in doing that. So do we have opportunity to go to jurisdictions and get other helicopters contracted in the case of a serious fire.

So to answer the question, there are some within the province that we use. Many times, depending on the seriousness of the forest fire situation, we do have to shop around in other jurisdictions to try and find, in this case, the helicopters that are needed.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I wonder if the minister could provide me with an idea of the direct costs involved with using a water bomber. And I understand that there are different types of equipment and there are certainly different ways in which it can be used. But is there a basic cost that when you have to put a water bomber in the air that you can identify?

(1130)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again for the question, in terms of the direct costs in using water bombers, give us a couple of weeks and I'll get the answer for you. We don't have the details here. But within the next couple of weeks we should have the information and we'll certainly forward it to you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have a lot of — as you're very well aware of, Mr. Minister — smaller privately owned businesses in northern Saskatchewan that have developed over the years who are available to participate in the

firefighting program. And I think in some cases we probably depend on it to a certain degree with investments that they've made in equipment and resources, those kinds of things.

What number of northern contractors are involved in firefighting? And how many people are involved through the employment by these northern contractors?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Chair, our priority when we look at the forest fire situation is to fight the fire with the most effective means and try to get the fire out as quickly as we can. And we don't have the direct number of contractors here available for you, but we will forward to you the number of contractors that we have used in the past and certainly the number of employees. That information will become available very, very quickly.

However just to point out that in the northern part of Saskatchewan — I go back to our earlier point — SERM is certainly recognized throughout the jurisdictions across Canada as having one of the most effective means to fight fires. And many times in northern Saskatchewan we have private business, as you mentioned, that do want to get into the service of trying to help fight fires and they certainly come at a cost.

So the SERM officials are constantly, diligently looking at ways and means in which we can hold the costs, use as many of the contractors that are available within the immediate area within Saskatchewan, certainly within the other jurisdictions around Saskatchewan, so we're able to maintain the costs and at the same time fight fires as quickly as we can and as best we can.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, I certainly understand the minister's appreciation of the work that the men and women who fight these fires do, and he indicated that appreciation a little earlier.

There is some confusion in some quarters. I know that a lot of people have a difficulty understanding what's all involved in fighting a forest fire, and how individuals themselves work both on the ground and with equipment — that kind of thing. One of the things that a lot of people I don't think are very familiar with may be some of The Labour Standards Act regulations — that kind of thing — around forest firefighting.

Perhaps if you could, could you explain the types of hours that people fighting . . . the workers fighting forest fires work? The number of hours that they are allowed in a maximum per day, a maximum per week? What overtime provisions there are? And what types of shift work there may be involved in terms of manning a fire throughout a 24-hour period?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just for your information, depending on the fire situation again, there's oftentimes that some of the staff work 14 to 16 hours because of the intensity of the fire. If the fire is deemed under control or a less serious nature, then there are oftentimes 10- to 12-hour shifts. And because of occupational health and safety, oftentimes these people that are out fighting fires cannot stay more than 14 days.

And the average salary for an emergency firefighter would

range roughly between 7 and 7.50 per hour depending on the certification. Other firefighters may make as much as 8 to 8.50 per hour again if they're certified and qualified.

So the amount of money that they are being paid is fairly low, but certainly it's something that we're continually working towards to try and see if we can get better working conditions and certainly better salaries. That's certainly something that we have to look at in the future. Thank you.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Are the majority of individuals involved directly in firefighting trained in any kind of night fire firefighting, and do we have any particular types of technology available to us for early detection? And I'm thinking specifically of being able to fly at night and do early detection and have trained personnel that can go in and perhaps eliminate the threat before it becomes full-blown.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just for the member's information, as always SERM is always looking at new ways of doing things and there are some exciting plans that we want to talk about later in the years.

But certainly in reference to the night firefighting situation, we do some work with heavy equipment, the cap lines, certainly that isn't a problem, but during a night, we do not place people on the fire line. Occupational Health and Safety rules dictate it's just much too dangerous, and certainly we agree.

In terms of looking at early means in which we could look at the firefighting or forest fire problems, we have a tower system that we are constantly trying to improve. We have aircraft patrolling that really helps with this particular challenge. And we also monitor lightning strikes. These are certainly some of the efforts that we have undertaken and will continue to undertake to make sure that we get a handle on our forest fires, before they get too big to handle.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair and to the minister, and welcome to the officials that you have here. I was listening to the questioning and the responses and there's an area that from my constituency has quite a bit of relevancy, particularly in the changing mode of agriculture in the northwest. And I'm referring to the raising and marketing of elk in my part of the country.

Now I know under your program the elk is a responsibility of SERM, and I just wanted to explore one or two things there.

The first question, Mr. Minister, would be because it is under the jurisdiction of SERM, what is the overall objective that you have for this elk program. And we want to get maybe into some of the marketing objectives, or developing objectives later.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just first of all, our priority from SERM's perspective is safety and health for both the game industry and wildlife. That's very, very important. What we do know is that we have a very strict protocol with Ag and Food on this particular file. Both SERM and SAF (Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food) are working together, and this strict protocol is certainly looking at some of those issues that I spoke about earlier in terms of safety and health.

And also to point out that the elk industry, from my information, is growing at 15 per cent. So that we're able to continually watch that balance between growth and to ensure that there is safety and health for both the wildlife and the elk industry, then we would continue going down that path. But certainly from SERM's perspective, our priority is safety and health for both the game industry and wildlife.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, as I mentioned earlier, it's an industry that is certainly growing in my part of the country and probably all across Saskatchewan, and the northern part of Saskatchewan in particular.

Safety concerns, I think, are very, very important, and I think they have been. And the industry itself is also very concerned. And, as you know, the industry is maturing quite rapidly. It's expanding as you've mentioned. Some of the people that are involved in the industry, particularly in my constituency, have been in the business now I think for 28 years — one of the original elk producers in the province.

I guess their concern starts to come to the surface when they see other industries that are developing kind of peripherally to them. One industry, for instance, the bison industry has virtually moved ahead of them in terms of commercial production of bison — moving into the slaughtering and meat marketing of the processed meat. They can identify those industries such as bison being under the jurisdiction and control and programs of Saskatchewan Ag and Food.

I think they're wondering now is it time that the elk industry, because it has matured and has developed, moved over into a similar program controlled under Ag and Food in conjunction with their own ability to monitor certainly the safety aspects?

(1145)

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order, members. Order.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just quickly, there is no question that the elk industry has certainly expanded, and it's growing rapidly than within any other jurisdiction across the country.

The point you raise is why is bison dealt differently from elk. The information is elk is also in the wild, where bison have almost no wild population at all. So SERM has to ensure that not only are the native elk species protected and certainly the native wildlife as well, from the potential problems associated with importing of elk.

As you know, Ag and Food is much more involved with the elk industry than before. And we're constantly working on a protocol arrangement to work out some of the differences that SERM and SAF may have to ensure, as both portfolios are wanting to ensure, that we have a strict protocol process in place to ensure that some of the elk that are being imported into Saskatchewan are safe.

Mr. Wakefield: — Deputy Chairman, thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess the concerns that the elk breeders themselves have are similar to that. They certainly don't want to see any contamination or disease movement from the wild into their

herd and vice versa.

I think what they feel is that the maturity of their industry now probably has some validity in allowing them to do the testing, and the testing can show up any particular disease or cross contamination very, very quickly, more so particularly now with the kinds of testing that's done.

And I'm happy to hear you say that there is a development of protocol between your ministry and the ministry of Ag and Food. I think that's healthy. And I think the producers would support that.

If your ministry is going to continue to do the . . . be responsible for the elk production in the province, I wonder if you could give me an idea of what are some of the advantages, other than the safety, what are some of the advantages that your ministry can offer the elk industry, and I'm thinking in terms of promotion of diversification? What can they do in terms of developing value added? I'm thinking of commercial herds and slaughtering. And what are the costs that you are now experiencing in trying to promote the elk industry in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Again SERM's role is to not control industry. As you know this particular challenge is of trying to help the elk breeders, and certainly maintain the health and safety of other animals is shared between Ag and Food and SERM. And our particular challenge is, as we mentioned before, the elk industry is moving at a 15 per cent at an annual growth rate, which is fairly impressive, and as part of our marketing efforts with SERM, if we can put it in those contexts, is that we want to ensure that these animals that we're importing are disease free. This is where SERM certainly is contributing to trying to make sure that the problem doesn't get out of hand in terms of the potential diseases that could be imported into Saskatchewan.

And certainly that's consistent with what the industry wants as well. So SERM and SAF — Ag and Food — certainly have a shared responsibility here and we're doing our very best to ensure that we work these things out.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. The elk industry is in Saskatchewan . . . I think has a really bright future along with some of the other diversified animals as well. I think what the industry is looking forward to, and I know that this is being developed already, but they're really looking forward to a lot of not only diversification but international marketing as well. And I know a lot of the breeders are doing a lot of international travelling in order to promote those kinds of things on their own. And I know that there's a lot of restrictions, at least I'm being told that there are restrictions, between cross-border, provincial cross-border trading of animals within our country. And certainly to move animals from Canada into the United States seems to be a market that these producers are trying to develop because they feel they're restricted between provinces.

My question, Mr. Minister, then would be in the promotional aspect of trying to develop this elk industry, can you assist these producers any further in conjunction with maybe the economic and development department or with other forms of economic

development to try to expand that elk industry outside of our area, and also to allow the cross-contamination and improvement of genetics coming into the province. And I think that's a very important aspect that the producers are really looking for.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for your question. Again SERM's role is to ensure that our animals are disease free so that they can move pretty well anywhere. And again we go back to re-emphasizing SERM's primary role in this whole protocol, and that is the safety and health for both game industry and wildlife. And I think the industry itself certainly appreciates that.

And what I also want to add is that I think it's to everybody's interest — industry, province, potential markets that you speak about, the elk breeders, and also the wildlife federation, all the people involved with this particular exercise — is that we make sure that these animals are disease free. That is our primary objective with SERM and we'll continue working towards that objective.

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Minister, thank you. And I just have one question to follow up on this particular line, and that is with those objectives that you've outlined for your department regarding elk. Is there in place or can you assure us that there will be in place a representative group of producers that are involved in the industry in assisting you on a consultative and a positive consultative way in trying to improve and develop further protocol programs and strategies for the elk industry?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just wanted to point out that, as always, our effort here is to maintain the health of the wildlife and the game industry.

As a result of some of your questions, I want to assure you that we do meet with SEBA (Saskatchewan Elk Breeders Association), which is the elk breeder's association, and to also point out that one of the challenges that we certainly appreciate coming from the industry itself is they have much more to gain or to lose depending on how well they develop their industry.

And certainly my challenge as a SERM minister to SEBA and to other people involved with the industry is you have to work very, very closely with both Ag and Food and SERM in helping work and develop your particular industry.

So SERM is more than willing to work on a number of initiatives to help the industry along. But I say again, as I've said many times before, is their industry has to be very, very co-operative and collaborative with SERM and with SAF in order for us to ensure we see a very good healthy growth of the elk industry in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Wakefield: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'll be pleased to relay some of that information back to the producers in our particular area.

I'm going to defer to a colleague now, Mr. Deputy Chair, if I can.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is for the

minister. I have a constituent concerned about the Lovering Lake access road. If I may, I'll read you a little piece of letter and then ask you a question about it.

I am writing to voice my concern over the terrible condition of the road leading into the Lovering Lake Recreational Site.

To begin with there are huge holes at the cattle gate, one on each side of the gate large enough to swallow half a tire. These holes abut the metal ties of the cattle gate. There are large potholes in the dirt road immediately prior to the gate as well. The blacktop also has large holes immediately prior to the gate. I feel that cars/trucks are in danger of tearing off an oil pan or wrecking the transmission.

The paved road from the cattle gate in (it also) has many large potholes that cannot be avoided.

Are you budgeting any money towards fixing that particular road?

(1200)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just wanted to point out that geography class was one of my weakest classes in high school and I never passed the subject. So in terms of the particular area you're speaking about, I'm not totally familiar with it. And what I would ask you to do, please, is to send us the information as well as the letter from your constituent and we will find out whether this is a Highways road or a parks road.

And to further point out is that we are making every effort to look at the park system to review how we're handling the whole park challenges facing Saskatchewan. And we're going to do our very best and we're very optimistic that we are able to do some work in the parks system throughout the province.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Minister. She did send you a letter and hasn't had a reply yet back so that's why she sent it to me. So she asked if I would bring it up here, so you should have it on file. So hopefully you will address that.

One of the other questions I'd like to ask you about that. The RCMP and the army uses this particular area for practice manoeuvres. Does the federal government give any grants to the Lovering Lake for the use of this land?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for the question. Just to point out to your constituent, if I can apologize to her through you, you can tell her that I'll respond to her letter promptly. We do go through a great amount of letters at times and we will do our very best to respond as quickly as we can, but sometimes it takes some days.

I want to point out that to my knowledge we don't get any revenues from the RCMP or from the army in terms of use of this particular road, but we'll check with that and confirm with you if we do or if we don't.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'll thank you, Mr.

Minister. I'd be interested in that information.

Also while we're still on Lovering Lake there, the leases have gone from \$50 to 500 over the last five years. Could you give the reasons why they've increased that much?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out just for the information of the folks that may be watching, right now from all the revenues from the campgrounds and from the park system, the province of Saskatchewan receives 8.565 million, and the actual expenses of the park system is 13.699 million. So there's a net loss of 5.134 million which the government covers. This of course is part of our 10-year, \$25 million effort towards our park system.

In addition to that we are also contributing \$2.5 million in capital construction to the park system on an annual basis. And we'll continue putting as much effort and emphasis on our park system.

So to answer your question, there may have been increases. I can't dispute your numbers; I don't know of the particular details of the park and the span of the increases. But what I do know is this government is certainly committed to the park system. There's much more that we can do and there's much more we're going to attempt to do with the park system.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank you, minister, and I hope we will keep on you to make sure that you follow through with them promises.

Another question I'd like to ask you about parks and rec grants. How many were given out last year to various organizations under the park . . . if they had a park and recs board? And how much was budgeted this year for the upcoming year to be given for grants for parks and rec boards?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out that SERM does not fund or grant any money to any rec boards. We simply provide all our funding to the park system.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Deputy Speaker. A question I'd like to ask you concerns underground fuel tanks, abandoned ones that have been abandoned in yard sites, townsites. Does that fall under your jurisdiction? Are you doing any funding, putting it aside, to clean up if there's some contaminated areas.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — To answer the question, the underground storage tanks are indeed a challenge in the province of Saskatchewan. They are environmentally challenging for all the different communities that have them, and certainly areas that have these underground tanks.

SERM does not have any dollars for the clean up of these tanks. We are largely leaving that to the responsibility of the people that have the tanks in the first place.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, how about sites that have been abandoned or maybe are on . . . basically that have been abandoned or they can't even trace the owners back in some of the towns, that really nobody kind of almost — shouldn't say — almost doesn't own the property.

They can't . . . they're just abandoned sites that they haven't taken back in tax enforcement yet, but to try and find the person responsible. Or the person that does own the property obviously has no money to fix up a site that they bought; maybe they had bought this site and not realizing that there was an underground tank under it at that time. Does that mean that they're responsible for it?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out to the member, the situation with the underground storage tanks is this: number one is that we're working with the jurisdictions and the people and the communities that have had this particular problem. We're trying to see if we can trace back, as far back as we can, using some of the resources that the province and SERM has, to try and see if we can find somebody responsible for that.

And the second thing is that certainly, as you've indicated from time to time, is that SERM does not have the budget to go around redigging up these old underground storage tanks, cleaning up the site, and then, then leaving it as it is. It's a tremendous challenge, as I've mentioned before. But as I mentioned, we are working with the different jurisdictions, the different people involved with this to try our best to see what we can do to help them with that particular challenge.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, who determines and what is a contaminated site? Do you go out and do you test them if you're requested? Basically is there money budgeted for that for you to test them? Or who . . . does your . . . do you decide what is a contaminated site or who does decide it's a contaminated site? How much it has to be dug out, how many feet has to be dug out of dirt, surrounding dirt? If it has to be aired out, dried out?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out that in the event that you were to buy property and there's some underground tanks in there, and you wanted to be ensured that these underground tanks were safe or you wanted to make sure that the problem was there, we in SERM would ask you to do a study of the site, which includes test holes. And then we'd ask you to fill out documentation and return it to SERM.

And we certainly would ask you to get somebody that's certified to do that for us, to determine whether this site is of course contaminated or not.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, I'd like to do some follow-up in regards to these underground tanks.

Are you just telling us that if someone buys a property and there happens to be an underground tank on it, it's the responsibility of that individual to then approach the department to do some testing to see whether or not there's contamination on the site?

We've had a debate about this for a number of years already, and it would seem to me the department should have a policy in place that basically says, we've reviewed, we understand, we've got processes in place to determine whether or not sites, there's contamination on these sites, and to kind of, if you will, close the book and basically acknowledge the fact we checked all of

the sites so that if a person buys the property, they're not left with, now we've got to decide whether or not that site is contaminated before we can do anything on it.

I'll tell you, no one is going to buy any parcel of property that has the potential of an underground site. And that right now, Mr. Minister, is one of the problems that we have in regards to rural communities working together with RMs (rural municipality) to amalgamate some of their services, where communities and smaller communities even want to amalgamate to provide higher levels of, if you will, some of the amalgamation that your government has been talking about, some of the amalgamation that Mr. Garcea and Mr. Stabler have been talking about, that communities themselves have been involved in, but nobody wants to go beyond some of the discussion because of the fact that there are some underground sites that they really haven't a clear idea of what's happened in regards to those sites.

And I think it's time, Mr. Minister, that your department either took the time or made sure that we had, if you will, a closing to this whole account rather than just letting it fester and grow.

There's obviously a lot of tanks out there that aren't a problem. We should be able to come to some kind of determination to say that yes, we've undertaken the studies, we know that there isn't a problem here and this site is now free and allowing communities to get on with the process of amalgamating their services. Or even, and for small hamlets and villages, to amalgamate with the RMs to provide a higher level of government and services they're looking for.

So, Mr. Minister, I would like to know exactly where your department is going, whether you've got a plan in place, or whether this is an issue that's going to drag on for even the next 10 or 20 years. I think it's time that we came to resolve on this matter.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just wanted to point out, as we mentioned before, this is a very serious environmental problem that we have. And we are going to continue working with the RMs, with the villages, on this particular challenge to see what we can do to help them alleviate this growing problem and this ever prevalent . . . or ever present problem that we have throughout Saskatchewan.

And certainly your comments are noted in terms of what we wish to do in SERM, what we should do in SERM in reference to this problem. And I can assure you that it is our intent in SERM to do all we can to address this particular problem.

And I say again, we will do all we can within SERM to address this particular problem. If that means working with every individual RM out there that has this challenge, we shall undertake to do that.

(1215)

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, I'm not exactly sure if any RM or . . . (inaudible) . . . really feels comfortable with the comments we will continue to work with. We've been working with them for how many years?

You have the technology in place. I think it would be very simple and very reasonable to ask. And if there are situations out there that haven't been addressed, and I know a number of areas that have already been addressed, and where there was a . . . because of some concerns about contamination and that they've already been . . . tanks have been dug up, they've been removed, and the site has been cleaned.

But where there are sites with the testing equipment we have out there right now that really don't have to be dug up, that can be just basically addressed and said whatever precaution and measures have been taken to address that situation, it would seem to me that it's time we got on with it rather than saying we will continue to work with. And the unfortunate part is what happens, most people don't realize until they start looking at a parcel of property that maybe there is or has been an underground tank on that site.

And all of a sudden they're left with the responsibility of approaching the department; what do we do now. Because I'm not going to buy that; that's an ideal piece of property but I'm not going to invest in that and even for rural governments.

And I don't think we can wait and just expect that you're telling us today we're going to continue to work with. We need a resolve. We need to have a resolve to the issue and basically a timeline that says by such and such a date our department, working in conjunction with local governments or communities or towns, is going to address this problem and we're going to arrive at a solution so that we can move on with our lives. And that communities or local governments can then begin the process that they all would like to work to in regards to amalgamation of services.

And I think, Mr. Minister, we need a commitment. Because there's no guarantee that you, sir, will be sitting in that chair next year. The Premier may decide he wants to change ministers again, and then we start the whole process over with the new minister. Or maybe the deputy minister has been moved to another area. And it's just an ongoing problem. And I think the department must be getting somewhat frustrated with this issue as well.

So I think, Mr. Minister, we need a firm commitment, a timeline that says we will address this issue so that it's off the plate and the discussion is over and we've resolved the issue.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out to the member as I . . . it is my endeavour to be here for the next three or four years, maybe longer, and I'll work towards that.

I just want to point out is that we do risk-based analysis, that if a certain area is not deemed to be an environmental risk then we will certainly undertake to advise the owners or the RM that — or the village — that there isn't a major problem here. There are not many dangerous situations out there in reference to underground storage tanks. And I say not many because there are some.

What we're struggling with now is the liability issue — who is responsible. And again as we mentioned, we are looking at all the avenues that are available to us. And we're even going so

far as to work with the different industries that are out there — the oil and gas industry — to see if there's something that they could do.

So as I mentioned previously, I think that SERM is doing all that they can on this particular file. They'll continue exhausting all the avenues to address the serious economic matter as I've indicated in previous statements. And to also point out that we haven't the resources or the dollars within SERM to address this particular matter and this is why we're exhausting all these other avenues — to work with the RMs, to work with the villages, to work with industry, to work with the potential owners, and to work with the whole issue of liability.

So it's something that we are quite serious about and we'll continue being serious about. And as I mentioned before, we'll undertake to exhaust all avenues on this particular file.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Minister, one final comment, because I know my colleagues would like to get into some other debate and areas of discussion, and maybe they have some particular issues in regards to underground storage.

But I think, Mr. Minister, I think we need a commitment to a timeline, I think we need a commitment to a timeline that basically says by such and such — whether it's two or three years down the road or five years — the department working in conjunction with municipalities, local governments, urban municipalities, we're going to come to a resolve on this issue.

And basically at the end of the day, we're going to be able to say to each, everyone involved that we have met all the requirements of the department, that those properties certainly meet the standards; we've addressed all the concerns in areas where we need to indeed dig up tanks that are continuing to give problems. We will address those, and we will address that issue.

I don't think it's good enough to just sit here and say, we're going to continue to work with and we hope to come to a resolve. I think that you need, as the auditor has indicated over the past number of years, you have to sit down and come up with a plan that says by such and such a date we will have a total resolve of this issue so that it isn't an ongoing problem and an ongoing . . . The liability is a major concern for communities or businesses that have to address this issue.

So I would ask you, Mr. Minister, and your departmental officials, to give us a timeline. Sit down, draw up a plan so that we can come to a total resolve and we're not addressing this issue on an ongoing basis. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out that in reference to the underground storage tanks and the particular problem that we have in SERM in reference to the environmental challenge that they pose, I'm pleased to report that many of the sites that we have spoken about have been cleaned up and many of the people involved with the industry — the owners, the RMs, or the business people — have taken the initiative and many of them have spent a considerable amount of money upgrading their fuel tanks and doing the environmentally responsible thing.

And I'm pleased to report that as a result of that effort, 90 per cent of the problem has been resolved, and that's a very impressive position compared to other jurisdictions. And SERM has always and will continue, as I mentioned, working on the final 10 per cent. And as you know and as you may appreciate, there may be other sites that will be found as times goes on, and we need to get a handle on that as well.

But as we've mentioned before, there's many people that have led this particular charge and we feel that at SERM all the avenues and all the resources that we can afford for this process has had some success, and we'll continue, as I mentioned, exhausting those avenues in working to resolve this very serious problem in a timely fashion. Thank you.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you Mr. Deputy Chair. Okay, I guess that was an area that I hadn't planned on asking any questions on, and I may just make a comment or two. But I think it's a very real one, and I'm very concerned that SERM doesn't have a plan to sort of say we're going to deal with this issue; we're going to put timelines in place for various aspects of the problem.

When you mention that there's only about a 10 per cent of the problem left, I would beg to differ because I . . . You go to any small community and you talk to an old-timer and they will tell you of tanks that SERM hasn't even thought existed. Because virtually every small town had two, three, four, a dozen service stations around and over the years those places were rebuilt and covered over. And as I said, most people under the age of about 45 or 50 in those communities don't even know there ever were tanks there.

So I think your problem is a whole lot bigger than you're prepared to admit. And that's why I think it's important to get some timelines and some plans and programs out there so that we don't have this hanging over the heads of people who want to develop; people who want to purchase — not knowing what kinds of requirements SERM is going to put on them to clean up the particular location.

Having sold a particular business some time ago that had an old site on it and knowing the problems that we went through, I think that's something that's very definitely needed. Because any people making a particular deal on a piece of property end up with a very open-ended problem — not knowing what the extent of the situation's going to be. And I think something much more definite needs to be in place. However, you can comment on that in a minute or two, if you wish.

I did have an outfitter talk to me sometime ago that had a question that he very definitely wanted an answer to. So the question I'm just relaying from him, and that is apparently there used to be a number of — quite a number of — picnics/washroom sites on highways and roadways in northern Saskatchewan. And he has an outfitting camp for fishing, and he's very concerned that numbers of these have been closed down and shut down.

And I guess my question, first of all, is how many have you shut down? What's the rationale behind that? And what is your view for the future if you plan on shutting down some more and why?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just to point out that . . . to be blunt and open and front in reference to the number of rec sites we are looking at closing down, and the reason why we're looking at closing them down is simply, primarily because of the volume of use. And that number is 40.

And such a rec site is about 30 kilometres south of Ile-a-la-Crosse, my hometown. And that particular area . . . that particular rec site is called the South Bay campground. And throughout time, throughout time, we've had SERM come in there and do some cleaning up and paint the toilets and drop off some firewood. But over the last four or five years the majority of some of the costs of maintaining that park, building some buildings on there for youth conferences and so on and so forth has been undertaken by the community of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

So in reference to the 40 sites that we announced today that we are looking at shutting down, we are also making every effort to try and transfer some of those rec sites to the RM, to the municipality, or just certain group [CORRECT] of people that want to undertake to be friends of that particular park. And we're exhausting all those avenues.

In the case of the South Bay provincial campground, I would suggest to you today that perhaps Ile-a-la-Crosse would be in a perfect position to say, yes okay, we'll take care of the park, give us the park and we'll do all we can for it. Because we have been doing that for years.

They never received any grants for that; they never received any funding whatsoever. And as I mentioned SERM's role was to go there and put the firewood in and certainly paint some of the buildings and so on and so forth.

So I think of terms of the rec sites we're looking at shutting down because of very minimal use, we're making every avenue available to some of the RMs, the municipalities, and the villages, and other friends of the park system to take over the system so they can retain them as parks and use them for all people's enjoyment. Thank you.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I just want to verify that I understood the answer correctly. And that seemed to be that there were . . . that you're planning on shutting down some 40 sites. Correct me if that's wrong. And I guess following to that, how many sites do you plan to maintain?

And like I said, some of these aren't major sites. They're more the stop-off spots that might have a picnic table or two and a washroom.

(1230)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you for the question. Just to confirm that we are looking at 40 sites that we will be reducing service to; and these are rec sites — as you mentioned, stop-over sites for a picnic and a day in the park, so to speak. And we're doing all we can to avoid closure.

Now I make reference to the Ile-a-la-Crosse campground. As you mentioned, throughout time the village of Ile-a-la-Crosse and the people that use the regional park never received one red cent from any other source besides what SERM brought in for

firewood. So they maintain that park at their own costs, at their own time, for their own leisure. And we look at that initiative and that opportunity to be available to other RMs in southern Saskatchewan and to other villages and band councils and other friends of the park system throughout northern and in southern part of Saskatchewan.

So our premise here is to be very clear. We want to do all we can to avoid closure but we are going to be reducing services to 40 rec sites which are primarily unserviced parts that not a lot of people use.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I guess the reason I asked the question, I was just rather astounded that you're shutting down 40 sites, particularly at a time when I think one of the success stories in Saskatchewan — and we're always looking for some of those — is the tourist industry. And I think it's one of those things that everyone in Saskatchewan is feeling very positive about. And then to close down 40 sites.

And I guess the other question I had is how many sites does that leave that you are going to maintain and what your plans for those would be.

Moving to a slightly different area, and that's to the Cypress Hills section of Saskatchewan — the east block and the west block. And I guess my first question would be, from your recent surveys, what are the number of elk in the Cypress Hills area?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out again as we mentioned, we are not shutting down these sites; we are trying to reduce services to them to avoid closure and do all we can to handle the transfer, if we can use the word, transfer, to some of the potential users and some of the potential people that might want to use these sites.

We do maintain about 90 other rec sites plus the provincial park system. And as I mentioned it certainly comes out of costs of the provincial government — that \$5.1 million. A good investment, I might add.

In reference to the elk situation, we done a survey last winter in conjunction with the Alberta government. And we don't have those numbers in front of us today but we'll certainly get them to you as quickly as we can.

Mr. Heppner: — The area around Cypress Hills is a very attractive area, especially for elk hunting. And I guess the follow-up question is: how many elk were taken through the draw licence in Saskatchewan last year and how many elk were shot by people not being involved in the draw system?

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out we don't have the exact numbers here because there is some extenuating circumstances. But in terms of the harvest itself, we harvest in the fashion of one-third for subsistence, one-third for Saskatchewan residents, and one-third for Alberta. This is where we have to make sure we get the proper numbers from the Alberta folks, and this is what we undertake to do as well. But we will have those numbers. But in terms of the harvest, again, one-third for subsistence, one-third for Saskatchewan residents, and one-third for Alberta.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I'm going to ask you to clarify the subsistence part because to me that seems people living in the area who need those for food, who are living there. I'm going to ask you if that's correct, and maybe to explain that to some extent.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that it is always the intent of SERM to balance all the interests in the province. And I'm pleased to report that the one-third subsistence hunting is for the First Nations bands that have traditionally hunted in these areas for many centuries.

And it is part of the concession that they gave the province of Saskatchewan to manage this particular harvest. And there is a great number of bands that do hunt in the area. And so far . . . and it's been so good in terms in the relationship and everything seems to be working well.

Mr. Heppner: — You mentioned the Saskatchewan situation. I'm wondering what happens with people coming from out of province under that headline to hunt in Cypress Hills, if that follows the same jurisdiction. And secondly, it seems the definition of subsistence kind of falls apart. If you're going have to drive 500-or-so miles to hunt it, then it's no longer subsistence.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that there is no out-of-province hunting allowed in the area except for the Alberta participants. And as well the courts will and have identified what subsistence hunting is. And if it's from 500 miles away, again as I mentioned, the courts have identified what that is and we're certainly abiding by that.

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Chair, I would hope that the minister does a little more research on that because I would like the numbers that I've asked for, and I would like for him to check a little more carefully with his people out in the field to see what's actually happening out there. Because having hunted there myself, having talked with the people that reside in the area, including with the officers themselves, I think some of the information that he's presenting at this particular point seems to differ to some extent with what seems to be happening there on that particular issue to some extent.

And I guess here's something I personally experienced hunting in that area, where people who do not require a license are hunting in that area but are not wearing the proper hunting apparel, which is very much a safety thing. And I remember walking through the north side of the west block and running into people who were hunting there without the proper clothing on — ended up being a very scary and a frightening situation. I'm wondering if that's being addressed in one form or another.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Chair, just to point out that it is always SERM's intent to promote safety when people are out there hunting. We encourage people to do that on a constant basis. But in terms of the subsistence hunters, they are not required — as identified by the courts — to wear hunting apparel. And we do all we can at SERM to encourage them. We promote awareness with them and talk to them on many of these fronts, but we can't enforce them to wear hunting apparel.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you for that answer. And I would hope

that SERM puts a lot of effort into that because it's very definitely a safety hazard and creates all kinds of problems in that particular area.

Moving to something else that's close to the Cypress Hills, and that's the antelope. And I'm wondering exactly what's happening with the count there. I know the season's been closed for a while because the numbers have been down substantially.

If I could have some comment on what you see as the reasons for the population being down, and what you see happening in the fairly near future — three, four, five years — with the antelope numbers.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to point out that surveys are done in the summer. We'll be doing one in this budget year of 2000. And the reason why the antelope numbers are down is the production is low. And of particular interest to your colleague there, one of the reasons why the production is low is that many of the young antelope are quite frankly hunted by predators called coyotes.

And as a result of that we now have a coyote tax where we allow people to come in in outfit and hunt these coyotes down so the antelope could grow up and there'd be greater numbers and the producing levels certainly happened, and then you, sir, can go out hunting.

So the situation is quite clear. We'll be doing a survey this year on antelopes, and the reason why they're low and we anticipate they'd be low is because the production is down as a direct result of the coyote problem and the other predators that are high in that particular area.

(1245)

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. And one question dealing with the coyotes, because I know that was sort of the answer. We've had some fairly mild winters in the last few years and that should have definitely helped the population come up. But it's interesting that when you say that, you know, hunting is one way to keep the number of coyotes down, but you still put a licence on individuals that come from out of province to hunt them.

If anything we should be putting some sort of a bounty on them to bring those numbers into line, because that's part of SERM's responsibility is wildlife management. And I'm wondering if any thought has been given to putting a bounty on it to get the coyotes down to where they should, because they also affect the populations of a lot of the birds in the area.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The problem with the coyote population is especially apparent in the south, in the southern zone. And it is a serious problem. And as I mentioned before farmers can, indeed, shoot coyotes and other predators such as wolves if they're of threat to their herd and certainly if they're a threat to their family and to their home area.

And, as we mentioned before, if you're sort of looking at a cost of putting a bounty on the coyotes, you're looking at a fairly significant amount of dollars. And many times the bounty

programs do not work. We anticipate that if we increased the harvest opportunities to some of the outfitting opportunities and in working with the trappers' federation and encouraging people that see some of their animals under attack, such as the farmers, that they have the right to harvest these animals. And we think through those scenarios, that there is not a problem with us bringing those numbers down gradually in a safe, consistent, and a credible manner.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, the members having received much food for thought to gnaw over, over the weekend, I think perhaps it's time that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I'd ask leave to make a statement regarding the celebration of Easter in the Orthodox rite.

Leave granted.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Orthodox Easter Greetings

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As many people in Saskatchewan know, today is Good Friday for many Ukrainians and indeed Serbians, Russians, Romanians, and Greeks, and others who came to this country from countries in Europe who had an orthodox tradition. This, of course, will be followed by celebrating Easter Sunday — the Ukrainian word for which is Velekden.

People celebrate Velekden by attending a Sunday church service which is quite often followed by a blessing of the traditional Easter baskets, baskets filled with freshly baked braided bread known as kolachi, or Easter breads fondly known to little children as babka reminding them of their grandmothers, and the traditional, beautifully decorated Easter eggs, the pysanky.

Mr. Speaker, the largest pysanky in the world is probably in Canada, prominently displayed near the town of Vegreville.

And many times, Mr. Speaker, these baskets and the blessing of these baskets is done outside, around the church, if the weather is favourable.

It's a time when many of us take this opportunity to get together with our families and celebrate the old traditions. Often the focus of these celebrations are on children. It's an occasion to teach the young people about these age-old traditions and skills; such as the traditions of the techniques of decorating the Easter eggs.

Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of hope that Easter brings, I want to express to all in the House and to all families in Saskatchewan who observe this great holiday, and I want to do it with the traditional Ukrainian greeting of Easter Sunday: Chystos Voskres which means Christ is risen. And the response to that is Voyisten Voskres, which translates, indeed He has risen. Chystos Voskres, Voyisten Voskres.

And if anybody wants lessons in pronunciation I'm prepared to help right after we adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — To make a statement, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join with my colleague from Prince Albert Carleton in wishing all of the people of Ukrainian ancestry and others of the Orthodox faith a Happy Easter. I, of course, am far more familiar with the Ukrainian traditions around Easter.

My baba was of Ukrainian ancestry, and we participated in all the traditions and customs as she learned them as a child in the Ukraine. And it was a very nice time of year for our family when we got together around Easter, and baba used to look after the grandchildren very, very well.

The contribution of the Canadians of Ukrainian ancestry, I think, has been very, very well documented both in our province and in our country. And their ability to be able to emigrate here and make the transition and then make the contribution that they have as all of the others, as the member indicated, of the Orthodox faith have made to the quality of life in this country and in this province is truly something to be celebrated.

So I would join with the member in wishing everyone of Ukrainian ancestry, their families and friends, a Happy Easter. I'm not quite as eloquent in Ukrainian as my colleague, so I'll leave it at a very Happy Easter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Hon. members, I too would like to join, and I thank the members for having acknowledged this special time of year. And I also would like to wish each and every one of you a very happy and special weekend with your families, with your constituents. And do I look forward, I really do look forward to seeing you at 1:30 p.m. Monday. This House stands adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 12:55 p.m.