

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed exclusively by citizens of the community of Eastend which I represent. And it deals with the issue of forced consolidation of municipalities. The prayer reads:

Therefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly reject the idea or concept of forced consolidation of municipalities.

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

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the quality of cellular coverage. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause government to provide reliable cellular service in the districts of Prud'homme, Bruno, Vonda, and Cudworth.

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Bruno and from Humboldt.

I so present.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by individuals from the communities of Melfort and Kinistino.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition in regards to 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 petition is signed by people from Senlac, Kerrobert, and Unity.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand

also to present petitions on behalf of citizens concerned about 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, costs shared by both levels of government.

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

And this is signed by people in Swift Current, Kelvington, and Maple Creek.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I rise again on behalf of people in Swift Current and area concerned about the Swift Current hospital. And the prayer can be summarized as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to assist in the regeneration plan for the Swift Current Regional Hospital.

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition today is signed by people from Success, Swift Current, Neville and McMahan, as well as Cabri.

I so present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from citizens who are against forced municipal amalgamation. And the prayer reads:

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

And it's signed by citizens from Melfort and Kinistino.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan regarding forced amalgamation of municipalities. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly reject the forced consolidation of municipalities.

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

And these petitions are signed from people in the Eastend area.

Thank you.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like 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.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

From the good people from Melfort. Thank you.

Mr. Brkich: — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here to reduce fuel tax by 10 cents:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

They're from Davidson, Macklin, Saskatoon, Regina, and Bladworth.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned about the 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 Humboldt and Bruno.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I have a petition by the people of the province of Saskatchewan opposed to enforced municipal amalgamation. Mr. Speaker, 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 as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people from the Rural Municipality of Paddockwood No. 520.

I do so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today on behalf of citizens concerned about the high tax on 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 tax by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And the petitioners come from the communities of Lestock, Cupar, Dysart, and Edenwold.

I do so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring forth a petition to reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre.

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 petitioners are from Leoville, Spiritwood, Rabbit Lake, and Shell Lake.

I so present.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

And the petition is signed by individuals from the Melfort community.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition to reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. The prayer reads as follows:

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

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The petition is signed by the good folks of White Fox, Carrot River, and Saskatoon.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

To provide funding for the Swift Current Regional Hospital;

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

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — Hon. members, if I may. Earlier today, as you are aware, at Government House tribute was paid to Saskatchewan recipients of national and provincial honours. These recipients are seated in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon and we want to recognize them here in the Legislative Chamber today.

I will be inviting the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the Liberal caucus to make a few brief remarks, following which the members of the Legislative Assembly will then have an opportunity to introduce their constituent, or constituents, as the case may be.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and members of the House. I will not be referring to any of the recipients and award winners by name because they will be introduced to you.

But, Mr. Speaker, my — I hope relatively short — remarks are to the point to say not only for me but I think for all of us who attended what a great, special pleasure it was and privilege for us today to attend the event recognizing some of our very distinguished Saskatchewan citizens who have received some of the highest honours of the province and the nation that can be bestowed upon them.

This morning I offered the view of how fitting it was — not fitting, it's more than fitting actually if I think of it, it really is a special moment, maybe once in a lifetime moment — to have the Governor General, Her Excellency Adrienne Clarkson, present at this morning's ceremony. Indeed this will be a memorable occasion for the recipients, and it was I think for those of us who took part as witnesses in the ceremony.

Before we ask . . . I say it's appropriate for the Crown's representative to be there because we obviously ask the Crown to give these honours and awards, and it's a special indication of our gratitude and respect for these citizens and for their many contributions, seated in your gallery.

This morning, and I suppose in brief capsule summary, shortly we're going to hear, but for sure we heard this morning, MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) introduce these very special people and briefly describe their achievements. And these are stories, the achievements of dedication, of commitment, and of heroism. It is truly amazing to hear the stories of accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, a number of us said this morning that these men and women are heroes. Whether they had that one shining moment of extreme bravery or whether their heroism was in their perseverance and dedication to their work, they are heroes.

And for that reason it's entirely good and right that we recognize them here in the Assembly.

We've thanked each of them with the honours and the awards they've received, and we now honour them here in this House.

A very prominent Saskatchewan lawyer and legal scholar and thinker, Dr. Morris Shumiatcher, once said this, quote:

No nation can long survive without being nourished by the innovative, the inventive, and the energetic, tempered by the sensitive, the conscientious, and the compassionate.

Dr. Shumiatcher went on to write, quote:

No individual will find the pole star by which to guide his or her steps except in the standards of excellence that men and women of high purpose adopt and according to which they perform their public duties and live their private lives.

Well I think that's a very eloquent way of summarizing these innovative, inventive, energetic people whom we proudly honour today. Sensitive, conscientious, and compassionate — they've set those standards as well. And in doing so, they provide all of us with that, in the words of Dr. Shumiatcher, pole star by which we may guide our steps, confident that we're moving in the right direction as individuals and as a community.

And on behalf of the New Democratic Party members of the coalition government, I hope on behalf of everybody, I can say congratulations to everybody in the Speaker's gallery for a job very well done. We're very, very, very proud of you and inspired by you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too am pleased to rise and pay tribute to the people who have contributed so much to Saskatchewan and to Canada, and who've been recognized for these contributions with the highest honours our province and our nation have to give.

As Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, it's an immense pleasure to take part in a day such as this because it's a fitting reminder of the major accomplishments many of our citizens have made.

The men and women present today truly do represent our province's very best. While they all have very different backgrounds, they also share some important qualities. They are all extraordinarily talented in their fields and they have shared their gifts with others.

It's no secret that Saskatchewan is renowned for giving to Canada — and to the rest of the world — people that make a difference, and that's certainly true of this past year's honour recipients.

Those we honour today are a reminder that each and every one of us have qualities which we can use to make a contribution to our community and society. The special people in our Assembly today

have chosen to make that contribution, and for that we thank them. And we can take pride in the fact that these women and men of such distinction are our colleagues, our neighbours, our friends.

Today is only one small way in which we can sincerely say thank you to all of our honourees. And so on behalf of the official opposition, and I believe on behalf of all of the people of Saskatchewan, we do say thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Honours recipients, guests, and fellow members of the Assembly, I am very pleased to rise on behalf of the Liberal caucus to give thanks for the magnificent contributions made to our country and our province by these wonderful people being honoured here today.

The character of our country and our province, the very nature of who we are can be defined by the efforts of these noble individuals. Mr. Speaker, these men and women have dedicated themselves and in some cases placed their lives on the line for their fellow Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, some of the qualities that define us as a nation are courage, strength of character, and of course hard work and determination. It is that courage and strength which enables us to overcome those obstacles placed before us; and it is through hard work and determination that we not only overcome these obstacles but prevail beyond them.

These honoured individuals not only deserve our appreciation, Mr. Speaker, they command our respect. It is through their contributions that we are privileged enough to live in a country that is the envy of many.

On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I want to salute and thank each and every one of you for giving the best of yourselves in order to make Saskatchewan and Canada the best place in the world to live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I will ask the honoured recipients if they would stand while being introduced by their MLAs and remain standing for the applause that you are so deserving of.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to the Assembly Boyd Anderson, Member of the Order of Canada, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Douglas Knott, Member of the Order of Canada.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kenneth Mitchell, who's a Member of the Order of Canada.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature Dr. Geoffrey Pawson, who is a Member of the Order of Canada.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I get to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly Mr. Gordon MacMurchy, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a second constituent to you and members of the Assembly, the Hon. Dr. Stephen Worobetz, Officer of the Order of Canada, Member of the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, and Recipient of the Military Cross.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly three individuals, Clinton Carter, Roy Littlewolfe, and Cecil Wolfe, recipients of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Kieth Heck, recipient of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce an honouree who is joined today in the gallery by his two daughters, wonderful daughters, Shelby and Kiesha, with whom I had lunch, and who are here today just feeling especially proud of the most famous person in the world — their dad.

And I'd like to introduce, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce firefighter Brock Knipfel, recipient of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, it is also my pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly, Mr. Donald McMillan, firefighter, recipient also of the Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Donald Therens, recipient of the

Medal of Bravery.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kasperski: — Merci, M. le Président. Il me fait un grand plaisir de vous introduire le gendarme Hervé Millette, récipiendaire de la Médaille de Service Méritoire.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce Hervé Millette, recipient of the Meritorious Service Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly, Thérèse LeClaire, recipient of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to this Assembly, Mr. Clark Lewis, recipient of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to introduce to you and to other members of the Assembly, Ms. Muriel Jarvis, the recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Sam McAdam, recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker it is my pleasure to introduce to you and members of the Assembly the grade 4 students from Haig School in Weyburn. They're seated in the east gallery with their teachers, Michele Craigen and Karen Leitch.

I'd like you to help me welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you to the rest of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce a lady sitting in the east gallery, Ms. Christine Whitaker, a long-time teacher, since retired, but now has found another cause, and she is a counsellor with the South Qu'Appelle RM (rural municipality).

And I'm proud to see her wearing that bright yellow button saying no to forced amalgamation.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of

the Legislative Assembly, Holly Ann Knott who is sitting in the Speaker's gallery. She's a constituent of mine and a well-known lawyer in Saskatoon, and she's accompanying her father, Mr. Knott, who is one of the awards recipients today.

So welcome Holly Ann to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Contribution to Prince Albert Centre for Visual and Performing Arts

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to tell my colleagues of a generous contribution by two Prince Albert citizens to the proposed art centre.

Malcolm and Melba Jenkins, owners of the Prince Albert Canadian Tire store, have pledged \$500,000 towards the fundraising campaign for this facility.

Mr. Speaker, this generous donation kicks off the official fundraising campaign for the new Community Centre for the Visual and Performing Arts. The Jenkins truly value the contribution that arts make to our society. They are active patrons, boosters, performers, and are the mainstays of the Prince Albert artistic community. What's more, this contribution reflects, Mr. Speaker, their confidence in Prince Albert's future.

Recently the Jenkins announced a massive, multimillion dollar expansion to the Prince Albert Canadian Tire. A vote of confidence for Prince Albert and Saskatchewan's economy.

This contribution is just another vote of confidence in the direction Prince Albert is moving. Their donation will ensure that future generations will be able to access and enjoy the arts. And I want to commend Melba and Malcolm for their commitment to our province, their community, and for their dedication to the arts.

This donation will really enrich the lives of many people for years to come. Please help me recognize their generous donation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Pay Phones in Rural Areas

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to inform the hon. members that a small victory has been scored for rural Saskatchewan and that we owe a thank you to SaskTel.

Last year SaskTel began removing pay phones from many of the smaller communities in the province. The crown said that these pay phones were not really viable, given the explosion of technology in many other communication areas. Plus they had to make sure the phones were always serviced and in working condition.

Use of the pay phones had certainly dropped considerably in recent years. But what SaskTel found out was the people in small communities like and, to a degree, relied on their pay phones. Not everyone has a cell phone nor carries a phone card. There's not much doubt . . . there's not much that a quarter buys these days, but it still buys you a phone call.

People in these communities also felt that no matter who wanted to use it, whether it be a resident or a traveller, access to a phone or other services as needed, or in emergency situations, was crucial.

Well, after reviewing their policy and listening to the people, SaskTel has decided they will keep one public pay phone in each of the rural communities. These communities that had a pay phone removed will see it reinstalled and those communities that were worried about losing their pay phone can be rest assured.

We would like to thank SaskTel and president and CEO (chief executive officer) Don Ching for hearing the voice of rural communities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Battlefords Business Excellence Awards

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that all members of this Assembly realize that I've made every effort not to foment their envy of the Battlefords. I've done everything in my power to try and minimize my excitement level and to limit my enthusiasm, but last night it boiled over. It became increasingly difficult with the announcement of the Battlefords Business Excellence Awards for the year 2000.

And I want to tell you that I think the real winners were the people of the Battlefords. However, the actual awards were presented to Peak Manufacturing for community involvement; Dr. Peter Holtzhausen for property appearance; D & L Novus Auto Glass Repair & Replacement for best new business; Table Mountain Regional Park for best customer service; Tanya Kalin at Salon Rose for young entrepreneur. The Heritage Award went to Fisher's Drug Store; and business of the year was Gold Eagle Casino.

Each recipient was presented with a beautiful desk model made by master craftsman Stanley Wychopen.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in congratulating the organizers, volunteers, nominees, and of course the winners of the annual BBEX (Battleford Business Excellence) Awards.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Seeding Progress

Mr. Kowalsky: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to bring you more good news. And you know what the good news is about, Mr. Speaker? It's about farming.

Mr. Speaker, with good weather, some of the year 2000 crop has already been planted. The farmers in Saskatchewan are on

their way to seeding a projected 33 million acres, which is 2 per cent above the 10-year average of 32.3 million acres.

Mr. Speaker, farmers have confidence in the province of Saskatchewan. Moisture conditions are rated fair to good for hay and pasture topsoil, fair to good for cropland soil. But farmers could still use moisture in all areas.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say again that prices are up. Effective May 2, 2000, initial payments for no. 1 Canada western red spring wheat, and Canada no. 2 western red spring wheat will increase from \$5 to \$8 per tonne. Initial payments for no. 5 Canada western amber durum will increase \$5 per tonne. Feed barley initial payments are up \$10 per tonne and barley payments are up \$5 to \$7 per tonne.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good combination of market values up, strong commitment from our farmers for a good crop for Saskatchewan coming this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Reserve Force Uniform Day

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to salute members of the Canadian Forces who serve with the reserve force. There are about 800 reservists in Saskatchewan from all walks of life. They are members of reserve units in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, and Yorkton.

Saskatchewan reservists have served on peacekeeping missions around the world. Today many are serving on active duty in places like Bosnia and on other operational missions overseas. Reservists have been instrumental in disaster relief operations across Canada.

Although they usually only become visible when they put on their uniforms, reservists bring the moral and ethical values of the Canadian Forces, as well as valuable work skills that they learn in the military, to their civilian workplaces.

Today is Reserve Force Uniform Day. Reservists wear their uniform to work or to school today to display the pride they have in serving their country. Reserve Uniform Day allows employers, educators, and the public a chance to show their support for reservists.

I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that all members will want to join with me in thanking Canada's reservists who serve our country with distinction, dedication, and pride. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mental Health Week

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a key ingredient of healthy living is good mental health. Many Canadians, however, have not acknowledged the importance of good mental health. We tend to be more aware of the importance of our physical health and ignore the emotional causes of many of our illnesses.

Every year, more than 100,000 Saskatchewan people see a

health professional for mental health reasons. Mr. Speaker, we need greater public awareness, and that is the purpose of Mental Health Week which began on Monday, May 1.

This year's theme, "Workplace Stress Can Throw You Off Balance" is very relevant these days. The focus is on improving our mental health by reducing work-related stress which many of us feel in our daily lives.

Our government recognizes the importance of promoting good mental health by providing more than \$70 million to our province's health districts to provide mental health services. This year, Saskatchewan Health will add \$2 million to enhance mental health resources, including those in the area of child and youth services.

Mental Health Week is a national event sponsored by the Canadian Mental Health Association with activities taking place across the country. In Saskatchewan, there are mayors' luncheons in various communities, and many other activities are taking place in towns and cities. The Canadian Mental Health Association is a non-profit organization that promotes issues related to mental health.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish everyone a stress-free day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Funding of Film Festival

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier of Saskatchewan. Mr. Premier, we have received information from the Saskatchewan Arts Board on the Queer City Film Festival that I'd like to table in this House. I've delivered copies to all hon. members.

The information details the objective of the panel discussion called "Community porn, what's up with that?" It also presents the biographies of the panellists and mentions some of the movies that will be screened.

Mr. Premier, if you are so proud of your government's support of this event, will you please read the names of these movies into the record?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I stood in my place and I said to the member opposite, and I want to say to the member opposite again that I'm reading here from a briefing that was provided for me by the Saskatchewan arts council, and I think it's important . . . I want to say this, Mr. Speaker. I agree that this is a cross-section of six North American artists and filmmakers who are in Saskatchewan today. They are filmmakers and curators.

And among them, Mr. Speaker, they're here . . . they've come here to talk about the issues as they relate to race relations, Aboriginal art, and they talk about AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) research. These are the men and women who are here. They're also talking about, Mr. Speaker . . . The festival talks about how they can build on self-awareness in the community and build on the individual topics.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite, they said that this is not a pornographic film festival. They have said also that none of the films depict children or violence pertaining to individuals or children, Mr. Speaker. That's the information that's come to me.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the names of the films are so explicit that the Premier cannot read them out loud in the legislature. Mr. Premier, the language is offensive and taxpayers are finding the idea that they are funding this display of pornography offensive. The information proves that this festival will include screenings of hard core pornography. In fact, the description of one of these films being shown says, and I quote, "This is very hard core. People do everything in it."

In fact in the interview over the release of this particular film, the filmmaker herself says, and I quote, "Please don't print my real name; my mother will kill me." Well, Mr. Premier, this filmmaker is one of the panellists coming to Regina under her real name and she describes herself as a sex activist with a mission.

Mr. Premier, do you support the use of taxpayers' dollars to fund this screening of pornographic films in this festival?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite that a couple of days ago, when I was on my feet, I said to the member opposite that in Saskatchewan today, we have an arts council. Now the arts council's responsibility, Mr. Speaker, is to establish a jury of men and women who will then make a decision about the kinds of funding that they would provide across the province, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the member opposite and to the House, Mr. Speaker, that if the member opposite has a problem with these names, if she has a problem with these names, if she has a problem with Mrs. Colleen Bailey from Yorkton, Saskatchewan, who sit on the Arts Board, if the member opposite has a problem with Mrs. Faye Anderson from Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, a rural member of the Arts Board, if this member opposite has a problem with Lon Borgerson, from MacDowall, Saskatchewan, which is a rural member, if this member has a problem with Maggie Siggins, who's on the arts council in this province — I say to the member opposite, you should go to them and say to them that you want to provide censorship in this province and that they're not capable of providing those kinds of decisions for the people . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My problem is with this government funding pornography. The information promoting this festival describes what the panel on pornography will discuss and I quote:

Community porn, what's up with that? It's an attempt to illuminate . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, please. Members on both sides — please — allow the question to be heard. And I would ask you to please allow the answer to be heard as well.

Ms. Draude: —

... is an attempt to illuminate and celebrate this queer sensibility. The informational discussion will provide the public and six visiting artists with an opportunity to investigate positions of comfortability, pleasure, and value as we take a look at the way both body and soul are negotiated and explored in queer culture.

What is community? What is porn? Can pornography be a celebration of our identity?

Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) yesterday stood up in this House and said, and I quote “we do not condone pornography in any way”. Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is not only condoning pornography, it is funding pornography.

Mr. Premier, you can't say that you don't condone pornography on one hand, and on the other hand use taxpayers' dollars to support it. Mr. Premier, which is it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the House and to the member opposite and I'm reading here from an article that was printed in April of ... April 4 of 1996, because the member says this is about pornography and I want to read what the response here was, Mr. Speaker, by the previous member of ... or the previous minister of Municipal Affairs and this is what she says:

I think the lack of censorship and freedom of expression is at the very root of our democratic system and those who try to impose their preference on art, music, and medium, should think again about the quality of country that we live in today.

That was her response, Mr. Speaker. And her response was to a question that came from the member from Rosthern. And the member from Rosthern asked the question about why in fact the Arts Board is funding the film festival in Regina, this very same festival that we're talking about today. The member from that ... the member from Rosthern asked that question in 1996.

This is not about pornography, this is about that group of men and women not supporting this festival. And it's the same ... that's the old Tory over there that asked the question and the new Tory over ...

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order, order.

Ms. Draude: — The people of this province do not care what a defeated member of the NDP government said in 1996. They want to hear you read those names and those titles into the record if you're so proud of them.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that this government will not stand up and take responsibility for this issue is absolutely appalling. SaskTel, SaskFilm, and the Arts Board are funded by the taxpayers of this province, and the government is responsible for those agencies. Taxpayers don't want their money funding screenings of pornography, they don't want to use their money to celebrate pornography, and they definitely don't want to use their money to promote pornography. And, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what is being done in this festival.

The executive director of the Arts Board said that the ... on the radio this morning that only 25 per cent of the total applications they receive are actually funded ...

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

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Premier, will you do the right thing today, stand up in the House and say you're removing support for all funding for this festival?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I just want to go back to my previous point because I want to say to the member opposite that this has very little to do with this particular festival and the kinds of ... and the kind of discussion that they're having in the festival. This has to do, Mr. Speaker, with your belief as a party and what you believe in, in terms of this kind of ... this kind of event, because in 1996 exactly the same questions that you're asking today were asked by the old Tory member, exactly the same question.

And today you say you're a new party and you provide a different image. Same old Tories — same old Tories in the same old story. You don't believe in ... what you don't believe in ... you believed in censorship ...

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. I'm having a great deal of difficulty hearing the minister's response.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I was just finishing my comments by saying to the member opposite and to the House, Mr. Speaker, that this is exactly the same kind of event that we had in 1996 in which your member over there talked about how in fact he wanted to provide censorship, lack of expression. And this is exactly the same thing that you are doing with the very same event.

And today in this province you say you're a different party, that you provide a different kind of presence to Saskatchewan people; and that's false because in fact what you are, you are exactly the same kind of party that you were in 1996 — the same old Tories.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskEnergy Transmission Capacity

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we'll change the direction a little bit which will allow the members over there to climb out from behind their tables.

Mr. Speaker, I have some more questions for the Minister of SaskEnergy. Yesterday that minister was completely incapable of answering the questions so he had to go ahead and call one of his lifelines and phone a friend.

Well you'd better get Ron Clark on the line again because some of his answers didn't make too much sense. Yesterday Ron Clark said the reason demand has fallen is because the bottom fell out of the gas price. That's the same Ron Clark, Mr. Minister, that just jacked up SaskEnergy prices because he said gas prices had gone through the roof.

Mr. Minister, gas prices may have fallen in '96 and '97 but today they're at historic heights and you're still transmitting less gas than you did before you built that \$114 million pipeline. How do you explain that, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we continue to provide the lowest gas prices in Canada in a very fair and efficient manner.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — SaskEnergy is an efficient company that's providing good service to our people. The member opposite has asked a question about a pipeline that is 350 kilometres long. The SaskEnergy system has 13,500 kilometres of pipeline and it provides very complete coverage for the whole province.

We will continue to work with this company to provide the best service that we can in the natural gas area and continue to have the lowest prices possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well the minister doesn't seem to know anymore about his pipeline than he did yesterday.

Mr. Minister, Ron Clark said you had firm commitments — firm commitments — in place from gas companies before you decided to spend that \$114 million on that pipeline. You had the commitments before that.

But in the next breath he said the gas price fell, and some customers de-contracted — some customers de-contracted.

Mr. Minister, if you had firm contracts in place and if the gas prices have now rebounded, why are you still shipping less gas than you did half a decade ago?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — We do continue to provide the lowest natural gas prices in Western Canada. And we continue to know that when that pipeline was built there was a huge amount of pressure on drilling in Saskatchewan. The numbers of oil and gas wells were huge. The customers were saying we need to have access to the markets, we want you to build a pipeline.

The pipeline was built. What everybody should know is that in those years — from 1994, '96 — there was about a half a billion dollars in land sales in the oil and gas area. This was a huge expansion there. This was part of that.

What's happened is that this pipeline is built on a 30-year-plus

timeline. It's making money now, it's going to make money in the future, and it's made money in the past. We're going to continue to provide the lowest gas prices in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons it's making any money — and it's not and we'll get to that — is because the other pipelines are now working at half capacity.

Mr. Minister keeps saying this pipeline's making some money. How is that possible when your transmission revenues are down \$18 million? There may be gas flowing through those particular pipelines but that's only . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Hon. members, the member . . . members from the side of the House from where the question is being asked is making it difficult for the question to be heard. I ask the co-operation of all members, please.

Mr. Heppner: — You've diverted, you've diverted gas from your other existing lines into this one. If you had never built this pipeline you would still have all the capacity you need. But there's the rub — you wouldn't have blown \$114 million, you wouldn't have the interest expense, you wouldn't have depreciation expense, you wouldn't have maintenance expense.

Mr. Minister, you overestimated demand seriously. You built a pipeline you didn't need. You spent \$114 million you didn't need. Why did you do that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, SaskEnergy will continue to provide the lowest natural gas prices for our customers in Canada, and we will continue to build a system that's going to provide for what we need now and for what we need in the future.

This particular pipeline was built on a 30-year plus timeline, and it's made money in the past. It's going to continue to make money. The whole system is designed to provide as great a coverage as possible for natural gas in this province. We're going to continue to do that.

This is a well-run company, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to support it so that it provides good, efficient service for all the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister keeps saying how this is all going to work out someday in the future. Well, that's not how you run a business, Mr. Minister. You don't go out and buy a piece of equipment you might need 10 years from now, or as you said, 30 years from now, and have it sitting there for 10 or 30 years while you pay interest, while you pay the maintenance, while you pay the depreciation.

If anyone else ran a business like that, they'd be out of business. But not SaskEnergy — not them. If they blow \$114 million, they just reach into the pocket of Saskatchewan taxpayers to pay for their incompetence.

Mr. Minister, how can you defend blowing \$114 million on a pipeline you haven't needed for the past five years?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that I stand on this side of the House, and that we were part of the party and people who protected this asset for the people of Saskatchewan. Because we have . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — We have clearly shown over the last decade that this company provides good service for our residential customers, provides good service for industrial customers, and it provides a base for building the economy of the province. The money that's spent in building the infrastructure for this province in natural gas . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Hon. Minister of Crown Investments Corporation, complete your answer.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, all I would like to say is that we are proud to be the owners of this particular asset, on behalf of all of the taxpayers of the province, that provides good, efficient service for everybody.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Review of Personal Injury Protection Plan

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the minister responsible for the Crown Investments Corporation.

And, Mr. Speaker, last December the NDP (New Democratic Party) government promised to establish a fully independent committee to study SGI's (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) no-fault insurance system.

Mr. Speaker, when they finally got around to establishing the review, the Saskatchewan Party applauded their choice for Chair of this committee — Mr. Justice Thomas Wakeling. But not even a person of Justice Wakeling's stature could be successful given the NDP's interference in the work of this committee.

Mr. Speaker, NDP political interference of the no-fault review has chased away the legal community from the process, it's chased away victims' groups from the process, and now it's chased away the committee's chairman, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, isn't it time you just scrapped the whole committee and started over with a truly independent review of no-fault insurance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this committee was set up pursuant to the legislation which was . . . had a very clear five-year review of the personal injury protection plan. And this review needs to be done in a way that includes all members of the community, not just the lawyers, not just the victims' groups, and all the different people.

What we've done is brought people forward to do this particular work. Unfortunately there have been some questions around the initial mandate. It's very clear that you can't do a review of this particular legislation unless you look at what we had before, what we have now, and what other jurisdictions are doing.

That particular issue is going to be dealt with, and I'll be very pleased to be making an announcement about the continued independent review of this personal injury protection plan in a very short while.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question to the minister. And if you listen to his answer, you believe that it's his perception that everything's completely fine with this so-called independent review of no-fault insurance. It's little wonder why people are wondering what the weather is like in the world that that minister is living in, Mr. Speaker.

You said that the committee would be given a budget of \$700,000 to get the job done, and on Monday the media reported that Justice Wakeling has been paid \$13,000 for his work. Unfortunately, thanks to NDP interference in the review process, we don't have anything to show for it yet.

Mr. Speaker, my question is this. How much money has the NDP government spent so far to achieve absolutely nothing except to alienate the legal community, the victims' groups, and the committee's Chair?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, there is a budget of \$750,000 for this review, and a portion of that money has been spent, but practically it's over quite a number of months this year, and the whole amount clearly hasn't been spent. Mr. Justice Wakeling was paid for the services that he provided, and that's only appropriate.

What we are going to do is have a full review of the personal injury protection plan, and that is going to continue. We will be bringing forward new people to handle some of the roles in the five-person review committee, and we'll give those announcements soon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have been waiting for that government to hold true to its promise that it made in the Throne Speech and during the election for an independent review of no fault. And that's what we're asking today. From day one, this review process has been torpedoed by the government because of the strong-arm tactics you've used.

First you send a letter to the committee basically dictating what their terms of reference are going to be; then you take steps to ensure the review will do nothing to embarrass your government. Now you're left with a committee that doesn't have a chairman, doesn't have any credibility, and doesn't have any independence.

Mr. Minister, how much have you spent ruining the no-fault review, and when will you finally admit that what you've done so far has been a mistake? When will you start over with an independent review of no fault, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to stand up and answer questions from that member about a matter that's important for this government. Because we've had some previous questions that relate to little things flying around in this province. So I would just say that.

Now what we're doing when . . . when one does a review of . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, this is a committee of five people who have been working since last December. Some of what they do is in the public. It's the public review. Other things that they do include research and preparation and some other things. All those things have been going on.

We're looking forward to getting a full comprehensive report from this committee, and we hope that we will have that in the fall as planned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ombudsman's Report

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Social Services. Mr. Minister, about three weeks ago the Children's Advocate issued a report condemning your government's management of children in foster care.

Today the annual report of the Provincial Ombudsman doesn't reflect well on your department as well. In fact, Mr. Speaker, according to the Ombudsman's report, your department is by far and away the most complaint-ridden area in the entire government, and things don't seem to be getting any better. Last year your department also came in at the bottom of customer satisfaction.

All right, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, are you not concerned about the more than 600 official complaints received by the Provincial Ombudsman against the Department of Social Services in each of the past two years?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question.

I would not be surprised, Mr. Speaker, if the Department of Social Services is the source of a great deal of concern for the Ombudsman, given that we deal with real people and real people with real problems, Mr. Speaker — many people who don't necessarily have the wherewithal or the means to have others advocate for them. And therefore they're in a position to turn to people like the Ombudsman, which I think is a great institution, Mr. Speaker, to help those who don't necessarily have the means to turn to others for assistance.

Mr. Speaker, we will carefully review the Ombudsman's report, the specific concerns that may be raised, to try to improve the services we provide for the people of Saskatchewan, and in this way, Mr. Speaker, ensure that those who need our services will always receive those services in an effective and respectful way, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Minister, the Social Services minister is not the only NDP cabinet minister getting poor performance reviews. It appears that complaints about the maintenance enforcement office are up by more than 40 per cent.

Now, Mr. Minister, members on this side of the House are well aware of how hard the staff at maintenance enforcement work each day. But clearly, Mr. Minister, such a massive increase in the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman would suggest the maintenance enforcement office needs better support from the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister: what actions are you taking to increase the resources available to the maintenance enforcement office to reduce the number of people who are lodging complaints with the Provincial Ombudsman?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question because it gives me the opportunity to indicate the great work — as he indicated — the maintenance enforcement officer does.

Mr. Speaker, he will know that before the introduction of this program 85 per cent of maintenance orders were in default and that this program collects over \$2 million per month for custodial parents and children, Mr. Speaker. That's a good job and that's something that we all should be proud of, Mr. Speaker.

Now from time to time, Mr. Speaker, when we're dealing with matters of some urgency and some personal conflict with people, problems arise, Mr. Speaker. The Ombudsman, as she quite rightly should, intervenes and attempts to find solutions. And, Mr. Speaker, the report of the Ombudsman is replete with kudos for the Justice department, the officials in the Justice department, for the good job they do in response to the queries that she raises and the complaints that are raised within the Justice department, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to introduce guests if I might.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, on second thought, I'm on my feet but perhaps maybe this should . . . honour should fall to the Leader of the Opposition. But with his permission — I'm sure he'll be speaking to this — thank you very much.

It gives me pleasure to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all the members of the Assembly, some very special visitors. The family . . . some of the family and friends of Sandra . . . the late Sandra Schmirler.

Joining us today in your gallery are Shannon England, Sandra's husband and the father of their two small children. I believe Sandra's mother, Mrs. Shirley Schmirler, is here — yes — as well two teammates from the world and Olympic champion rink, Jan Betker and Marcia Gudereit.

Mr. Speaker, these important people in Sandra's life are joining us today because, as you know and everybody in the House knows, we're planning an all-party amendment to the province's honours legislation which will allow this grateful province to award Sandra the Order of Merit — our highest expression of gratitude for achievements.

I invite all hon. members to join in welcoming Shannon England, Mrs. Shirley Schmirler, and their families, and their curling teammates for being with us on this very, very auspicious and important moment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests as well.

Leave granted.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct privilege to join with the Premier in welcoming our guests in your gallery this afternoon. I too would like to extend a welcome to the husband of the late Sandra Schmirler, Mr. Shannon England.

Also to Sandra's mother, Shirley Schmirler, who is my constituent in the riding of Rosetown-Biggar. Very happy to see Shirley with us today.

Also Marcia Gudereit and Jan Betker, teammates on the Schmirler team, who I understand are going to form another team and go after another gold medal. So we're quite excited about that as well.

A very warm welcome to each one of you to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 33 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 33,

The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a first time and, by leave of the Assembly, ordered to be read a second time later this day.

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 33 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, members of this House.

Today it is the privilege of myself, and I am sure of all of my colleagues, to join in passing this important amendment. And it comes on an important day in our province as we earlier today observed Honours Day and introduced the recipients of honours and awards both from Canada and from Saskatchewan. And this year, for the first time, it was of course done in the presence of our Governor General.

Today I trust we speak as one voice as Saskatchewanians, and we are privileged to be able to unite in the service of the province we love. We have the opportunity now to change a small part of Saskatchewan history. And we do this in honour of a loving and much loved member of this community whose untimely death cheated her, her family, her friends, and all of the people of this province.

Today we are giving first, second, and I hope third reading to an Act to amend The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act, so that a person may be invested with the Saskatchewan Order of Merit posthumously if he or she is nominated within one year of date of death.

This legislative amendment comes before the House today, with the support and sanction of every member, to expand the eligibility requirement of Saskatchewan's most prestigious recognition of excellence, of achievement, and of contribution — the Saskatchewan Order of Merit.

The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act was adopted in 1988, Mr. Speaker, to provide statutory authority for the Saskatchewan Order of Merit as an official honour of the provincial Crown. This Act was amended in 1995 to include the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal, and to introduce the Saskatchewan Honours Advisory Council, a skilled group of independent individuals charged with the responsibility of considering nominations and recommending recipients to the highest honours in our province.

In 1997 the Act was again amended to enhance and clarify procedures for awards and to declare sylvinite, more commonly known as potash, to be the province's mineral emblem.

The amendment before the House today is a significant one. Now the province of Saskatchewan will have a mechanism through which deserving individuals who die prematurely or unexpectedly are eligible for nomination to the Saskatchewan Order of Merit within one year of day of passing.

We are setting a courageous course with this amendment. In

Canada, only L'Ordre nationale du Québec currently permit posthumous nominations and then only under very restrictive circumstances.

This amendment is a public testimony to the life and achievements of Sandra Schmirler. This woman showed us through thought, word, and deed, the meaning of greatness, the richness of leadership that one individual can leave as her legacy to the people of Saskatchewan and Canada.

We are united in grief at her untimely passing, and we remain united in our admiration at what this great Saskatchewan citizen accomplished in her all too short life.

We now have an opportunity to come together in this House to offer a tribute to her memory, a tribute that will live on in the history of Saskatchewan. That is the posthumous nomination of deserving citizens for Saskatchewan's most prestigious honour.

The Labrador explorer and missionary, Sir William Grenfell, said in the late 1800s:

The real value of your life can only be gauged by what it gives to the world. Life is redeemed by achievement.

Out of the untimely death of one of our most renowned citizens, there comes an opportunity for good, an opportunity for lasting public acknowledgement of achievement in fields of endeavour important to our province.

It is a proud moment in this House when we can join together, and a proud moment in Saskatchewan history to propose this amendment before the Saskatchewan Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I apologize to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I would ask the Hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to move the motion for second reading of the Bill.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes. I move now this Bill be read a second time.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, it's an honour to rise today to address all members of the Assembly regarding the amendment of this Act, The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000.

While there can be no denying that while a person may accomplish great things while he or she is here with us, those achievements become even more important and cherished when that person is gone. This most certainly holds true for Sandra Schmirler.

I would like to take a moment or two to describe why we should amend the Act and grant this honour to Sandra.

To the people that knew her best — her family, close friends, and teammates — I'm sure that they recognized long before the rest of us did Sandra's great accomplishments and achievements. Throughout her too-short life, Sandra accomplished more than many do in an entire lifetime — friend, mother, wife, ambassador, and the ultimate champion of her sport.

Who among us haven't dreamed of doing great things? Who among us has then said that what we're dreaming is too big, to figure that we just don't have what it takes. Sandra proved that inside each and every one of us we do have what it takes.

By continually pushing the envelope, by asking more of herself than before, and by giving everything she had to life, Sandra always came out a winner. And this was not just in curling but in life as well. She left us with a sports legacy that will never . . . will likely never be rivalled. She gave us two beautiful little girls who will no doubt be curling before they know it.

We can't help but remember her infectious giggle, her sense of humour that is always . . . that was always directed at herself — never others — her spirit, optimism, dedication, and commitment to living life as it was meant to be lived.

Sandra's team helped put Saskatchewan on the international map — not just in curling, but as ambassadors of the province itself. Jan, Marcia, Joan, and the rest of the team showed the world that not only are we fun to play against, but we're darn good at what we do.

We all watched proudly as Sandra led her team to six provincial championships, three national titles, and to a Gold Medal victory at the Nagano Olympics. We all celebrated with her. We thought the possibilities for her were endless because she had so much to offer.

Never did we dream that this could end so suddenly. No one could have prepared us for this. Even after we have said goodbye, we are committed to keeping Sandra's memory and her spirit alive.

The residents of Biggar, Saskatchewan have taken this one step further. They couldn't be more proud of their favourite daughter. Her spirit and her legacy will live on with the opening of the Sandra Schmirler Olympic Gold Park later this summer.

It should come as no surprise that Sandra herself got involved in this project and was only too willing to lend her support and ideas when needed. She made sure that the park would be accessible to everyone and that it would fit in with the new school being built. Again this is a poignant reminder of the type of person that Sandra was.

No matter what circumstances she was facing, Sandra always gave her best. Whether it was on the ice or off, she always pulled through and helped others pull through as well.

For the many, many contributions that Sandra made — not only as curling champion, but as a friend, wife, mother, and ambassador for the province — we believe that her spirit and memory should live on, and that Sandra Schmirler should be honoured in a way fitting for someone who showed all of us

how enriching and rewarding it can be when you never let a moment go by and you cherish all that you have.

Sandra's life was a life well-lived, deserving of the highest honours the province of Saskatchewan can bestow — including the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. To that end we are proud and honoured to lend our support to this amendment to The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ladies and gentlemen, guests, and fellow members of the Assembly, as Leader of the Liberal caucus I want to take this opportunity to voice our support for the proposed amendments to The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act.

The last time this Act was amended was in 1997. Today, in the year 2000, I believe that it is fitting that we have re-examined the qualifications for nomination for the Saskatchewan Order of Merit in a manner that reflects the sentiment of the people of Saskatchewan.

(1445)

The Saskatchewan Order of Merit is the highest honour that can be bestowed by our province. Its recipients are individuals who have been recognized for their significant contributions to our province in areas such as the arts, business, community leadership, and the public service. This nationally recognized award is bestowed to a select few and its recipients wear it with pride.

As human beings it is within our nature to recognize individual accomplishments, hard work, dedication, and commitment. It is also important for us to honour those individuals who for their selfless dedication have contributed greatly to our society. Perhaps it is because they remind us of who we are as people, and they serve as role models for all of us.

Yet as the past has shown, there are times when tragic circumstances take these individuals away from us before we can properly express our appreciation to them. Sandra Schmirler was one of these such individuals.

Sandra's contribution to her province, her leadership, her pursuit of excellence, and her strength in the face of adversity inspired and continues to inspire the people of Saskatchewan and all of us here today.

By amending The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act, the people of Saskatchewan will be able to nominate individuals like Sandra posthumously for the contributions to the province of Saskatchewan.

It is a tragedy that she is no longer with us today, and it would also prove tragic if we were unable to celebrate Sandra's accomplishments with this honour.

I believe that the proposed changes to The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act will be well received by the people of this province. I believe that these changes are the right thing to do.

And I believe that the people of Saskatchewan will appreciate our leadership in this endeavour.

Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons that the Liberal caucus will be supporting the proposed amendments to The Provincial Emblems and Honours Act.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find myself in an awkward position for at least two reasons, if not more. One, it's very difficult to follow the eloquent words spoken by the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party in support of this amendment and in memory of this outstanding Saskatchewan, Canadian — I would even say citizen of the world, obviously, when you win an Olympic championship.

I think it is correct to say, as the member from Biggar . . . Rosetown-Biggar, the Leader of the Opposition has said, and the Leader of the Liberal Party has said, for most of us, most people in Saskatchewan, Sandra Schmirler will be remembered primarily for her accomplishments on the curling rink. And those were indeed not only prolific but of high moment. The recollection of the number of world championships, the local championships, national championships, highlighted by that exceptional, extraordinary win in Nagano at the first ever Olympic championships, and other images that we have of Sandra and her teammates and her family will be what most of us will remember forever.

There's no doubt about it that you could stop there and say those images represent more than the images. They represent a quality of character, the traits of personality, of intellect, of depth, which really speak to a person of high quality and high contribution.

But there was clearly much more to Sandra than simply being an outstanding, world-class athlete. She was a teammate and a team member. This is a team sport. And while she had to make that fantastic shot, which she did in order to win the championship, she was part of a team and was able to inspire and co-operate and be inspired by them.

In any team sport in order to achieve that goal it takes humility for any leader, any skip, to understand that you're only as good as the third, and the second, and the lead, and the substitute in case of emergencies, and the coach maybe. I think that speaks very highly to her personality and her character.

Her personality has been described, and I have had occasions in the past to try and put in my own rather inadequate words, the nature of her personality. It was very bubbly, in the sense that it was always optimistic, and effervescent, and refreshing, and unpredictable, and sometimes even shocking.

It was my very pleasant occasion on two or three times to have the team in my office for a little bit of a lunch after a victory. And I remember one special occasion at 218 where all the members of the Assembly gathered to wish them bon voyage and success in the world championships.

The conversations on those occasions epitomized a very, very lively mind, which was the engine behind this effervescent personality which I've described. This was a person who could engage in light talk, as we all have to in the ordinary course of life and day-to-day events, but had also profound thoughts of meaning and importance about life and putting the sport into perspective, putting honours into perspective.

I dare say, if she could be with us today personally, she'd put this into perspective as well. A deep, thoughtful, intelligent person, who brought in addition to her intelligence this effervescence.

I always feel, if I may say a third thing about her persona in further support about this remarkable individual, she, I was convinced, had her priorities — all of her priorities— right. It's not to say that she didn't make mistakes in life. She was the first to admit some of those. We've all made mistakes in our lives. But her fundamental priorities were there.

Her recreational activities for the city of Saskatoon, and for the people of the city of Regina — I said Saskatoon — city of Regina, but it may as well have been Saskatoon, at least extending by way of example to that and the parts of the world.

That was a priority which is very important, because recreational and sporting activity, I've always held the view, brings out the best in character of people. It is more than just simply trying to take off the extra pounds and to kill a bit of extra time in more productive activity. This really speaks to determination, to discipline, to hard work, and to practice.

And many of us, I would dare say almost none of us in this Chamber, I didn't, witness the hours, the endless hours of practice which took place, demonstrating that steel which was part of getting the proper centre of life.

And one of the most proper centres of life, in addition to being a stimulator, a promoter, a teacher, a friend of those who were involved in athletic activity, not at that world class level, was her centring of life around her family and the children, the Leader of the Opposition talked about and the Leader of the Liberal Party talked about, and her husband.

That we did see on television on every occasion. The priority was: we won this particular curling tournament, but it was just a curling tournament; the real victories in life are the victories that count — family, issues of love, support, the ups and downs of life. I think that indicates to me quite clearly that this is a person who was very, very solidly centred, who had priorities fixed and right.

And if you stop to think of it, what I said may not be all that profound — I'm sure it isn't — except perhaps to this extent. It is so easy, I would imagine, in a world like that where you are feted and where you are celebrated and where you are toasted and where you are in effect so idolized and made a visual symbol in many parts of the world, to let it go to your head and fall off the centre of life.

I remember at one of our luncheons saying to the group, I said, look, why don't you people hire an agent and get out there and market your skills as world champions and we'll go out there

and sell some products? In fact, I'll be the agent, I think was the recollection I made. To which there was huge guffaws and laughter and I got the impression that that was kind of a rejection. I'm not sure whether it was a rejection of the idea or a rejection of me as agent, or both.

But it's easy in that kind of an environment to get off centre. Very easy. And she never was off centre. And in a way, if I have read this correctly, this battle, her last battle, demonstrated better than anything that she was what I have just said — determined, committed, disciplined, and had the right stuff, as they say.

When the news of her illness struck us, it was a shock. The moving poem, "To an Athlete Dying Young." We said it can't be true. It isn't going to be true. She's been in tough fights, but she's going to make this fight as she has every fight. Her teammates were there; the sustenance, the support.

You know, I suspect that there's probably an energy force in all of us as individuals, but maybe an energy force in inanimate objects, indescribable relationships from which we gain strength and regain our health and somehow all of us are part of this great universe which permits us to have done some heinous things in the world, but has also permitted great accomplishments of human effort and endeavour; and when the news of the illness came, it can't be true.

And she brought this centred life, maybe some sense of energy and life force, whatever she brought her family, her religious background — I don't know — to this cause. And I'm sure everybody in this House shared my sentiment. I said she has the ability to win and carry the day. Well, sadly, it was not to be.

But I hope that we can look beyond, in the passing of this amendment today, beyond Sandra's passing, to the fight that she put up, and that we can now focus on the bright and glorious story that was her life. A commitment to ideals, sporting, family, community. A life of achievement and accomplishment. A life of fun — I mean that in the best sense of the word — happiness. A life too full to be wholly recaptured in these brief moments of life that she enjoyed.

But I look at it this way. At her age, maybe — not maybe, I'll withdraw the word maybe — I bet you she lived life more to the fullest, to the full, than 99 per cent of us ever will, or the population ever will. It's a life that deserves to be included in the halls of our highest honours in this province. It's a life of inspiration, and it's a life and a dedication which I hope will be an inspiration to future generations.

My only hope — and I know it'll be true — that her family and particularly her children, husband, and her children particularly, will come to really know who she was, and with growing age to really love as they do, and really love who she was. And if there's anything to this theory about energy and life force, I have no doubt that will be the end result.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that there are members of Sandra's family as we've introduced them today, some of the members of her team, and of course Sandra's memory will live with them forever. And this legislation will assure that Sandra's life will be recognized as a permanent part of the great story, the great

stories of Saskatchewan and Canada, and I'm very proud and pleased to be a supporter of this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1500)

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and, by leave of the Assembly, referred to a Committee of the Whole later this day.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 33 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000

Clause 1

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The official opposition has reviewed the Bill. We find it to be in order and would support this clause and every clause of the Bill. Thank you.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 33 — The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do now move that this Bill be read a third time and passed under its title, Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to and, by leave of the Assembly, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

ROYAL ASSENT

At 3:08 p.m. Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took her seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bill:

Bill No. 33 - The Provincial Emblems and Honours Amendment Act, 2000

Her Honour: — In Her Majesty's name I assent to this Bill.

Her Honour retired from the Chamber at 3:09 p.m.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER

Letter of Nomination Read into the Record

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I would like to read into the record a letter of nomination which I understand has already been signed by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Party,

and myself.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I should say at the outset that we'd like to thank all hon. members for their co-operation — and the idea doesn't come from our side, it's a mutual idea all around — for passing this important legislation in the timely fashion that we did today. On, as the Provincial Secretary said, Honours Day in Saskatchewan.

I'd now like to read into the letter — into the record — a letter to be signed by the Hon. Minister of Education, the Liberal Leader; the Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and the MLA for Rosetown-Biggar; and for myself. The letter is dated today, and it's addressed to Mr. Ted Turner in his capacity of Chair of the honours advisory committee. It reads:

Dear Mr. Turner:

We are writing to you today to nominate Sandra Schmirler for the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, the highest honour the Government of Saskatchewan may confer upon its citizens.

We submit this nomination with mixed emotions. On the one hand we, and all of Saskatchewan citizens, were deeply saddened by Sandra's untimely death. The sense of loss, though no doubt felt most by her family and closest friends, is shared by literally millions of people, throughout this province and country.

But on the other hand, we experience a great sense of celebration in submitting this nomination. It is a special opportunity — as Brian McCusker helped us all to do at Sandra's funeral — to celebrate the life, the achievements, and the personality of one of Saskatchewan's best known and most loved citizens.

In the nomination form we are submitting, we highlight many of Sandra's achievements — as world champion athlete, as wife and mother, as community leader, as an outstanding ambassador for Saskatchewan, and as a kind and decent person.

The criteria for nomination to the Order of Merit include individual excellence, outstanding achievement, and exceptional contributions to the well-being of the province and its endeavours. We believe that the qualities that she exhibited during her life make her a richly deserving recipient.

Renowned broadcaster and journalist, Peter Gzowski, once said that: "Saskatchewan is the most Canadian province in the country," referring to the way that the values of Saskatchewan people epitomize the values of this great country.

If this is true, and we believe it is true, no one represented and lived those values more than Sandra Schmirler.

No one has made us prouder of ourselves and our province.

And no one is a more deserving recipient of Saskatchewan's highest honour.

Yours truly. Signed Mr. Elwin Hermanson, Leader of the Official Opposition; Dr. Jim Melenchuk, Leader of the Liberal Party; and myself as Premier of the province of Saskatchewan.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you members.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1515)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs Vote 30

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

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you Mr. Chairman. It's a good afternoon and I trust the spirit of co-operation, the unanimity, that we saw earlier in this afternoon will continue throughout my departmental estimates.

And I am pleased in that vein to introduce to the committee members of my department whom I am very proud: deputy minister Brent Cotter, Gord Sissin, Paul Osborne, Ernie Lawton, Al Hilton, and seated at the back we have Glen Benedict and Olivia Shumski.

Subvote (IA01)

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'd like to extend a welcome to the officials that have come today with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and I'd like to welcome the minister as well.

One of the first things of note is that this is a relatively small department if you consider that \$34 million is a small budget, yet it's one of the few departments that has an associate minister. Is the workload associated with Intergovernmental Affairs so onerous that you require an associate minister?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I'd like to thank the member for that. I suppose on the one hand the member's observation that, in spending terms, this is not one of the largest departments of government is certainly a valid observation on her part.

I'd like to say though that, as you know, our department has the responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs and that therefore it has been found appropriate by the Premier to name to the department as well to work in co-operation with me, a person of Aboriginal ancestry and from the North where most of the Aboriginal citizens of the province work.

And may I say that I think that was particularly beneficial this past winter when we undertook our consultations among Aboriginal peoples. And a number of the meetings both the member for Athabasca, the associate minister, and myself attended several of the meetings together. There were other meetings which only he attended and other meetings which only I attended.

But I must say, especially on the Aboriginal side of the portfolio, it has proven to be very beneficial to have someone working with me who has such a good and first-hand knowledge and perspective both of Aboriginal peoples and of our North. And I'm very grateful for that.

And I would also say of course in terms of government expenditures, that my associate minister, also as you are aware, has responsibility for Environment, so consequently he actually receives no remuneration at all by virtue of being associate minister. So the cost to the Government of Saskatchewan for having an associate minister in this department is zero.

But it is nonetheless certainly a benefit to me and I would say to all the people of Saskatchewan to have an associate minister I say who is of Aboriginal ancestry. I'm not; I'm of Swedish ancestry, but . . . so I certainly appreciate the input of my associate and say taxpayers should be aware that the cost to the people of Saskatchewan is nil.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chair, a question. Prior to the election there was not an associate minister in this department — not Aboriginal nor non-Aboriginal. So what changes have you made in this department to warrant the need for two ministers?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — As you know, it is one of the fundamental values of this government and one of the things which brought together the two partners in the coalition, that when we see the changing demographics of our province, when we are told that by the middle of this century, 35 per cent — over one third — of our population will be Aboriginal, we realize that there is nothing more crucial to the future of our province than to end the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples and to bring them into full participation in our economy and in the larger society.

There simply is no bigger challenge that we're going to face as a province in the next few decades than that one. And that's a challenge which I've repeatedly said is not only facing Aboriginal peoples but all of us. And so I think that it is terribly important that we have the perspective of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and I believe that that's what the associate minister and myself bring to this file. We share a common commitment and the goals of bringing Aboriginal people into full participation in the province.

But we have the somewhat different perspective of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, I think that's a tremendous advantage and benefit. I have worked very hard, as I think the member knows, at building ties with the Aboriginal community. But the fact remains that sometimes Aboriginal people feel more comfortable and more able to approach government when they see someone who is himself of Aboriginal ancestry within government.

And so that gives us another contact with Aboriginal people in the province which is, in my view, so terribly important. And we are getting these two ministers for the price of one, because as I say, I again stress, that if you want to know what the associate minister is getting for his duties, the answer is nothing. Zero. Zip. Zilch. So, he has additional responsibilities over and above SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management).

And I realize the member from Kindersley may be skeptical of my word. I might say that I think my record speaks for itself and so does his. He campaigned for harmonization of the provincial sales tax; now he's criticizing it. So I'll stand on my record of credibility and we'll have a look at his some day, but I realize that's not the focus of today's debate.

But the fundamental point is, is the associate minister important in us looking at Aboriginal policy? I think he is. I think this is a valuable contribution. Is this costing additional money to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan? The answer is absolutely, positively — no.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, we have no argument with the need for Aboriginal input. Do you have anyone working in your department that is of Aboriginal descent?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, several. I'm sorry, I'm not . . . 65 per cent of the total, I'm told by my officials, in the Aboriginal Affairs side as opposed to the Intergovernmental side.

Incidentally, if I may just very briefly, there are different components of the department. One is we have oversight in connection with the Office of the Lieutenant Governor. There then is the anniversary secretariat, which has planned the millennium and now is beginning to work on the centennial of the province. There is the Intergovernmental and trade side, and the Aboriginal side.

I think the largest single component is the Aboriginal side. Both within my personal staff and also the larger Aboriginal Affairs side of the department, there are a number of persons of Aboriginal background, about 65 per cent.

Ms. Bakken: — Would it be accurate to say that in many ways your department is a go-between between other departments? For instance, if . . .

Would it be accurate in many ways to say that your department is a go-between between other departments? For instance, if there's an agriculture issue, the Agriculture department is involved. If there's a health issue, the Health department is involved. And because of this, does your department basically overlap on most issues with another department?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I think that's a valid observation. We view that we do correlate government policy from the various line departments with national, with the federal government, and the other provinces. Also in the area of Aboriginal policy, oftentimes we view our role as perhaps I could say advocacy in making sure that line departments are considering what are the special impacts of policy in, say, education or health or social services as it affects Aboriginal citizens in particular.

But you're absolutely right — I think a good example would be the Social Union Framework Agreement or the Children's Agenda. My department has taken considerable responsibility for these two national initiatives. But we work closely with the line department in doing this because these are social services and health and sometimes education.

So your observation that we are one . . . we are a department of coordination and advocacy and consultation with the other line departments is a valid one, yes.

(1530)

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, do you feel then that your department warrants spending \$34 million and have a staff of 75 people when in fact most of the issues you deal with are also dealt with in another department that also is spending millions of dollars and has full staff complement?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well in the first point, I would point out to the hon. member that about 20 million of that budget — that's the bulk of it right there — is the treaty land entitlement process. And that of course is strictly within our department.

Indeed you've already mentioned that we are relatively a small department. I guess we get a whole lot smaller if you take out the flow-through monies through the treaty land entitlement process. So that's a very large part of our budget right there.

So I say we are a department that has the major, almost the sole oversight, of the treaty land entitlement process that was put in place by the Mulroney-Devine governments, and of course is something that is essential for the province to be able to complete and close the books on.

And in the other areas, is it a waste to have a department of government that is dedicated to saying, if 35 per cent of the population of Saskatchewan is going to be Aboriginal, we've got to make sure that those Aboriginal people are educated, have full opportunities, full training, full ability to participate in the economy, the workforce, and the culture of this province.

Is that important? I have no hesitation in saying it is. I hope the hon. member agrees with me.

Ms. Bakken: — Well, Mr. Minister, I do agree with you that the Aboriginal people of this province are very important. But we still have another \$14 million that we're spending that has nothing to do with the Aboriginal Affairs department of your ministry.

And as you have stated, that even much of what you deal with with Aboriginals is to do with education and the workforce. Those issues are all handled in other departments, or if they're not, they should be.

The Aboriginal people of this province are the same as everyone else and so should be treated as such. And education should involve everyone. So the Minister of Education should deal with all peoples in Saskatchewan that need an education, not segregate the two.

So again I ask you: is the department, the money spent, the \$14

million that is spent above and beyond the 20 million that is spent in Aboriginal Affairs, warranted?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well I would say to the hon. member, there's the Metis and off-reserve strategy in addition to treaty land entitlement. The treaty land entitlement of course only affects First Nations.

We also have, as I point out, sole responsibility for Government House and the operation of Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor's office; the anniversary secretariat and the planning of the centennial of the province which is still rather low key and small at present. But I'll be happy to get into the hon. member later by talking about some of the consultations which will occur this spring, and I hope that all members of this House will participate in the consultation meetings when they're in their constituency.

Federal-provincial relations; international relations; trade. I know the hon. member from Kindersley was very flattering about my participation at the recent World Trade conference in Seattle, and I want to thank him for that.

So there are a number of areas in which we have primary if not sole responsibility. And again, if I may say, on Aboriginal policy the hon. member has said, well Aboriginal people are simply part of the province and should be treated the same as everyone else.

And may I say that I agree in large part with that observation. And I would tend to think that in a perfect society — then issues of how we make sure that a particular group has the same educational and social and recreation and work opportunities that other members of the society have — in the perfect world that wouldn't be needed. But we know that in Saskatchewan we have not done a particularly good job. In fact we have done unfortunately a rather poor job of making sure that Aboriginal people will be full participants in our economy and in our society. And, as we see the changing demographics, this is something of very pressing necessity for the future of us all.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, I'd have to agree with you that this government has done a very poor job of treating Aboriginal issues with great concern and with forwarding any kind of . . . I mean we do not see any advancement in helping the Aboriginal people. So I guess again I say to you, what is your department doing towards helping these people and helping them to become full participants in our society?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you for that question, and I would point out when you say this government's done a poor job that of course this government has only been in office for six or seven months. So I would ask you to be a little bit patient until the full impact of Liberal involvement in the administration can be brought to bear to clean up, admittedly, the defects and problems left behind when the New Democrats were floundering on their own.

But please recognize some important and fundamental changes have been made in the province, so whatever problems you may have seen in the past are certainly being quickly addressed now. But unfortunately we haven't cured all the problems in the province in six or seven months, but . . . so I'd ask you to just

be a little bit patient and we'll get to them.

Now however, may I also say that I just take some slight . . . some slight objection to what may have been a misinterpretation on my part. But when you said, what are we going to do for them. It would seem to me that one of the fundamental defects in Aboriginal policy over the years in Canada has been this idea of, what are we going to do for them. And we have tried to correct that.

This winter as I already mentioned, we had Aboriginal consultations around the province, my associate minister and myself. And we're trying to devise public policy and government policy that has input and ownership from the Aboriginals, especially off-reserve and urban Aboriginal peoples, themselves. So we think that we have to get past the age of us deciding what's good for them.

We realize two things: first of all, that a successful Aboriginal strategy is one that they have had a hand in developing; and two, that when we talk about Aboriginal policy we're talking about the future of the province and of all of its people, we're not just talking about the future of those persons who happen to be of Aboriginal background.

So we've started the consultation. You know about the Aboriginal employment development plans and program of my department — that's been so much in the news the last few months. I'm certainly happy to discuss that with the member if she wants to go into that.

So we have a number of programs and plans. I think that as a government, after only six or seven months, we've made some important steps, some important progress. But we will need a little bit of time for the Liberal coalition to correct all of the problems in the province.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, I would certainly agree with you that we need to have the Aboriginals involved with the decision making with regards to them in this province.

I guess I'd like to ask you, considering what you just said, about the Liberal involvement. If it comes to the issue that you have a policy that you want to bring forth, and it makes sense, and the Saskatchewan Party supports you — will you vote with us, and we with you and breakaway from what the government wants to do and support what's right for the province?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — If I understand the hon. member correct, if the question is do I . . . are I and my Liberal colleagues committed to doing what is best for the province of Saskatchewan and will we support what is best for the province of Saskatchewan — the answer to your question is yes.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm glad to hear that because that has not been our understanding to this time that that's what would happen. But I'm very glad to hear that that would be your stand should that issue come to the forefront, and we have to make a decision in this legislature about what's right. And that the Liberals will stand for what's right and vote accordingly. And I'm glad to hear that.

And I'd just like to move on to another area to do with

minister's travel. In the *Public Accounts* from last year, the minister, Mr. Wiens, spent approximately \$50,000 on travel. However, under other, there's some \$557,000 spent. Who are these other?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, and, Mr. Chairman, I am told that the travel which is not listed by name is of departmental officials, non-elected persons who work for the department. Again, because of the intergovernmental aspect of our department, there are officials, especially the deputy minister who is often in Ottawa or in provincial capitals, and there was also a fair amount of travel leading up to the world trade talks in Seattle. But those are for departmental officials.

Ms. Bakken: — And do you have a list of where these government officials went and what their purpose was?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes. I'm sorry I can't file it right now, but I will give my undertaking to the member to deliver that to her.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, thank you, I appreciate that.

Just one more large item on the public accounts is \$400,000 given to Saskatchewan Council For International Co-operation. Would you like to explain to us what that was for?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you. The Saskatchewan Council For International Co-operation is a group of non-governmental organizations who do humanitarian and aid work around the world. Now what we have in the budget is that if they raise at least \$350,000 for . . . from private sources, we will match that. Or put another way, they actually, I understand, raise about \$8 million in this province. And I think we're all very proud of the record of the people of this province in supporting international aid, relief and development.

So these organizations raise \$8 million, we match 350,000. Now 350,000 from the provincial government, 350,000 from private sources, that's of course 700,000, which in turn is matched by the federal government and its international aid program. And we have found that overseas oftentimes the most economic and effective way to deliver foreign aid is through the non-governmental organizations.

So the answer is that this 350,000 is the Government of Saskatchewan's contribution to international aid development and relief and that it is funnelled through aid organizations — non-governmental organizations — working in this province, who've done a marvellous job; and it is a credit to the people of Saskatchewan that I'm told that they raised something like \$8 million from private donations.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister, the Saskatchewan Council for International Co-operation, do you have any control over what organizations they fund or is this strictly at arm's-length?

(1545)

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, it's my understanding that we do not exactly approve each project, but we certainly receive reports; and that the funding goes through what are well-known, recognized, and respected international agencies, including such

agencies as Mennonite Central Committee, Save the Children, Oxfam. And the criteria is set in conjunction with our department and a complete reporting back as to what we did help fund is received by us.

And quite frankly, the feeling is that by using non-governmental organizations — people-to-people as opposed to government-to-government — that the projects that we have been funding actually get down to the population of those peoples living in the developing countries who need help; and that this is the best way to make sure that the money doesn't get lost in military or governmental expenditures, but actually gets down to helping people. These are people-to-people projects through well-known and widely respected organizations.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I guess the issue here is again the same with many other issues, is that the government is taking taxpayers' dollars and giving it to a third party to then give it to another party and there doesn't seem to be any foreknowledge of what these dollars are being spent on. To get the information after the fact is a little bit too late to do anything about it. So would it not make more sense to have the knowledge up front as opposed to after the fact?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well I guess I'm just a little bit puzzled. These are agencies like the Catholic Conference of Bishops, the Mennonite Central Committee, Save the Children, Oxfam. These organizations I have to admit don't raise a lot of flags in my mind nor do the reports we have received back.

And I guess I have to say to the member first of all, you know, a complete rundown of all the lists I would be happy to supply her with, but has she heard something or is she personally concerned that the Catholic Conference of Bishops or the Mennonite Central Committee is not honestly concerned about the issues of international aid, development, and relief?

Does she have some concerns? Does her party have some concerns that Oxfam or Save the Children are operations that we should be worried about, that these are not legitimate development organizations which are providing necessary relief around the world?

So I guess in order . . . well I'm quite happy to co-operate with the member in providing her with any information she needs. She seems to be terribly sceptical and concerned that Save the Children might be off doing something improper with the \$8 million that private donors in Saskatchewan have given, or the 350,000 that the Government of Saskatchewan has contributed.

If you have any information of this sort that leads the Saskatchewan Party to think that the Government of Saskatchewan shouldn't be giving organizations like this 350,000 — a tiny fraction of 1 per cent of the provincial budget as our contribution to international aid — if you have any reason to think that the Mennonite Central Committee is not on the up and up, please tell me.

But I have to tell the hon. member that I have never, as a citizen or as a minister, heard anything that would lead me to be suspicious or sceptical of the motives or operations of any of these organizations.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chairman, and through to the Minister, Mr. Minister, I did not imply in any way that the groups that received the money should not have received it. What I am saying is that if you support these groups and your government supports them, that you should know upfront who's receiving the money, not after the fact. That was my only point.

After the fact is too late and I don't think that it's too much to ask that a minister of the Crown who's using taxpayers' dollars would look at this first, not after the fact. Because it is a third-party group, which there's some concern about, but the issue is that it should be vetted through the minister prior to doing it.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I am pleased to advise the member that there are audited reports on all of the projects which are justified against the criteria under which these monies have been forwarded in the first place.

And I am proud that as a government we make this small contribution. I know it has the support of the people of Saskatchewan because as I say, the Government of Saskatchewan's contribution is only 350,000. And private donors, I suppose if anything, they put us to shame by coming up with donations many times that, and they know when they give money as private donors to groups through their churches and through Oxfam, through Save the Children, they know that these are honest, legitimate organizations committed to the goals they espouse. They know the monies are being well spent.

We are getting audited reports back and we're just perfectly satisfied that everything is legitimate here. And if it was otherwise we would certainly have to take action, but I've just never heard or seen anything coming out of the Mennonite Central Committee that raises the flags in my mind that they appear to raise in the minds of the members of the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the minister, first off of course, as you're probably well aware that there are some Mennonites of . . . (inaudible) . . . Mennonite background on this side of the House, and we have a great deal of concern about them.

Mr. Minister, you spoke earlier at some length about having an associate minister, the minister who is also responsible to the Department of the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management.

Now, Mr. Minister, I have some confusion I guess as to why someone who would be the minister of a department as Environment Resource Management, which in this province has a massive responsibility and I would assume to have a great deal of workload, would also be able to have the capacity then to be able to help out with the ministry of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

Then is the government of the day of which you are a representative, Mr. Minister, trying to marginalize in any sense the Department of Environment and Resource Management?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Pardon me, Mr. Chairman. It's very difficult for me to respond when I'm laughing so hard. Boy, is

that a stretch.

The reason for having an associate minister, as I say . . . I know the hon. member shares a Swedish ancestry with me. Now the Swedes are marvellous people. Our Viking ancestors are certainly something to be proud of, but they're not Aboriginal.

And I have found it an enormous benefit to be able to work with and work in conjunction with someone who is Aboriginal. Furthermore, I know there are times when some of the Aboriginal people in the province feel more comfortable. They know this is their government when they see in this government, members and persons of Aboriginal ancestry.

You know, this government is not just a white institution; it is an institution to represent and reflect and serve all of the people of the province. And that is the point we are making when we put into this portfolio someone of Aboriginal background who can advise me and assist me first of all to understand the issues from an Aboriginal perspective, and secondly to communicate with our Aboriginal people, and thirdly to give the point to Aboriginal people that this is their government and their legislature and their cabinet as well. I think those are important messages.

Now what is the Minister of the Environment getting paid for being associate minister to my department and assisting me in my responsibilities? The answer is zip, zero, zilch, nil, nothing.

And the member for Kindersley says he's going to check that out. Go right ahead. I invite you to. That's the truth. I stake my portfolio on that. And I'm willing to stand behind my words. There's some things you have said I wonder if you're willing to stand behind.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, to the minister, we certainly enjoyed the tirade from the minister in regards . . . and we're certainly very pleased that he wanted to illustrate to us three times the remuneration that his associate minister receives from the department.

But, Mr. Chair, to the minister, I guess to us we need to try to have a real clear understanding as to the importance of having someone such as the Minister of Environment and Resource Management as your associate minister. Is it because there's some problems in the staffing level with the Aboriginal familiarity?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well, I'm sorry I can't be more helpful to friends across the way. I guess what this comes down to . . . and it kind of helps, I think, if one wants to understand the coalition . . . what it comes down to, Mr. Chairman, is a fundamental difference in philosophy that unfortunately we can't yet bridge here. I hope that we will be.

The fundamental bridge and philosophy I see is that it is important over here that Aboriginal peoples be part of the process, part of government; that they be seen to be leaders of this province and full contributing and participating members in the society and in the government.

And we think we're making that point when Aboriginal Affairs is not just someone of European ancestry but also is assisted by

someone who is himself northern Aboriginal. We think that's important. We think it's fundamental.

I respect the fact that members opposite don't think that's important. I respect the fact that notwithstanding that it costs the taxpayers not one thin dime, not one red cent, they still have spent the last hour complaining because there's an associate minister who is unpaid.

So this fundamental belief that Aboriginal people should be part of the process that I share with other colleagues over here of another party, I respect the fact that you don't share that fundamental belief. And I can only say in regards to that: this is a democracy; you have the right to be wrong. And you are.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, to the minister, I'll try to rephrase the question in a much simpler form so the minister can respond to it.

Now my question had nothing to do with the associate minister and his background. My question was to you, concerning your senior staff and how many of them, how many of your senior staff have Aboriginal background familiarity? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — In regards to that question I would say that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, it's higher than zero which makes it higher than on the other side, yes. But it is 22 per cent of the staff . . . 22 staff, 65 per cent — 22 staff, 65 per cent — have some Aboriginal ancestry. In terms of your question of familiarity, I believe and I would hope that the answer is 100 per cent.

And I think in, say in my own case, prior to going into politics, I worked very closely with Aboriginal people and I have considerable experience — if I may be so immodest to say — with Aboriginal people. But I still accept that I'm not an Aboriginal person and so there are times when I certainly benefit from having the input of someone who is Aboriginal.

But the answer to your question is 65 per cent of the staff have some Aboriginal ancestry; and I believe 100 per cent of the staff have some Aboriginal familiarity and sensitivity.

(1600)

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, to the minister. Thank you. It's just too bad it took two cracks at it to get you to answer the question.

Mr. Minister, shortly after you attained the responsibility of the Minister for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, a gentleman by the name of David Huliyyappa, I believe — who was a former Liberal candidate — was hired as your assistant after the campaign. I wonder if you could enlighten us as to why he was removed from office?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes. Mr. Chairman, you'll recall that shortly after I was sworn in, I hired as my chief of staff someone who had been the Liberal candidate in Regina South. Now at that time he indicated to me that he was not interested in a career in the civil service. He saw his chief interest in being in business, but he did assist me to get started up.

Now of course . . . And I'm very grateful for the fact that, in terms

of getting my office established, he was able to give me an enormous assist in that regard before returning to his private business interests.

Now I accept that members opposite disagreed. The hon. member for Kelvington-Wadena said that it was wrong to hire a candidate from the Regina South constituency, and then of course she proceeded to hire the Saskatchewan Party candidate from the Regina South constituency to work in the Saskatchewan Party caucus office. Then the member for Kelvington-Wadena said that, well this should not have been by appointment; this should have been by a Public Service competition for the staff in my office.

So I was waiting to see the Public Service competition for staff positions in the Saskatchewan Party caucus office, and I assumed that when they hired the Saskatchewan Party candidate in the Regina South election that it would be by Public Service competition. Well unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, unless I missed it, there was no competition. She was just appointed.

Well then I was asked, why don't we cut down and reduce staff? I said, we have in my office. But again I want to ask the Saskatchewan Party, their communications budget, their staffing budget, how much has that been reduced since September 16? How much money have they returned to the General Revenue Fund, to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan since September 16, because they don't need to hire staff and they're going to reduce staff and reduce costs to benefit the people of Saskatchewan?

But I know that I'm kind of mixing apples and oranges when I'm suggesting that, you know, when the member for Kelvington-Wadena sets out a set of rules I'm supposed to live my life by, of course she wouldn't understand that those rules might apply to her. Because of course the situation we're in here, Mr. Chairman, is there's one set of rules for them and another set of rules for everybody else in the world.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister. I guess I'll have to use the same process as I did for the previous set of questions, and that's to try to rephrase them with much smaller words to help him understand.

Now, Mr. Chair, to the minister. We heard . . . certainly heard quite a tirade against the Saskatchewan Party and their hiring practices which are open competitions which are advertised and certainly went through a significant amount of work to make sure that we hired the best staff and make sure that we get the staff that will certainly accommodate us to a great deal so that we can do our job to hold this government accountable, Mr. Chair. So, and unfortunately to the minister, that for them this has been a big success for us because we've certainly been able to hold this government up to the limelight.

Mr. Minister, then are you indicating clearly to us — it won't take very long — clearly to us that the open competition process that the Saskatchewan Party uses to hire staff for the opposition office is not in tune with the beliefs of the Liberal Party, who prefer to make appointments?

The Chair: — Order, order. The Chair has a fairly long tradition of allowing members some latitude in questioning, but

I'm really struggling to understand how that question fits in Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

If the hon. member for Saskatchewan Rivers can make that connection, I will . . . on that basis I would allow the question.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In all honesty, I believe the question is very relevant to, to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs and to his department and to the expenditure of this department. After all, it was the minister himself who raised the issue of hiring practices surrounding government employees. And so then we just feel quite strongly if he wants to broach the issue surrounding Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, we're certainly willing to have him explain his policies to us.

The Chair: — Order. And then what is the question? I've not seen the tie?

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, highlighting the question again for the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

As your term proceeded in through . . . after the election and into the term of, of ministry for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, you clearly indicated to us that you had some problems with how the Saskatchewan Party hired staff as the official opposition through an open competition.

Mr. Minister, how does that then reflect upon your policies, and why do you feel you have so much problems with that when it comes to hiring your staff through appointment?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well of course most of the staff are hired through Public Service Commission competition. Now there are a few staff within, within the minister's office who are hired by competition that the minister, that the minister publicizes.

Now my point was that the member for Kelvington-Wadena thought that personal staff, such as the Saskatchewan Party has, should be hired by Public Service competition. I'm just puzzled as to why that wasn't done.

But if you're asking me when we hire staff for our constituency assistants or the ministerial assistants, do I want that . . . a broadly ranging competition to ensure that we get the very best people possible? The answer is absolutely yes.

I just still come back to it that if you, you know . . . the member over there says it should be Public Service Commission for caucus staff. You're not doing it. But I am committed to having the very best people working for me and I've got some darn good people working for me; and you can see from the results what good people I've got working for me because this department is ticking along very nicely, thank you.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I see in doing a little bit of research under your administrative budget, and I noticed in years past that you've had a great deal of difficulty being able to keep down to your estimates. And actually, in the past, in many times the department has exceeded the budgetary estimates.

Now of course for the year 1999, year 2000, we don't have

those numbers yet as to how much you might have exceeded your estimates. I'm wondering, at this time, if your officials would have those numbers at this time or if they could attain those numbers for us in the very near future?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Of course in terms of this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, we are dealing with the last fiscal year's estimates. Now they were actually under budget. So the department was under budget, so actually under budget spent by about the tune of \$700,000.

So I don't know what sort of history lesson the hon. member wants to take us on. But there's a particular year . . . The last year's estimates are before this House today. The answer is there were no special warrants and the department did not spend its full budget. It underspent its budget to the tune of some \$700,000.

Now I don't suppose that if we go back into history that was always the case. I mean, we all know under the Conservatives that everything was wildly out of proportion and whatever they said they were going to spend, they spent several times that. But I'm sorry, I'm not responsible for what happened in the Tory years. You'll have to ask the hon. member from Kindersley to answer why it is that the Tories — when they were in office — would budget for a balanced budget and end up going a billion in the tank. I'm sorry, I can't answer that.

But what I can answer is we have one year's estimates before us. In that one year, my department did not go over budget; in fact, they underspent the budget.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, to the Minister, I want to thank him for the history lesson of the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan; after all we haven't heard that for quite a few minutes now.

Now, Mr. Chair, to the Minister, he had some problems with me bringing up expenditures in administration for past years, and I guess what I was trying to do, Mr. Chair, through the Minister, was try to establish a pattern here. Apparently they don't have the numbers right now but . . . well can I safely assume, Mr. Minister, that the expenditure line for '99-2000 in administration can be brought to us in the very near future? Just a nod of the head. Thank you very much.

Now as indicated by the information that was provided in *Estimates* that certainly administration is down a little bit, so mostly in salaries. Now has there been a significant or just a minor reduction in staffing or how is this reduction taking place?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well as I said earlier in answer to one of the other . . . to the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy, the biggest single expenditure in my department is a flow through to cover the treaty land entitlement process.

Now last year we were expecting Kawacatoose First Nation TLE (treaty land entitlement) to be completed. That did not happen and that is mostly the reason why a 700,000 budget did not end up getting expended. And admittedly that is money that will still be spent. It just didn't get spent in the last fiscal year.

And, as I say, I'm certainly not at all adverse to trying to answer questions from previous years, but my understanding of this afternoon's *Estimates* is that we are dealing with the figures for the last fiscal year.

I didn't think I was supposed to answer for the craziness of the Devine administration, that you wanted to know how this province got \$15 billion into debt by wild overspending and lack of control that the members over there are concerned about. But I wasn't here then. It was your friends who were running the show. But I'll try and do the best I can if you want to go into that again.

But I thought I was here to answer for the last year, the last fiscal year, and at that last fiscal year the government, the department underspent its budget.

(1615)

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Chair, to the Minister, I'll have to use smaller words again. Obviously the minister is not understanding my question. Certainly we got another tirade against the Devine administration who was in existence much, much prior to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs ever being involved in the provincial . . . operation of the provincial government.

And, Mr. Chair, to the minister, in very recent history there has been some problems in the department with exceeding their expenditure line, and in fact in the very recent history in administration they were spending as much as a million and a quarter dollars here. But I see that for this year, the estimates are down by almost \$200,000; and this is on the administration line alone.

So I'll try to keep this very simple for you so that you can understand it, Mr. Minister. There's a huge significant reduction here in the last two years of almost 20 per cent. Has there been a significant reduction then in how your office, your immediate office, is being operated?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well as the member will be aware, we are budgeting a \$30,000 decrease this year. It is expected that there will have to be less travel. There was considerable travel over social policy — the Social Union Framework Agreement; over trade policy, it is expected there won't be as much travel this year.

I would also say that a couple of years ago there was in fact both a minister and an associate minister in this department. So there were some administrative costs there. Whereas today, as I pointed out, although there is an associate minister of the department, that associate minister receives no salary and no staffing. So it's completely gratis for his work in assisting me. Whereas a couple of years ago the associate minister in fact did receive staffing and administrative costs, today the associate minister of this department is a totally gratis operation as I think I've mentioned a time or two already this afternoon.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, I'd like to just switch what we're talking about in your department for a few moments and go to the telecommunications and broadcasting sector of your department.

A year or so ago the legislature passed an all-party resolution calling for a universal access fund in order to keep the costs of telephone and Internet down in rural areas. Can you tell us what has occurred regarding this since that time?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes. I'd like to thank the hon. member and to advise her that, first of all, on July 1 SaskTel comes under the jurisdiction of the CRTC, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, a national agency. And it has, as you've correctly pointed out, been the position of this House and this government that we need what is known as the universal service fund to ensure that telecommunications access will be available to all of our residents.

This is an issue which affects rural and northern obviously. It also affects the viability of those businesses that are heavily dependent on telephone use. Now as things stand now the Canadian Radio and Television Commission has only allowed a service fund on what is called a service area basis. In our case that would be the province of Saskatchewan.

So we have a service fund that is considerably higher than that of say Toronto, because in Toronto they are served by a company that does not in fact serve Northern Ontario. Our concern is that if we don't have a national service fund then we will be up against two very, very unpleasant choices.

The one is that service to rural and northern residents would become prohibitive at a time when our farmers are under a lot of stress, as the hon. member knows. Or the other is that the urban members of . . . residents of Saskatchewan have to pay a very, very high service fund.

We think the fairest thing would be to have a service fund that is national in scope. Australia has got this. United States has got a national service fund; in fact three. And the United Kingdom — which of course is, in geographic terms, tiny compared to Canada — has a national service fund. So we think it's terribly important that Canada have a national service fund.

You know, one of the marvellous things about the Internet is that all of a sudden for the first time in human history we thought we were going to have available to everyone, no matter where they lived, instant access to all of the world's knowledge and information. This is just as available to somebody who lives in Val Marie or Fond du Lac as it is to somebody who lives in Toronto or New York.

And this is a marvellous development — as I'm sure the member will agree with me — and we're afraid that this can now be undermined if we don't have this national service fund, and the result is that to have a telephone in Fir Mountain or Stony Rapids could become prohibitively expensive; and the same for Internet hookup and connections.

So to conclude though in answering the question, we have appealed now to the federal cabinet asking that the federal cabinet overturn the CRTC decision, and we have asked that the federal cabinet order that we have a universal service fund in Canada. We think that's extremely important.

And if I may just go one moment further, this is also an

example of the way my department functions. Because it is SaskTel it involves that Crown corporation, but because it is intergovernmental my department had the primary responsibility for preparing the appeal documents to go before the federal cabinet. So this appeal was done by my department, in co-operation with other branches of the public sector in Saskatchewan. And this appeal is to be heard by the federal cabinet, I believe this month . . . this month, and we are hopeful that we will get a more satisfactory response from doing this appeal.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, it is my understanding, and you've clarified that July 1 is when the SaskTel will come under a jurisdiction of CRTC. And my question to you is why have you moved already to implement fees that are under CRTC when that is not in effect yet?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I'm not entirely sure I understand the question. I don't think we have done that.

The point is though that SaskTel not so many years ago, as we're all aware, had a monopoly. A few years ago it lost its monopoly in the area of long-distance operation and is now facing competition in long distance.

With facing competition in home delivery service SaskTel needed to make some moves to ensure that it would be a viable corporation in a competitive atmosphere. So the only anticipation, the only anticipation is that we are preparing for CRTC regulation, preparing for globalization, open marketing, competition, and this has been the stress that SaskTel has been under the past few years.

But in terms of the service fund specifically, the point is that we're already in the position that there is no national service fund. And so we as a province have to deal within the province to find ways of making sure that people living in rural or northern areas will have access to telephone telecommunication services, because there is no national fund.

So the question for us is: how do we make sure that people living in remote rural and northern areas will have affordable service? And that's something we have to address as a province, and we are hopeful that the federal cabinet and the CRTC are going to assist in that regard. But that's a challenge that's here right here and now. It's not July 1; it's here now.

Ms. Bakken: — Chairman. Mr. Minister, well your argument unfortunately will not be very strong with the federal government if while you are on one hand appealing to them to put in what you call a national service fund to keep fees in line and on the other hand you've already moved to implement those higher fees in Saskatchewan and have been charging the people of Saskatchewan since the beginning of the year these fees.

So how can you argue on one hand one and on the other you're doing the exact thing that the CRTC is saying that they're going to do?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I'm not entirely sure that the member and I are talking on the same purpose, and I'm not trying to be sarcastic here.

There are two separate issues. One is SaskTel's rates to keep the corporation viable. Now that has nothing to do with my department. So my department is not involved with SaskTel setting the rates for its service.

Where we are involved is as to whether there will be a surcharge on long distance, which is 3 cents a minute in this province and that applies to everyone using our phone lines, not just SaskTel. But 3 cents a minute is a surcharge that goes into a fund, and that fund is expressly for the purpose of a cross-subsidization to making sure that subscribers in more remote locations will have affordable rates. And that is the only area that we're involved in.

As I say we're already doing it as a province, but we think it would be better to do it as a nation because the problem that we are up against in Saskatchewan — though no doubt it exists elsewhere — the problem we're up against in Saskatchewan is that our mix of urban versus rural is greater than in other provinces. As I've already pointed out, Ontario's got Toronto, BC (British Columbia) has got Vancouver — a higher per cent.

We have in relative terms the most thinly scattered population, a large area and a small population that we're trying to serve. And this universal service fund, at present 3 cents a minute on long distance users, carriers — and that's a charge against the companies — it's what we use to cross-subsidize. And that's where we're trying to get the federal cabinet to agree to a similar fund on a national rather than a provincial basis.

And as . . . I guess I would have to ask the hon. member, just to make sure that we are in fact on the same page here: does the hon. member agree that some sort of cross-subsidization is necessary in order to make sure that residents living in rural and northern areas will be able to afford to have the Internet, to have telephones, to have telecommunications the same as other residents? Or does her party think that we should just simply have an open free market which would mean that telephone services would come down in the large urban areas, and be out of sight in some of the rural areas?

So if she could tell me where she and her party stands on this, it would help me to answer her concerns.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Minister, my question to you is: why have you made the move to charge the rates that are being imposed by CRTC at this time when it has not come into effect yet? You are gouging the people of this province and charging them fees that I have been told — I've met with SaskTel officials — I've been told that they have to charge these because of a CRTC ruling that is coming into effect in July so they're phasing it in now. The government has decided that they're going to do it now.

Now tell me why, on one hand you're going to Ottawa and saying we're appealing this, we want you to help us to keep rates down. And on the other hand, you're already implementing them.

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I'm not trying to duck the question, but I was trying to flag that the rates charged by SaskTel — which, I

understand, are among the lowest in Canada — those rates, I and my department do not have any involvement in. Our sole involvement is on this issue of a service fund which is 3 cents a minute for long distance in this province. And I understand it's considerably lower in Toronto; I think it's half a cent.

So if you want to complain about SaskTel rates, I mean we do have the rate utility commission. You recall in the last provincial election, the Liberals said we should have independent rate review. Now it's not part of my department, but the Liberals said we should have independent rate review; the NDP weren't so sure. Since the coalition, we're getting an independent rate review commission.

So, I think you should go before them if your issue is SaskTel charges. Because they're the people who are in charge of that — not me.

But on the universal service fund — if I could come back to that — because we're not doing it on a national basis, our service fund here in Saskatchewan is relatively high. It has to be because we don't have a lot of urbans. And so, our service fund charge is 3 cents per long distance minute. In Toronto, it's half a cent for long distance minute.

And we think that it's very important, for national reasons, that there be a standard policy across Canada. We think that one of the modern, democratic rights that our citizens should have is access to the Internet, access to telecommunications, on an affordable basis. And we're only going to have this if we have a universal service fund such as what this legislature has endorsed. And that's what we're pushing for. That's what my department is leading the appeal to the federal cabinet on.

That is, unfortunately, the only involvement my department has on SaskTel rates. The rest of the SaskTel rates, you should take to the independent rate review commission that my party pushed for and demanded. And that's the proper format for dealing with that issue.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, your department is responsible for CRTC. SaskTel claims that their service rates are tied to CRTC rulings. I met with SaskTel officials because of people in my constituency that have been charged outrageous fees for installation. Now if they go into a town, they pay \$5,000 less than if they step over the line and they're in the RM. This is because of CRTC rulings. And you have put these into effect ahead of the deadline.

I would like to know why your government has put these into effect before they had to implement them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I'm certainly not trying to duck the question but may I again say — one, in a few weeks we're under the CRTC. And if I may say, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, the reason they have jurisdiction, is a reinterpretation of the Constitution of Canada. You are aware that under the constitution, public works of a local nature are given to the provinces.

Now in the early days of this province, of fence phones, etc.,

telephones were of a local nature and consequently they were provincial in jurisdiction. Now what has happened is of course with modern telecommunications, our telephones give us instant access around the globe and therefore it has now been interpreted that they are no longer local, they are national and therefore they fell under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Now there will, I understand, be greater administrative and regulatory costs to SaskTel because they will have to fall under the CRTC; and they've tried to get ready for that.

Now that isn't a function of my department, that they have to deal with the fact that they used to have a monopoly in long distance; they don't any more, they're in competition. They have to deal with the fact that they're going to be regulated by the CRTC. They're trying to cope with a changing global economy, a changing global environment, and a changing regulatory environment.

I don't have any direct input into that except on the issue of whether or not there should be a national service fund, whether or not you believe in cross-subsidization.

So I come back to the hon. member. The appeal that my department is taking to the federal cabinet is to ask the federal cabinet for cross-subsidization whereby in effect urban Canadians will pay to make sure that rural Canadians will have the same access to telephone telecommunications as they have.

Now we believe that's important. We believe that's very important, that rural farmers, reserves, the North, these people, should be able to get the Internet and they should have telephones. Now we accept that as important. Do you? Do you agree with us?

The only involvement of my department in SaskTel — period, full stop — is this appeal to the federal cabinet asking for a national service fund which in effect establishes cross-subsidization so that rural Canadians will have affordable access to telecommunications. Do you support that appeal? Because that's the only involvement my department has got.

I sense that you think this is wrong. I think . . . I sense that you're saying you would support Toronto and Saskatoon and Regina having low telephone rates so that people who don't live in the urban areas will have to go back to sending letters or smoke signals or whatever.

Ms. Bakken: — Chairman, to the minister. I've asked a simple question. On one hand you tell me that your responsibility is to put in the national service fund agreement — to work on that — but on the other hand your department has no responsibility for CRTC rulings today.

I'm sorry, you can't have it both ways. The CRTC rulings that are supposed to come into effect July 1st are already being implemented by this government. The people of Saskatchewan are paying the price.

You're telling me that your department is trying to cope. Well our concern is not your department. Our concern is the fee that the people in rural and Northern Saskatchewan are having to

pay for rulings that aren't even in effect yet but you are implementing. Now I would like to know how you can justify this.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes. Mr. Chairman, what I explained a few minutes ago about telephones transporting from provincial jurisdiction to national actually occurred everywhere else in Canada several years ago, about seven years ago. And we applied for an exemption here which was granted for seven years. But that exemption is now expiring on July 1 which, after all, is a few weeks away.

And with that exemption we had a moratorium on increases in rates. Now we've also had SaskTel lose its monopoly on long-distance service and will be losing its monopoly on local service. And so we have to cope with this environment which in terms of protecting the rural people that you mentioned, our point is that if SaskTel is not competitive in the cities we could end up with a scenario where the subscribers are in Fond-du-Lac and Val Marie and Fir Mountain and Carrot River, in other words in the communities that Ma Bell isn't interested in servicing, and how do we guarantee good service for them?

Well what we say is we are going to guarantee good service for the entire province, no matter where you live, by convincing the federal cabinet to adopt a national service fund. That's how we are going to protect rural people. So this is not about gouging rural people; this is about protecting them in the long term so that they will have telecommunications, Internet, telephone services on the same basis as urban Canadians. That's what we're fighting for.

Now will you support the amendment that is sponsored by my department to ask for this national service fund? Now that's my only involvement, that's my only involvement on this file is the national service fund. Will you support us, will you lobby the federal government for the national service fund? Or do you believe, do you believe that say Toronto shouldn't have to pay as much for telephone, so that the people who don't live in Toronto will just have to pay whatever the market can bear or do without?

I put it to you: do you support what we are doing — because this is the only involvement we have is the national service fund — do you support what we're doing or do you support telecommunications services only being available to urban Canadians on an affordable basis?

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, I will ask the question again. If you are concerned as you say about the people of this province in rural and remote areas having reasonable fees, then why is your government today charging the fees that will come into effect on July 1? You have been doing this since the beginning of the year.

We have people in rural Saskatchewan that are putting services into businesses. If their business is within the town, they pay \$5,000 less than if they're over the line and in the RM. And we are told that by . . . from SaskTel that this is because of CRTC rulings. They have no choice — no choice. So if SaskTel doesn't have any choice, then obviously the direction is coming from your department which does control CRTC.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, I realize that . . . You know when . . .

The Chair: — Order, order.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well, Mr. Chairman, when the hon. member says that I control the federal CRTC, I realize we're in one of those fundamental disagreements. It's sort of the same fundamental disagreement when I say it's important to have an Aboriginal minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and they say it's a waste of taxpayers' money even though we're not spending any taxpayers' money. I realize we've just got that philosophical difference.

I'm telling you that we now have in this province, thanks to the Liberal Party, an independent rate review commission; and if you have complaints on rates presently charged on SaskTel, they go before the independent rate review commission.

Now after July 1, those issues will be decided by not our independent rate review commission — they will not be decided in Saskatchewan at all, they will not be decided by the cabinet of Saskatchewan — they will be decided by the federal CRTC, which I regret to inform the hon. member I do not control. I'm sorry I don't control it.

However, the one thing that we see we can do to make sure that Canadians living in rural, remote, northern, and reserve areas will have a portable access to modern telecommunications is through this national service fund. That's why we're . . . that's why we're advancing this afield. That's why we're working on it.

And I ask again, the hon. member says she's not getting . . . Honestly, Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to answer her questions as best I can. I'm trying to understand her when she says that I control the CRTC. It's hard to understand her but I'm honestly trying.

But I ask her again for the fourth or fifth or sixth time: does she support the work of my department in trying to get a national service fund to protect rural and remote and northern Canadians to get modern telecommunication services? Does she? Does her party support us in that appeal?

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Chairman, and to Mr. Minister, I will re-phrase the question. Did your department advise SaskTel to start implementing CRTC ruling now?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — No.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Minister . . . or Mr. Chairman, and to the Minister. Mr. Minister, if your department did not advise SaskTel to start using . . . to implementing CRTC fees, then why would SaskTel be using these fee structure now? And why would they be telling MLAs on this side of the House, when we inquire of them why they are using these fee hikes, that it's because of CRTC ruling?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Well you know, again, I'm not trying to duck this but you know unfortunately SaskTel is not within my department. I can only say that in a very few weeks time we're under the CRTC. We're now under an independent rate review

process established by the cabinet of Saskatchewan. That will be falling away very shortly as we move under federal regulation. And you know we're going to have to, we're going to have to get ready.

(1645)

And SaskTel has worked very hard to deal with the issue of competition in long distance, which is already here; competition in the rural market, which will soon be here.

And the only involvement my department has is to try and make sure that Canadians who do not live in the large urban centres — Canadians who live on the farm, Canadians who live in the small villages, people who live on our Indian reserves, people who live in the Far North — that they will also have the benefit of modern telecommunications. That's what I'm committed to. That's what my department is committed to. That's what this government's committed to.

May I ask for the seventh time: is the Saskatchewan Party in agreement with us? Do you think it's important for affordable telecommunication services to rural people? Or should we just cut them loose and not worry about this national service fund that we're so concerned about?

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, when did your department talk to SaskTel about CRTC rulings? They obviously know this is coming in effect. When did you first start discussing this with SaskTel?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, as I indicated, it was actually seven years ago that the constitutional ruling came down that telephone telecommunications service was no longer under provincial jurisdiction but under the jurisdiction of the federal government. At that time Saskatchewan obtained a five-year exemption, which subsequently became a seven-year exemption.

But I think the answer to the hon. member is, we have known for seven years that this was coming. And we've delayed it. But the delay time is running out. The delay time is now a few weeks away. But in terms of how long have we been discussing this, how long have we been planning for it, how long have we been preparing for it, the answer is seven years.

The issues became more urgent last fall when the CRTC made its ruling against a national service fund. That was, I believe, last October. And we appealed it. Now this ruling against a national service fund did not directly apply to us at the time because of course we still weren't under federal jurisdiction, but we knew that we would be in the matter of a few months. And now we're going to be in the matter of a few weeks.

But the short answer to the hon. member's question is, we have known and been preparing for national regulation for seven years.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, what concerns did you have that made you appeal it?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, we are very, very concerned that without a national service fund, one of two things can happen.

The first is that if we don't have proper cross-subsidization, then the cost of telephone telecommunication services in our rural and northern areas will become prohibitively expensive and our residents who don't live in the cities simply won't have telephone access or Internet access. That's our chief concern.

The other concern is to keep SaskTel competitive in the cities; that with cross-subsidization, if you have cross-subsidization, you run the risk that city rates do not become competitive. Because the concern is that some of the larger international companies may be interested in servicing, may be interested in servicing the large urban areas, but would they be interested in servicing some of the smaller towns or the farms. And our fear is they would not.

So the fundamental commitment of this government which led to the appeal is that we want to make sure that all of our residents, no matter where they live, will have affordable telecommunications and telephone service whether they are on the farm, whether in the small villages, whether they are on the reserve, whether they are in the North.

And that's why we have asked for a national service fund, that's the only device we can come up with that will ensure that young people will have the same access to all the world's knowledge, the libraries of the world, through their Internet, that they would have if they lived in New York or Toronto.

And that's why we launched this appeal and I would hope that the Saskatchewan Party would agree with this. I've been waiting to hear the Saskatchewan Party say they agree with the national service fund. I haven't heard it yet. I'm hopeful that maybe before we adjourn here that I will hear it.

But that's why we launched the appeal because we are committed to affordable telecommunication services for all the residents of Saskatchewan no matter where they live.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. The problem that the Saskatchewan Party has is with the fact that SaskTel has been charging CRTC rates before it's implemented.

And the constituent that I have, who is a business — he is definitely expanding his business so it's great for the economic development of the province — was charged CRTC rates on July 1 of 1999. So that's a year prior to supposedly these becoming into effect.

So can you explain why that is not gouging this business person?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Again, I'm not trying to duck the question, Mr. Chairman, but of course this does not fall under this department. It's a question to CRTC and of course the independent rate review commission that has been established as to the purpose and their rates.

My department does not set rates for SaskTel or any other Crown corporation, nor do we have any involvement whatsoever in the setting of Crown corporation rates.

Our sole involvement is the national service fund, and the reason for the national service fund is that we believe that

Saskatchewan residents — living on the farm, living in our small villages, living on our Indian reserves, living in the North — they have the same fundamental rights to telecommunications and telephone services as those Canadians living in Toronto and Montreal and Vancouver.

That's my department's involvement, and that's what I'm here to talk about this afternoon.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, can you . . . Since this isn't your department, would you mind informing SaskTel that until July 1 you are not under CRTC regulations? You could send them a letter and perhaps . . .

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I'm not sure, I'm not sure that SaskTel needs to be informed that July 1 is the magic date under which they will switch over to CRTC regulation. But if they're not aware of that fact, I would certainly be happy to communicate it to them. But I suspect that they are.

But I would say to the hon. member opposite, your party has asked for deregulation. Your party did not want SaskTel under provincial regulation. Well it won't be under provincial regulation any more. You wanted deregulation; you wanted globalization; you don't want controls. You want the free market operating even though we all know that the free market is going to be kinder to Toronto than it's going to be to Val Marie. That's what you wanted.

You want a free market in which the companies will decide what is an appropriate charge in Montreal and what is an appropriate charge in Fond-du-Lac or Roche Percee. So you fought for deregulation. Congratulations — you won.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.