

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand today to present petitions from some of my constituents who would dearly love to have much better cellular telephone coverage in their areas. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

And the signators on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Bruno, from Prud'homme; also from Wakaw, and Aberdeen, and from the Vonda area also.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of citizens still concerned about the high price of fuel. The prayer reads as follows:

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

Signatures on this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are all from the community of Melfort.

I so present.

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition in regards to the high cost of fuel. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by people from the Candle Lake area.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also stand today to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan 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, cost shared by both levels of

government.

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

And it's signed by people from Kinistino, Melfort, and Ridgedale.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people in Swift Current and area who are 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, cost shared by the federal and provincial government.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people in Swift Current and Herbert.

I so present.

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

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

And it's signed by residents of Govan.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned about the high price of fuel. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

These petitions are signed by people in the Melfort, Kinistino area.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to read a petition concerning the high price of fuel tax. And the prayer reads:

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

provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

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

From the people from Melfort, Tisdale.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with citizens concerned about poor cellular service. The prayer reads:

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

The petitioners are from Vonda, Warman, Aberdeen, and Prud'homme.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present on behalf of citizens concerned about the high tax on fuel. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

I do so present.

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:

Cellular service to Watson and area;

Reduction of fuel taxes;

Confiscation of municipal reserve accounts; and

The grandfathering of vehicles that were tax paid on budget day.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and hon. colleagues. I'd like to introduce to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, a distinguished guest who is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to introduce him and describe his visit just briefly and then ask him to stand.

In the Speaker's gallery today we are blessed with a visit by His Excellency Sandor Pápp, ambassador of Hungary, and his wife Mrs. Klára Pápp, who are accompanied as well by Irene Janz from the protocol office.

The ambassador is visiting Regina today and on his first official visit to Saskatchewan since taking his appointment as ambassador from Hungary to Canada. While here he is meeting with the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Economic and Co-operative Development, the mayor of Regina, and representatives of Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership.

He's also meeting with officials from SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) in regard to the working relationships with SIAST International.

And tomorrow, His Excellency and Mrs. Pápp will travel to Moose Jaw, I'm happy to report, where they will tour 15 Wing NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) at the training base there.

I also had the honour of meeting with His Excellency this morning and hosting a luncheon in his honour, and I would ask, Mr. Speaker, if all hon. members would join me in welcoming to Saskatchewan and to our legislature, His Excellency Sandor Pápp and his wife Klára Pápp.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, I too would like to welcome the ambassador from Hungary and his wife, His Excellency Sandor Pápp and Mrs. Klára Pápp to the province of Saskatchewan. We're very pleased to have you in our great province.

I've not had the privilege of visiting the country of Hungary, but my wife has been to Hungary and she tells me it's a beautiful country, a lot of farmland which is similar to Saskatchewan, and she quite enjoyed her time there.

So we welcome you to Saskatchewan, hope you enjoy your stay, and will come back again some time. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege again this afternoon to introduce more distinguished visitors who are in Regina for the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) governance negotiations. They are seated in your gallery.

I'd ask them to kindly stand. They are Morley Watson, First Vice-Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, accompanied by Joe Quewezance, tribal chief of Saskatoon Tribal Council, and Joan Greyeyes, the president of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies school.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, 26 students from the Almighty Voice Education

Centre, the One Arrow Reserve, near Bellevue, Saskatchewan. And accompanying the students are Roger Petrisor, Christine Baldhead, Janet Galler; Warren Paul and Deloris Paul, who are also chaperoning the group today.

I look forward to meeting with you, students, and with your teachers a little bit later on in the day, and I do hope that you'll enjoy the proceedings that you are witnessing today in the Assembly. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly, 26 students from MacNeill School. These students are sitting in the west gallery and they are accompanied by their teacher, Ms. Debbie Kivela, and parent volunteers, Ms. Josephson and Mr. Bowering.

I welcome them to the Assembly and ask you to join with me in welcoming them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seated in the west gallery, Mr. Speaker, is a wonderful teacher, Ms. Michelle Prytula. There are three chaperones, Mr. Toovey, Ms. Senga, and Ms. Inac. They are accompanying 32 students from St. Luke School in Saskatoon.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the best students from one of the best schools, in definitely the best city, in indisputably the best province, in absolutely the best country in the world. Please welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add to the acknowledgement of the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs by introducing and adding to the information related to three very special guests who are here today for first reading of a landmark piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

As already introduced and I'll ask them to stand again, they are here in this capacity today for this purpose. Morley Watson, First Vice-Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations; joined by Joan Greyeyes who was president of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology; as well as Joe Quewezance who is chair of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology board.

Mr. Speaker, at the request of the FSIN, the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training together with SIIT (Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies) has developed The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies Act. And this unique legislation will make it easier for First Nations students to continue their education or to find jobs when they graduate. The proposed Act acknowledges SIIT as a technical institute governed by the FSIN that will issue certificates and diplomas for its programs.

These credits will better be recognized by employers and other

post-secondary institutions. The proposed legislation, Mr. Speaker, reinforces government's commitment to support First Nations people in accessing quality training and education.

And I'll ask hon. members again, Mr. Speaker, to join me in welcoming these three leaders to the Assembly. I believe that they represent Saskatchewan's greatest natural advantage for the future, our young people, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce today to all members of the Assembly, friends of this Assembly, Mr. Gordon Gunoff and Mr. Pat Therrien from IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers). Let's all welcome them here.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I thought that as well from northern Saskatchewan, I would give a great welcome to the members from a tremendous institution like SIIT. And as well, Mr. Speaker, in Cree I would say:

(The member spoke for a time in Cree)

And with due respect, Mr. Speaker, I was saying that it is great to see that self-governance of First Nations take place in the institutions of education in this province. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the privileged opportunity on behalf of the official opposition to welcome also the members of the FSIN here. And I wish you very well with the conference that you're partaking in, in Regina at this time. Thank you. Welcome.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I also want to join my hon. colleague from Humboldt to introduce some of the students we have in the gallery up, up above there; and to also welcome the people that are here — Mr. Quewezance, and of course Mr. Watson, and Ms. Greyeyes.

I think it's very important for all the students that are here to appreciate some of the work that's being done in the Assembly here. But to, more importantly, to appreciate each other as well.

And I want to point out that, Mr. Speaker, that we do have the present leadership here in terms of the FSIN and the First Nations community of Saskatchewan and to ... (inaudible) ... do we have the future leaders here of the First Nations community.

And I want to welcome them both and say that there's a lot of room in the Assembly, and I certainly hope that your visit today is very informative and pleasant. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Tuesday's Debate on Funding of Film Festival

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP (New Democratic Party) has never let logic stand in the way of politics, and yesterday was no exception.

During the debate on government-funded pornography, the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley said that even if we don't agree with it we need to have a frank and open debate about pornography and it was not the Saskatchewan Party's place to limit that debate. He then moved a motion to cut off the debate, Mr. Speaker.

The member for Saskatoon Southeast said the majority must never be allowed to silence the minority. The NDP then used its majority to end the debate and silence the opposition who for the time being are the minority in this House.

Mr. Speaker, not one of the so-called defenders of tolerance and free speech would ever acknowledge the inherent inconsistencies of their actions. That's because the NDP don't truly believe in tolerance and free speech. To the NDP these are simply Orwellian slogans to be used to stifle free speech and promote the intolerance of differing views.

Mr. Speaker, there is no one who understands how to use the tyranny of the majority like the NDP. They have proved it many times in the past; they proved it again yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatoon Businesses Not Relocating

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of inconsistencies: first it was the bat cave story — good plot, wrong facts. Then it was AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) — eloquent Leader of the Opposition, bad script. Last week, the oil and gas industry was leaving due to a tax that does not exist. Need we mention, Mr. Speaker, that no one on the government side is promoting pornography.

And yesterday, we had the member from Cannington in the deep south of the province — about as far away from Saskatoon as you can get — announcing that Saskatoon businesses are leaving. And he said, Mr. Speaker, that his claim was quote, "accurate."

Well, today's front-page headline in *The StarPhoenix* says, "Businesses not going anywhere, survey says." Mr. Dale Botting, Director of Saskatoon's REDA (regional economic development authority) said his organization has been tracking 753 Saskatoon and area companies since last summer, and none of them have left. Not one in ten, Mr. Speaker, as the member claimed. None. Period.

These facts make me feel good, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the members opposite want Saskatchewan to fail, that's why they don't deal very well with facts at all. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tuesday's Debate on Funding of Film Festival

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I would like to share with my colleagues in the Assembly the great disappointment I am feeling. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, is one of the sorriest days in the history of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party brought forward a motion that would have given the government an out — a motion that would have saved them from further embarrassment on the issue of taxpayer-funded pornography. It was our way of putting out a helping hand to say, here's your chance; pull the funding for the porn and make things right.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have found out where the members opposite stand on this issue. Mr. Speaker, they support taxpayer-funded pornography. They support using the money of the good people of Saskatchewan to fund porn. And this is a sad day, indeed.

We heard the member from Saskatoon Southeast stand up and talk at length about how she supports artists and free speech, but ignored the fact that the people that voted her in would have some of their tax money going to support porn.

We also heard from the member of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. He stood up and agreed with the use of taxpayers' money to fund porn.

Mr. Speaker, it's a sad day in our province, indeed. The members opposite generally support the use of taxpayers' money to fund pornography. Mr. Speaker, the *Titanic* known as the NDP is sinking. And yesterday, the members opposite accelerated the plunge to the bottom.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Rivers School Division Reduces Mill Rate

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are fond of thinking out some facts but not all the facts. It's getting so the public cannot tell exactly what the Sask Party means when they say facts and reality. They might say they are dealing with the facts, but frankly their thoughts are incomplete and convey impressions that are wrong.

The Sask Party says that the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division is facing enormous rate hikes. However, Mr. Speaker, an article appeared in the May 9, yesterday's, *Prince Albert Daily Herald* proves their facts are incomplete. The title of the article is "Saskatchewan Rivers passes mill rate decrease."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — This article goes on to say that besides the mill rate decrease, the budget allows for the addition of a second speech therapist, the replacement of 140 computers, and the expansion of a microwave system. They are also budgeting \$75,000 to upgrade playground equipment, \$116,000 to upgrade computerized library programs, \$100,000 to renovate the education centre. They have also allocated \$550,000 in its transportation budget to replace six school buses.

All this new spending, Mr. Speaker, plus a decrease in the mill rate. Somehow this doesn't look like the same picture painted by the Sask Party.

Mr. Speaker, Sask citizens are getting weary of the Sask Party selling our province short. It's time for them to admit all the real facts and impose . . . rather than impose their reality of gloom and doom.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Democrat Constituency Meeting

Ms. Julé: — Well, Mr. Speaker, more good news for Saskatchewan. Even the NDP is getting sick of the NDP. I would like to quote, Mr. Speaker, quote from a recent article in the *Melville Advance* entitled "NDP members grill Regina MLA", and I quote:

The guest speaker at Melville NDP Constituency Association annual meeting Thursday talked a lot about vision . . .

But Roy Romanow's government's position on several controversial issues had members (there) seeing red instead.

Regina-Qu'Appelle MLA Mark Wartman and the Romanow government in general received a rough ride . . . from the less than a dozen members over . . . (such issues as) municipal amalgamation . . . farm aid . . . and rural economic development during the three-hour meeting in Melville.

Wartman was also put on the defensive over expansion of his government's taxation policies . . . the meltdown of the rural economy . . . and the timing of last September's harvest election. And the MLA further received a verbal broadside from a long-time local member . . . who accused the urban-based Romanow government of displaying arrogance . . . and the lack of appreciation for the party faithful in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, that's the review this government is getting from NDP members and all less, less than a dozen of them at that.

Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, what the rest of Saskatchewan is saying.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Carrot River Health Care Facility

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, well, well, well, three times in one day. Three misrepresentations, one right after another — four if you throw in a small film festival. Even for these guys . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I heard the member comment on misrepresentations, which is what you can't do; you can't do indirectly what you can do directly. And I would ask the hon. member to just rephrase and apologize for that statement.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three times in one day . . .

The Speaker: — I just would ask the member to apologize.

Mr. Yates: — Three wrong facts, one right after another — four if you throw in a small film festival. Even for these guys, Mr. Speaker, that's pretty good. The members from Saskatoon and Prince Albert have straightened out two crooked roads. Here's the third.

On August 12, 1999, before the current member from Carrot River was even elected, the Minister of Health wrote a letter to the North-East Health District which said, quote, "I am pleased to provide approval-in-principle and to confirm provincial funding for this project . . ."

The funding — \$2.3 million. The project — a new integrated 24 health care facility. And for who, Mr. Speaker? The people of Carrot River. An integrated facility providing 24-hour nursing care, acute beds for palliative care, acute observation and convalescent care, rehabilitation and respite care, X-ray services, home care, education and emergency services.

And, Mr. Speaker, this project is unfolding exactly as approved nearly one year ago. The North-East Health District and the community of Carrot River are to be commended for working in partnership with the health district. The member from Carrot River Valley should be ashamed of himself for trying to take credit for their work.

But then shame is a strange word to them . . .

The Speaker: — Order. the member's time is up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Volunteer Medal for Mr. David Shurry

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a constituent of mine, Mr. David Shurry.

David was honoured in the past year by being awarded the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal and was invited to take part in last week's honour ceremonies with Her Excellency the Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson. However because of his affliction with multiple sclerosis, David was unable to make the trip to Regina. But I would like to acknowledge this remarkable man nonetheless.

Despite being confined to a wheelchair since 1969, David Shurry has been a leader in the community of Battleford. A lawyer by trade, he has been a constant volunteer, primarily in the area of sports. In 1983 he founded the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame and authored a history of baseball in Saskatchewan.

David has worked hard and very closely with a paraplegic group and has been a member of the Kinsmen Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, people like David Shurry are a constant inspiration to each and every one of us. They are a reminder of

a legacy we can leave despite the hurdles that might be put in our way from time to time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members to join with me in expressing our congratulations and appreciation to David Shurry and his family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Trade Union Legislation

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my question is for the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister accused me of spreading misinformation. She said, and I quote. I quote, Mr. Speaker:

... there is no standing union contract in the province that requires the use of union subcontractors.

Well, Madam Minister, I have a copy of the metal ... the provincial sheet metal workers' agreement. I also have a copy of the provincial carpenters' agreement and I have a copy of the provincial operating engineers' agreement. Every one of these contracts clearly states that subcontractors must be hired under the collective agreement.

Madam Minister, you are the one, you are the person that is spreading misinformation. Why are you spreading this misinformation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always appreciate an opportunity to expand the knowledge on these issues because quite often these matters aren't discussed in school.

But where the member opposite is not quite understanding the interpretation of these agreements is the subtrade does not have to be union nor do the workers. But if there's a contract agreement for certain benefits and wages on that job, then they would pay those benefits and wages but are not required to be unionized and are not required for the employee to be unionized.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard the folks on the other side talk about if it looks like a duck and it sounds like a duck ... Well this certainly looks and sounds like a duck. All we need to hear now is the quack, Mr. Speaker.

The minister simply doesn't have her facts straight. And that's because the research she is doing is checking her bank account. She's counting on the big donations from her union friends and she's not going to let the truth stand in the way of a good political payoff.

Mr. Speaker, not only is she spreading misinformation in this House, we understand she's been feeding the same lines to her

Liberal colleagues. I understand the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has also been telling the construction industry that subcontractors are not bound by union contracts.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the minister is basically honest, so he's clearly being misinformed by the Minister of Labour.

Madam Minister, why are you telling people that subcontractors are exempt from the union agreements when that clearly is not the case?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — The member opposite may be familiar with the concept of fair wage policy which exists at the federal level. And that doesn't say that you have to become union. It says that you have to pay the fair wages that have been agreed to in the union contracts in the same environment. So what he's doing is he is confusing the need to be unionized with the need to provide a comparable level of compensation.

But I will add, Mr. Speaker, that it seems to me that his benefactor, Mr. Conrad Black, has been trying as hard as he can to oppose unionization. And if their \$75,000 requires them to get up in this House and argue against unionization, Mr. Speaker, I would say that they got more money than we did and maybe they ought to examine their principles a little more deeply.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister who's in a conflict of interest because the unions provide her party with \$300,000, has a lot of nerve talking about another party who only takes a free-will donation.

Mr. Speaker, the implications of the minister's comments are enormous. This will not only mean the forced unionization for spinoff companies ...

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'd ask all members to please come to order.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hitting a raw nerve over there. This will not only mean forced unionization of spinoff companies, it also means forced unionization for all the smaller subcontractors who work for those companies.

Madam Minister, these contracts clearly state that if a project falls under a union agreement, all the subcontractors must also follow that agreement. Madam Minister, this is unfair. It's undemocratic and it will drive businesses and jobs out of the province of Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister, why are you now attacking subcontractors and their employees?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, this law is extremely similar to every law that exists in every other province; it hasn't driven anybody in droves out of those provinces.

And I'd have to say for the members opposite who purport to support working people, they voted against a budget that removed 55,000 poor people off the tax rolls, that has protected low-income people on every front, provided the largest single tax break in history. And I ask them, what have you got against working people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

District Health Board Consultations

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Madam Minister, yesterday we asked you to confirm that the NDP has placed a gag order on health district boards. We asked you to confirm that you're planning to close hospitals in Lanigan, Watrous, and Wynyard. And we asked you if you were planning to get rid of the Living Sky Health Board if they didn't approve your plan.

Madam Minister, you responded by accusing us of misleading the public and not getting our facts straight, and then you went outside the House and confirmed to the media every single word we said. You said indeed there were plans to close the Lanigan Hospital. You said the Living Sky Health District Board would be dissolved if they didn't follow your plan. And they said that, and they said that you were not allowing them to speak freely about this.

Madam Minister, will you stand in the legislature today and apologize for the statements you made during yesterday's question period?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, what I find so interesting about the member's question and line of questioning is that he is accusing the province of putting gag orders on health boards across the province.

Mr. Speaker, then I have to say this to the member: why is it, member, that on May 3 of the year 2000 you were in the Assiniboine Valley Health District at a public meeting in Canora discussing their 2000-2001 budget plan?

Mr. Speaker, if there's a gag order, I'm sure the member would have seen muzzles on the health members' noses or rags in their mouth. And I want to tell that member, why were you there if there was a muzzle?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister.

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, there was no muzzle on me; the muzzle's on the board. Because what they said is that they could only talk about the options they had and they couldn't say what the final plan was until you approved it, Madam Minister. That's the gag order.

Madam Minister, yesterday you said, and I quote from *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, everyday in this legislature these people get up and they make false statements about everything, Mr. Speaker. They are simply misleading the public.

That language is clearly unparliamentary.

My question to the minister is simple. Yesterday you confirmed that there are plans to close the Lanigan Hospital. You confirmed that the district health boards were told not to talk about the budget till you approved it. And you acknowledged that if they didn't follow the plan, you would consider getting rid of them. Will you stand up today and apologize for those statements?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, across the province, health districts have been holding stakeholder meetings; they've been holding public meetings about the various options that they're preparing. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Hon. members, these are some very serious questions and answers, and I would ask all members to come to order in order that the questions . . . Order. I would ask all hon. members to co-operate and allow the question to be heard and the answer to be heard as well. These are important questions to this Assembly.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, the point that I am making is that this member across the way had an opportunity to attend a public meeting in Canora to discuss the 2000-2001 budget plan for the Assiniboine Valley Health District. Mr. Speaker, he has a copy of this because there were handouts that detailed a number of options the district was considering.

Mr. Speaker, each day in the House these members get up and indicate facts that are incorrect. We heard from the member about Saskatoon, about P.A., (Prince Albert) and about Carrot River. All I'm saying to that member is it's time they got their facts straight and stopped misrepresenting facts to the public, given that they were at a public meeting.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, my question again for the minister. Madam Minister, you're again misleading people because you're not saying . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Hon. members, I would ask to kindly words . . . choose your words judiciously.

Mr. Gantefer: — I retract that word and I apologize.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfair for the minister to characterize the meeting in that way because it is not the whole facts about how the meeting was conducted. The board . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I was there; you were not. The board explained the options of what they had to do. They explained the options and they clearly said, and they said . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I would ask all hon. members not to engage in debate across the floor.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, the boards clearly said they could discuss their options with the public but they couldn't discuss their final plan until you signed off and approved it. That's a gag order, and if they are not going to comply, then with what you decide and what you agree upon they're going to be dismissed if they don't implement them.

Madam Minister, that's what's going on in this province right now. That's what going on with your so-called consultation process. Boards are forced to be quiet about their final decisions about the budget until you sign off on it.

Madam Minister, is that your way of closing hospitals without letting anyone know in the communities?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, in the province of Saskatchewan we have 32 health districts. Each year health districts design health plans that are sent to the Department of Health for ministerial approval.

Mr. Speaker, last year the health plans came in in September, October, November, December, and into the new year. Mr. Speaker, this year . . . and there was a strike . . . this year I asked the health districts to have their preliminary plans to the department by May 15. This year, Mr. Speaker, I indicated that because of the federal budget it was going to be a rough year for health care. We had 113 million new dollars but, Mr. Speaker, it's not enough.

Mr. Speaker, the health plans are not yet in. They will be in by May 15. We will have an opportunity to review all of those health plans within a provincial context, which is important because there is this thing called . . . (inaudible) . . . of Saskatchewan. And those health districts will have an opportunity to take . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, the truth hurts, Madam Minister. And the truth is you confirmed to reporters yourself yesterday is that the Living Sky Health District is going to plan and be asked to close hospitals in Lanigan, Watrous, and Wynyard in order to comply with your budget requirements.

Is that what you're doing, Madam Minister? You're forcing these budgets on these district health boards. You're forcing them to make these kinds of decisions. And then you're saying to them, don't tell anybody because the communities affected may get upset.

Madam Minister, if that's your direction, what's in store for the rest of this province when you do your consultative budget and put it all together? How many more hospitals are you closing?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, there were consultations before the plan was sent. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Living Sky

Health District spoke to people in their health district. I now have a copy of the plan. I understand the members opposite have a copy of the plan. It is one of two plans that I've received. There are another 30 plans to receive.

But, Mr. Speaker, they will have an opportunity to speak to their public about the health plans. The health plans may be confirmed, they may be varied, or they may be denied. There is nothing secret about this process given that these members have the information and given that that member attended a meeting where the health district laid out its options dealing with its budget, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Municipal Amalgamation

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Big Gully Regional Economic Development Authority hired an independent business and economic consultant to review both the Garcea and Stabler reports on municipal restructuring.

They felt they had to do this, Mr. Speaker, because of the threat made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he would bring in legislation that would force amalgamation on municipal governments, and because of the weight the NDP-Liberal government was giving to the Garcea task force and the Stabler paper.

So now we have this report from Mr. William Mackness, who is former dean of the business at the University of Manitoba, senior vice-president and chief economist which one of Canada's major banks, and this report raises serious questions about the analysis done by both Garcea and Stabler.

Mr. Minister, have you saw this report and what is your response to it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to the member from Saltcoats and to the House that I've not yet seen the report. I understand the report was issued this morning and that the copy of that report will be making its way to the ministry and to the departments so we'll have a chance to see that fairly soon.

I want to say to the member opposite that on Monday of this week, we had our first round table meeting. We selected our facilitator; her name is Ms. Barb Walter. She's going to be working with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and the provincial government in working towards an action plan and some timetables so that we might be able to take a plan to the municipal regional meetings sometime in the middle of June.

I want to say to the member opposite that throughout the course of that discussion, we've established some of those timelines and some of those parameters, and we see that it's being a very good working opportunity for all of us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, I'll explain some of that report to you. Mr. Speaker, this report by Mr. Mackness confirms everything the Sask Party, SUMA, and SARM have been saying all along — that the Garcea and Stabler reports both lacked any evidence to suggest there would be benefits of a municipal amalgamation.

He also said that there was no cost analysis . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order.

Mr. Bjornerud: — In his report, Mr. Minister, he also talks about no cost analysis done by Mr. Garcea. This reports calls both Garcea and Stabler's report narrow and presumptive in its attempt to tie the province's, and I quote:

... long, unsatisfactory economic performance to a perceived lack of size of municipalities and insufficient empowerment of municipal governments.

To single out efficient municipal governance as a principal culprit in Saskatchewan's economic under performance, is unwarranted and risks drawing attention away from large and rectifiable deficiencies at the provincial and federal government levels.

Mr. Minister, were these your instructions to Joe Garcea and Professor Stabler? Did you direct them to create these reports so the public might blame municipalities for your government's dismal economic performance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I want to say to the member opposite that if the creation of 10,000 jobs in this province is not an important record for this province or a direction, I'd say to the member opposite you can . . . you provide us with some better direction in that area — 10,000 jobs in Saskatchewan.

I say to the member opposite that I . . . if you're taking attack today, if you're taking attack today on the Garcea report, and you don't respect the wisdom of people like Mr. Westby, and you don't respect the wisdom of people like Mr. Konenoff, then I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that you're, you're flying in the face of some people today who have a lot more intelligence or knowledge about municipal reform in this province, in Saskatchewan, than either you do or I do. These are long-term people in this community.

So I say to the member opposite, over the next couple of weeks we're going to do a number of things. We're going to table all of the reports at the round table that we've been working on, which includes Stabler and Garcea and the work that was, that was done throughout the '70s and throughout the '80s. We're also going to . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear now we have another academic review of the two reports the NDP government commissioned, two reports they

spent \$1 million of taxpayers' money on. And that person says the government commission reports aren't worth the paper they're written on — the same response the public, urban and rural, municipalities gave of these reports, because people involved in local governments could not understand the logic behind the conclusions drawn by Garcea and Stabler.

And when Mr. Mackness was doing his study and trying to validate the stats provided, especially by Mr. Stabler with his telephone poll, he didn't get any co-operation. The survey was paid for by the public and Professor Stabler refused to release the full survey — questions and results. He even admitted he had not seen the full survey and . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order please. The hon. member has been quite lengthy in his preamble, and I would ask you to kindly go to your question.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, will you tell the House who conducted the telephone survey referred to in the Stabler report and will you table that survey in the House today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Just to the final point of the question first — that report that Stabler provided to us, he commissioned that review on his own. Whoever he got to conduct the review is the work of Mr. Stabler. And you could go to him and ask him that question.

I say, Mr. Speaker, to the House today that in the next couple of weeks we are going to be tabling all of the documentation, information to the round table, everything. And I say to the member opposite that there has been some criticism that there hasn't been a cost analysis provided on each of the . . . or any of the reports in the way in which we'd like to see it.

And I say to the member opposite that in the next sitting of the round table, we're going to provide a cost-analysis review, an analysis of the report that was done, and of some of the modelling that was done in the province. We'll provide some of that, and it will be tabled to the round table so that we can proceed with our discussions about what kinds of municipal renewal and municipalities and the government believe are necessary in Saskatchewan. And we're going to do it on a voluntary, conciliatory basis in the way in which we said we would always do this, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, the round table discussions are a step in the right direction. We'd be the first to agree with that.

But, the task force process Mr. Garcea started is still underway. Mr. Garcea is still going ahead, Mr. Minister . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, it was brought to everyone's attention this morning that, if you are not going to force amalgamation, why is Mr. Garcea still going

ahead? Why are you spending good money after bad, wasting taxpayers' money on a report you evidently have no intentions of listening to? If you're not forcing amalgamation, retire Mr. Garcea. Will you do that, Mr. Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — First, I want to say to the member opposite from Saltcoats that the Garcea report was scheduled to provide its final legislative information to SUMA and SARM sometime at the end of August. That was their job, to provide the legislative agenda. And the member from Saltcoats should remember that this particular review was conducted in Saskatchewan at the request of SUMA and SARM, Mr. Speaker. They requested this.

And so today they consulted across the province with the committee that was there and they provided, Mr. Speaker, some information to us which we're going to table at the round table, and we're going to discuss it; and we'll be deciding at the round table how in fact we'll engage the legislative portion of discussion that needs to occur by the committee of Garcea.

Now whatever that municipal round table decides that the legislative agenda should be for the next several months, that round table will decide it.

I say to the member opposite you've been looking for a parade again. You said earlier in this House that hysteria doesn't happen on its own, that you create hysteria, that you whip it up, and here you are . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Film Classification Board

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, yesterday you were asked why the Saskatchewan Film Classification Board is allowing over 90 films to be shown at the Queer City Cinema without, without any of them being rated by the board. You said, Mr. Minister, you said that's for the board to explain. But now the Film Classification Board is refusing to comment.

Mr. Minister, you are ultimately responsible for the Film Classification Board. Why are you allowing these movies to be shown without being rated?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, well, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that members of the Film Classification Board have been making clear their views as to their decision today, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the member is unaware of that.

Mr. Speaker, I think the member needs to be clear that this board is a separate, independent board from the ministry of Justice and separate from the minister. There is a legislative guideline, Mr. Speaker, which sets out how they make their decisions.

And, Mr. Speaker, what the board has decided as I understand it, is that these movies . . . none of these movies, Mr. Speaker . . . or, Mr. Speaker, that these movies will be shown, but will not be shown to anyone under 18. There will be a check to make sure nobody under 18 gets into these movies, Mr. Speaker, and there will be a visible sign making sure that people know the content of these movies.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Jones: — With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a former colleague of mine and a very good friend, Mr. Greg Eyre.

Greg is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. And he's a staff representative with United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 1400.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Federal Grain Transportation Reform Legislation

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak on an issue of great importance to the people of this province.

I'm referring to the federal grain transportation reform legislation that was announced this morning. We are pleased that the federal government has taken action on this important issue. The new legislation has been long awaited.

At first glance, the proposed legislation looks good for Saskatchewan's producers. And fairness to producers was one of the key points that we also asked the federal government to address. Of course, we'll have to see all the final details before we can make a complete determination.

The legislation deals with revenue caps, the 178 million or 18 per cent annual freight rate reduction from 2000-2001 levels . . . 2001 levels will help farmers who are already dealing with low grain prices and increased production costs. Our initial estimate is that Saskatchewan's share will be in the order of \$100 million.

We also note there are measures to address the branch line abandonment and transfer process. Provisions to support short-line development and discourage the abandonment and transfer of grain dependent lines are a move, we think, in the right direction.

We understand there will be monitoring of these proposed reforms and we expect the federal government will be

transparent in its monitoring and reporting practices because we will certainly be keeping an eye on things and making sure there is a measure of accountability.

We've also said that any changes to grain handling and transportation must maximize returns to the producers. And the monitoring process should give high priority to this key point.

It's positive to note that the federal government has committed to fund road improvements resulting from damage caused by grain being transported over road instead of by rail. Saskatchewan is already faced with incremental annual road impact costs of about \$50 million per year, Mr. Speaker.

Due to continued rail line abandonment and elevator consolidation, road impact costs could reach 85 million by the year 2005. We will be looking at this legislation very carefully to assess its effect on the Canadian Wheat Board.

We have always said that the Wheat Board must have all the tools it requires in order to effectively market wheat on behalf of Saskatchewan producers. We would hope that it is clearly demonstrated first that the 25 per cent tendering that takes effect in August is successful and maximizes returns to producers. We would want the federal government to ensure that before . . . ensure that, before moving to 50 per cent tendering in 2002-2003.

Saskatchewan supports the move to a more commercial, competitive, and accountable system. Measures will be needed to promote rail competition to maintain competitive rates and services for farmers.

I would like to point out that the review of Canada's grain handling and transportation system started at the request of Saskatchewan and the other Western provinces on behalf of their producers following the transportation backlog faced in the winter of 1996. At that time the Western provinces called on the federal government to take the initiative to reform and modernize the system so that producers can benefit.

We emphasize our position of maximizing returns to producers in both stages of the review process — first under Justice Willard Estey and then under Arthur Kroeger. We will be closely reviewing the legislation when it comes down.

We expect that the monitoring will encompass performance measures to ensure that the system improvements are achieved and shared with farmers. We want those dollars savings captured by the grain . . . we would want those dollar savings captured by the grain companies and railroads flowing back to the farmers.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave to respond to the minister's statement?

Leave granted.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have indeed as well

been made aware of the changes that the federal government is proposing with regard to transportation, and this is something that farmers across Saskatchewan have been waiting for for some time to see what the federal government's direction is. And certainly a big part of this and concern on behalf of producers is will this money indeed go back to the actual farmers, the producers of this province, or will it be funnelled back to the province to determine where they want to allocate it.

We indeed are of the opinion that it has to be moved as quickly as possible back to the actual shipper, the farmers of this province. I don't think they certainly . . . they don't, nor do we, trust this government with those funds in any way, shape, or form.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — The other concerns as well are what kind of impact this will have on short rail line opportunities and options for farmers here to ship product out of Saskatchewan. Rail line abandonment is indeed an important part of this, and we'll be watching to see that the farmers' interests are taken into account with any changes in that area.

Key to this, key to this proposal is the part about moving to a more commercial system on car allocation and we are very, very supportive of that, Mr. Speaker.

We feel that if you are going to be asking for competition in the rail industry, you certainly should be asking for competition at the car allocation process as well. And that's important and farmers will be looking very carefully to see that that is included in these proposals from the federal government.

A final offer arbitration is something that we will be wanting and looking for clarification from the federal government. And I'm sure the minister will be taking an interest in that as well. We want to know what their thoughts are in this area because it is very, very important that the producers' interests be taken into account in this area as well.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in the area of roads, we are agreeable and certainly support the fact the federal government will be taking a more . . . an area of more responsibility in road construction here in Saskatchewan. We need a national transportation policy in this country and we hope this is a start of that.

(1430)

We also hope though, Mr. Minister, that you will start taking some responsibility for highways and secondary roads in this province. We have seen, we have seen the most dramatic reduction in the quality of our highways and secondary highways that we have ever seen in this province. And all you have to do is travel the highways and byways of this province to see potholes; as one farmer told me the other day, you have to turn your headlights on in order to get out of in Saskatchewan.

That's the kind of problems that farmers are faced with in terms of getting their product to market. There are highways in this province, Mr. Minister, that are basically untravellable. You simply cannot ask for on one hand help from the federal government and not live up to the responsibilities that you have

as a government.

So we'll be watching with great interest to see what kind of impact this report will have on the producers; and indeed as people who represent rural Saskatchewan and largely are the only ones that represent rural Saskatchewan in this legislature, we'll be holding this government accountable and the federal government as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I also have a ministerial statement, Mr. Speaker.

Province's Credit Rating Upgraded

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today to announce to the Assembly that the Dominion Bond Rating Service has again upgraded our province's credit rating.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — This time, Mr. Speaker, from the previous A-low rating we had to a straight A from the DBRS (Dominion Bond Rating Service). Mr. Speaker, one reason why credit rating upgrades are significant is that they represent the views of objective third parties from outside the province that examine our books and finances. They look at the books and finances of all governments and major corporations. And that can be distinguished, Mr. Speaker, from political debate in the legislature for example. These are the views of objective third parties.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has made more progress than any other Canadian province in improving its financial reputation. Today's upgrade is the second upgrade from DBRS and the sixth Saskatchewan has received from all rating agencies since 1995, Mr. Speaker. And most significantly, we have now moved back to straight A's across the board. We have a straight A credit rating, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I want to point out to the House, Mr. Speaker, that the bond rating service lists one of Saskatchewan's key strengths as, and I'm quoting: "Its track record of good fiscal management."

Now what does this mean for the people of Saskatchewan? It means, Mr. Speaker, that they can have faith in their government's commitment to carry out the affairs of the province in a sound, responsible, and accountable manner. It means they have . . . can have confidence that their government will do what it says it will do.

And most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it means we are building a solid foundation on which to continue to build a future of opportunity and growth. And I want to quote the DBRS in this regard, Mr. Speaker, they say:

The province's balanced approach to fiscal planning has

not only strengthened its financial profile, but has contributed to the improvement in Saskatchewan's economic fundamentals. In addition, the province's economic base has become more diversified.

This means, Mr. Speaker, reduced debt, lower interest payments, improvements in priority public services, and lower taxes for every Saskatchewan person. These, Mr. Speaker, are the rewards of sound planning, commitment to goals, being in it for the longer term, and the desire to work with people across the province to build a bright future.

Mr. Speaker, the financial turnaround this province has achieved is a fundamental strength that supports our plans for the future. DBRS has looked at our record and they've looked at our plan, the plan for growth and opportunity that was delivered on budget day, Mr. Speaker. And they have determined and reported that the plan is sound. And I'm quoting from their report, Mr. Speaker, where they say, quote:

The effect of the tax reductions over the last five years, combined with the tax cuts announced in this budget, should improve the province's competitiveness and its economic growth prospects.

That's what they say, Mr. Speaker. It's a plan that will result in continued debt reduction, further improvements to priority services, increased economic diversification and investment, and a competitive tax structure that will save the average Saskatchewan family about \$1,000 per year.

Mr. Speaker, this latest credit rating upgrade demonstrates to Saskatchewan people that we have every reason to take on the future with confidence. And just as we delivered on our promise to turn our finances around, we will deliver on our plan for growth and opportunity, bringing tangible benefits for all Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — With leave to respond to the minister's statement.

Leave granted.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance comes to the legislature and brags about an improved credit rating. Well it's no wonder his credit rating has improved because he's sitting on a \$400 million slush fund. It was \$700 million from the liquor and gaming account. Well obviously, Mr. Speaker, any hard-hearted banker is going to be pleased about a Minister of Finance who's sitting on a big pile of cash and will not give tax relief to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, not only does this minister refuse to give tax relief to the people of Saskatchewan but he's also the minister that refuses to provide proper services to the people of Saskatchewan. So it's pretty easy to get a better credit rating from a hard-hearted banker when you won't fix the highways of the province, when you put people's lives at risk every time they drive down a road in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it's pretty easy to get a good credit rating when

you're closing hospitals in Saskatchewan. They're going to close the hospital in Lanigan and a number of other hospitals. One of these days they're going to announce that they're going to close the St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, when you go to New York and tell them you're going to close hospitals, yes, you can get a good credit rating. And, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty easy to get a good credit rating when you starve school boards of proper funding for education in your province and just tell the banker, well they're going to leave the province anyway to get their jobs, we don't have to worry about education in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the budget increase, the PST (provincial sales tax), it increased fees. Mr. Speaker, the government has increased utility fees, utility bills in this province. And so he's sitting on a pile of cash and has the nerve to come to this legislature and brag that he's improved his credit rating.

Mr. Speaker, this government is fat. This government is fat but the taxpayers of Saskatchewan are starving. This minister should be ashamed of his record. He should not be gloating in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 39 — The Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 39, The Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 40 — The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies Act

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 40, The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies Act be now introduced and read the first time.

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

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, a point of order before orders of the day.

The Speaker: — I'll ask the hon. member to briefly state his point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I waited until today to bring this forward because I wanted to review *Hansard*.

Yesterday the Minister of Health, in question period, breached the traditions and rules of this House. On page 1094 she said, and I quote from *Hansard*, the Minister of Health:

... and they make false statements about everything, Mr. Speaker. They ... simply (mislead) the public.

Further on another response, Mr. Speaker, she said:

... and make statements that are not true ... (and) not based on fact.

Normally this is corrected immediately by the Speaker, without reliance on the members to rise on a point of order. I ask that the Speaker rule that the member, the Minister of Health, breached the protocol of this House and that she apologize to the member from Melfort, and that she apologize to this Assembly, and that she unequivocally withdraw her remarks.

The Speaker: — Hon. members, I would require to be allowed to review those tapes if I may, and return with a ruling later to respond to your point of order, hon. member. If anybody wishes to speak to that point of order?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to just make a short comment to say that it's my understanding of the comments that it was referring to misleading the public, not misleading the House. And I think that is up to interpretation.

I think in members' statements today I think we clearly indicated that there has been misrepresentation to the public, of issues. That's our opinion and I think we're perfectly within our rights. And I'm sure when the record is reviewed, that the record will be that this referred to misleading the public that the minister referred to, and I think that is our opinion. And we look forward to the ruling from the Speaker.

Mr. D'Autremont: — On another point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Please.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your ruling yesterday talked of disrespectful behaviour of one member towards another in this Assembly. In particular, that there have been several instances when aspersions were cast or when the motives of members were impugned.

Yesterday on pages 1105 of *Hansard*, I direct your attention to the remarks of the member from Saskatoon Southeast. Twice she stated the member from Kelvington-Wadena was not homophobic, that the member from Moosomin and Kindersley were not homophobic, that the member for Rosthern was not homophobic, or that the Saskatchewan Party was not homophobic, while all the time her statements were trying to indicate otherwise.

This is indeed a device used by Shakespeare in his play of *Julius Caesar*, and to quote, "Brutus was an honourable man" was stated by Mark Antony when his entire speech — Marc Antony's — was an attempt to prove otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, the tradition in this House is that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. And that is exactly what

the member from Saskatoon Southeast was doing. She was calling the members of the opposition homophobic and was . . . which is an accusation that is patently untrue. And the fact of the issue was that the gay and lesbian lifestyle was only an issue in the minds of that member and her NDP colleagues and was not the issue or case of the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you review this breach of the rules and traditions of our Assembly, and that the member from Saskatoon Southeast withdraw her remarks, apologize individually to each of the members that she named, and that she apologize to this Assembly, and that she apologize to the members both in this House and across the province of the Saskatchewan Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Does anyone wish to speak to the point of order?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that I wasn't present for all of the debate yesterday but I did have a chance to look at the *Hansard*. And I believe that the issue being discussed was an issue of great importance to the public, an issue of censorship in someone's mind, an issue of the rights of people with alternative lifestyles in other people's minds.

And when I read the verbatim of the speeches I think both the opposition and government were stating in debate format their position and ideas, and I think that's what debate in this House is all about.

But while I'm on my feet discussing about the issue and decorum raised by the member opposite, I must say, Mr. Speaker, I was shocked while the ambassador was being introduced today, heckling constantly from members of the opposition.

And when we're talking about decorum in the House . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, we're just speaking the point of order raised by the official opposition. Hon. members those are . . . Order, order. I would ask the hon. members to kindly curtail their debate across the floor. And I'd like to inform the Assembly that the points of order that were made need to be taken seriously. And I will review the transcripts and I will rule on those points of order. And I thank the hon. member for bringing it to my attention.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order, please.

The Speaker: — State your point of order briefly.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe another member — the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley — also breached the traditions and rules of this House in his statements yesterday.

Your ruling yesterday talked of casting aspersions and lack of respect for members. I draw your attention to the words of the member from Regina Qu'Appelle yesterday in *Hansard*, pages 1107 and 1108, and I quote from the member:

We want to talk about a moral high road and their history? We can do that. We can talk about the convictions, the criminal convictions, of (the) people on the political right.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I go on to quote:

And I've got to say very clearly I raised the issue of criminal convictions and the history and, you know, what we faced in this province . . .

Another quote:

What I was saying was that the people on the opposite side of the House do not own the moral high . . . (ground).

In fact, historically, again I . . . repeat, that they have shown very clearly . . . they're proportionately many, many convictions, (and) many, many problems dealing with moral issues . . .

The member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley is clearly casting aspersions and questioning the honour of all members of the opposition. In doing so, he questions the right of opposition members to sit and to speak in this Assembly, when those members were democratically elected by the good people in their constituencies, indeed, most with a greater plurality than his own.

His comments raise questions of the right and the honour of any voter to oppose his, or his government's point of view.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you rule on this most serious breach of rules and traditions of this Assembly and that the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley unequivocally withdraw his remarks and apologize to all members, indeed to the entire legislature for dishonouring all of the members of this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Does anybody wish to speak to this point of order?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I would agree on the one issue with the member opposite, that it's my belief that all members come here with the best intent to represent their constituents. And not only the constituents that vote for them but I think it's fair to say that once you are elected, you represent everyone in your constituency whether they voted for you or not, or whether they voted at all.

But when it comes to the issue of debating the role of MLAs historically in this Assembly, this is in fact a debate going on in our community at the present time as indicated by one of our writers in *The Leader-Post*, I think, as recently as yesterday, who talked about, in a very open way, about the importance of members of the legislature ensuring that they carry out their term in office in a way that is credible to their constituents.

And so the issue of the debate about the role of MLAs that you raised here today I think is one of debate. And I say to the members opposite, and I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to in fact, we support your ruling on this very issue.

The Speaker: — I thank hon. members, and I appreciate that you recognize the seriousness of words that are spoken in this venerable institution. And I will review the *Hansards* and I will come back with a ruling very shortly.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Justice Vote 3

The Chair: — Before I call the first subvote I invite the Hon. Minister of Justice to introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to introduce on my right, John Whyte, the deputy minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General; Doug Moen on my left, the executive director for public law and community justice; behind me is Colleen Matthews, the executive assistant to the deputy minister; and behind the deputy minister is Elizabeth Smith, the director of administrative services. As well, Mr. Chair, there will be other officials in the room who may be assisting from time to time.

Subvote (JU01)

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman of committees. I'd like to welcome the minister and his officials here today for a review of the Justice estimates.

Mr. Minister, I guess the first thing I would like to start off on is one of my personal pets, and one that I know you have had some things to do with because you attended a gun control meeting in Saskatoon the same as I did.

This is an issue that has been ongoing in this country for approximately five years now, six years. And Saskatchewan has been very much in the forefront of the fight against the federal Bill C-63, the gun control Act. And the fact is, Mr. Minister, I and my colleague at that time from Rosthern, introduced the first motion in this Assembly that urged this Assembly to fight that particular piece of legislation. And I'm proud to say that we received unanimous support after we presented that legislation to this House.

Initially that support was not as forthcoming as it could have been. We had actually asked the member at the time for Indian Head-Milestone, who was the minister of — I guess he wasn't the Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) yet; he was a backbencher at the time; later became the Minister of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management — to second our motion. But the current minister of Justice at the time, Bob Mitchell, was reluctant to become involved in that particular issue.

And only after we had raised the issue on the floor of the Assembly did the members opposite decide to vote in favour of our motion to send our concerns and our reluctance to have Bill C-63 brought forward in the Parliament of Canada.

Since that particular point in time, that Bill has been

implemented by the federal government. We have seen the start of its implementation. We have seen many presentations made and delegations sent to Ottawa from this Assembly, all-party committees to voice our displeasure and our reluctance to become involved in this, the entire registration process of firearms in Canada.

Bill C-63 dealt not only with registration but with a number of other matters dealing with sentencing and penalties for abusive firearms, and those we supported. The members of this House supported those particular pieces of legislation but found it most troubling, the registration portions of Bill C-63.

The provincial government, after that point in time, became involved in the court case launched by Alberta along with the provinces of Ontario and Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon. And I believe Ontario was also a part of that, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister.

My question to you is, what were the presentations made by Saskatchewan on behalf of Saskatchewan firearm owners to the court case, both in Alberta and in the subsequent appeal to the Canadian Supreme Court?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Chairman, let me thank the member for his question. This is a matter of concern to all in this province. The member asks the questions, what did our lawyer, on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, present to both the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada?

Mr. Speaker . . . I didn't mean to give you a promotion. The legal argument, Mr. Chairperson, was that the forum's legislation, Bill C-68 as the member referred to it, was both unconstitutional of the . . . was unconstitutional in terms of being beyond the jurisdiction of the federal government because it intruded into matters of provincial jurisdiction. I think the member is aware of the arguments which were presented. Those arguments were not successful in the Alberta Court of Appeal, as the member will know, and we're awaiting the decision from the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, under what you say were unconstitutional, under what clauses of the constitution was the province launching its appeals in conjunction with the other provinces and the territories?

(1500)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The argument was . . . the federal government's argument was that they had the jurisdiction under their Criminal Code powers under section 91(27). In other words that this was part of addressing issues from the perspective of criminal law. And the federal government also argued that they had this power to pursue this type of legislation under the peace and order and good government provisions of the constitution.

Our arguments, Mr. Speaker, and the arguments indeed of the provinces and the territories engaged in the litigation both before the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada, is that the appropriate part or section of the constitution under which this type of legislation could be introduced was

section 92(1) which is basically, Mr. Chairperson, a provincial civil rights.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Was not the argument also, my understanding, based on section 92(13) of the constitution, dealing with property rights?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — I'm sorry, I couldn't read my deputy's writing here — 92(13) was right.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I have a similar kind of writing.

Mr. Minister, I have presented to this House a number of times, probably five times at least, property rights legislation for the people of Saskatchewan. Every time that I have brought this forward, every time we've actually had an opportunity to debate it — which has been rarely, but it has been debated in private members' day motions at least once — the government opposite has been absolutely against the idea of implementing property rights in this province.

In fact it was Premier Allan Blakeney, prior to the 1982 repatriation of the constitution, along with I believe the premier of Prince Edward Island, who opposed the institution or the implementation of property rights into our Canadian Constitution.

I find it somewhat surprising then that this provincial government supports the arguments on the debate against Bill C-63 and the use of section 92(13) property rights as a . . . property rights being an empowerment of the provincial government, using that argument to defend this particular position. I like the fact that you're using this argument; I just find it surprising that you are.

Mr. Minister, would it not strengthen the position of the province, the position of firearms' owners in Saskatchewan if we actually had a property right Bill, a property right piece of legislation passed within this province?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Chairperson, the point the member raises about personal property is one which is, first, complex, but we should, first of all, say that there is I think no one in this House who denies the importance of personal property rights as a vital part of our democracy.

We all possess things of importance to us. The Criminal Code protects our right to have those things unaffected, Mr. Speaker. Without doubt, we are committed to ensuring and to reinforcing that.

But the member speaks on behalf of a party which constantly argues against adding power and adding authority to judges and to courts across this land. And, Mr. Speaker, I think the member would agree that if we added property rights to the constitution, that would add further powers to judges across this province and across this country.

Would it be his view, Mr. Chairperson, that he would want every matter that we adjudicate in this House, every matter we discuss, scrutinized by the courts of this country from the perspective of whether those decisions interfere with personal

property rights?

I doubt that he would, Mr. Speaker. But that seems to be the implication he is drawing.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Indeed I do not support the idea of allowing judges to have more and more sway over our lives. And in fact is, I would argue, that providing property rights would diminish that. They are already intrusive in every — every — segment of our lives. They make the determinations.

We pass laws in this legislature, in every legislature across the country, and the Parliament of Canada. And yet the judges make the determination as to whether or not those laws apply, how they apply, where they're going to apply, and whether or not they should remain in place. And the fact is in a number of instances judges have used their prerogative to rewrite laws or to write laws.

And I believe that is wrong; that if laws need to be changed, if laws need to be written, then it's the legislature's duty to do that not the judges of this country.

And I think property rights, having a property rights Act in place for the citizens of Saskatchewan would be a greater protection against the interference by the courts and by the government than not having it in place.

We clearly have seen under Bill C-63 that we don't have protection. The minister talked about protection under the Criminal Code for property. We don't have that under the Criminal Code. Because there was 533,000 pieces of property confiscated by the federal government under Bill C-63 with no compensation whatsoever. At a minimum, a property rights legislation would provide for compensation for property confiscated by governments, be it federal or provincial. We don't have that protection now.

We don't have the protection that if this government today, or the federal government, wanted to expropriate a piece of land, a piece of chattel, that they could do so and not have to pay compensation. Because they're certainly not paying compensation under Bill C-63.

Mr. Minister, you're prepared to utilize section 92(13) to argue the case against the federal government. And I thank you for that and every firearms owner thanks you for that. But why not expand section 92(13) and give the people of Saskatchewan real property rights?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well let me thank the member for his continued question. Mr. Speaker, the issue of Bill C-68 — he keeps calling it Bill C-63 but he means Bill C-68 — is really a matter of whether or not this is criminal law or civil law, Mr. Speaker, not a matter of property rights, it seems to me. I'll make another point about that in a minute.

But the issue before the courts and the argument that we made was based on our view that Bill C-68 was an attempt to interfere with property and civil rights in the province. And the argument that the member is making that we should take a stronger, if you want, property rights aspect I don't think would

have helped in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, this is not . . . In fact there is no occasion in which I think we should legitimately criticize the courts for doing the job they do. The members opposite like to criticize the courts every time they interfere in a way which is not acceptable to them.

Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Chairperson, this is not an argument against judicial activism. It's an argument against judicial activism they don't like; and, Mr. Speaker, in this democracy in which we, this democracy in which we live, Mr. Chairperson, we accept things we don't like in return for things we do like. And we've heard much of that over the last few weeks.

So I would say that it's not our view — and I repeat what I said before — not our view that we would want the courts to interpret everything that we say in this House from the perspective of whether or not it interferes with one or more person's property rights. We don't, Mr. Chairperson, think that moving from the balance we presently have in that direction would in fact achieve either the member opposite's aims or the aims of the citizens of the province.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair of committees. Mr. Minister, I believe it's the role of the legislatures to make the laws of this land and it's not the role of judges to change those laws. If there are changes or expansions or diminishing of laws that are needed, then that's the role of the legislature not the role of the courts — no matter which side of the argument they may be on or that I may on.

Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could table the legal arguments that you presented or that your department presented to the Alberta Court of Appeal on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Of course, Mr. Chairperson. We'd be happy to do that for both the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, the factums which were presented which contain the arguments in writing that were made.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. That would be most appreciated.

Mr. Minister, what do you see as the future in the struggle against Bill C-68? I admit I had the numbers wrong. I am perhaps a bit dyslexic when it comes to reading my own writing. If you could please tell us what you foresee happening within that court case, when we might see a resolution of it, what kind of comments have come down from the court on that appeal up to this point.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — With regards to the member's question, it would be improper for me to comment on the matter which is presently before the Supreme Court of Canada, but we anticipate the decision this year. And we will then know the court's decision.

He will have . . . the member will have read the discussions or read the newspaper coverage of the presentations before the Supreme Court of Canada, as I and others have. I would add merely, Mr. Chairperson, that the position of the province

remains that we will not play a part in enforcing the regime developed under Bill C-68. We continue to take that position; we will continue to take that position. And we then, we have then, I think, taken as strong a measures as we can with regards to that, the legislation which the member has been focusing on.

I'd also say, Mr. Speaker, that we take, and I take personally, every opportunity I can to present our position on Bill C-68 to the Minister of Justice. The position of the province of Saskatchewan is well-known in Ottawa, and we will continue to ensure that the interests of gun owners in this province are respected to the greatest extent we possibly can.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I look forward to questioning you further on this particular issue, on the province's involvement in the administration of C-68 and a number of the other firearm related laws. But at the present time, I would like to pass this off to my colleague from Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, Mr. Minister, and thank you to all of the officials from the department who are here today. I maybe want to start by thanking the officials, and through them, thank many of the staff in the Department of Justice.

As the Justice critic, frankly, Mr. Minister, I've found the department to be very co-operative. Most of our concerns it seems relate to maintenance enforcement concerns that we get. And I know that particular area of the department works very hard; some would say is overworked. And they are . . . even when they can't respond as immediately as we would like, they're never impolite and they're always very professional. And we certainly appreciate the work that they're doing.

(1515)

Mr. Minister, because it's topical, and frankly because I think the House would like a few answers or the committee would like a few answers, I'd like to ask a few questions with respect to the relationship between the minister and/or the department and the Film Classification Board and explore that a little bit as to exactly what that relationship would entail.

And I guess that would be the first question: a request that you characterize the relationship between the minister and the Film Classification Board here in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Deputy Chairperson, and let me thank the member for his comments on the work of the officials in the department. They indeed work long and hard and do their utmost to respond to our sometimes unreasonable questions and demands. And they are to be congratulated for the work they do. And many of them are here today — well, some of them are here today.

In response to the member's question, the member will know that while the legislative framework for the Film Classification Board rests within the Department of Justice and therefore falls within my responsibility, the members of the commission . . . or the board is an independent quasi-judicial administrative board made up of three members. They exercise their . . . the powers specified in the legislation in an independent, arm's-length way

from the department.

The member will know that as part of various changes made in the . . . three or four years ago, the decision was made to seek the assistance of the BC (British Columbia) Film Classification Board for them to view the films and videos which were to come to the province and to classify them on our behalf.

Since that time, since 1997, there has been no appeals from that classification by the British Columbia Film Classification Board. I take it from that that we have then a similar set of community standards by which we have been able to rely upon.

In addition, Mr. Chairperson, in other measures to save precious taxpayers' dollars, we have made some changes to the appointees on the board. There is one . . . there are two government . . . in fact Department of Justice officials who sit on the board, Keith Laxdal and Al Dwyer, and other member of the board is Melissa Wallace who is not a member of staff.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I think the member will know from the events of the last week that the minister does not exercise any authority in the sense of determining the board's criteria for allocating . . . for deciding the classifications and exemptions other than that which is prescribed in the legislation.

So the relationship, to answer the member's specific question, is one of independence and arm's length. But as the member will know, two of those members of the board are members of the Department of Justice staff.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, and Mr. Minister, what discretionary power then, if any, does your department have with respect to altering any decision of the board and/or what are the prescribed methods for appealing a decision of the Film Classification Board?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — The nature of any appeals from the Film Classification Board are as follows, Mr. Chairperson. There is an appeal board — I don't remember the name exactly — comprised I think of two members. So if a person who wishes to show a video or a movie and objects to the classification or the lack of exemption, that person can appeal to that appeal board.

But there's no ability, nor should there be, on the part of the Department of Justice or myself to interfere in that process. The process is laid down in the legislation. The decision of the appeal board is final, Mr. Speaker, and indeed that independence is assiduously protected by the Department of Justice as it should be.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, the question . . . an additional question to the minister with respect to the Film Classification Board. When a decision is made by the board, what is the policy? And I'm sure if there is one, it's probably similar to other agencies of government. Frankly, probably similar to the policies of your government.

What is the policy for communicating not only the decision that has been made but also the rationale for the decision? And I'm speaking of course with both the classification of films as well

as the decision to possibly exempt films from classification.

And I know that today, I think, there was an official from the Film Classification Board here at the legislature. I think he was just outside our legislature here after question period and he was providing some of the rationale for the recent decision by the Film Classification Board to exempt I think 11 films in the festival upcoming this . . . well, the festival that will be . . . that's happening currently in Regina.

And so I guess there's a bit of a concern. Because yesterday you will know, Minister, that it was CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio and other outlets that were reporting that the minister couldn't comment on the rationale for an exemption. But neither would the Film Classification Board.

And I wonder what would have happened if there would have been no media attention paid to that fact. I wonder, if we hadn't raised it in the legislature today in fact, would there ever have been a rationale provided for what was a fairly weighty decision and one that's certainly topical, one that people and taxpayers are interested in?

So I wonder if you could outline what the policy is for the Film Classification Board to explain to the taxpayers the decisions that it has made.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Deputy Chairperson, I think the appropriate response to the member's question is that generally decisions of the board, based as I say upon the advice of the British Columbia board, are not matters of public debate. They are responses to an application made by someone who wishes to show a movie or a video.

Now the criteria the board pursues is clearly laid down in the legislation. And they would apply then . . . the British Columbia board and our board would be applying those criteria to the content of the movies or videos in question.

Mr. Chairperson, with regards to a film festival — and the Yorkton film festival is a good example — attention is paid to the nature of the audience, the nature of the publication, the nature of the showing of the movie. Festivals and those which are designed for particular artistic purposes like the Yorkton film festival are generally given exemptions. They are not movies often which are designed for wide public exposure.

To go through the process of classifying a movie or a video, the cost is about \$400 so generally, Mr. Chairperson. The board would make an exemption based, as I say, on the nature of the showing and the nature of those who are to watch it.

So generally the decision of the board will be . . . (inaudible) . . . always, the decision of the board will be based upon the criteria laid out in the legislation. And the rationale such as it might be explained, would presumably then be that, if the movie did not contravene any of the prohibitions or fell within the appropriate guidelines for exemption, that the reasons for granting the classification as granted or granting the exemption are that the criteria contained within the legislation have been appropriately followed.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Thank you, Mr.

Minister, for that answer. Subsequent to the media coverage yesterday . . . Basically the media coverage I'm referring to is that which highlighted the fact that neither this legislature, or neither the minister, the department, nor the Film Classification Board would provide a rationale for the decision they made with respect to the Queer City Festival.

Was there . . . Subsequent to that, was there any contact between your office and the Film Classification Board either from your office or from the department, as it relates to explaining the rationale for this decision.

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, with . . . Mr. Chairperson, with . . . Everybody's becoming a Speaker. Mr. Chairperson, the communication I had with . . . my office had with the Film Classification Board was with regards to their preparedness to explain the decisions they had arrived at, or it had arrived at. And my understanding is, and I think I'm pretty clear, that that's what happened today — the members of the board were available to explain their position.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Deputy Chair. In your answer just prior to this one, you outlined the fact that the Film Classification Board uses some fairly set criteria in evaluating applications that it has before it. And you mentioned too, that there are also classifications . . . or rather there are fairly narrow or at least fairly strictly defined criteria for granting an exemption from classification.

Now as I read it, and I'm reading from a document that I think highlights the . . . that I know highlights those criteria. And basically I point to this, Mr. Minister:

The board is not required to disapprove a film or require the removal of a portion of a film that contains scenes mentioned in subsection (1) . . .

And subsection (1) you will know highlights in very . . . well frankly, unwanted and explicit conduct that might be depicted in movies. So:

. . . contains scenes mentioned in subsection (1) where the board considers the theme, subject matter or plot of the film to be artistic, historical, political, educational or scientific.

Now as I understand, outside here at the legislature when the representative from the Film Classification Board was now explaining the rationale per your request yesterday from your office, I'm not sure he touched on that. I'm assuming that when he agreed to come and explain the rationale for his decision, he probably outlined it to you yesterday when you talked to him, or this morning, or whenever it was.

So I wonder if you could tell us which of these areas, or maybe there's more than one, that the Film Classification Board . . . upon which the Film Classification Board made their decision to grant the exemptions.

(1530)

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — We're both looking for a specific section that we can't find, but the . . . I would say first of all I

should clarify one point. I did not ask the Film Classification Board for its reasons. That I think would not be proper. But what I did ask was whether the Film Classification Board was prepared to . . . or was going to, was planning to explain its position and I was assured that it would.

In making a decision to exempt a film or a video, Mr. Chairperson, the member will know that there are essentially three things the board will take into account — and this is contained in the legislation — whether the general public or any specific group is invited to attend the exhibition, firstly; and secondly, whether people invited to attend are otherwise warned about the content of the film or films or videos; and whether, given the group involved and the nature of the film being exhibited or distributed, approval by the board, classification information, or restrictions are necessary.

In other words I think, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that the classification board looks at the nature of the showing of the video or the movie; looks at the nature of the structure within which that is being done, i.e., is it a movie theatre or is it a festival; and then makes decisions as to whether or not there should be conditions attached to the showing of any particular movie or video.

And in this particular case with regards to the . . . We should be trying to shed some light on the other side over there I think, Mr. Speaker. The . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Maybe electricity isn't quite enough. The, the . . . and of course now I've lost my train of thought.

But the classification board as the member will know placed three restrictions or three conditions on the film festival in question: that no one under 18 would be permitted to view the movies or videos; that there would be a process of checking age at the door; and that there would be a sign visible from six feet away warning potential viewers of the nature of the films and videos.

So I think the object here is to ensure that people know what is expected, what they can expect, and that those under the age of 18 are not permitted to watch anything which you or some of the other members might seem untoward.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, I wonder then, you know, the next section goes on, section (3) goes on to say, and I won't read the whole thing but just some highlights:

In exercising its duties (the Film Classification Board) . . . to clause (1)(b), the board shall consider:

(a) the extent to which the film:

- (i) degrades or denies human dignity;
- (ii) exploits men, women or children by portraying them in a manner that denies their essential worth and dignity as human beings; and
- (iii) has capacity to stimulate illegal conduct.

And those are a few of the . . . a few of them also: "the

standards of tolerance and propriety prevailing in Saskatchewan” is the next one.

Now, Mr. Minister, I think it's a very worthwhile discussion and certainly a worthwhile question to ask. I understand, and you've outlined the arm's-length nature of the Film Classification Board from the Government of Saskatchewan, specifically from your ministry, but I think there comes a point when we need to have a discussion about the accountability of decisions made by quasi-judicial, as you've characterized it, quasi-judicial, fundamentally government organizations as this one is, that expend taxpayers' dollars and that make decisions on behalf of taxpayers, those decisions that affect the lives of taxpayers who have a wide range of views in society.

I know that . . . and we talked a little bit about some of the content in one of the movies that has received the exemption under this clause yesterday. And one of those . . . one of those movies, as you know, involved lesbian bikers who kidnapped the children of straight parents to make them into sex slaves. And frankly, after I hear that I don't care how graphic the movie is, in terms of what it depicts. Just the storyline and the fact that that's the way it proceeds frankly flies in the face of a lot of what I had just read earlier.

And at some point, Minister, where is the accountability? Where can the people of Saskatchewan go if they fundamentally object to a decision that has been made by people that work for them, as it relates specifically to this Film Classification Board and the decision that they've made to exempt these movies from classification. Where can they go?

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Well, Mr. Deputy Chairperson, it seems to me that the member should first of all be careful not to assume that the movie is . . . or the video in question or indeed any movies which are classified in this province do the very things that he suspects they do. He probably hasn't seen the movie. I haven't seen the movie; I don't want to see it. I don't think many of us want to see it. And we might regard, and certainly we would regard, I think, that type of story as offensive.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that some would make the argument that this is some kind of parody and that it is in fact not what the member is saying it is about.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, it does seem to me that in a democracy with the appropriate levels of tolerance and open-mindedness and respect for others, Mr. Speaker, that we in fact accept as part of the price of living in a democracy of this sort, that things will be done that we don't approve of, and that we will have done things which we do approve of.

And there's a quid pro quo — there's a social contract if you want — an acceptance that not all things will be exactly as we would want them to be. That would be essentially totalitarian. None of us want to live in that kind of state.

So, Mr. Chairperson, what we are then faced with is an attempt through the Film Classification Board to apply general community standards to the movies and videos which are available in this province.

I don't think it would be very difficult for anyone in this House, or indeed in this city or this province, to find things, find videos or movies which are available for rent or shown in movie theatres which they would regard as offensive. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that that would be the case.

The issue is not that. Surely the issue is the appropriate level of tolerance that we have in our society for the rights and interests and preferences of others. The board is set with the task of assuring, of ensuring that not our values, not your values, but community values — generally accepted community values — are respected with regards to things that are shown in videos, movies, and of course also plays and various other activities.

So it is an expression of general community values — not yours, not mine. And the board will then apply the various criteria which we have set out in the legislation.

Now it would be appropriate, or it would be open for you to initiate discussion in this House as to whether that is appropriate, I suppose. But I would say, and the member surely knows this, that the Film Classification Board process we have in Saskatchewan is essentially the same as in every other province. Ontario has a very similar process to ours.

The community standards which are applied are essentially the same across this country. And we live in a free and democratic society where I think it's appropriate for us to respect the rights and interests of others, notwithstanding that it is our desire and our responsibility to ensure that community standards are respected.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Minister, and Mr. Deputy Chair. The minister spoke quite rightly, frankly, about the community values being the standard by which this board or any other similar to it would have to operate.

And that goes to the heart of my question. His concern or his opposition to a direction that would lead us to anything that would sort of even marginally appear to be totalitarian is a similar concern I have. And frankly it's the basis of my previous question. And where I'm going with . . .

The Assembly recessed for a period of time due to a power outage.

The Deputy Chair: — Members, members of the Assembly, I'm going to suggest that we . . . Order. I'm going to suggest that we come to order again and resume proceedings.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Chairman, I move the committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Mr. Prebble: — Mr. Speaker, I'm ordered by the committee to report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

The Deputy Chair: — Members will be familiar with this department starting on page 111 and 112 because this is a continuation of committee estimates that started on May 4. Before I call the first subvote, I will invite the Hon. Minister of Social Services to reintroduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seated beside me is Dan Perrins, the deputy minister; seated behind Mr. Perrins is Bonnie Durnford, the assistant deputy minister. Seated behind me is Bob Wihlidal, who is the executive director of financial management.

And seated at the rear of the room are Phil Walsh, the executive director of income support; Richard Hazel, the executive director of family and youth; Dorothea Warren, the associate executive director of family and youth; Deborah Bryck, the director of child daycare; and Ron Hart, the community living programs manager.

Mr. Chair, while I'm on my feet, when we were here previously the member from Moosomin made a number of inquiries and asked a number of questions. And I take this opportunity if one of the pages could assist me, to provide him with the answers to those questions. Thank you.

Subvote (SS01)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome, Mr. Minister, and to your officials. Mr. Minister, we were addressing a few issues the other day and I just want to go back to a couple of them for a moment.

One of the issues we were addressing was the funding for individuals on assistance to help them gain the educational tools that were needed to give them the opportunity for gainful employment.

And, Mr. Minister, you had tossed out the idea, brought forward the idea, that maybe we could at sometime or other in conjunction with the Department of Post-Secondary Education, maybe have a bit of a debate in regards to that to see where we're going to address some of the concerns and the needs that individuals have in receiving the required educational tools to give them a real opportunity to become productive and gainfully employed individuals.

Mr. Minister, I'm just wondering if indeed you've had an opportunity to talk with the minister responsible for Post-Secondary Education and whether or not that might be a possibility that we could sit down as the two departments.

And I think as I indicated to you after our discussion the other day, it wouldn't necessarily mean having all the department officials here at any . . . from both departments, but basically specifically dealing with education. And I'd just like a response to that matter, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, I have considered the suggestion. I don't believe that at this point we're ready to proceed in that fashion, although I note that there are proposals for changes to the rules of the House which might see some of the estimates dealt with in committee rooms other than this room. Perhaps that might be a proposal that might be

entertained there.

Having said that, I want to again underline the member's concern, and my concern as well, that there is this overlap in, if not, responsibility certainly for some of the clients that we have, and then become their responsibility; and whether it might assist all members to provide some briefing by officials from both departments to members that are interested about the overlap if any, or the relationship if you like, between the Department of Social Services, the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training on these particular issues. And we can certainly arrange to provide that for members, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, thank you. I think, Mr. Minister, you can appreciate the fact that as opposition members the frustrating part we face is where there is overlap, and when we get into questions that are specifically related to Post-Secondary, we have you and your officials here. The response is, well you'll have to wait until the minister responsible is available. And then at that time then, well that's an area that you should discuss with the Minister of Social Services.

And I guess that's one of the reasons that we've put forward the idea of in some ways having a bit of a correlation between the two departments, especially where we have discussion taking place that . . . where there is information that overlaps and relates to trying to help people get on with their lives.

So this is something that, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I think we need to certainly pursue and look at and maybe in the future we'll find a way to address that concern, so that we can identify some of the issues, identify some of the concerns and some of the problems, and come to a clear understanding of what the role of both departments is. So that when individuals indeed come to us, as you indicated earlier, we can give them the information that they need so that they can follow up and proceed with questions to the right and appropriate departments to address the problems they're facing.

On another matter, Mr. Minister, I notice by the paper that — and unfortunately I don't have a copy in front of me — but in regards to rental properties, we discussed the last time we had met the problem that many individuals on assistance are facing in regards to the level of the rental rates and the reimbursement that individuals receive from the department.

And just the other day I understand that the suggestion was made about a rentalsman again. Or not a rentals . . . setting a rate process in place. And I think you had indicated at that time that what your department is attempting to do is look at ways in which you could build or provide properties rather than getting into a debate about limiting or holding the line on rent, rent in the city on different properties so that people on social assistance would be able to have access to quality living facilities at a reasonable rate.

And, Mr. Minister, since that discussion and the most recent debate that has taken place, I'm wondering what your department has pursued in regards to that matter of rental properties?

(1600)

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, if I remember correctly — and at my advanced age I don't always remember from one day to the next exactly what we discussed — but it seems to me that we were discussing the question of shelter allowances versus the question of supply of housing. The notion being that if you can do things in a way to affect the supply of shelter, you might in that way ensure that there is a supply of safe, decent, affordable shelter for low-income people, whether they were in receipt of social assistance or whether they're low-income working people, as opposed to the idea that shelter allowances should be increased because there are clients for whom shelter costs are increasingly a concern.

And I indicated at that point that my personal preference would be that we deal with the question of the availability of housing. There are other initiatives. And I know this sounds very similar to the previous discussion we just had, but the Department of Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing, which is responsible for the matter of housing policy has, as I understand it, a rent supplement program to assist some low-income persons to be able to have decent housing at affordable rates.

They also have public housing which is administered by housing authorities throughout the province. And it's my understanding that they will also be undertaking a discussion or consultation with respect to funds that are budgeted for in the area of social housing to see what the most appropriate response would be in Saskatchewan to deal with the question of expanding the supply of decent, safe, affordable housing.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, in the article I was talking — in fact it's today's paper I guess is what it is — they're talking about Regina's vacancy rate being so low right now and the fact that we may not have affordable housing readily available in low rental housing if you will, or public housing. And individuals are going to be facing the fact that, I believe the shelter allowance's max at about \$385, and you're looking at rental rates currently averaging in the 450 and moving up to the \$500 range.

Mr. Minister, what is the department doing to address the problem that is currently out there in view of the fact that we may not have the type of housing that we're talking of readily available for individuals looking at housing, and unfortunately having to rely on social assistance and the shelter allowance that is allowed from the department?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, in short the government has set aside an extra \$5 million in the budget under Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing to deal with the question of the availability of decent safe shelter, affordable shelter for low-income people in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, the other day I as well asked about when a person finds that they're really digging into their other allowance, their food budget and what have you, food and clothing allowance, to supplement, you had indicated that there is an appeal mechanism.

And outside of just coming to your office . . . And I unfortunately didn't have the time just to quickly peruse the

information you gave. I was just wondering if you had . . . Yes, you do, you do. I believe it's in here — the information regarding the appeal and how we . . . who we should . . . people in touch with. And so I appreciate, appreciate that information; we'll go through it and pass that on to the individuals that have been calling us.

Mr. Minister, another area I'd like to go to for a moment, and then I know some of my colleagues have some information or some questions that they would like to get into. And this comes back to the whole debate about child welfare and the well-being of children and even going to the Child Advocate's report on *Children and Youth in Care Review: Listen to Their Voices*.

And, Mr. Minister, I'm raising it because of the number of issues that have come across my desk in the past few weeks in regards to how children are cared for by your department, and the concern that in many cases children are removed from an environment that they have grown up with, that they're quite comfortable with, and put into basically a strange and whole new environment; and an environment that may not necessarily be a very positive environment in the enhancement of their character and building of their character, as they're so far removed from family.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, you may have . . . may be aware, and I'm not sure if you've had a chance to go through this document totally, but certainly the Child Advocate is strongly suggesting that we need to look at ways and means of which we . . . and where we have situations where children maybe have to be under the custody of child and family services for a while, that we look rather than just strictly foster care, but that we begin to look at extended family, extended family members for care of those children. And certainly even closer to the family environment, so that those children are made to feel and have the opportunity to feel that they're still part of the family rather than removed from it.

I'm just going to read a comment from a Legal Aid lawyer and this comment is this. It says:

The way DSS manages the program, contact with natural parents is seriously limited. When reunification is a stated goal, one hour per week in an artificial environment is insufficient contact.

And that, as soon as I read that it stuck out very clearly in my mind because of most recent time and events. I've had different individuals — and certainly fathers more than the mother — have been coming to me because while the courts have awarded them a period of custody they're finding that they do not have that opportunity and that contact. And that's another matter, that's a matter that we have to deal with Justice on that matter.

But in regards to Social Services, when you apprehend a child — and maybe that's the wrong word; maybe I shouldn't be using the word apprehend — but when a child is removed from a home because of complaints that have been raised with your department, what efforts if any are your department taking to take a closer look at where they can place that child that is more of a family environment.

And I know it goes beyond the white community. I know the

First Nations community feel quite strongly about this too. They really feel and certainly they . . . the committee that I'm a part of in addressing child prostitution in this province, one of the issues that was raised very strongly was the fact that we really haven't looked at working with First Nations people and with family members to help address this concern.

So, Mr. Minister, I would like to know what your department is doing to address this concern, to address this issue? And what plans are you putting in place to come up with a better scenario that indeed looks at children and looks at the family ties and comes up with a way in which we can provide more of a home environment for young people to help them to continue their development?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, first of all, I might point out that approximately a third of the children that come into our care, come into our care for a period of less than six months and then are returned to their families.

We have been making some improvements in the area of kinship care during the course of the last few years. This was an issue for us before it was raised in the Children's Advocate's report. And would point out that there are funds within the budget this year to help us expand the option of kinship care for those children that come into our care as opposed to placing those children in foster care situations with families that aren't known to them.

We are also consulting with the Child Welfare League of America as to the use of kinship care and where it's appropriate and where that might raise difficulties, and their experience from all the jurisdictions in North America, so that we can make the best use of kinship care. And we are very pleased to be able to have that consultation with the Child Welfare League of America.

I would also point out that during the course of the last number of years, we've seen the development of Indian child and family services agencies that provide child protection services on reserves — or most reserves now, I think, in Saskatchewan — and approximately 380 children have been, if you like, returned to the care of the people in those communities through their ICFS (Indian child and family services) agencies. And we are pleased with that development.

Having said that, the provincial or the Children's Advocate clearly outlines a need to do more. And we agree. And that will be the challenge for us in the coming year.

(1615)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I feel quite strongly it's something that we certainly need to pursue. And I appreciate the fact that it's something that you're talking about, especially when . . . read comments such as this, "Social workers need to learn to work with us, rather than try to have power over us." And that comment there reverts back to a statement to me back in the fall in regards to a parental situation where a baby wasn't even allowed to be with the parents; the parents were deemed to be unfit of having this child and never did see the child other than in hospital.

And the comment at that time was that . . . from the worker, that was related to me, was that the worker made the comment that they even have more power than the police. And I was really bothered by that, and I realize that under legislation there are certain agreements and powers that the department has, especially when it comes to an allegation against . . . about child abuse, in investigating that.

But I strongly think and believe, Mr. Minister, that we need to find ways of not being confrontational. Like I think many times they do end up being more confrontational than we are in trying to work with people to address the concerns that are raised with us. And I think while that comment may relate to the odd worker, it probably doesn't reflect all of the workers. I think there are a lot of workers out there who sincerely work very diligently and think of the needs of the children that they're working with and involved with.

Mr. Minister, when you talk kinsmen, I take it from that comment you're talking about an extended family. You're talking, say, brothers or sisters who may not be that far away, but an extended family are part of still the family ties so that there is a tie there; that you can . . . certainly helps in the development and the fact that that child still feels they're part of family.

There was a comment here on page 49, another comment I wanted to read:

There is a concern that it's supposed to be a family-centred practice, but it gets fragmented right away, so then the talk is about child-centred things, rather than looking at the family and looking at solutions that way. It's a deficit-based system rather than looking at the strengths of the family.

And then just a comment, immediate:

DSS stepped into our family — in a nice way at first, but DSS can destroy your life in a way you can never recover from.

I realize, Mr. Minister, that when we're dealing with children, and certainly when accusations are made and Department of Social Services is asked to call, to step into situations, that it's very difficult when you're walking into a situation to really understand what you're walking into or to know what you're walking into. An accusation has been made, and of course for the worker out there, especially when it may be an assault — it doesn't matter whether it's an abusive situation or sexual assault — those things are very serious accusations. And a person needs to look and give some very serious thought to them because if indeed that is a problem there, you need to be able to protect the child on that matter.

And yet on occasion I think it's quite possible and quite conceivable as well that somebody who is well meaning may make a comment about a neighbour or a neighbour's child or somebody else they don't even know. And the department . . . the call comes into the department, the worker is sent out.

That worker is walking into an environment that they're not really totally aware of, based on the information they have,

removes the child without — and I'm using the word, without, and I may be wrong there — but it seems to me walks in, removes the child, and then decides afterwards to do an assessment. And that assessment of the home environment may be two, three, four weeks down the road. And in the meantime, you've got a child in your care that maybe doesn't have to be in your care.

And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, what is in place right now? So when a social worker is asked to go and investigate or to follow up on a complaint that that worker has that opportunity to really sit down and do a total assessment, even if they've gone to the home to see whether or not this is a legitimate complaint, whether or not I should remove this child immediately, or whether we can work with this family, or whether the accusation is more of a malicious accusation — something said in anger rather than an actual accusation that should be taken very seriously.

What guidelines are set in place to give workers an opportunity to really assess the concerns that are raised so that they aren't just immediately plucking children up from the home when it may not be necessary?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, I'm advised that in any year we would have approximately 5,500 investigations that we commence as a result of complaints that are lodged with the department. A significant number of those investigations would never result in any child being apprehended or taken into care.

Having said that, we do practise a policy of zero tolerance. We do have a responsibility to ensure that the lives of children . . . that we're there to protect them, and that if complaints are lodged, either of neglect or abuse, then we must investigate. We don't have an alternative to that.

Our people who do the investigation are trained and, I venture to say, as a result of a previous report by the Children's Advocate, are better trained. Also better educated than they might have been some years ago because of general improvements in the education level provided by the University of Regina and other schools.

Our first option, and the first direction that we go, is to look for ways to maintain the child in the family. Our goal in the long run is always to reunify the family. And so if that's our goal, then we try to do what we can to maintain the child in the family to the point sometimes of assisting that family with parent aids that might assist a family in a matter of crisis.

Where that is not a realistic goal, then we seek the co-operation of the family to have a child come into our care by agreement of that family.

Finally, when that is not a possibility and we feel that the issues of neglect or abuse are real and must be dealt with, we can apprehend, can take children into our care, but recognizing that the matter ultimately has to be adjudicated by a third party, that is to say, the courts. We can take action, but ultimately the courts have to make the decision as to whether the action we took was warranted — was the right action.

I think that it's fair to say that in any family, that when we're

called in, it will be a very, very difficult time and will raise very strong emotions for all concerned. When we have to respond to complaints of neglect or abuse and, if you like, intrude with the family, there will always be very strong emotions raised.

(1630)

The Children's Advocate points out in her report, in the introduction, that the review team and the panel that she had to advise her on the report that she prepared and tabled with the Legislative Assembly, is that one of the conclusions that they all shared, recognizing that they might have differing opinions on some of the recommendations and some of the proposals in the report, the one conclusion that they all shared, in addition to a need for us all, wherever we sit, on whatever side of the Legislative Assembly, that when we deal with the needs of children, we should listen to children.

The conclusion that they came to was that we should be doing more to prevent children from coming into care in the first place. And that for us will be a considerable challenge in the coming year to try and find ways that we might do exactly that and I think also respond to the member's concern.

The Chair: — Order. Why is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, I wish to ask leave to introduce some guests to the members of the Assembly.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, it is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you some students from my home constituency of North Battleford from the Saulteaux Heritage School.

And I would ask all hon. members to join me in saying tansi to the eight students this afternoon who are accompanied by teacher Audrey Night — please stand — and chaperones Norma Jean Night and Lorraine Moccasin.

And students too, please stand so that you can be acknowledged by the members of the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Social Services Vote 36

Subvote(SS01)

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and certainly we'd like to extend a warm welcome to the students that have come to join us this afternoon and as . . . debate in the Assembly, and an opportunity where opposition MLAs have the privilege of debating with a minister regarding his department and having his officials handy to address a number of the issues and

concerns and provide answers, as my colleague says.

Mr. Minister, in regards to the apprehension of children, and I think, just thinking back and reflecting back on your comments, one of the most important things is to take some time to listen to the children. And one of the areas of concern that certainly seems to be coming to the forefront, is are we, or the question is, are we really listening to the children?

Because I think when a situation comes forward of an accusation of abuse or what have you, a lot of times those accusations can come as a result of anger in a home, of anger with one spouse over the other spouse. And sometimes those comments can come when a spouse is trying to get at the other spouse by making an accusation in regards to the children.

And, Mr. Minister, I think it's important to sit down with the children and to hear their side of the story as well, because I think children know exactly what their feelings are. They certainly have a love and appreciation for their parents, and unless the parent is very abusive, and I think a child would be very honest in indicating that's the situation they're facing.

Most children are going to be very honest in indicating as well how well their parents treat them even if they have to discipline them at times because they have misbehaved as a result of some guidelines that have been set up.

So the question I have for you, Mr. Minister, what initiatives are taken when a worker goes into a home or is called to a home, to actually sit down where it really affects children, to sit down with the children independently, whether it's the worker or someone who is . . . I think you'd have to find someone who the children could identify with and be confident with. Because to send someone with authority in doesn't necessarily mean that that child is going to be able to really open up and relate to them.

If the child is fearful of the person that they're sitting down with, then they're not going to be very honest and open with that person. But what I think is important that we have — maybe I could use the word — someone who's almost got a mother's ability to listen to that child.

What initiatives are taken to sit down with children to hear their sides and hear their concerns and to certainly get their perspective before they're even removed from an environment as a result of issues and accusations that may have been raised with the department?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, all our workers are trained in methods of engaging children, if you like, to elicit information from children as much as we try to obtain information from other members of the family to help us get the facts as to what is actually taking place, if anything is taking place, so that the worker can then come to some conclusion about what needs to be done, if anything should be done. And that's the approach we take.

They are specifically trained to engage children and to obtain the input of the children before any decisions are made, recognizing of course, there's a question of the age of the child. But that's the direction that they're supposedly taking when

they do these investigations. We have a comprehensive training package for them.

If the members like we could certainly send across, Mr. Chair, a copy of the training package so that the member can be satisfied that that is the expectations that we have of workers, that the children clearly be involved in any discussion about complaints that have been raised.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, when it comes to training, and while I think you have a manual that sets out certain guidelines, I think no matter how long and how many hours you spend on studying a manual it still doesn't give you all the tools and maybe give you the abilities to really understand specific circumstances.

And I guess the question I would have, Mr. Minister, what areas of training do you have or avenue do you have where people are actually working in some practical experiences — and maybe not necessarily on their own, but with other people who have already worked in the field — to get some feedback and training and ability to understand the circumstances they might be facing versus just reading out of a textbook. Because we all can read out of a textbook, but we're going to understand it differently. That doesn't necessarily give us all the tools that are needed to address certain situations.

So, Mr. Minister, are there some practical training experiences that a person goes through? Because I believe many of the workers out there aren't even parents or haven't really had the . . . or may not be parents yet. And so they don't . . . in that matter they won't understand the different realities of what it is to be a parent, what it is to raise a child.

So the question I have, Mr. Minister, is what practical tools do you have outside of just learning from a textbook?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, the member raises what is, for the department, a significant challenge and to . . . one is to ensure that we're able to attract social workers who have the appropriate training. And I believe, oh about two-thirds of all those that we hire in child protection have a social work degree. A social work degree that would also include field experience or a practicum setting if you like.

Once they're hired, we provide a further orientation as to how the department works and what is expected of them within their particular roles. Then we get into a more detailed training — which is both classroom and then follow-up after a period of time — to review specific cases that might have been provided to those workers, where both supervisors and the experienced staff who provide the training are able to review in detail with the new workers: how is that you approached this case, what were the questions that you asked, how did you implement the education and the skills that hopefully that you've developed through your training. That's the approach we take.

(1645)

Having said that, I think I indicated in a speech a few weeks ago that it was my feeling that to be a child protection worker is arguably among the most difficult jobs in our society. That no matter what experience you have, and skills that you have, and

no matter what support that you can obtain from supervisors and colleagues as to the individual decisions that you're making, it is an extremely difficult task to try to be absolutely certain as to whether or not you made the right decision after receiving a call to investigate a complaint of child abuse or child neglect. To investigate that complaint and then try to decide after you've reviewed the situation in the family, gathered all the information, gathered all the facts, whether or not you've made the right decision.

It is an extremely difficult decision and I venture to say that there's always social workers who've investigated, who will leave the home — not having apprehended the child — who leave there thinking, did I make the right decision? Is this child going to be subjected to abuse or neglect? Did I get the right facts? Or, after taking the child, thinking did we make the right decision? What impact will this decision have on the life of the child?

So I think that the job is very difficult. It is a significant challenge for us to ensure that our workers not only have the requisite education, academic education, have the appropriate training which is a coming together of classroom work and training on the job, but to do it in a way that always responds to the challenges that are there.

But the member points out a very significant challenge for the department.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I guess what I would say to that is all the letters behind your name does not, does not necessarily make you a good social worker. You can have all the degrees, you can have followed up on all the training, on all the education, I think it still comes down to finding people who really fit into the job. I think people fit jobs. And going into social work may be a good thing to do, but you may not be always that compatible.

So I think there's . . . beyond the educational training and receiving the degrees, we certainly need a format that looks very carefully at whether or not that individual is going to be compatible and fit the role and the requirements of the job that they are called to do.

Having said that, Mr. Minister, I know a couple of my colleagues have some comments or questions they'd like to get into and a couple of areas to address, and so I'm going to step aside for a while. And the member from Humboldt would like to get into the debate at this time.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And good afternoon to the minister and his officials.

Mr. Minister, I understand that family mediation services in Saskatoon, Saskatoon regional office, lost nine workers that were withdrawn from mediation services. I know that that service was offered and it was a great help and instrumental in dealing with family mediation especially needed in, in especially the Riversdale area, and people there brought this to my attention.

So I'm just wondering if, you know, this is something you're aware of? And if you could comment on why the government

would withdraw those workers?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, the member must be confused. We did have the Department of Justice in earlier who have responsibility for mediation services. But we're now dealing with estimates for the Department of Social Services.

Ms. Julé: — Minister, I quite realize that but I know that it was certainly social service recipients that were benefiting from some of the services that this family mediation was providing. And if you're not aware of this, that's fine. I would be happy to address the Minister of Justice on it at another time.

So there's another issue I would like to bring to your attention. Mr. Minister, it's my understanding from one of my constituents, who are on social assistance and also divorced, that she's had a great deal of trouble accessing maintenance payments from her ex-husband for the children. She gives me the information saying that, if there is problems with someone who is on social assistance in accessing maintenance and receiving payments, that the Department of Social Services will take over that role and they will then make efforts to access maintenance. If they were not successful in doing that, then the Department of Social Services actually provides the funding in lieu of the person who is supposed to be making the funding.

Now if that is the situation it's in, it is pretty evident to myself and I think others that the Department of Social Services and taxpayers are putting money in for the delinquent payee of the maintenance, and that certainly is alarming I think.

And I was wondering if you could comment on whether or not this is accurate and whether this arrangement is in place?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Chair, as the member indicates, someone applies to us for assistance because of a breakup of the family, and there is an expectation that there will be maintenance payments made by the other spouse. Then if there is no arrangement in place, we will refer the client to Legal Aid to try and get the order for the maintenance payments.

If maintenance payments still aren't forthcoming, we refer the person to the Department of Justice maintenance enforcement office to try and see what they can do, whether it's . . . whatever actions they can take to try and make sure that those maintenance payments are being made, so that those maintenance payments can then be taken into account in any determination of social assistance that might be provided to the other party and the children.

Maintenance enforcement has over the years — how should I say this — improved their techniques to enhance the ability to obtain maintenance enforcement payments, and we applaud that. Having said that, the reality is that some spouses might undertake to provide the maintenance payments and then stop making that, and then for a period of time the mother and the children might be left without any income. And we want to make sure that they do have the income that they need.

So it does create problems for us. We'd be much happier if maintenance payments were made as required, on a regular basis, so that the family themselves can plan on that income

when they're making their plans for the future.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

CORRIGENDUM

On page 1107 of *Hansard* No. 37A, Tuesday, May 9, 2000 correct the following: "We want to talk about a morale high road and their history?" to read: "We want to talk about a moral high road and their history?"

We apologize for this error.