

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**PRESENTING PETITIONS**

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition dealing with the fuel tax and I read the prayer:

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

And this is signed by the good people from Caronport, Tompkins, Caron, Riverhurst, Ituna, all over the province, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan who would like to see their cellular telephone coverage service improved. 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 signatories on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Vonda, from Nipawin, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Prud'homme, and other places throughout the province.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms. Draude:** — Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition today for increased cellular coverage. This is in the Watson area.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to ensure reliable cellular service to Watson and area by installing a cellular tower at Watson.

The people that have signed this petition are all from Watson. Thank you.

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

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

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

I so present.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition regarding fuel taxes and the fuel price in the province. Reading the prayer:

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by individuals from the communities of Swift Current and Herbert.

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

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

And the signatures are from the people of the community of Arborfield.

I so present.

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand today to present a petition 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 this signed by folks in Arborfield and Zenon Park.

I so present. Thank you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people concerned about the high price of fuel. So concerned in fact, Mr. Speaker, that I think they spilled some coffee on the petition when they were signing it.

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 the government.

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

And the concerned people are from Swift Current, from Webb, from Regina, and from Preeceville.

I so present.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to provide reliable cellular service in the districts of Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea.

These petitions, Mr. Speaker, come from the citizens of Silton and Bulyea.

I so present.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too present petitions on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan regarding forced amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

This petition is signed from people in Star City, Nipawin, and the famous community of Carrot River.

I so present.

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to read a petition:

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.

Signed by the good people of Arborfield. Thank you.

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here opposed to the forced municipal amalgamation. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

The signatures are from Buena Vista.

I so present.

**Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition

with citizens concerned about the high price of fuel. The prayer reads:

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

The petitioners are from Arborfield.

I so present.

**Mr. Hart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition on . . . that deals with a group cellular telephone coverage, and the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide reliable cellular telephone service in the districts of Strasbourg, Duval, Govan, and Bulyea.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And the signatures to this petition come from Bulyea and Silton.

I do so present.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan 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.

As is duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The petition is signed by the good citizens of Arborfield, Zenon Park, Nipawin, and my wife's hometown of Bjorkdale.

I 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:

To halt plans to proceed with the amalgamation of municipalities;

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

To provide reliable cellular service in Prud'homme, Bruno, Vonda, and Cudworth.

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 44 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: how much did your department pay out in 1999, year 2000, to cover the cost of repairing damage to vehicles owned by people or businesses where such damage was found to have been caused by highway conditions; how many requests for compensation were made to the Department of Highways in 1999, year 2000, and how many were granted?

## INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through to all members of our House today, a group of students, teachers, and chaperones that have journeyed over a fair distance to come to our Assembly today. As you know, we live a long way from the seat of power and we rarely get guests, so I'm especially pleased that this is the first group of students and teachers and parents that have come here.

I'd like to introduce to you today 23 students in grades 2 to 6 in the east gallery. And they come from the community of Piapot and they braved rather difficult weather conditions to get here today. Their teachers are Ms. Karen Schommer and Ms. Janice Markert, and they're accompanied by Ylla Klein, Heather Hecker, Doug Smith, Renée Wasilow, Art Unsworth, Vicki Kruetzer, Laurie Bertram, and Susan Selke.

And they came to see how we conduct the people's business and how well behaved we are. And I will try and keep them under control for the rest of the afternoon. Please welcome them with me today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pride that I rise today in my place and introduce to you and through you to all colleagues in the Assembly, some very important people in the lives of my family. I inherited them through marriage but they've adopted me and they provide me with a lot of personal support and a great deal of unconditional love.

In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, I have cousin Arlene, her mother, Aunt Margie Weeks, and with them a special guest from Dawson Creek, BC (British Columbia), Lois Smith, Aunt Loie.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a new bride, we spent a few years in Dawson Creek and I can't tell all of you how important it was to have a sense of family that lived close by and the support and love that was provided. And Margie up there has recently turned 39 with 41 years of experience, so Loie has come to be with us to celebrate that great occasion. Aunt Margie also includes me in her Christmas tart and Christmas pudding baking list of which I'm grateful and most appreciative.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in a warm welcome to our family.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House, students from the fine community of Osler. Osler is one of those fortunate rural communities that's growing and it helps to have had a good constituency like that.

Mr. Speaker, there are 31 students, grades 8 and 9, in the east gallery and they are accompanied by their teachers Glen Osmond and Suzanne Clements; also chaperones Jennifer Reimer and Colleen Rempel. I'll be meeting with them later on and discussing what they observed in the House. Would you join me in giving them a warm welcome.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now you may remember a while back I introduced my father Mr. Hub Elkin, and I did mention at that time that he pesters me constantly about the minimum wage. But today he has someone else with him, a long-time friend, Mr. Adrian Moen, a retired official of the Labour department of the Government of the Netherlands Antilles and a resident of the main island of Curaçao.

Mr. Moen and my father worked together on an international labour organization project — they both look so young — 27 years ago. Can you believe it? And Mr. Moen continues his interest in labour matters and spends much time representing immigrants from poor countries who experience problems arising from unfair labour practices.

So I ask them to rise and be recognized.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join my colleagues from . . . colleague from Cypress Hills to welcome one individual in his group of students and teachers and chaperones from Piapot. It's an old friend of mine from, back from Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Karen Schommer is with the group and she was a teacher, and she was a very good teacher. She spent many hours, extra hours working with the students of Ile-a-la-Crosse. So I sincerely say to the Piapot students that you're gaining an incredible advantage over the rest of Saskatchewan having Karen as a teacher.

And as well I want to thank her publicly for her nomination of me several years ago to be awarded the National Native Role Model Award for Saskatchewan. It was her nomination that they accepted and certainly it was her that afforded me the opportunity to represent Saskatchewan in that capacity for several years.

And the exchange, Mr. Speaker — what I had done was I taught her curling and taught her husband hockey. So that was my gift back to her and to her husband. So I want to tell her that I hope that her curling has improved drastically and her husband's hockey has improved.

But I want to show special recognition to her, and thank her

once again.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### STATEMENT BY MEMBERS

#### Federal Initiatives to Benefit Saskatchewan

**Hon. Mr. Melnychuk:** — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and let some sun shine through the doom and gloom that the Saskatchewan Party brings to the province. Indeed the announcement Wednesday from the Liberal government in Ottawa should give farmers, motorists, and municipalities throughout the province a reason for optimism.

The announcement yesterday shows Minister Goodale does listen to what we say in Saskatchewan, and with this government's support he can get results. Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, if we have 14 government members in Ottawa next election, how clearly the voice of Saskatchewan residents will be heard.

The announcement of new money for rural roads and \$100 million in the pockets of Saskatchewan grain farmers in the form of reduced freight rates can only be described as a victory for working co-operatively and constructively with all levels of government.

Not only has the federal Liberal government addressed some of the major costs to both farmers and our road system, but there is also good news on the long-suffering subject of branch line abandonment. Measures will be put in place for railroads to provide transitional compensation of \$10,000 per mile annually for three years to affected municipalities when a grain line is closed.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, there will be initiatives put in place that will require that railways continue to operate the remaining part of a branch line when they transfer grain line . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Time has expired. Members, time has expired.

#### Government Funding of Film Festival

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, just before he moved to cut off debate and silence the opposition, the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley challenged the opposition members to go to the Queer City Film Festival and to do so with an open mind.

Mr. Speaker, I fully intend to do just that. I want to see where taxpayers' dollars are going, and I will consider whether there is some possible reason the government should be funding pornography.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to issue that same challenge back to the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. He should go, and he should go with an open mind. He should consider whether this is an appropriate use of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I plan to attend tonight and Friday night

screenings and the Saturday afternoon panel discussion. And I invite and challenge the member of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley to join me.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Meadow Lake Students Compete in National Science Fair

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize four constituents from Meadow Lake who are showing us just how innovative students can be. Maegan Fincham, Charley Lepage, Mitchel Sarauer, and Cassie Opikokew, all grade 8 students from Jonas Samson Junior High, are heading to London, Ontario for the national science fair. These four students earned top honours at the regional science fair held this spring in Meadow Lake and are off to the nationals in just a few days.

Mitchel Sarauer and Cassie Opikokew studied genetically modified organisms by extracting DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) from an onion. Earlier this year, they took home the \$1,000 Saskatchewan Education Award. Maegan Fincham and Charley Lepage did a project on electronic monitors building one from scratch, if you can believe it or not, using among other things paper clips and batteries. These two won the SaskEnergy Award and \$500.

Mr. Speaker, these four students exhibit the very best of creativity and knowledge in young people. I'd like to commend the students, their teachers, and their parents for supporting the scientific endeavours of their children.

Cassie, Mitchel, Charley, and Maegen have made their school, their community, and their MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) very proud, and I want to wish them all good luck as they embark on their journey. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Theatre Fest 2000 Held in Swift Current

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last week of April, the Swift Current Little Theatre hosted the Saskatchewan Community Theatre Full-Length Play Festival, which included workshops along with performances every night of the week-long competition.

Seven amateur companies from around the province took part in the event. Congratulations to the Milestone Prairie Players, who captured the award for the best play, and hats off to the runner-up, the Saskatoon Gateway Players.

But, Mr. Speaker, it was the host theatre company that received the most recognition. The Swift Current Little Theatre and their play titled *Noises Off* won five awards including Brian Dueck for best actor and Ken Johnson who was the first runner-up for best director.

The Swift Current Little Theatre also won awards for technical merit and community involvement. The cast of Joanne Matsalla, Iain McLean, Brian Dueck, Rachelle Haubrich, Terri Potter, Sean Finell, Lynn Theise, Bruce Rayner, and Bill Sharp, along with the entire crew, should be commended. And a

special congratulations to Agatha Dyck of Swift Current who was the festival chairperson. She was recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her support of local theatre.

Mr. Speaker, many people in Swift Current have told me they watch the legislative channel from time to time, what a treat it must have been for the entire community to actually see some good acting for a change.

I hope all members will join me in congratulating the Swift Current Little Theatre and all who participated in Theatre Fest 2000.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Support for Bread and Roses and the Healing Co-operative**

**Ms. Jones:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our progressive social democratic movement has always been very supportive of co-operatives. And yesterday in Saskatoon our government showed its dedication to the co-operative movement once again.

The Minister of Economic Development presented two cheques to two very unique co-ops, Bread and Roses, and the Healing Co-operative. Bread and Roses will develop programs that will help women deal with workplace stress and build better workplaces. The Healing Co-operative will offer alternative, holistic health care, especially to low-income individuals and survivors of sexual abuse.

It is fitting that this event took place during Women Entrepreneurs' Week, as both co-ops will create business opportunities and employment for their members. These co-ops reflect the very special dual nature of the co-operative movement — commitment to the economic progress and social justice. Bread and Roses and the Healing Co-operative join a network of co-operatives that have shaped a caring Saskatchewan.

Co-ops are indeed about economic progress. But they're also about people, quality of life, and building a better world.

I would like to commend all 14 women involved with these two co-ops for their commitment to helping women help themselves, for their work will not only benefit women, but all of society. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Tammy Cool of Davidson Receives Scholarship**

**Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to inform the members of this Assembly of a remarkable young lady from my constituency. Ms. Tammy Cool, daughter of Don and Gloria Cool of Davidson, presently attends grade 12 at the Davidson High School.

Tammy is a most remarkable student, having a grade average of over 95 per cent, Mr. Speaker. To add to this academic excellence, Tammy has contributed greatly to her community through her leadership achievements . . . the enormous energy in helping organize and run events in Davidson.

It is by these great achievements I'm proud to announce that Ms. Cool has been awarded the University of Saskatchewan's top academic scholarship — the \$17,000 George and Marsha Ivany President's First and Best Scholarship.

Mr. Speaker, only four of these scholarships are awarded to Saskatchewan students who are entering higher education. Ms. Cool was selected from a group of only 63 candidates whose academic and leadership qualities were so high to be considered by the university.

And, Mr. Speaker, Tammy's ongoing achievements are many. Besides being involved in SRC (student representative council) activities and leadership at school sports teams, Ms. Cool has been involved in community fundraising in regards to Telemiracle, Peers Helping Peers, and the Fly Higher program. She's even composed lyrics for some songs performed at Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon. And to add to all of this is her membership in the pastoral committee involved in selecting a minister for a church's congregation.

To be proud of this through this higher . . . proud of this . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Order. The member's time has expired.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Renal Dialysis Services for Swift Current Regional Hospital**

**Hon. Mr. Hagel:** — Mr. Speaker, my home health district, Moose Jaw-Thunder Creek, has CT (computerized axial tomography) scans because of a partnership with the province and other health districts including Swift Current.

I'm pleased that another technology partnership means renal dialysis services are now in place at the Swift Current Regional Hospital, and patients began using the service on April 17.

Renal dialysis is an important service for kidney failures as it helps to delay or prevent the onset of kidney failure.

These new services in Swift Current are provided by satellite. As we all know, staying near one's family helps to alleviate stress during a time of illness. Satellites help to do that. They are a way of bringing services closer to home for some people, reducing travel time for patients.

Currently eight patients who require treatments three times a week use the services of the Swift Current Regional Hospital. Since 1998, Mr. Speaker, the number of operational satellites has more than doubled. We now have satellite services in Lloydminster in the northwest, Prince Albert in the north central, Tisdale in the northeast, Yorkton in the southeast, and now Swift Current in the southwest.

The development of this service has been a joint effort between the Swift Current Health District, the Regina Health District, and Dr. Cam Wilson, a renal specialist in Regina. And Saskatchewan Health contributed more than \$700,000 in one-time operating funding to establish the service for the people in the southwest part of our province.

I want to commend all of these participants for helping to improve the accessibility to health care in Swift Current and area and for allowing patients to remain close to their families, receiving support during their illness.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Regina District Health Board

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, for the last two days we've been asking you questions about the Living Sky Health District after one of their board members expressed his concerns that health facilities in Lanigan, Wynyard, and Watrous were on your chopping block.

And now we have another health board member, this time from the Regina Health District, expressing his deep concerns over the plans for his district. In fact he was so dismayed by the cutback proposals that he has resigned.

Madam Minister, the health boards are supposed to represent the public in their district. But your top-down approach to dictating health care delivery is too much for them.

Madam Minister, how do you explain the fact that health board members are saying they are being muzzled? How do you explain their public frustration with your process driving them to the point of resignation?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you. Mr. Speaker. What I can confirm is that Mr. Crosby, a health board member in the Regina Health District, resigned yesterday. I can confirm from the media reports — I have not spoken to him nor have I spoken to anyone in the district — that he resigned because he was concerned about the Regina Health District's budget.

But I can also say to the member that the board has not dealt with their health plan as of yet. My understanding is they are dealing with their health plan this evening and once the health plan is approved by the district board, they will forward it to the Department of Health by May 15. Once all of the plans are in, the province will either approve the plan, vary the plan, or disapprove of the plan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. Well, Madam Minister, I did speak to Mr. Crosby this morning. He resigned, he said, because he was not going to be a puppet for this government. He resigned because he felt that there was no choice. He resigned because he felt that the results of the discussion tonight were going to be a foregone conclusion and that his one dissenting voice was not going to be enough in order to make this changes more appreciable or acceptable to the people of Regina that he serves.

Madam Minister, we've been, we've been told by these individuals from Living Sky and now from Regina that they

either have to approve the direction that you've set or they are going to resign or be dismissed.

Madam Minister, if they approve this budget tonight, will you make it public tomorrow morning?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite — and I have heard him say it on a number of occasions — that I am not going to dismiss any health member, health board member, in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is one district that a public administrator was brought into, and that is the East Central Health District. And I have indicated the reasons for that, Mr. Speaker. But these members continue to indicate this to the public, and I want to assure the public that what they are saying is simply inaccurate, Mr. Speaker.

Now what I will also say to that member, and there was a document that was sent to staff in the Regina Health District today and it says is . . . what all of this means is that anyone who claims to know what the approved plan is going to contain is just creating mischief.

**The Speaker:** — Order, order.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, the only mischief that's being created in health care in this province is from your department.

Madam Minister, in his comments, Mr. Crosby said he was resigning because he didn't want to be in a position of ruining people's lives. That's a pretty serious statement.

And when I talked to him this morning, he said that the decisions that are going to have to be made that your department is imposing on the Regina Health District will rival the closure of the Plains hospital and its impact.

Madam Minister, what does that mean? Does it mean the closure of facilities in Cupar and Imperial as was reported? Does it mean bed closures in Regina, staff layoffs?

Madam Minister, there's warning signals coming from all over the province. When this budget is tabled tonight will you table it the House tomorrow morning, Madam Minister, so the people of Regina know what's in for them?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I want to go on — and this is from Jim Saunders, the CEO (chief executive officer):

What this all means is that anyone who claims to know what the approved plan is going to contain is just creating mischief. Since there is no approved plan, and since our Board has not even (decided) the final draft recommendations for such a plan (let alone decided to accept them), there is no-one who (could) claim to know that this or that initiative is going to be approved for implementation.

So those who are promoting the idea that there are going to be closures here or there, or that certain areas are at risk for layoffs simply don't know what they're talking about, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Mr. Speaker, my question again for the minister. Madam Minister, you said earlier that the Regina Health District is going to formalize their plan this evening. My question is very clear to you then. Tomorrow morning when you receive that plan, will you table it in this House?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, the health districts are to have their health plans to the Department of Health by May 15. Once all of the plans have been received by the Department of Health, the Department of Health will review all of those . . . (inaudible) . . . in the context of a provincial, broad, conceptual basis. Once we have that work done, we will indicate to all districts whether we approve the plan, disapprove the plan, or will vary the plan, Mr. Speaker.

#### Bone Density Examination

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, osteoporosis is a serious health issue for many women in Saskatchewan, and yet the waiting list for bone density scans, a critical diagnostic procedure, is more than a year in most cases. I say in most cases, Madam Minister, because sometimes the wait is much longer.

Now we are being told things are going to get worse. The bone density testing facility in Saskatoon is being shut down for at least six weeks because of a lack of technical staff, yet the Saskatoon testing service is the only one in this province.

Madam Minister, we should be extending the hours of testing per day to alleviate the waiting lists, not closing the only one we have in the province.

Madam Minister, what alternatives will you provide for people who are facing a long and growing waiting list for bone density testing?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, tests are prioritized by specialists based on the needs of the patients. Specialists use a written requisition form to determine the priority of exams. I understand the initial requisition is sent to the district.

In the case of Saskatoon, this is a temporary closure because of a lack of technical staff who are doing their exams. And medical imaging specialists in Saskatoon have determined that are not providing bone mineral density tests, but they will maintain the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), the CT, and nuclear medicine. And that's how they plan on managing this technical shortage for a six-week period while these folks are writing their exams, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, another question for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, on April 26 I wrote to you about Dorothy Herauf whose family has a history of osteoporosis.

In October of 1998 her family doctor recommended a bone density study and faxed the request to the University Hospital in Saskatoon. After waiting more than a year for an appointment, Dorothy's doctor finally contacted the hospital. The hospital claimed the request was never received. Finally, last week Dorothy received confirmation of her appointment for a bone density test on August 22 of year 2000.

Madam Minister, Dorothy has waited for almost two years. In Dorothy's words, there is something dramatically wrong with the health care system in this province.

Madam Minister, I ask you again: what alternative are you providing so that women requiring this test can receive it now?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member, there is a prioritization that can be given by specialists. As I've indicated, the bone density program in Saskatoon is not working at the moment because technicians are writing their exams.

What I can also confirm, Mr. Speaker, is that on September 1 of 2000 there will be a second bone density site here in Regina that is being funded by the province of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, another question for the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, Dorothy Herauf relied on the NDP (New Democratic Party) health care system and it let her down. And her experience is not unusual in Saskatchewan. Your mismanagement is forcing many people to seek private health care outside Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister, Bernelle Lutz is a constituent of mine from Weyburn. She also suffers from osteoporosis. But when her doctor told her she would have to wait for more than a year for a bone density test, she called a hospital in North Dakota and was told that for \$400 she could have the test done within days.

Is that your advice, Madam Minister? If you don't like the NDP's growing waiting list, just pull out your cheque book and call North Dakota?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, what I have indicated to the member is that we will have a second bone density site in the city of Regina in September of 2000.

What I also will say to the member . . . And I know why they raise the kinds of cases that they do. They are trying to create a climate — as they have in Alberta — where they are now going to allow privatized, private surgical clinics.

In fact I see that that member in her election campaign thought that privatization of health services should be an option, and she says we need to look at privatization of health services. Well I can assure the member that we are not going to privatize health care as long as the NDP-Liberal coalition is the Government of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bakken:** — Mr. Speaker, Madam Minister, you and your government refuse to take responsibility. It's not good enough any more to say just wait. While people are waiting, they are dealing with lives, and we're dealing with people, and they are losing loved ones because of you and your government.

Madam Minister, it is not just the Saskatchewan Party that says the NDP is implementing a two-tiered health care system in Saskatchewan. Bernelle Lutz from Weyburn, and I quote, says in our local newspaper:

The fact is we have a two-tiered health system right now. People are going and paying for what they cannot get done here.

Madam Minister, after nine years of the NDP, Saskatchewan has the longest waiting lists in the country, and things are getting worse. Will you finally admit the NDP has created two health systems in Saskatchewan — one for the rich and one for everyone else?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, before the last election the Saskatchewan Party asked very few questions about health care in this Legislative Assembly. When they did ask questions it was about MS (multiple sclerosis) patients, the drug plan, and MRIs.

What I can say is that we are now providing Aricept and Betaseron coverage for MS patients. What I can say is that we have triple the numbers of MRIs in the province of Saskatchewan. What I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that we are going to have . . . we are going to double our capacity in bone-density testing.

And, Mr. Speaker, all of the time when in the last election their *The Way Up* was nothing other than the Provincial Auditor looking at the health system and a freeze on health spending, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Trade Union Legislation

**Mr. Weekes:** — Mr. Speaker, this government continues to ignore the people who create the jobs in this province. The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is meeting in Prince Albert. Yesterday the chamber passed a resolution calling on the government to scrap its proposed forced unionization Bill.

And what does the NDP do? Yesterday the NDP gave notice that they will be pushing ahead with this Bill. It doesn't matter how much it hurts business, it doesn't matter how much it hurts

workers, the NDP has to pay off its union leader friends and that's what they are going to do.

To the Minister of Labour: Madam Minister, the Saskatchewan chamber is telling you to scrap the forced unionization Bill. Will you listen?

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm always interested in what anybody has to offer on the matter of legislation.

But I will reiterate, I think I mentioned this a few days ago, that these parties had over a hundred meetings two years ago. We asked them to resolve these issues, warned that we would have to make a decision if they failed to act. And the fact of the matter is, is that they were not interested enough in the common interest to get together and resolve this thing so we've made a decision.

But I would give the member opposite . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order.

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — I would give the member opposite the same advice that was given to the chamber of commerce by their speaker and that's to accentuate the positive — 10,000 new jobs, a credit rating upgrade, and 55,000 low-income people removed from the tax rolls.

We have a lot of activity going on in this province and I think that members opposite should get with the program.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Weekes:** — The Saskatchewan people will not be fooled by the minister's response to that question.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the chamber heard from Ron Woodward, President of Red Deer College. Mr. Woodward has spent much of his working life in Saskatchewan, and he talked about the differences between the two provinces. He said in Alberta, government is a facilitator and a supporter of the private sector. In Saskatchewan, the government is a partner and sometimes even a competitor.

In other words, in Alberta, government works with business; in Saskatchewan, government works against business. And you don't need to look any further than your forced unionization policy.

Madam Minister, the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce is telling you to scrap this Bill. Why are you working against business by pushing ahead with forced unionization?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Mr. Speaker, in democratic economies all over the world, people consider the democratic right to unionize as a fundamental part of a modern economy.

Now these people want to take the economy back to the . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please.



**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — There is no place where a union would be formed without the appropriate process of the certification. And the only instance where an employer would be affected by this is where they have tried to avoid their legal collective bargaining obligations.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Weekes:** — I'd like to remind the minister that in a democracy people get to vote in a secret ballot.

The people of Saskatchewan spoke against forced municipal amalgamation and the people of Saskatchewan are against forced unionization.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan chamber doesn't want forced unionization, the construction companies don't want forced unionization, construction workers don't want forced unionization.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Weekes:** — Mr. Speaker, nobody wants it. Nobody except the union leaders who write the big fat cheques to the NDP. That's what this is really about, Mr. Speaker — the NDP paying off its union leader friends.

Madam Minister, if the workers in these companies want the union, they have the right to unionize right now. The reason only 20 per cent of the industry is unionized is because the other 80 per cent doesn't want to join a union.

Madam Minister, why don't you respect their wishes? Why are you bringing in a forced unionization policy that no one wants?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Crofford:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I'm not sure why the member opposite wants us to be different than all the other provinces in Canada who have the very same rules. And I would ask the member opposite why he thinks Saskatchewan should be the first place in Canada to not have the same standards as other provinces have. This is a commonly accepted right of people in a modern economy.

And if he wants to rediscuss what his motives are in supporting the de-unionization efforts of Conrad Black, we could discuss that, but I don't think the member really wants to get into that.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### **Municipal Amalgamation**

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said he is working with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) on municipal amalgamation. Then in the next breath, he said he's doing a cost analysis of amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, I've spoken with people from municipalities —

urban and rural, from all over the province — this is the first they've heard about a cost analysis. How can you possibly do a cost analysis without checking with these people?

Is your department cooking up some sort of an analysis to try and justify forced amalgamation when municipalities know nothing about it? It's no wonder they don't trust you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, how can you do a legitimate cost analysis in two weeks, and what are you basing this on?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite . . . and I listened to some of his questions over the last couple of weeks of which he's been up asking about municipal affairs. And I've read some of the articles of which he has responded to when he's attended many of the meetings that Garcea was at, and spoke at all of them. And one of the most important things that comes from the member from Saltcoats on a regular basis is that there's no credibility to Stabler or Garcea because there's no cost-benefit analysis, which is what he said all along.

And that's what SARM said in their meetings that they went to. It's what SUMA said in their meetings. And this is also what Mr. Mackness says, just a couple of days ago, that he says there's no cost-benefit analysis. So we say, I guess what we'll need to do is provide some information to the round table that provides some cost-benefit analysis on those models of which we're going to be looking at and discussing over the next couple of weeks.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, all through this process you've said there's going to be a saving. Now after all the smoke is cleared you're going to go back and do a cost analysis. Isn't that a little bit like getting the cart before the horse?

Mr. Minister, you had Stabler and Garcea out there for over a year. You cost the province probably in excess of a million dollars and their reports are now useless because they didn't do a cost analysis.

Mr. Minister, your department is now cooking up some kind of a cost analysis. It's like putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop.

Mr. Minister, you're going to check on yourself to see if there's a cost saving to promote your NDP agenda to force amalgamation on municipalities. Mr. Minister, if you're doing this then you might as well let Mr. Garcea go, put him away, we won't have to pay any more money for this person . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order, order. Order, please. Order. The member's been rather lengthy in his preamble. Go directly to your question please, hon. member.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, where was the public consultation on costing? Is it because you're dictating and slanting the results to fit your NDP agenda?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Speaker, it looks like the member from Saltcoats is back again. And over the last couple of weeks the member from Saltcoats has been out there saying that the government is going to be forcing amalgamation in this province. No where in our language have we talked about forced amalgamation, no where in our language.

And what the member from Saltcoats should try to understand, Mr. Speaker, is that the report of Garcea and his committee in this province was commissioned by the government because SUMA and SARM requested that there be a review in this province.

And the member from Saltcoats should know that there are a whole host of issues that need to be reviewed within the municipal structure — need to review legislation; need to review whether or not there are any services that can be enhanced or economic development that can be enhanced by the change in the municipal structures in this province, a question that municipalities want us to answer. Cost efficiency is a part of that.

Those are all of the issues of which the round table will be talking about and discussing over the next little while, of which the member from Saltcoats should stop running around and fearmongering with Saskatchewan people and say that forced amalgamation is somebody's agenda. It's his agenda, Mr. Speaker, it's his agenda.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, it's no wonder people out there don't trust you, because you flip-flop. From day to day you do double scums. You say one thing on one hand. Your bureaucrats come out and say, Mr. Minister, to the media, we have to change that because that wasn't exactly what the hack said that you should be saying.

Mr. Minister, yesterday I asked you about a Bill Mackness study that was done on amalgamation and you said you hadn't seen it. Well now you've seen it, Mr. Minister.

He also slams forced amalgamation. He said that the study on both Mr. Garcea, Mr. Stabler were very narrow-minded. That they had their own agenda and weren't really listening to the people.

He said there was no advantage for rural municipal governments, town or RM (rural municipality). The benefit from that was nil, and he said there is no reason to be doing something like this forced.

Mr. Minister, will you back off from any kind of forced amalgamation, bring in legislation that would actually remove impediments and stop . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Speaker, we finally find out which side of the page the member from Saltcoats and the Saskatchewan Party is on. And they're attached to Mr. Mackness.

Now I read from Mr. Mackness's report, which I have now seen an opportunity . . . I've now had an opportunity to read. And he said, he said this: there are certainly a case for municipal renewal and there is rethinking of administrative structure. He says that.

He also said there are indeed a large number of smaller municipality units in Saskatchewan and some amalgamation may be beneficial, is what he says. And then he goes on to say, there is a clear case for renewal and there should be no mistake about that, is what he says.

But I say to the member opposite, for the last couple . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, please.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — For the last couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker, the member from Saltcoats, the Saskatchewan Party has been going around the province and saying that we have academics that are doing the reviews.

We have Dr. Garcea who's an academic. We have Dr. Stabler who is an academic. And then we have Val Kononoff from Saskatchewan, and then we have Mr. Westby from Saskatchewan. All Saskatchewan people that are involved in municipal reform in this province.

And he attaches himself to somebody from Ontario who comes in here, is going to tell us that Ontario people know what rural municipalities need. Beats up on the municipalities and the leaders in Saskatchewan who know something about municipalities and attaches himself to an Ontario firm, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 41 — The Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2000

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 41, The Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2000 be 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. 42 — The Cattle Marketing Deductions Amendment Act, 2000

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I move that Bill No. 42, The Cattle Marketing Deductions Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 43 — The Summary Offences Procedure  
Amendment Act, 2000**

**Hon. Mr. Axworthy:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 43, The Summary Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 44 — The Insurance Premiums Tax  
Amendment Act, 2000**

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 44, The Insurance Premiums Tax Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 45 — The Fuel Tax Act, 2000**

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 45, The Fuel Tax 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. 46 — The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2000**

**Hon. Mr. Cline:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 46, The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**Bill No. 47 — The Power Corporation Superannuation  
Amendment Act, 2000**

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 47, The Power Corporation Superannuation Amendment Act, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

**STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER**

**Ruling on a Point of Order**

**The Speaker:** — Before orders of the day, hon. members, yesterday the Opposition House Leader raised three points of order. The first point dealt with language used during oral question period and I will rule on that point today. The second two points arose in regards to the content of debate during Tuesday's private members' motions. I will return to the Assembly with the ruling on these points in due course.

I have received the verbatim for Tuesday's oral question period and I draw the members' attention to page 1094, where the Minister of Health responded to a question with the following statement. And I quote:

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

Hon. members, it has been a long-standing practice in this Assembly that members are not permitted to insinuate that a colleague is not being truthful. In this regard, members are guided by paragraph 494 of Beauchesne's *Rules and Forms*, 6th edition, which states that, and I quote — Order, please.

It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible.

The statement made by the hon. minister is clearly out of order, and I would invite the minister to withdraw those remarks and apologize to the Assembly.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I do now apologize.

**The Speaker:** — Thank you.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**WRITTEN QUESTIONS**

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Mr. Speaker, I request that question 136 be converted to motions for returns (debatable).

**The Speaker:** — The Government Whip has asked leave to convert the question.

**An Hon. Member:** — Convert.

**The Speaker:** — The question to be converted.

**An Hon. Member:** — Convert.

**The Speaker:** — The question to be converted as well.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

**ADJOURNED DEBATES**

**SECOND READINGS**

**Bill No. 4**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 4 — The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Amendment Act, 1999** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make regarding The Saskatchewan Pension Plan Act. When I looked at the amendment as proposed, there was some, I felt, really positive things that we want to make sure is continued. But I wanted to highlight one or two things that I feel is important as well, Mr. Speaker.

This is one of the areas that is very important, particularly in the rural areas, Mr. Speaker, and it's very important in the areas of

the cities that we find the lower income groups. Because this is one of the pension plans that Saskatchewan residents . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. I would ask hon. members to please not debate across the floor while there is a member on his feet speaking, please.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The importance of the pension plan, the Saskatchewan Pension Plan is, I feel, really critical. And again, I would like to reinforce the fact that it's very critical in the rural areas particularly where one of the participants in farms is unable to participate in other forms of pensions, particularly the RSP (registered savings plan). And that I think is one of the most important aspects of this particular Bill, that we continue to give that option of pension for the participants in the province.

I guess one of the disappointing parts of this that I'm finding is that there is an administrative fee that will be charged, according to these amendments of the Act. Now an administrative fee attached to that kind of a service certainly raises questions in my mind — questions about why the fee is necessary.

And if we're trying to put a pension plan in place that people can access freely and they have no other option but an . . . other than the RSP, then we should not try and criticize them or put impediments in their place, in their way, in order for them to achieve gaining access to this pension plan. And I believe a fee in place, an administrative fee, is a negative aspect to this particular Bill.

The right to charge this fee gives me another concern as well. Because once it's a fee, then the government has the authority to increase the fee at their will.

And of course we learned earlier that fees can be changed without a great deal of fanfare or a great deal of notice to the public in general. And I'm afraid that the same thing might happen in this particular case — the fees charged will be hidden and all of a sudden it will be increased without the knowledge of those being part of it.

Also because people want to get involved in these kinds of pensions, I don't think that the fee will . . . I don't want the fee to be a deterrent for them. Because in fact being part of this pension should give these participants a tax advantage, and by charging a fee you just turn around and add a fee in lieu of a tax. And I think that that is not exactly the right thing to do.

Another item that makes me a bit nervous when I read through these, Mr. Speaker, is that the investments of these funds are put into place and we want to make sure that the safeguards are in place; there's a proper check and balance for these funds.

Now I see that the funds have been handled really quite well over the years, and I think that that is also a very admirable thing.

So these fees and funds that I'm looking at, particularly the funds, should continue to have a very close monitoring so that the investments of these taxpayers are safe for their future usage and for their returns.

Again there isn't a great deal of information about the rates of return on these funds, how they can compare to other plans. All of these things I think we'll have to explore in the future.

Those are the comments that I have, Mr. Speaker, and I at this time would just thank you for the opportunity of making these comments.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

### Bill No. 18

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Cline that **Bill No. 18 — The Public Employees Pension Plan Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding the pension for Saskatchewan government employees' pension, there is one or two items that I would like to bring to the attention of this legislature in terms of my concerns with this pension, government employees' pension.

I think in general terms, Mr. Speaker, the pension has been performing very well. It has been doing what it was intended to do. And I notice that there is an increasing dependence on this particular pension fund.

I guess the concern I have, Mr. Speaker, focuses around the term, unfunded pension liability. I noticed that there are other pensions that the government has been involved with that has in fact not a particular fund in place but becomes a liability of the government.

That has been an ongoing concern of the auditor, Provincial Auditor, and he's commented on this many, many times. And yet I'm afraid that this might begin to fall into that same kind of a category, unfunded pensions. I haven't been given any assurance that it will not.

For instance, when you put the unfunded pension amounts into the overall financial position of the government, it's easy to determine that the overall liability of this government is in fact increasing. The amount of unfunded pension itself has been increasing.

And when you do a comparison, the amount of the liability of this particular government from 1991 to 1999 has actually increased as opposed to what is normally recognized as a decrease in the public debt of this particular province. So that's a concern of mine, Mr. Speaker, that this particular pension fund also become part of that unfunded pension plan.

One of the things I noticed when I was reading through these amendments is the fact that the minimum age for retirement has been . . . is proposed to be amended from 55 down to 50. It would seem to me that that's going to add an increasing draw on this particular pension and in fact become an even greater . . . a greater problem or greater liability for this particular pension plan.

I guess another concern is that when a person reaches 50, Mr.

Speaker, there is ample opportunity for continued employment, for moving to a different work environment. And I guess the concern I have is that when a person decides to change into another occupation from being employed with the government, there is certainly a strong temptation to follow the trend that we have seen oh so clear, lately. And that trend of course is to move away from your field of employment and go to where other opportunities are. And we are seeing . . . the statistics show quite clearly that some of that opportunity is outside of the province.

I would very much hate to see a person be able to take some of the voluntary contributions that he has paid over the years into this plan, withdraw those voluntary contributions, and then move out of the province and invest those provinces somewhere else . . . those funds somewhere else into another jurisdiction.

Generally speaking again, Mr. Speaker, I think the amendments, we can support generally, except for the concerns that I have outlined. Those are the comments that I have, Mr. Speaker, on this particular item.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

## COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

### General Revenue Fund Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing Vote 24

**The Chair:** — Before I call the first subvote, I invite the Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing to introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This afternoon I have with me, seated to my immediate right is Mr. Ken Pontikes who is the deputy minister of the department. To my immediate left is Mr. Brij Mathur who is the associate deputy minister of municipal and community services. To my far right is Lana Grosse who is the executive director of protection emergency services. And directly behind me is Larry Chaykowski who is the executive director of finance, administration, and facilities. And just to my left here is Peter Hoffman who is the assistant deputy minister of housing.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister.

#### Subvote (MG01)

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to start today, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, by welcoming your officials here today. And I think there's a number . . . in fact there'll be a number of times we would like to get together because we have many, many questions, Mr. Minister.

But I think the hot topic as you know is amalgamation. And we would certainly like to go into that a little bit because it does affect every facet really, of municipal government.

Mr. Minister, I don't know if you've realized by now, but I would think you have, just how serious this is to people in rural Saskatchewan especially, but it affects the cities, the towns,

RMs, everything, but to I think a different degree.

I think you will even admit, Mr. Minister, that to the cities, probably the idea of forced amalgamation, or the changing, as Mr. Garcea would suggest, 17 areas or even going as drastically as Mr. Stabler is suggesting to 11 areas, for all intents and purposes would probably cater to the cities in this province. And I can understand why they probably don't have a problem with this. In fact it would probably be not to their advantage to get up and holler against this.

And I realize within SUMA themselves they probably have a bit of a problem, because SUMA represents not only, as you know, the cities, but the same towns out there that you in your wisdom are trying to do with away with — their local autonomy, local councils, any say in what happens in their lives at all.

Now you can say this isn't going to happen, but you know, Mr. Minister, as well as I do what has happened in health care with health reform. We've saw with our health boards out there where we have volunteers now that were serious about what they were doing before, have pulled back and said, this is a sham; we want nothing to do with it.

I think the first question I have today, Mr. Minister, and I believe that this was a fight, I have no idea why you got into; I don't think it had to be fought. I don't think there's a benefit that I can see unless it's hidden, and hopefully we can get to that today.

Why on earth are you pushing amalgamation so hard? Will you explain to me, to councillors, to alderman, to mayors, to reeves, what is the advantage of amalgamation, and why in your mind do you think they should be accepting this, while at the same time you know they're just furious about it, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Chair, I welcome very much my colleague's from Saltcoats' question because he asks the very important question of which Saskatchewan people I think have engaged themselves in having a discussion around.

And when I talk about . . . get up and talk about municipal reform in this province, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . or Chair, I talk about renewal. Because when you look at what's happened in Saskatchewan over the last we could say 50 or 60 years, there has been a significant change in the environment and the climate of the Saskatchewan community.

Where we used to 50 years ago . . . as the member is also a rural individual and farmer and a past municipal reeve, understands what's happened in rural Saskatchewan in particular. And I share the same kind of view that you do because I too am a farmer today and have a small farming operation, do all of our business and work in a small community of about 450 people today of where I went to school, did all of . . . got all my elementary and high school years, watched a community wither away over the last 30 years of which I've been a party to. And not any different than I think what you've experienced in your own life.

So over the past 50 or 60 years what we've seen in Saskatchewan is that we've seen a tremendous change where

we've seen the population of rural Saskatchewan, where 70 per cent of our Saskatchewan community used to be agriculturally based and 30 per cent used to be in the urban areas, over a period of 70 years we've seen that reverse itself completely.

And so what's happened over the past many years is that we've had, not just this administration, but we've had all administrations across governments over the past 40 or 50 years address this issue about what we should try and do in terms of renewing the municipal structure in Saskatchewan, not unlike what's happened in other parts of Canada. Our neighbours to the east and west of us had municipal reform and renewal in the '40s and '50s. Saskatchewan hasn't done municipal reform over that period of time of which municipalities were created, both urban and rural.

And so I say to the member opposite that since we came to government in 1991 there have been a series of events that have looked at addressing how in fact we might look at renewing the municipal structure system in Saskatchewan.

And I just take you back to the last couple of events that we had. In 1997 we had in this province the district services Act, of which the district services Act was intended to provide a voluntary consolidation of municipalities, or redesign of municipalities in this province with incentives that would be provided for the urbans and rurals of which they agreed they wanted to have. And so we brought to this House in 1997 a piece of legislation that was going to assist municipalities to do that.

And at the end of the day it fell off the order table because SARM, at that particular point in time, saw that as being the first phase of some sort of amalgamation, a major consolidation of municipalities, and so it fell off the Table with incentives being there and it being voluntary.

Following that came the MOU (memorandum of understanding), as you're aware of; so a MOU was signed between SUMA and SARM and the government. And over a period of a year and a half we tried to resolve some of the issues about how do we change the structure of Saskatchewan, the face of municipalities, the municipal structure in the province.

And one of the barriers that they ran into right away was that of the legislation. They said that there are legislative impairments today that exist within the environment, within The Rural Municipality Act and the urbans Act.

So what we should do was a discussion at the round table; was that we should engage a discussion around the province and we should put together a task force, a team of men and women who would travel the province and look at how they could undo the legislative structure today so that in fact you might have municipal redesign, or provide for easier opportunity for municipal redesign in the province.

And so came about the Garcea committee. And so the Garcea committee was struck on the blessings and goodwill of all of the partners at the round table, which was SUMA and SARM and the provincial government. And they selected the individuals who would sit on that committee and charged them with the responsibility to go out and do their work.

They said that within two years, began their work in 1998, said that in two years you'll come back and you'll tell us what the legislative reform or changes should look like. But before you come back in August to provide us with that — in the spring of the year of 2000 — you will provide us with an interim report. So that interim report could signal then to the round table what kinds of legislative renewal was required.

And so the intent was always in 1998 for that committee to go about the province and talk about municipal legislative changes, which could do a whole host of things. The legislative reform was to provide opportunities for greater recognition of an order of new government because municipalities said we want to be a recognized order of government, and you should make us that. And you should change your Act to allow for that to happen. You should give municipalities more responsibilities. You should give municipalities more access to the revenue base, the provincial revenue base. And you should provide municipalities with an opportunity that they might assume some of the provincial services in the future.

Then they go on to say we should also at that same time examine whether or not there are any efficiencies in this process. And they were going to look at that.

So when the committee began its work in 1998, they had a very specific agenda. And that was to craft new legislation that would permit for municipalities to become new orders of government, to have greater access to revenue bases, to be able to provide a broader range of services and economic development. This was the idea when they began their work.

And so they did. And when they got to the process in about December of the year 2000, they discovered that there was a fundamental problem with structure. And so Mr. Garcea and his committee then came back and said in order for us to provide a change to the legislative structures of the Acts, urban and rural, what we need to do of course is we need to look at addressing what the structure in this province should look like.

And that's where Mr. Garcea and his committee then made the statement that there should be fewer municipalities. Not suggesting . . . He didn't draw a map, didn't outline what in fact that should look like, didn't talk about . . . did make some signal about how that might happen. And then proceeded to say you tell us — round table, urban and rural municipal leaders — how you're going to achieve that and tell us what kind of legislation you need.

And that's the stage that we're at today — at the round table. Now we're going to be talking about what kind of reform, if any, do we want in the province. And at the end of the day, what kind of legislative changes do you require.

And that's just a short history of what's happened in this province around the thinking of municipal renewal in Saskatchewan which I happen to think is a pretty important exercise.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, but . . . and seeing that we're getting on to the Garcea report already, I'll turn to there.

At meetings we've had with Mr. Garcea, we ask a couple of basic questions that we felt would be very important to what was going on, Mr. Minister.

Number one, what would be the cost savings if we went through and forced amalgamation? I think in Mr. Garcea's words it was a directive approach which, let's face it, was nothing more than a nice way of saying forced amalgamation.

Number two, we asked him, what did you find when you looked into the efficiencies of local government?

You know what the response was? Number one, he never looked at the costing effect, as you know. And number two, he never looked at the efficiency of local government.

Well if neither one of those things have anything or any advantage to what he had done in his report. Where on earth does this agenda come from? And I think that's the most bewildering question on this side of the House.

You know, I'm really wondering who's driving this, Mr. Minister. Is it your department that's pushing this? Is it your own bureaucratic hacks in your own office? Who is pushing this agenda? Or is it the NDP government themselves to remove any local voice out in rural Saskatchewan because on September 16 they didn't vote for your government?

Mr. Minister, is this a punishment for those people because they jumped off the bandwagon for your NDP government and said, we're fed up with what's going on in this province whether it's health care, education, highways, roads, whatever it is, Mr. Minister . . . agriculture, agriculture especially, Mr. Minister, in which you say you are a so-called farmer out there. You should know better.

Mr. Minister, will you go back . . . And you talked about the service district Act. There was the one, the former minister, Ms. Teichrob, tried to ram down the throats of people involved with municipal government, and what happened? She was forced to withdraw that because of the backlash from things like SARM, the official opposition. All those people at that time made you withdraw that. And, Mr. Minister, you didn't seem to listen at that time.

You carried on. In fact you've even gone farther because now you say it's not forced amalgamation. SARM says it's forced amalgamation, towns say it's forced amalgamation, we say it's forced amalgamation, Mr. Minister.

Let's face it — call a spade a spade: it's forced amalgamation because that's the NDP agenda. We know it and you know it, and you're not scamming anybody when you say that's not there.

Another thing, Mr. Minister. You say with your round table talks now that forced amalgamation's off the table. Well forgive us, Mr. Minister, because number one, I don't trust you. And any municipality, whether urban or rural, out there I've talked to also don't trust you; that before the end of this present session you may bring that legislation onto the table, which I believe you've already got drafted but haven't at this point got the nerve or the intestinal fortitude to put it on the table because

of the backlash you heard from the public.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Mr. Minister, stand up today and tell me as a rural taxpayer, as a farmer, as a past reeve, of a person that lives every day with rural people, what advantage to those people there's going to be by your forced amalgamation?

Or don't call it that — just say amalgamation. These 11 districts, 17 districts — I don't care where you're talking from — what advantage to their lives out there today are you going to have for them when the smoke clears and they've lost their local councils?

Explain to me how it's better for those people than they were yesterday, than they will be tomorrow after you ram your NDP agenda down their throat.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very interested in the approach that the member from Saltcoats takes about the discussion around the estimates of Municipal Affairs, and I would be happy to entertain a discussion of anything in our document as it relates to the finances.

But to have a debate today, Mr. Chair, to have a debate today about whether or not there's going to be forced amalgamation in this province, I want to say to the member opposite and to this Assembly and anybody who's watching, Mr. Chair, that on this side of the House, this member and this government has never talked about forced amalgamation. It's never been our agenda.

And so I want to say to the member opposite that the only language about forced amalgamation has come from over there. And I want to say to the member opposite, just recently on April 19, on April 19th, SUMA and SARM and our Premier were in the same room, had a discussion about a process, and said that there will not be any kind of legislation this spring in this agenda from this ministry or from this government.

And so you need to rest peacefully and Saskatchewan people need to rest peacefully that there isn't any legislative agenda that we're on, and there isn't any legislation that's coming to this House.

And I've said that to you on a number of occasions; the Premier said it to the people of Saskatchewan; the two municipal leaders have said it to the people of Saskatchewan. And you continue to get up in this House, again today, and say that somebody has an agenda about forced amalgamation. This is only your own verbiage. This verbiage doesn't exist within this ministry, or this department, or those people who are working together at the round table.

(1500)

What we're going to do at the round table, Mr. Chair, is that we're going to look at all of the work that's been done in this province over the past 10 years and all of the commitments that have been made by municipal leaders and this government to

look at renewing the climate in Saskatchewan. Because on many occasions I hear you stand up in the House and other members from your side of the House stand up here and say that this is about the consolidation of this province into two communities.

And I say to you, Mr. Member, because I very much care about what happens in rural Saskatchewan, that you people who sit on that side of the House are not the champions for rural Saskatchewan alone. There are many of us who sit in our chairs on this side of the House who know what rural Saskatchewan is about. Who live it every day — who live it every day.

And so I say to you, Mr. Member, that I'm concerned about the consolidation of services from rural Saskatchewan only to two major communities in this province. I'm concerned about that.

And so I want to be sure that when I have some responsibility to provide some leadership in this province, around systems and structures, that collectively, with my partners in SUMA and SARM, we set up the best municipal structures in Saskatchewan that can do the kinds of things that they want to do. Because municipalities are asking for things to do in this province that they don't have the ability to do. They say things like we need to have changes and reform to the Acts so the Acts can provide us with greater opportunity, and greater opportunity to do things like enhance our service delivery systems in rural Saskatchewan. We want greater access to the financial resources of this province's municipalities.

And you know what? They should have some of that. They should have it. Because municipalities are the most integral part of the service delivery systems in our province. They're closest to the people.

So there's not an attack on this side of the House on municipalities. None at all. This is about enriching the abilities that municipalities will have in the future to do the kinds of work that they can do to sustain those rural communities that you and I are concerned about. That's what we want to do here.

Now how do we do that? We're going to try to do that in a process of conciliation and voluntary agreement. That's how we're going to do it. That's how we're going to do it.

Now what doesn't help this debate for sure is to say to people in rural Saskatchewan today, in particular in rural Saskatchewan today, that on this side of the House there's some kind of agenda where we're going to consolidate everybody and at the end of the day there isn't going to be existing municipalities.

I say to you, Mr. Chair, and to the member opposite, there's no agenda of that nature. There's no agenda of that nature at all. This is a discussion about how you can strengthen the quality of life for municipalities and improve services, economic opportunities for people in Saskatchewan.

And we'll do it at the pace and the rate and in the manner in which municipalities will want to do that. That's what we're going to use. And that's how we're going to do it.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, but I find some of your comments very interesting. You say that

municipalities are the backbone — and if I understood you right and I think you meant that — are the backbone out there of rural Saskatchewan. And I agree with that point.

But then why on earth at the same time are you trying to eliminate them, do away with them, and create these monster boards? And there's no other word for it, Mr. Minister, because Mr. Stabler himself said — and I would like to be able to quote exactly when we met with him what his comments were — but he said our problems in rural Saskatchewan are minuscule and they're mainly only in our minds, and that him and others like him know better what's better for us out there than we do ourselves.

I found, coming from a university professor, that was a very amazing, amazing statement, Mr. Minister. It was hard to even think that someone with that attitude should come out and be having any part in rearranging our lives in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, I thought at the SARM convention this last spring there was a very interesting comment that a lady made to Mr. Garcea, and you may have heard it. She said, Mr. Minister, there wasn't a problem out here until you people invented it.

And I believe that, Mr. Minister. I'm not saying amalgamation can't happen; I'm not saying it won't happen. In fact in a number of cases, I think we're going to see it happen at a greater rate than it has ever happened before. Because as you mentioned, Mr. Minister, our population is dropping. But the problem being out there, Mr. Minister, is that the same number of roads are out there, the same need for municipal governments are out there — local — because they're in touch with what happens every day out there.

And I'm afraid, Mr. Minister, if we create these . . . Say we go to 17 — give you the benefit of the doubt here. We don't go to Stabler. We go to Garcea's report and what he is suggesting. Let's go to 17. What does that say out there? How many RMs would have to be lumped in with how many towns with no voice out there?

Well you said . . . as you said, you could have a volunteer from Saltcoats, a volunteer from Eston, a volunteer from Kelvington. That's a joke, Mr. Minister, and you know as well as I do it is. Because they would have no voice in anything. You know who'd have the voice? Probably your appointed boards that would match our health boards, and we saw how successful they were.

In fact, Mr. Minister, in your own area, what happened to your health board? You disbanded it because it wasn't actually doing exactly what you wanted it to do. And for you to stand up and tell me that these boards would be different and they wouldn't be listening to you, they would be representing the people, is a myth. We know who they would be listening to.

And I think that's the whole agenda here, Mr. Minister. That voice out in rural Saskatchewan would be gone.

You talked before that you are the champion and we weren't for rural Saskatchewan. I find that an amazing statement considering last September 16 that on this side we elected pretty near every rural seat in this province went to the Saskatchewan



Party and your people got booted out of office. That's who's championing the cause for rural Saskatchewan.

Farmers out there, when the agriculture problem, Mr. Minister, was forefront, I didn't see people from that side jumping up and down to run out and help farmers. I did see people on this side voicing the concerns of farmers, standing up for farmers, standing up for people in rural Saskatchewan. And we're getting renowned for that and we're becoming respected for that, Mr. Minister, and that's why we elected so many seats in rural Saskatchewan last time around.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — And I might go farther, Mr. Minister, that if you persist with things like forced amalgamation, there's a number of city people that are starting to see what's really happening in this province — a touch of a dictatorship, I might say. And even they are starting to really realize what your government's about.

Mr. Minister, yesterday I asked you if you'd seen the Bill Mackness report and you said you hadn't had time. And I guess I would ask you, number one, have you had time to look at this report? Because it's quite a scathing report of Mr. Stabler and Mr. Garcea's study. And I know what you may say, Mr. Minister — well this is just a gentleman off the other side, paid for and bought.

Well let's go through his credentials to start with. Mr. Mackness is a former dean of business of the University of Manitoba. I think he's got pretty good credentials there. He is also a former VP (Vice-president) and economist with one of Canada's largest banks. So I think this gentleman's been around the block.

And I'd like to just read you a few things where he starts out here and there's a number of things in here that are quite scathing to both Stabler and Garcea reports. But he says:

These reports (and he's talking about Garcea and Stabler) are not helpful to the cause of municipal government renewal. In fact, they are deficient to the extent that they threaten to materially impede rather than advance or assist the cause of renewal.

That's quite a statement.

The first arresting weakness of the studies is that they advocate reliance on force (forced amalgamation) and compulsion as the first option for implementation of the sweeping, radical reforms.

And it just goes on and on, Mr. Minister. And if you've read this . . . I'm sure you've had a chance to see it. And I guess I would ask you to comment on the report to start with, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to make a couple of comments about the report and as I alluded earlier this afternoon, to the report. And you're right, the kinds of language that Mr. Mackness uses are, I would suggest, fairly inflammatory and not supportive of the work of either Stabler

or Garcea. I agree with that. He says that. He says that repeatedly on many pages of his report.

But he also makes some other comments that I think are important to note and I've made a couple of notes of them. On page 10 of his report he talks about "there certainly is a case for municipal renewal as there is for rethinking other administrative systems from time to time." So he says there's a need to do some of that.

He goes on. On page 14 he says, "there are indeed a large number of smaller municipal units in Saskatchewan. Some amalgamation may be beneficial." He says that on page 14.

And then on page 20 he makes a fairly profound statement where he says, "there is a clear case for renewal, and there should be no mistake about this."

And so in his report . . . Then he goes on and I think he finishes his comments by talking about how in fact the round table is the appropriate place in this province to deal with the issues, of which you won't get any disagreement from me. And he says that in his dissertation.

I say to the member opposite though that it strikes me as a little bit unusual, a little bit unusual because . . . And I'm a little surprised by the fact that my good friends at SARM have attached themselves with some of the work here. And I say this to you respectfully. Because what I've heard for the last six weeks or eight weeks in this province or ten weeks, coming from you and members of your side of the House and particularly from SARM, is that the academics of the research that's been done in this province in the two reports of Garcea and Stabler . . . They talk about these guys as being some sort of university misfits in Saskatchewan — Stabler and Garcea, who, by the way, have been in Saskatchewan for the past 20 and 30 years doing work on municipal reform, studying the demographics of Saskatchewan. These two people have been doing that.

Mr. Stabler provides reports for all sorts of Saskatchewan communities today including the business community when they go to do their demographic work. He does that kind of work for them. He does it for the business community. He does it for the industrial community. He's done it for tourism authorities. He's done it for REDAs (regional economic development authority) all across the province for 30 years. And if you take a look at his history on Saskatchewan, you can see what he's done.

Mr. Garcea educates our young people in universities today and teaches about municipal reform in this province. Attached to his committee are people like Mr. Westby who's a long-time municipal leader in this province, who you know well and your colleague from Indian Head knows well. Clearly, Mr. Kononoff, who was the past-president of SARM, he sits on this particular committee with Garcea.

Here you have a collection of Saskatchewan men and women who have travelled this province to speak about municipal renewal in spades. And we attack them, we attack the work that they do.

Now are their models right? I don't know if their models are right — what they're saying in Saskatchewan, what they say needs to happen in Saskatchewan. Some people say that, yes, we need to have renewal including SUMA and SARM.

But for you, sir, and members of my round table who support what Mr. Mackness says — an Ontario academic, an academic of who you in fact have been yourself questioning over the last several months, saying that what place do academics have in this province. What place do they have in telling rural Saskatchewan what they need? And here you are today in estimates telling me that you have an academic who you support not even from Saskatchewan — somebody from Ontario who has arrived in our province and is going to tell you and I and Saskatchewan people what's good for us.

I find that extremely, extremely disconcerting, I have to tell you, sir. Because I don't know which side of the page you sit on. Because you attack our Saskatchewan academia and people who work in the municipal system in spades for weeks, and then you line yourself up and attach yourself to some guy who comes here from Ontario and writes a report who you say is your vision and your wisdom to guide you in what should happen with municipal reform in this province.

I find that really, really disconcerting, I have to tell you — I have to tell you.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I definitely believe you do find that disconcerting because your government has never done one thing like that where you didn't have somebody that already had a bias before you hired them or you wouldn't have hired them to do the study.

Mr. Minister, where did Mr. Garcea, when he went out . . . did Mr. Garcea have any instructions from you? When you hired him to do the study, did he have any instructions from you what you wanted him to come back with? What really did you tell him?

Because I was at a number of the meetings, Mr. Speaker, or at least a number of members on this side attended his first round of meetings. And we find it somewhat mystifying how he came back with what he said that we should have, whether it was 17 districts, and this radical change that he's suggesting we have, when I never once, and I don't think any other member on this side or anybody from SARM that we've talked to or municipalities, heard these ideas coming from the meetings. Where did this come from?

Has Mr. Garcea got his own agenda? Or like really what did you instruct him when he went out to get his . . . come back with what you wanted to see him come back with. Where did he get all this stuff from?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, Mr. Chair, I just want to say to the member opposite, and I know he knows the difference of the two reports, I just want to be clear that he and I both are speaking from the same page.

Mr. Garcea in his report, talked about — his interim report — talked about the consolidation of communities, urban and rural. And when you read his report, it looks . . . he discusses the

disappearance of rural municipalities by and large, is what Mr. Garcea and his committee talk about. There are the incorporation of municipalities, whether they're urban or rural, they come together as one unit.

(1515)

Stabler has a different approach in his model. Stabler's model talks about 17 regions in the province, or 11 regions in the province is what he puts out as possible scenarios, of which he says any community, any community over 1,800 would remain whole or remain with their own councils, would still remain with their own authorities. Everything else would get folded in into the larger piece, is what he talks about.

And those are the fundamental differences between those two reports, is what I wanted to highlight first.

But I want to say to your most important question about what was said to Garcea. And as you can appreciate, when I assumed the responsibility of this file in September of this year, one of the first things I did is I invited the members of the committee to meet with me because they, as you can appreciate, had already started their work. They began their work in 1998.

And if you have a moment or you wish in the future to ask any one of the committee members — this is the very first question I asked them — when you began this work in 1998, Mr. Garcea, and members of your committee of which they were all present, did anybody give you any direction about what we anticipated to see at the end of the day? Did anybody say anything to you? Did our government give you any direction? And on an individual basis, barring none, they said there was no direction given to them. Their job was instructions of the round table to provide a report on legislative renewal in this province. That was their task.

And so I said to them — and you can check this with them if you choose — I said to them, we are not intending to get involved in changing that approach with you at all. And I want to say to you today, Mr. Member, in this House and to anyone who is watching this, that we have not. We have not been involved in getting in the way of the work of this committee or the work that it's reported in any way, shape, or form.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well, thank you, Mr. Minister. Then I can only conclude from that, that when Mr. Garcea went out he already had his mind made up what he wanted to come back with because I'm very sure he heard next to nothing of recommendations from the public, especially rural Saskatchewan, that they wanted these kind of changes that he's suggesting.

Mr. Minister, we've talked a lot and that maybe we may be exaggerating and I think you could set the record straight right now, is how many dollars has Mr. Garcea cost us to this point?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Chair, the amount that this work would cost us from the committee to the end of August would be \$750,000. If your question is more specific than that, what we've spent to date, I don't have that particular statement, that particular amount now, but I know that to the end of August that work will be \$750,000.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Would you be able to give us a figure then on what Mr. Stabler has cost for his study to this point? No, I should clarify that, Mr. Minister. I accept your answer. That's actually what I wanted to know, what Mr. Garcea's total cost will be to August.

What about Mr. Stabler, and I'm not sure if he's finished or not, but what will be the total cost of that?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — To the member, Mr. Stabler has completed his work and the cost of his work was \$99,000.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Okay, thank you, Mr. Minister. I guess I haven't been exaggerating other than maybe a thousand dollars to this point. I've been spreading the word that he's cost us \$100,000, so I apologize for that.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to talk to you . . . and Mr. Garcea — I know a number of times, and I know he's sincere about this — but he said one of the handicaps we have with so many local municipal governments is economic development in this province. Now this may be the difference from that side of the House to this side of the House, but I cannot . . . and especially being a past reeve. I didn't know as being a reeve that I was the one that was being . . . restricting economic development in our area. I had no idea that it was my fault. I know that the mayor in our town would be totally dismayed if somebody could explain to him why he is holding back economic development, because there's so many of them.

And Mr. Garcea has gone on and on. We met with him a couple of times ourselves as a caucus, and he used this same argument that because, not because of the costing analysis he's done, not because of the efficiency of local government, but because, mainly because economic development in this province is stymied.

Well I had to agree with him there. But where I disagreed with him was that blaming this on too many local municipal governments . . . I just can't grasp where that's coming from.

I'd like to read you a little bit out of the Mackness report again. And you can disagree with it if you like, Mr. Minister, but this man has a lot of credentials when it comes to economic development.

But he's talking about the Stabler-Olfert study and he says that it completely ignores important factors other than the existing system of municipal governance that clearly are contributing to the provincial economic underperformance — underperformance, Mr. Minister.

In particular the role of burdensome levels of federal and provincial taxation and regulation are ignored in the discussion of provincial economic underperformance. Having ignored the real culprits, the studies unjustifiably attempt to indict the efficient municipal governments as a principal cause of Saskatchewan's economic difficulties.

Well, Mr. Minister, if you could explain to me, I'd sleep a lot better at night, how so many local governments out there are at fault for our economic performance in this province, which I may say is dismal at best.

Maybe for just an example, Mr. Minister, it could be the high taxes in this province that are at fault, and we're trying to put a smokescreen over that to hide the fact that that's probably one of the main problems and it has nothing to do with local municipal government.

Mr. Minister, would you try and explain to me how local municipal government is a handicap to economic development in this province?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well if I do that, Mr. Chair, in a fairly significant fashion, I don't want to be responsible for you not sleeping at night. So if I can fix that a little bit, then I'll be very helpful — it'll be very helpful.

I want to say to the member opposite that I was most impressed by the work, I have to say, of Stabler. And I say that because when I looked at what Stabler says about what's happened in Saskatchewan, which is most important, I think, about this discussion, he talks about how, in fact, we've seen a regionalization today in Saskatchewan of individuals.

And this is an important discussion. When you take a look at where people are congregating around today. They're around many of the communities of which some of your members represent: the Estevans and the Swift Currents and the Yorktons and the Lloydminsters and the North Battlefords; and some of your larger towns in this province like the Nipawins and the Tisdales and the Humboldts and the Meadow Lakes. This is where a great deal of your business and your economy and your industry has moved towards today.

And that's been achieved, not because there has been an impairment or an inability by governments to try and promote that, it's because those are the choices that people have made in Saskatchewan. They've made that on their own, in spite of the fact that there have been our administration and previous administrations in this province who've tried to prop up rural Saskatchewan in a major way.

And you can go to communities across Saskatchewan today and you'll find a whole host of infrastructure that's there today that's not being used, and that governments made investments in them to try to prop up rural communities today.

And so what Stabler talks about to a large degree, and which I'm hoping to provide some direction on, is that when you have a major initiative in Saskatchewan today wherever it is — and you can take your part of Saskatchewan or mine — we have this competitive nature amongst communities, which is an important issue for us to try to discuss and see through. Because municipalities on an individual basis today can decide whether or not they're going to participate in a project or whether they're not going to participate in a project. And that might not necessarily be in the best interests of the region.

And you can take a look at a number of developments in the province today of which I've had some experience in my own. I mean when we go to develop something . . . the Melville community goes to develop something through their economic development folks, they rarely come and have a discussion with the people in Yorkton. And the reason that they don't do that is because they're concerned about whether or not they're going

to lose any of their opportunities to another community.

In the same way when you have hog barn developments in Saskatchewan today, you don't have necessarily municipalities that are working together, not only sharing their resources as elected municipal leaders but often they won't agree to share any of their financial resources because there isn't ability in some cases to do that. Now the legislation stands in the way of doing some of that. So we think we need to fix some of that so that the legislative opportunities permit for that to happen.

So rather today than looking at the larger economic regions, because clearly we know, you and I know, that my little municipality of Insinger, Saskatchewan today with a very small tax base and a very small network of opportunity for the future, for them to try and compete for a major project for my part of east-central Saskatchewan is not likely. It's not likely.

So they need to be a partner and a player with two or three or four other municipalities, not only where they share their expertise and their wisdom but they share their resources. They have to share their resources, which is their tax base and their assessment. Because when then they go to make a presentation to an industry or to a particular opportunity they have some solid financial opportunity to compete — to compete. And this is the issue. This is about competing with some of the other parts of Saskatchewan where places go to.

Why do some of the industries today come to Saskatoon or Regina and don't show up in your part of the world or mine? Partly because we don't have the economic base to support it. We need to start to think about how we're going to craft that in a broader way so the municipalities don't only give permission to each other to participate, but they might want to share some of their resources; because by sharing some of their resources, they'll be at a better opportunity to compete. And that's what that's about.

There's no point in my little municipality of Insinger, Saskatchewan, competing with yours and Salcoats. What's the point of that? Because whether or not it's successful for you in your municipality or just me, it's not sufficient because I can't win it in my little municipality of Insinger or Garry. We can't compete.

And so we need to start thinking about that in a broader way, because if we're going to attract economic opportunity to Saskatchewan, in rural Saskatchewan, which is important for you and I, we need to be able to put people on a more solid footing or a more solid base. That's what the economic opportunities are about that I think Stabler talks about. That I'd like to see us talk about at the round table. Not to beat up on the small, little municipalities — it's not about that at all, not about that at all.

This is about identifying the changes that have happened in Saskatchewan today in which those little municipalities do a wonderful job. There's no disagreement of whether or not they do a good job of sustaining the roads because they do a good job of sustaining the roadways. And many rural municipalities have become road authorities in many ways.

There are small, little communities today — we have 165

communities in Saskatchewan that have less than a hundred people, less than a hundred people, who down the road aren't ever going to be able to restore some of their infrastructure. We need to address that fairly soon so that grandma and grandpa today who live at Wroxton, Saskatchewan, or Calder, Saskatchewan, might be able to stay there because we can provide them with some of the essential services for them to be there. This is what we need to start thinking about.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, and I agree with you on some of the points that you made when you talk about Wroxton and . . . The village of Wroxton, the Calder RM is a perfect example of where voluntary amalgamation is working, has worked, and far as I've saw out there it's a great success because those people did it from the bottom up.

I would suggest, Mr. Minister, one way we could help is instead of threatening those municipalities in Saskatchewan with what you're talking about or has been talked about, is maybe . . . And you talked about, Mr. Minister, about bringing in legislation, and I think was what you were saying was to remove impediments for maybe that amalgamation to happen. I commend you for that. And you would have our full support if you brought that type of legislation in.

In fact I think that's maybe where we should have started this whole process, was by bringing that type of legislation in, removing the obstacles that were actually stopping amalgamation, and maybe amalgamation would be going at a higher speed right now, Mr. Minister, than we see it.

Mr. Minister, I have a bit of a concern. I was at a number of the meetings where . . . In fact we had a member at every meeting, and we had a presentation at every one of Mr. Garcea's meetings this last time around, and we heard the same message night after night.

You know as well as I do, Mr. Minister, 800 people in Yorkton — and I could be exaggerating, maybe there were 7, but an awfully good crowd — 550 in Melfort, 500 in P.A. (Prince Albert), and these numbers could be out a bit, but very large crowds, Mr. Minister, all over the province. And unless I'm wrong I got the message . . . out of every one of those meetings I would bet 95 plus were against what they were hearing and from the . . . Mr. Garcea's first recommendations. And they were definitely against Mr. Stabler's recommendations.

And, Mr. Minister, I guess where my concern comes now is: was Mr. Garcea and his panel listening when they went around the province this time? Because if he comes in . . . I believe he's going to give you an interim report on Monday, if I understand. And it's going to be interesting, Mr. Minister, to see what this gentleman comes out with on Monday, and we'll know instantly whether he actually paid attention or his panel paid attention to what people were saying out there.

The Yorkton meeting, for an example, RM and town after town after RM got up and said we want no part of what you're recommending, Mr. Garcea. And I think they went on for like four hours out there — this happened all over the province.

Are you expecting Mr. — and you may have saw it already, and I'm not asking you to report on what you saw because I know

you're not . . . he's not doing this till Monday so you can't tell us — but are you expecting that the comments that Mr. Garcea got at this meetings to affect what he's actually going to come out with on Monday? Are we going to go back to exactly what he was recommending before? And we've gained nothing by the second rounds of meetings, Mr. Minister.

(1530)

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Chair, I just want to say to the member from Saltcoats that Mr. Garcea is not providing a . . . first I want to make it clear that Mr. Garcea is not providing a report to me on Monday. Mr. Garcea is not providing a report to me on Monday. I expect that Mr. Garcea's report will be on its way fairly soon, but I don't have it yet.

Your question about whether or not Mr. Garcea and his committee have in fact been listening. It's my view, and from only what he's said to me, that the report that we had before us, the interim report, he says and his committee members say this is a reflection of the kinds of information that we've garnered over the period of September of 1998 to April of the year 2000 — that was a period of about 18 months.

And we should, we should remember that Mr. Garcea was in many, many offices and boardrooms across the province talking to people about what needs to happen with municipal reform and renewal in Saskatchewan. So the meetings that he had in rural Saskatchewan for the period of about eight or nine . . . I guess it was seven, seventeen meetings that he had across the province, that was only one small picture of what he's seen over the past 18 months.

And I don't disagree with you. It was obvious that Saskatchewan people, rural Saskatchewan people today weren't in favour of the kinds of things that were being said. But the kinds of things that were being said didn't address the rationale for why in fact this committee was ever struck. I mean the debate was whether or not somebody out in rural Saskatchewan today wanted to have something imposed upon them — forced amalgamation.

And if you ask the people the question — it doesn't matter where it is, whether it's in rural Saskatchewan or urban Saskatchewan or in this House — if we say to somebody how would you like me to force something on you, the immediate response to that is going to be no. The immediate response to that would be no.

And so the thinking that this issue in rural Saskatchewan is any different than it would be in urban Saskatchewan, if you said to somebody that you're going to force something on them, it would be problematic. I think that, and I agree with that.

So I want to say to the member, to the member opposite and to you, Mr. Chair, that this is a highly, highly emotional discussion — there's no question about that — because it really, the really . . . questions the fundamental issues that communities today talk about. Will there a loss of independence? Will there be any opportunity to enhance our services or economic opportunities? This is about people talking about possibly losing their jobs.

So when you take a look at what the kinds of debate that raged out in rural Saskatchewan and the kinds of issues that we're going to be forced to address at the round table haven't changed — haven't changed. If we're going to have renewal in Saskatchewan, and if we're going to have a change to the legislation, or if we're going to have changes to the structure, we're going to have the same debate within our closed doors and the same issues will be there.

Because if you're going to consolidate or you're going to look at changing the structural boundaries in this province, and people are going to be losing some of the independence that they have today, or maybe even their jobs, this will be a very tough discussion — even on a voluntary basis. And the fundamental question of course will be, are we prepared as municipal leaders and provincial governments, prepared to endorse any kind of a model that would address that? And that's the question.

We don't have a model today. We have two reports in front of us which is Garcea and Stabler, which are very different, very different in terms of what they're recommending. We have two reports in front of us today that are talking about legislative reform and economic opportunity of which we're going to have to balance.

And then we're going to have to answer the question that you've been raising and others have been raising: is there any efficiency in doing this? Is there any efficiencies? And if there are, what are they?

And the other question of course is what kind of model do you going to have in Saskatchewan? What is the model? Because I don't know what that model is going to be. I don't know what it's going to be. Because Stabler talks about 17 regions in the province, or 11. That's a very, very large consolidation of urban and rural Saskatchewan. And there are efficiencies in that.

Now if you have a fewer . . . if you have fewer consolidations or less consolidations or a different model, then you have to do the numbers on that to figure out whether or not there are any efficiencies. And I can't give you those because I don't know what they are, because there hasn't been a decision made on what those models should look like.

But I tell you, when I drive down the street in Canora, Saskatchewan and I see a municipal office on one block for one municipality and see a municipal office for another municipality, and the town office there, I have to ask the question about whether or not there's any efficiencies here.

And I can tell you that in my own community of Yorkton, Saskatchewan today we have the RM of Orkney and the RM of Wallace today who've consolidated their administration. Now why did they consolidate their administration? They consolidated their administration because there's efficiency. There's efficiency.

So if there's efficiency for that to be done on a gradual basis across the province, I think that it begs the question for us to examine that in a broader way within our round table. Now what will be the result of that? I don't have any idea today what will be the result of that. And what will the models look like? I

don't know what the models will look like. That's why we're at the round table having those kinds of discussions.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, you talked about jobs out there that are going to be lost and things like that, and I hope you're not insinuating that that's the reason that there's such a backlash out there in rural Saskatchewan. Because you know as well as I do there was a vote out there of the ratepayers just not long ago, and of the ones that voted, I believe — if my numbers are right — that 98 per cent were against forced amalgamation.

That wasn't just the administrators or the councillors voting. There was a lot of ratepayers out there that were expressing their concern, especially in a busy time of year like seeding, took the time to vote and showed that 98 per cent are against forced amalgamation.

Mr. Minister, you also have to remember — and you talk about Wallace and Orkney out there in your area and that's great; I think we have to help promote that, assist them, but don't ram it down their throats — but you have to remember, and I'm sure you know as well as I do, who's actually paying for local municipal government. It's not your government; it's the local taxpayer out there.

Now for an example, in the RM of Saltcoats in my community, if the ratepayers out there aren't happy and think we're wasting money, I would suggest to you that they probably should be the first ones we should be listening to that aren't satisfied with their local administration and their local councils, because they're picking up the tab.

Wouldn't it be them probably first that should be asking for this instead of you, as father government, coming out and saying, well we know what's better for you than you actually do for yourselves, when you aren't actually spending a nickel on local administration, Mr. Minister. And I guess maybe . . . I just ask for a comment on that, Mr. Minister, because I'm sure you're as well aware as I am aware of who actually pays the bills out there.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, Mr. Chair, it's a very interesting question, and certainly I think I've said on another occasion which I want to be very careful that we don't misconstrue what I say here, because I know in a previous discussion or comment that I made, it was. But today the provincial government makes the commitment as well.

I as a rural ratepayer today in my two RMs that I pay taxes to, the municipality collects, and they pay for the roads and they pay for the administration out of my tax dollars that I pay to those municipalities. But I want to say to you as well that the provincial government, through its revenue share, also sends a cheque to all of these municipalities and all these small towns. We send them all a cheque: \$26 million to the RMs and \$24 million to the urbans in Saskatchewan. And this goes to each of those on revenue share.

Now a portion of that, and I think if you were to go to your RM councillor or to your administrator, they would say to you if you were to say, well what portion of this money do you use for administration? Well they might say, well a portion of it comes

from you, Clay Serby, the taxpayer in rural Saskatchewan, from the farmland that . . .

**The Chair:** — Order, order. The minister, I think, understands already the mistake he made in using his own name and it's not allowable to use names of sitting members. It's just a reminder to all members.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Chair, as the member from Yorkton who has farmland in the municipalities of Garry and Insinger, when I go to the, when I go to the RM office and have a chat with the RM administrator and say to her, well of my tax bill that I pay to you here, Madam Administrator, what portion of it comes from my farmland and what portion of it comes from the revenue share?

I'm sure she's not going to be able to break that out for me; nor is any other administrator in the province going to be able to do that because municipalities get their funding from two sources — they get it from the taxpayer and they get it from the revenue share.

So I think it would be . . . I think it would be fair to say that part of the administration salary and part of the salary that's paid, or part of the per diems that are paid to municipal councillors or councillors across the province, some of it is revenue-sharing money as well, as well as it is taxpayers' money. But clearly it is.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well, Mr. Minister, I'm afraid I have to disagree with you again because I have checked with administrators out there, and they tell me that not one cent from your government goes for administration.

I know you pay for assisting on road maintenance, road construction, grass cutting, gravelling — I'm talking RMs now, Mr. Minister — I know you assist on sewer and water projects within urban communities, a number of those things. But, Mr. Minister, when it comes to administration I don't believe — unless I'm really, really out to lunch and I don't think my administrators are — that they pay 100 per cent of administration, Mr. Minister. So one of us is wrong, and I don't believe I am, Mr. Minister, on this issue.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you . . . and you talked a minute ago about models, and you were talking about that. Rather than going the route we're pushing, seem to be pushing for and getting such a backlash right now . . . and I'm sure there's got to be areas out there if amalgamation is such a popular thing. And I know in some areas actually they're already talking . . . you know that, I know that. Why don't we pick out an area out there — depending on how much, how many entities we could get to go in this — why don't we try a model for five years and just see how it works.

You know if it worked really well out there, then we would have some credibility going back to SARM and SUMA and say: here we are, you've been part of this project, and it's working great; we found the ways that we may assist this to happen.

Wouldn't that be a better way of trying to get this to happen out there and assist it to happen and speed it up, if that's what you

wish? Wouldn't that be a better way of going than to go the direction we are now? And I think you'd find that people will work with you a lot quicker than they will if you try and force them into something. If you can help the system to do it, they are much more ready to accept this.

Have you thought of making some model at some spot in the province and having a test case there, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, I think that that will likely be one of the discussions that we'll have at the round table when we're looking at all of the options or models that might be available to us.

I can say to you, I don't have a particular design or model that we want to put forward in Saskatchewan so if the municipalities say to me that — or they say at the round table — we should try and achieve some of these, I'm not going to be objecting to it. What I'll do is put forward sort of my case or my scenario of how, how some of that work has been attempted in the past.

I think in 1996, as I said to you earlier, we provided two things. We provided a legislative agenda of which municipalities asked for, for district services Act. And then we dumped in a whole pool of money and said go ahead and do this at your own pace and rate. In fact, I think there was as much as \$200,000 that was sitting in a pool for over three years, I think it was, for municipalities to . . . or two years, for two years for municipalities to access to do exactly what you said: to proceed to do whatever kind of consolidation or amalgamation or building stronger municipalities in their own regions and use some of that money to help do it. I've got to tell you that there was a very, very minuscule amount that was used — a very, very minuscule. And in fact I think this year we've taken it out of the budget because it hasn't been used for two years.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Chair. I just want to bring to you attention, Mr. Minister, it goes back to what we were talking about before. You were talking about putting the provincial money into X number of million dollars into municipalities out there.

The member for Lloydminster just brought it to my attention, and there's the example of the RM of Eldon out there is actually, when the smoke clears, a net taxpayer. From what you put into that RM out there, Mr. Minister, they pay more than that in PST (provincial sales tax) on equipment, fuel tax, and the taxes they pay.

And I know it may be news to some people out there that RMs and towns actually pay taxes, but they do, Mr. Minister. You know that as well as I do. So we can't leave that impression that actually every RM in town out there is getting this big bag full of money and they actually aren't paying taxes and putting a lot of that right back into provincial coffers.

Mr. Minister, you made a comment here a few minutes ago in one of your answers to me that you said, maybe if this happened with these, you know, amalgamation went on there, that these bodies, whatever size they may be, may assume provincial services.

And I was quite curious about that, Mr. Minister, because what

I am a little bit concerned about here, is what you're talking about here, is another way for government to pass off some of our secondary highways to RMs.

Is it a way of passing some government, provincial government responsibility to local municipalities, and maybe what we're going to see is nothing more than another form of downloading.

I mean, if this is what you're talking of doing out there if these big boards are set up out there, I'm even more worried than I was before, Mr. Minister. Because if we go through with what Mr. Garcea has talked about, he said, number one, he suggested that they could run . . . these boards could run deficits, which I think is scary and I think you know why, Mr. Minister. One bonus of local government out there is that they couldn't run deficits, kept their house in order, and have done a very, very good job at that. And I would question that.

But he also talked about greater autonomy when it comes to borrowing money, things like that. And the only place I've seen this where I think that people think there is a real need is in the larger centres, especially in the cities.

(1545)

Now, Mr. Minister, I have no problem with that at all. In fact I think if the cities think that this is an area where they need changes, why don't we make the changes that they're asking for but don't involve the local . . . the smaller municipalities in the same bowl and have to have it all as one big package.

Why don't we pick out the things that they're actually asking for. And the things like the city is asking for a greater autonomy when it comes to borrowing. Mr. Minister, would you respond though, back to the original question before I got carried away, about assuming provincial services, Mr. Minister? What were you actually talking about there?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — I was just reviewing, Mr. Chair, some of my information that I had, so I'm on two thoughts here. I'll get to your second one in a minute.

The RM of Eldon, you're right, doesn't get any equalization. You are right about that. And so I would suggest to you . . . and they do, but they do get funding for road preservation. So in that case they don't get any equalization. So their administration, you're right, would be covered fully by the municipality.

But there are far more, far more municipalities who receive equalization than not. In fact it's a rare case in the lists that we have. We have far fewer numbers of municipalities and it's to do with their assessment, of which you would know.

I say to the member opposite that if you might just refresh just the last part of your question, because I was looking for the other part of the answer. If you might just ask me again what the last part of that question was.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well, Mr. Minister, now we're both lost because neither one of us could remember it. You talked about passing some provincial responsibilities down to these boards, Mr. Minister. And I would just like an explanation of what you

were talking about there.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well I think when . . . Thank you very much for asking the question again. I was preoccupied with getting my first answer, and I'd heard you say earlier that again you were going to be staying up all night and your sleep disorder might be kicking in again. So I wanted to make sure that I could alleviate that.

But I say to the member opposite that, when in fact some of the discussion with the municipalities and particularly the large urbans, they talked about the fact that they want to be their own order of government. They want to have larger access to the revenue pool of the provinces, and that they would like to have greater authority. They'd like to assume some of the provincial services that we might be providing.

And to some degree, some of those might be better delivered by municipal governments than they would be by provincial governments today. And so I think that the question then remains, what source of provincial services could you devolve to municipalities and would you like to devolve to municipalities? Not only a devolution of the responsibility, but also where you would devolve resources, being money and manpower.

For example, today many of the municipalities that we deal with at the department do a lot of their urban planning or their planning. Now some of those responsibilities in my view could be done at the local level far more efficiently, and more broadly and quickly at that level.

I think some of the work that we do today with waste management, some of that work could be done far better at the municipal level with the resources that we have today on the provincial system than could be done at that level at the municipal system.

But I think what you would want to do, and certainly I'll put this to the round table and say to you, that you would want to make those responsibilities equal across the province to all municipalities.

So if you're going to be providing incentives and resources to one municipality, I think you'd want to do it for all to them rather than singling out one or two municipalities in the province, and say well I think what we're going to do with you is give you special powers or opportunities or incentives, while the rest of the province watches while those people do their work.

We already have some of that in Saskatchewan already today, I say, with the two larger urbans. Because when the rest of Saskatchewan goes to compete for an economic opportunity with the two larger urbans, often we're not successful.

Now in some things we are, because of our location. Going to build a hog barn in Saskatoon or Regina — we're not going to build. But where does the packing plant go in many cases, or where does the processing plant go? Often many of those things don't find their way into rural Saskatchewan because those economic opportunities aren't there.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Well, thank you, Mr. Minister. And, Mr. Chair, at this point I would like to pass off questioning to my counterpart from Indian Head-Milestone, our critic for urban municipal government.

I just want to take that opportunity, Mr. Minister, to thank you and your staff. And you know, in the next months to come — June, July, August, maybe even September — we'll still have you back a number of times before session is over. So thank you.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you very much. And welcome to the officials here today.

I am going to shift gears a little bit. I'm going to leave the amalgamation, the municipal amalgamation area for a while even though I have a number of questions on it. And I guess the whole point of urban and rural and who it affects more and things like that, but there are a number of questions that I would like to get to perhaps the next time you come back.

But what I wanted to deal with more today — because I've been getting a number of phone calls from it, it was discussed in the budget, and it's an area that I guess I was involved with quite a bit during the campaign and especially since the campaign — is the property tax issue and the education portion on property tax. And I know it was addressed during the budget speech.

I had the opportunity of attending a number of tax revolt meetings. As a matter of fact, the first tax revolt meeting that happened in the Benson RM was not in my constituency and it didn't pass. But after that I believe the next five or six tax revolt meetings that took place were in the constituency that I now represent, Indian Head-Milestone, and all of them passed quite easily. I think there was a little bit of an administration problem in that first one and that would be the only reason that that one failed, I would think, more than anything else. Because the ratepayers that went there went there on a mission, and there's some administration problems, and things kind of got misconstrued such as no secret ballot, and that was the problem with that one.

The RM that I'm from — Lajord and Scott where I've lived in, and Wellington and all those RMs — were kind of the genesis of this whole tax revolt idea that's sweeping the province. And now there's been something like 70 or . . . RMs that have held tax revolt meetings.

You and the Minister of Education at that . . . attended one of them in Montmartre and had an idea of what goes on that those meetings. And there's some very strong emotion. I would say the emotion only second to this whole issue of forced amalgamation. I think the RMs and villages have really been under a lot of fire. They feel like they've been under a lot of fire.

One of the issues that was big, of course, is the education portion on the property tax. And they wanted to see something addressed. Now you addressed it, I guess to a certain extent, in the budget where you talked about a two-year program and X amount of dollars. We'll get into maybe a little bit later on the other side of the coin where . . . what is going on with



education, and how much is actually going to be realized by producers.

But could you, I guess first of all, give me a little bit of insight on how far you are down that road with this property tax rebate, the dollars that are going to be put into it over the next couple of years. And perhaps, some sort of the process that it's going to be . . . the mechanism that it's going to be worked out on.

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Well, Mr. Chair, I want to say to the member opposite I can see now why you are going to keep me here until July and August or September, because if you're going to ask me questions about agriculture and going to ask me questions about education, I'm going to need a far thicker briefing book, and will need the kind of time that you're talking about.

I can't, Mr. Chair, to the member, tell you today at what level the rebate program is at because that particular program is being administered through the Department of Agriculture. And so I would suggest that when the Minister of Agriculture comes to the committee, that you might want to save that question for him and I know that he'll be able to provide you with that.

You and I both know that there was \$25 million put into the pool over . . . 50 million over two years. And of course, he will then be able to provide in greater detail the kinds of questions that you're asking today and specifically to the issue of the rebate. Because I can't provide it for you because I don't know where it's at today.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. So in other words municipalities are not going to have any input or say as to how this rebate is going to be put out; it's all going to be through the Department of Agriculture. Am I correct?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — That's correct, Mr. Chair. That it would be the Department of Agriculture that would be having those discussions with SARM, I would expect.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Okay. I guess then another issue that I really wanted to discuss also is the policing issue that was addressed during the budget and I guess maybe the lack of funding that's going to be going into policing for smaller communities and RMs.

Could you tell me . . . In the budget there is no funding going to the RMs and smaller communities. Could you tell me what sort of consultation you had with the RMs and the small villages that were benefiting from that grant program, what kind of consultation prior to budget time did you have with them, and what were their feelings leading up to the budget after talking to them?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Chair, to the member, there's been a committee in place for some time now called the policing cost redistribution committee. And that committee has been made up of representation from both SUMA and SARM, the Department of Justice, and Municipal Affairs. And it's been in place I believe now for about four or five years.

And when the committee began its work, one of the issues that they first found was that there were a number of municipalities

in Saskatchewan today that weren't participating financially to policing services. And they were municipalities that were under the population of 500. And those policing costs were being assumed by the rest of the province, by municipalities that were greater than 500.

And so an arrangement was attained, I believe it was in 1997, where in fact the province said that what we should have here is we should have equalization where each of the municipalities across the province today would in fact be contributing to policing costs. It wouldn't matter whether or not you were a community of 500 above or 500 below.

And in order to ensure that all municipalities participated, what the province said is, over a period of time what we'll do is we'll provide a small pool of money to you to ensure that that gets looked after — a portion to the RMs and a portion to the communities under 500. And we did that. Always with the understanding that eventually those municipalities under 500 would start to assume that.

And it was an interesting discussion because when I assumed the portfolio, one of my early tasks was to meet with this committee on the policing costs. And it was an interesting discussion because some communities where there were populations over 500 said this still isn't fair, because what's happening here is that those communities under 500 aren't paying their share of the policing at all. Those costs are being paid for by the province — not being paid by those municipalities who are getting the same kinds of services today as a community that was paying their own costs.

So it was a discussion that we had at that level. At the end of the day, this year, the province made a decision that the expectation would be then that all municipalities would assume paying their own policing costs on the formulas that had been established by this particular body that I talked about earlier.

**Mr. McMorris:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, the drop of the funding for policing, talking to the RMs and the villages in my areas, was really quite a shock. And they've had to since make up the difference and they will have to since make up the difference. Do you have any sort of idea what that is going to mean for the local taxpayer then as to how much more they're going to have to put into policing?

I know most of the villages and RMs, smaller villages, realize that this is not a permanent grant structure. That there was going to be some in the longer term, some more responsibility put on them to fund the policing issue. But to have it just dropped on them and really I think in a lot of the communities they're struggling with elevator closures and things like that, and then to have an added cost put on them.

And I guess that's where it's really disconcerting, because the ones that I talked to really felt that there was no consultation. It was just forced on them. It was just taken away from them, I guess, is more like it.

So do you have any sort of idea what the costing will be for those RMs and small towns, villages to make up the difference in the grant money that you have taken away through the policing?

**Hon. Mr. Serby:** — Mr. Chair, to the member. I don't have the exact breakdown of all the communities, but what there is a per capita plus the formula of which the formula each of the municipalities . . . not the municipalities but SUMA and SARM representatives worked on. So each of those . . . in each of those communities under 500, there will be some requirement now based on population and the existing formula that they had agreed on to be assumed now by the municipality.

I want to say to the member opposite that it shouldn't be assumed here, Mr. Chair, that in fact municipalities weren't aware that this wasn't an interim process. Because in 1995 when this committee was established, it was fully understood that there would be a transition period. There would be time when the province would cover off the cost of those communities under 500, and that eventually those municipalities would be expected to pick up their own costs.

(1600)

And in our conversations, certainly mine and yours, you'll find some municipalities that have in fact set aside some funds to assume this kind of loss of provincial revenue to look after the policing. In some instances, some municipalities did not. And so you and I will both find when we have discussions with municipal leaders or administrators that in some cases they did or they didn't. But this isn't a surprise — this is something that has been in the works now and discussions have been in the works since 1995. And as I understand it, always been the assumption that there would be . . . there would come a time when municipalities, urban or rural under 500, would be assuming their own policing costs.

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Chair, I move the committee report progress.

**General Revenue Fund  
Environment and Resource Management  
Vote 26**

**The Chair:** — I invite the hon. minister to reintroduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my immediate right is Stuart Kramer, who is my deputy minister, and to my immediate left is Dave Phillips, assistant deputy minister of operations. Directly behind me is Lynn Tulloch, the executive director of corporate services. And to her immediate right is Bob Ruggles, the assistant deputy minister of programs.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister.

**Subvote (ER01)**

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And once again, I'd like to join with the minister in welcoming his officials again today.

And I think, Mr. Minister, if I could I'd like to start back at the last time we met. And there were a number of issues where you indicated that it would be a couple of weeks before you were able to get the information back to us on this side. And the two weeks, I think, for all intents and purposes, has probably

expired now.

And the first one that I want to raise with you is the issue of the request for proposal process on the spruce budworm spraying. As you will recall, I gave some details the last time that indicated that cost was a very, very low factor in the consideration of these proposals. And that has caused a great degree of concern on the part of a lot of the smaller aerial contractors out there.

And you indicated you had not been aware of that particular mechanism for requesting proposals. And since we met last, I've also heard from others who are equally concerned about this — the member from Melfort-Tisdale brought a very specific situation to my attention. And I was wondering where we were at with that, and if you had been able to avail yourself of the information, and if you could share it with us?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to report to the member that, as you probably are aware, the two weeks that we asked for is a fairly tight time frame. There is so many questions that we're asked, however, we do have — probably by early next week — the response that you've asked for. Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I hope that we can have the information made available prior to the end of this session.

I would just like to make a couple of comments with respect to the whole issue of the spruce budworm spraying. Are you aware, Mr. Minister, that there has been a proposal submitted to your department by the provincial association that represents aerial spray applicators? And they have made a number of suggestions around the request for proposal process that, as an association, they feel that they would be much more comfortable with.

Are you aware of the proposal that they have presented? And if so, what kind of response have you made to that provincial association?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to report that we are going to meet with this particular association by the end of May. We have the proposal in hand and we are looking at. And I can assure you that a lot of the ideas and concepts that they have forwarded, that we'll give it our thorough consideration and look at all the factors.

As I mentioned, some of your specific questions, we'll have a response to you by Monday. Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, let's see if the two-week time frame held for a couple of other promises that you made the last time we met.

We had discussed the provision of a breakdown of a cost associated with the firefighting program last year — the contractors involved, individuals involved, contract amounts, and the salaries of those individuals. Has that information been prepared and is it available?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. As we

mentioned, the questions that were asked several weeks ago were very extensive questions. A lot of questions were asked and we'll have the complete answers to all the questions the member asked by Monday.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — And I think the other thing that I would like to remind the minister of, Mr. Chair, is that the component in there that we are particularly interested in is the number of northern contractors that have been involved in firefighting and the degree to which the resources that they have, have been utilized in firefighting.

Would the minister be able to separate that information out and provide that as well?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to report that it's often difficult in the business of fighting forest fires to determine what a contractor is. Is somebody working for two or three days considered a contractor? Is somebody working for two or three months, is that a contractor?

So in relation to the question, we're not trying to avoid giving you the answer, just that it'd be difficult for us to really put together what you would perceive as defined as Northerner, what you would perceive as being defined as a contractor.

But we will undertake to provide you with a ballpark figure as to what is part of the northern contractors' work as per the very basic criteria and understanding that we have as to how we would define a Northerner and a contractor. And as to what we also spend for southern contractors as well.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I would assume that your department would have definitions of what is a Northerner, what is a contractor, in order to be able to conduct their business. And I would be very surprised if those definitions weren't applied on almost a daily basis in terms of the work that the department does.

Firstly, do you have those definitions? Does the department have ways of applying those definitions? And could you provide those to me?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to report that the challenge that we have when we looked at the northern contractor in terms of the definition, and definition-wise, throughout my history of being a northern resident, anybody north of the NAD (northern administrative district) line — that's considered a Northerner.

And I guess my response, it's often a difficult exercise to try and categorize who is a northern contractor and who isn't. It takes a lot of work. And many times, as you know, there could be somebody that's based in northern Saskatchewan that has the main office or the head office in some other southern place, and it's difficult to try and track that down.

But what I will say is that it is often our effort to try and deal with as many northern contractors, who are impacted by some of the fires in and around the communities, as best as they can. One good example of that — if I could show the forest firefighters themselves — I would assume, again I'm assuming, that up to 90 per cent of some of the firefighters that we hire

would be from the impacted communities that the fire is close to.

So in that essence, if that's considered a northern contractor, by picking them up then we can say from the labour perspective that 90 per cent of our labour force is from northern Saskatchewan. So 90 per cent of the northern contractors, which could be forest firefighters are from the North.

(1615)

However, you look at the other aspect of, say the helicopters. Often they come into the North and they do work over the summer. We get choppers from Alberta and we get choppers from Manitoba and so on and so forth, and again they could be classified as Northerners if they lived the whole summer in the North. And people could say well, they're based in southern Saskatchewan but they work in the North so they're considered a Northerner. There's so many different variations to how you want to classify them.

So it's a difficult exercise. It's often time consuming. But I can assure the member that we're doing all that we can to ensure that Northerners do participate, and that they have a fair share and fair opportunity of some of the work associated with our forest firefighting program.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. And, Mr. Minister, in reviewing *Hansard* from the last time we met, I found a section there where you alluded to looking at some new ways of doing things, and there are some exciting plans that we want to talk about later in the year. That was with respect to the forest firefighting and some of the technologies that we were discussing at the time.

I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you wouldn't mind perhaps indicating what some of those exciting new developments may be and what the costs around them might be as well.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Once again, last time we basically bragged about Saskatchewan having one of the best forest firefighting management teams in place, and we continue upholding that dubious record across the great country of Canada.

And what I want to say in reference to some of the exciting developments, I think I first of all want to paint a picture if I may. To date in Saskatchewan we have had 86 fires, forest fires, that have been started, and I want to point out that 100 per cent of these fires have been started by man.

So certainly we can see that there is a tremendous challenge in not only making people aware of some of the challenges of being out there in the forest, but to make sure that they take care of their forests and that none of these fires in the future are caused by man. So awareness is probably one of the biggest challenges that we have to address, and certainly is a challenge that'll continue to remain for the province of Saskatchewan.

In relation to the Alberta example, I can almost guarantee you, and I won't go that far as to guarantee you, but they have had twice the number of fire starts so far. And again this goes back to some of the earlier comments I made in estimates, the fact

that the fire program in Saskatchewan is something that we should be very proud of. And as always, when we talk about being proud of something, there's always room to improve.

And some of the things we were arguing in terms of the exciting new efforts that is being undertaken by SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) is you want to have a highly specialized training program in which we get a lot of people that are able to fight fires very effectively and better than in previous years. That's some of the things that we're looking at in training of our forest firefighters, something that's very, very important.

The other thing is we are constantly evaluating our equipment needs, not only currently what they're able to do but the age and so on and so forth. So we're looking at some of our equipment needs and some of the challenges associated with equipment. Everything from our planes and everything to the firefighting equipment that we have now is being looked at.

The review is extensive. We're looking at forest fire technologies to see how the fires kind of react to certain challenges in our efforts to fight fires. As well we're looking at the preparedness of our system in terms of early warning system if you like. We've put certain towers in certain critical areas to make sure that we have people constantly watching for fires.

We're looking at improving the lightning technology. As you know, when there's lightning storms in Saskatchewan, there are literally thousands of lightning strikes. And we're trying to use that information on a constant basis, and this where it goes back to the effort of understanding the technologies associated with forest firefighting.

There's just so many options that are out there. And as always, as always, as we pointed out, it's a forest firefighting program we're quite proud of, but we know we have a lot of work to do. And I would suggest, if people had ideas or comments or suggestions as to how we can improve, we're certainly always open to that.

But clearly I think the stats speak for themselves. We look at the Alberta example, we look at the Manitoba example versus Saskatchewan, and you can indeed see that some of the efforts, the past effort and the future efforts really are a credit to the people that are fighting forest fires in the province of Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Deputy Chair, before I go on I want to pursue the issue of training a little bit.

The member from Moose Jaw North has a burning question, Mr. Minister, that he would like to ask you. And I invited him to join us on this side and pose it to you, but being the shy, retiring type of individual that he is, he declined and invited me to ask it on his behalf.

And his question is, Mr. Minister, and if you could direct the answer to him, what is the difference between a bison and a buffalo?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to point out that the member from Moose Jaw is not shy and he certainly is not going to be retiring soon.

But in reference to your particular question, in terms of the difference between a bison and a buffalo, it's the same animal but bison is Latin and buffalo is English, and there are also sub-species. So if you want specific information we can certainly give that to you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, with respect to the issues around training, and I think you and I both realize how important a component that is in the firefighting issue, has there ever been any thought given to working with farmers in the area of training?

SERM has had on occasion a bit of an adversarial relationship with the farming community over burning. And the concept of perhaps taking a lot of the burning that is done by farmers and using it, particularly in the rough lands, as training for firefighters, this would be able to meet the needs of the farmers in terms of getting the burns done that they need, but it would also provide the department with an opportunity to be able to train their firefighters.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just wanted to make reference in terms of the question about training farmers in reference to fighting fires. I understand that the challenge that we have in SERM is that the majority of our activities in terms of forest firefighting happens in the northern forest fringe of Saskatchewan.

And as you probably can appreciate, when SERM is busy fighting fires in northern Saskatchewan and part of southern Saskatchewan, it's also the busy time of the year for farmers. So both of the resources of SERM and the farmers are stretched very thin, to try and look at training farmers in reference to fighting fires on the farm, if it's for different purposes the farmers need to have training on.

We have had some examples in terms of certain individuals doing some work with the farm community. And there aren't many, I'll certainly admit that. But what we do provide as SERM is we provide some technical advice in terms of some of the behaviours of fire, and we also issue permits with the farming community.

And in one instance in terms of this individual that's stationed around Love, Saskatchewan, he works with SERM. He's also a farmer so he provides advice to different farmers as to how they can do that. So that's some of the extra effort being undertaken by some of the SERM staff.

And again, as I mentioned, it's not a grand plan of any sort but there is a bit of support and advice as you go along. But clearly, when you have the farmers' busy time and SERM's busy time, that the opportunity for training is certainly not there. But what we will say that if you're in Love, and you're a farmer, then certainly there is some help there as well.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, are there certain performance standards that have been developed and are applied with respect to the training and requirements that would need to be met in order for a person to be determined as a qualified firefighter, and to be able to be put in some of these very high-risk situations?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. The obvious answer is yes, we have very specific standards and mandatory training programs for the forest firefighters. The first rule here is that you have to be physically fit, so I obviously wouldn't be a forest firefighter for sure.

But some of the other things that they do, it includes helicopter safety, occupational health and safety, first aid, and that's just your basic first aid. You also have to understand how fire acts; behaviour of fire is also very important. And as well if there's other people out there that have certain proficiency and efficiency levels, then SERM also works with these individuals to give them some greater training for some greater opportunity within the forest firefighting program.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, the last time that we met we talked very briefly about 24-hour firefighting. And I was wondering if perhaps if you could just expand a bit and indicate to me what parts of the firefighting operation are in fact 24 hour? I understand from our previous conversation that there are very severe limitations in terms of the individuals and their ability to be able to fight fires at night. But are there any specific parts of the operation that are run on a 24-hour-a-day basis?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just wanted to point out that the 24-hour exercise is basically only limited to equipment and to kind of evaluate what's happened with the fire.

The only thing that we'll not do is we'll not put men on the fire line at night. There's obvious reasons for that. However, heavy equipment, and I stress some of the Cat lines that we sometimes build to fight fires, management certainly sits around after all the crews are back in camp, and they begin to decide what they're going to do the next day. So some of that work continues on.

We continue with the lightning and the weather watch to make sure that there isn't any drastic changes in the weather. And all that of course impacts how you're going to fight fire the following day.

And to point out that the peak season for firefighting is usually at the end of June. And as you know, at the end of June there is light sometimes as early as 2:30 in the morning, and sometimes as late as 10 o'clock at night. So the night fighting problem isn't so apparent at that time. But clearly the intent here is to not stop fighting fires 24 hours, but to make sure that the men, the men are not out on the fire line at night. That's our primary concern.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, can you tell me how much money the department has spent to date on technology such as infrared equipment? And is there any . . . are there any anticipated expenditures in this coming budget for any of those kinds of technologies?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Deputy Chair, I just wanted to point out in terms of the infrared scans, we do use them. I think we have approximately 12 of them. But we don't have the exact costs of them; but we will certainly forward that information to you very, very quickly. It will not happen by Monday. But to assure you that we do use this particular type of equipment and we will forward all those costs to you as quickly as we can. Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. And I guess after having listened to the last number of questions, I am a little bit puzzled because it appears that the department is spending a significant amount of time and money on training. They have availed themselves of different types of technologies that are available for fighting fires at night.

And I guess my question is, with that kind of investment . . . And I know that your department has received over the years a number of different representations that appear to prove that night firefighting can be very, very effective, particularly with the use of infrared technologies, that sort of thing.

It's interesting to note that a firefighter was quoted not too long ago as saying, after we've got the fire out then they come along and tell us it's out; because while the money has been spent on the technology and on a lot of the other areas, there is a reluctance or an inability to somehow use more effectively this equipment and to find a way of putting people out on the fire line sometimes when they can be the most effective.

As I understand it, a lot of very successful mop-up operations with fires are done at night in other parts of North America and this can be very, very cost-effective in the long term.

And perhaps the minister could indicate to me why it is that we're putting this much investment into all of these areas and yet we seem to be staying away from what would appear to be a very obvious and effective way of fighting fires. And there are some schools of thought out there that it could also save the province millions of dollars if we adopted a 24-hour firefighting system in this province.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. And I guess to respond to the question, I want to go back a number of years ago for the member. Being from northern Saskatchewan, as you can appreciate, I was at times trying to get into forest firefighting when I was younger, because obviously it does pay some of the bills as a young guy growing up in the North and they take practically anybody at that time. So I was certainly one that went forward to sign up.

And the guy that was there at that time was just starting off in his career. And when I walked in there and I said — all 140 pounds of me — saying that I want to be a firefighter, he looked up and down at me and said, at best you're a commissary man. And he did take me.

Now years later he's still working there, and I go visit him and I say, hello, I'm your minister. So I think what I'm trying to point out there is that these guys can make very, very quick assessments as to what they're able to do in forest firefighting. And I think basically as a minister, we are very, very proud of the work that's being done out there.

There are 50 different ways that people will tell you to fight a fire. What I say to you today is that number one, safety is the issue, first of all, for all the forest firefighters out there. And people are very, very well trained to make very quick assessments as to how to fight fires in northern Saskatchewan. And you're right — there's tons of ideas out there on how to improve that and we're always looking for new ideas and new concepts.

However, the underlying theme in terms of our success as a province in relation to fighting fires in northern Saskatchewan, and the rest of the province for that fact, is the stats. And we indicate, you compare Saskatchewan with Alberta and Manitoba and you will see that the investment that we have made in technologies and being prepared for the fire season and trusting the instincts of people that have been there for 20 years, 30 years, and really putting a lot of emphasis on things like early warning systems, like new towers, that indeed it is paying off.

And is there better ways of fighting fire? Obviously there is, and all I can say at this stage of the game is that the stats will certainly speak for themselves. We're always looking at new concepts. We're always open to that. But clearly, safety is a concern in terms of fighting fire at night.

And I'm sure that throughout time the people that are involved with the firefighting program have heard tons of ideas and they have responded to them only to come back to say, well, that didn't work out so well; this system is still the proven system.

So quite frankly, I think overall the bottom line is the number of fires in Saskatchewan, the numbers of successful fights that we have had against fires. And clearly I think it's a credit to people within SERM that have the task — and the rough task, the tough task — of protecting our forest and certainly fighting these fires.

So I think overall that, as Minister of SERM, we're very proud of the effort and we'll continue seeking advice and input from all walks of life on how we can improve this very, very important service.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Mr. Minister, so then am I to assume from that then that there is no consideration being given at this point to establishing any kind of a 24-hour operation even with respect to some very specific parts of firefighting such as mop-up operations, smaller, perhaps more isolated or just starting kinds of fires? Is there no consideration then being given to expanding any kind of 24-hour component to any of those at all?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — As I pointed out earlier, we are looking at those options. The only thing that we are having difficulty with is in terms of putting men out in the safety line. But as I mentioned, the heavy equipment, monitoring the weather, designing an attack strategy for the next day, certainly working with all kinds of different options that are available.

The only thing that we will not do in reference to the 24 exercise is put men out on the fire line. All other activity that you have mentioned, we undertake now and we're looking at ways to improve it.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, I'd like to move just very briefly, if I could, to land use planning. SERM is conducting a number of land use plans in northern Saskatchewan, some of these at a great expense to the taxpayer.

The Pasquia-Porcupine land use plan was the first. And as I understand it, the plans are there to balance the uses of the forest and to reduce conflict amongst users. Public meetings, some of which I have attended in previous capacities, and advisory committees provide input, raise concerns. And that was done in the example of the Porcupine-Pasquia plan to the degree that the result was something over 90 excellent recommendations coming from individuals and communities who were participating.

(1645)

But to date, it seems that very few of the recommendations that benefit the forest environment or the public that participated in these have been implemented. And yet the department is continuing to proceed with these land use plans prior to issuing the forest management licences. There, I think, is some cynicism developing out there particularly in light of some of these recommendations not having been adopted, that these are perhaps little more than window dressing.

And I guess my question I'd like to start with is how much money has been spent on the development of these land use plans, and how much money is it anticipated will be spent on the further development of land use plans in the coming budget? Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just want to point out that SERM has a very, very difficult task in managing and balancing all the different interests that the Saskatchewan people have in relation to the land mass of this great province.

We actually administer approximately 60 per cent of the land mass of the province of Saskatchewan. And you incorporate into that 60 per cent the different demands from all the different interests, special interests, that people want to have access to land. And land is always, always a tough thing to deal with.

And the reason why I point that out is that there has been some incredible work being done by a lot of staff members and some incredible people. Some of them are here today. And really, it's been a balancing act that has been going on for many, many years.

So in saying that we administer 60 per cent of the land mass in the province, you can almost guarantee that there's going to be some groups that will not be happy and some that will certainly be happy.

In terms of the Pasquia-Porcupine Plains or Pasquia-Porcupine land use planning, the 90 or so recommendations that you spoke about, they are now the basis of the forest management agreement with SaskFor MacMillan and that was issued in May, 1999. And we will forward to you the recommendations and the response to the 90 or so issues that we raised with SaskFor.

So I think in relation to the comment that you had, we will forward those across to you, we will forward the response. And to also indicate to you that it's a great day in the province of Saskatchewan when you can incorporate 90 or so of the recommendations into an FMA (forest management agreement) in co-operation with all the different interest groups and in concert with some of the forestry companies that we are working with.

So really it's a tremendous accomplishment, and SERM, as always, will be very diligent in trying to make sure we have that balance that we speak about and to make sure we try and involve as many Saskatchewan residents as we can in the whole land use of this province. Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. I'd like to ask the minister and I guess thank the minister for his offer to forward that information to me. Because the sense that I'm getting in talking to a lot of people who are familiar with this process, and in a lot of cases more familiar with it than I am, the indication I'm getting is that they don't feel that they're actually has been a lot of effort put into the implementation of, as we indicated, what are a very large number of recommendations.

But what is SERM's plans in terms of implementing all of those recommendations? And I know the minister indicated that some of them, and perhaps the majority of them, formed the bases of the FMA (forest management agreement) at this point.

But there were some pretty critical recommendations there that will have some tremendous impact, particularly on that Pasquia-Porcupine forest area. And I would like to get an indication from the minister as to what he feels the time frame for complete implementation will be and what the cost associated with complete implementation would be.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I just want to point out that we have an ongoing advisory committee of local people in reference to the Pasquia-Porcupine land use plan. So the question: is there a time line? The obvious answer is no. We continue consulting and working with people.

And what I want to say is that it's very, very important that as SERM we understand that forest development is going to happen throughout the province of Saskatchewan. We want to work alongside the forestry companies to make sure that they have — I don't want to use the word unfettered — but they certainly have the unfettered access to some of the . . . some of the forest resource that's out there.

And in doing that we have to make sure we take into account some of the other users. And I'll get into detail as to some of the special interest groups that we speak about.

But in terms of the forest itself, the advisory committee of local people is certainly advising us on some of the recreational use of that particular area, some of the outfitting use — which is an exciting industry — some of the ecotourism opportunities associated with the Pasquia-Porcupine area, some of the Aboriginal people that use the area. So there's, there's lists that can go on and on and on. And I would submit to you that perhaps this list is 20 or 30 long.

So the clear objective here of SERM is to try and work with that local advisory committee in balancing all the interests associated with that particular chunk of land, so that the forestry companies can operate in coexistence of them. And that's an incredibly challenging job as you can appreciate.

So we're not taking any of the recommendations lightly. Some of them have been incorporated as I mentioned through the FMAs; others will be incorporated through this advisory committee. But as I mentioned before, we are bound and determined and will work very hard and exhaust all avenues to make sure as many of the users in that particular area have access and have a say as to how things are going to operate in the future.

Now can we make 100 per cent of the people happy? Obviously we can't. But we'll do our very best to alleviate some of their concerns and work with their interests so that we can achieve that balance that I speak so often about. Thank you.

**Mr. Kwiatkowski:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Minister, as the time is running short, perhaps we can revisit some of the issues around this a little later. But if I could move specifically to the forest management plan just for a second. I note that a clause in the forest management plan, the Pasquia forest management plan, goes as follows:

The fundamental intent of this plan is to enhance the social and economic well-being of the people in the communities.

And then further:

That this should be reflected in all arrangements and dealings between the partnership and its contractors and subcontractors.

Now in light of that, there have been some very negative developments particularly in the Hudson Bay area, relating to contractors over the course of the last number of months.

Weyerhaeuser has advised that at least 14 and perhaps even more contractors, some of them with over 20 years of logging experience in this area, that they've only got one year left on their contract. There are others that have at least five.

The total employees for these small contracts, 12 contractors, is well in excess of 100 employees. If these contractors are forced out of business, they are going to be probably bankrupt, but the other thing is their recovery is going to be very difficult as well. Most of these are dealing with older, smaller equipment, and in order to try and get that . . . getting any returns back from that on the market, it's going to be very, very difficult.

So under the agreement that was signed May 14 of 1999, the company did agree to treat these contractors as fairly and honestly as they could. And in some cases there are going to be some pretty devastating consequences. So one of the contractors that is affected here just very recently invested over a quarter of a million dollars in equipment, and that could all end up being lost.

Could you, Mr. Minister, indicate to me: will the department be looking at this situation? And given the clause in terms of social

economic benefit to the community, how will they be interpreting what Weyerhaeuser is doing?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Just to point out that it's often very sad to hear when people are losing their jobs. And it's something that we don't want to see happen often.

What I will say is that from the environmental prospective in reference to SaskFor, we are always diligent in making sure that SERM does indeed watch from the environmental prospective that they're harvesting these forests in the proper fashion.

Secondly is that we are working with, you know, with the Weyerhaeuser group to make sure that some of these impacts are certainly not drastic and that they're . . . are looking at the whole package now.

But I will say is that, as always, from the economic point of view, that it's always a choice of the companies that are operating in this area to look at these issues. We strongly encourage them to minimize some of the layoffs, and it's always a sad day in Saskatchewan to see that happen.

But I can assure you that we'll do all we can from the environmental protection point of view to make sure it's done properly and to strongly encourage companies to minimize job losses.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:02 p.m.