

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDING

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to stand in the House on behalf of the citizens of Gull Lake and area to present a petition requesting that the government reduce fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. 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.

I so present.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure also to rise today on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens particularly in the areas of Cudworth and Saskatoon who would like to see improved cellular telephone services. And their 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 signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon and Cudworth.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of citizens concerned about the increasing cost 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 my community of Melfort but also from Saskatoon, Naicam, and Tisdale.

I so present.

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, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people of Cut Knife and Neilburg.

I so present.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand today to present a petition on behalf of citizens concerned about the high cost of fuel. And the prayer reads as follows:

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

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this is signed by residents of Swift Current; Virden, Manitoba; Preeceville, Saskatchewan; and even places in Ontario.

I so present. Thank you.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise on behalf of people from Swift Current, and actually a few other locales concerned about 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 as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Swift Current, from Regina, and Cabri.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise today to present a petition for citizens of Saskatchewan who are concerned about the high price of fuel. And the prayer reads:

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

And I present this on behalf of citizens from Swift Current and Lucky Lake.

Mr. Weekes: — I also would like to read a petition concerning the high fuel tax:

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

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

From the good people of Swift Current.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition about concern with the high fuel tax.

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

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

Signatures are from Saskatoon, Delisle, Davidson, and Bladworth.

I so present.

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to read a petition of citizens concerned about the high price of fuel. The prayer reads:

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

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

The petitioners are from Swift Current; Prince Albert; Regina; Stewart Valley; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Peace River, Alberta; and Thunder Bay, Ontario.

I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I rise to bring a petition to your attention to stop municipal reserve account confiscation. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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 every pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good people of the rural municipality of Paddockwood, No. 520.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the federal and provincial governments to immediately reduce fuel taxes

by 10 cents a litre, cost shared by both levels of government.

And the petitioners are from the good cities of Shell Lake, Leask, and Langham.

I so present.

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

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

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

Signed by individuals from Moose Jaw, Lumsden, Chaplin, and Mortlach.

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;

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

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING, SELECT AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Estimates

The Deputy Clerk: — Mr. Addley, Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates presents the first report of the said committee which is as follows.

The committee considered estimates for the Legislative Assembly and adopted resolutions with respect to the Provincial Auditor, the Ombudsman and Children's Advocate, Information and Privacy Commissioner, Conflict of Interest Commissioner, and for the Legislative Assembly.

And further, your committee recommends that upon concurrence of its report by the Assembly, the sums as reported and approved shall be included in the next Appropriation Bill for consideration by the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Watrous:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Estimates be now concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 51 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Labour: with regard to the recent certification of Doepker Industries of Anaheim, Saskatchewan, how many employees of this company signed certification cards; and what percentage of the total workforce at this company at the time of certification was this?

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 51 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: how many people in the Saskatchewan Health system currently treated for a Nephrotic Syndrome and Focal S. Glommeriosiolous; how many of these people receive all or part of their treatment in another jurisdiction?

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 51 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: please provide detailed ambulance logs for the month of April showing the number of trips made to St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago I was very privileged to be able to introduce in this legislature, students from the Lakeridge School. Today, I would like to introduce students from the Lakeview School.

Now these students, as you will know, are probably some of the very best students in one of the very best schools in the very best constituency in the absolutely most wonderful city in the best province in the best country in the world.

There are 62 students from Lakeview School accompanied by their teachers: Ms. Block, Mme. Elbardouh, and Ms. Widenmaier. They are also accompanied by chaperones: Ms. Korolis, Ms. Yee, Ms. Davies, Ms. Turton, and one very special chaperone, Ms. Metz, who is related to one very special person in this legislature. Ms. Metz's sister sits as the member for Watrous constituency. Her nephew is also here today and I would like everyone to welcome the Lakeview students to this legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would

like to . . . It's quite an honour to introduce the very best school chaperon, which is my sister, and the very best little nephew, Adam Metz. It's too bad they didn't have the very best representative for the province.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wakefield: — Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, 32 students from the Lashburn High School in my constituency in Lashburn. Mr. Speaker, they're sitting in the east gallery and I would, I would welcome them and highlight the fact that it is a very long trip from Lashburn to Regina and we appreciate their attendance here.

And I'd like to also welcome teachers Tracy Doering and Mary Fraser. Welcome to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you in the west gallery — we have 19 students from Pelican Narrows in northern Saskatchewan; along with 19 students are teachers Shaunna Currie, Linda Linklater, Delores Como, and chaperone Alphonse Dorion.

In Cree, Mr. Speaker, a special welcome and I will say, Tawaw Opawigischiguneeek. Opawigischiguneeek is the name of Pelican Narrows. It is actually, in Cree, means the narrows of fear, in reference to a famous battle that took place years and years ago.

Mr. Speaker, it's a tremendous pleasure to see the northern students who have travelled over 400 miles to come and visit Regina. When I was talking to them, of course, they corrected me when I looked at my reports and it said grade 4 to 6 and one of them emphasized they were actually grade 3 to 5 she told me. Now they travelled along to Regina. I asked them how many had their first trip to Regina? About two-thirds of them had their first trip to Regina.

I would ask all members to please welcome the students and the teachers and the chaperone from Pelican Narrows: tawaw, Opawigischiguneeek.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Child Find Day

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today in recognition of Child Find Day.

Mr. Speaker, the month of May has been declared Green Ribbon of Hope Month. There are many important causes that we must all be aware of, Mr. Speaker, but I cannot think of a cause that is more important than reuniting a missing child with their family.

Mr. Speaker, last year in Canada over 50,000 children were reported missing. And those of us in this Assembly who have raised children recognize that there is not a more fear-filled

experience than not knowing where your child is.

Mr. Speaker, today we wear green ribbons as a symbol of many things. We wear the ribbon to raise awareness of the growing problem of missing children, we wear them as a symbol of hope for those whose precious children are missing, and finally we wear these ribbons as a reminder to pray for these children — pray that they are safe from harm's way and that they will one day return home.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also take this opportunity to commend Child Find Saskatchewan on all of their hard work and dedication in assisting families to search for their missing children. Without the commitment from members of this organization, many missing children would be forgotten and just become a statistic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Child Find Saskatchewan

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Child Find Saskatchewan in partnership with Child Find Canada is holding its ninth annual Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. The campaign which began earlier this month continues throughout May.

Each year in Canada police departments receive thousands of reports of missing children who are classified as runaways or the victims of parental or stranger abductions.

In 1986 the Solicitor General of Canada declared May 25 to be Missing Children's Day in Canada. The Green Ribbon of Hope campaign which runs for the entire month of May, is designed to draw public awareness to the issue of missing children in Canada.

The Green Ribbon of Hope is recognized as a symbol to remember missing children and to seek their safe return. It is also used as an expression of our thoughts for missing children, their families, and friends.

Proceeds generated by the green ribbon campaign will enable Child Find to continue their mandate to reduce the incidence of missing children through education, prevention, and local programs.

I'm sure all members will join me in supporting the efforts of the Green Ribbon of Hope campaign.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Monument to Honour Canadian Soldiers

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in the House to make all members aware of a very important event. At this time, even as this House is sitting, the remains of an Unknown Soldier are being received by Ottawa from Vimy Ridge in France.

This weekend these remains will be laid to rest at the Tomb of

the Unknown Soldier, a new monument erected in honour of the more than 100,000 Canadian soldiers killed in the 20th century wars. This monument will serve as a tribute to the great sacrifices that Canadian soldiers have made.

It is important to note that the soil from provinces across Canada was sent to Ottawa to be used as part of this monument. Here in Saskatchewan, soil was lifted from the grounds of the war memorial located near the legislature.

As a young province Saskatchewan was proud and honoured to join in the fight for peace and freedom. Even today many of our regiments are still being recognized and are well respected throughout the world. Who can forget the South Saskatchewan Regina Regiment or the Royal Regina Rifles, just to name two.

As one who's had members of a family serve in one of the wars, I know how important it is to recognize the significance of events such as this.

As Canadians we must all be united in our continuing quest for peace. Our country was built on the principle of peace and the value of freedom. We must not forget those who fought so valiantly to protect and preserve this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Good News for Saskatchewan Farmers

Mr. Wartman: — A little update, Mr. Speaker. The members on this side of the House would like to congratulate Saskatchewan farmers on seeding more than 80 per cent of this year's crop. This is well ahead of the five-year average of 43 per cent and last year's progress of 28 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to update the House on the Canada-Saskatchewan adjustment payment activities.

Of the applications that were mailed out on April 13, 2000, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance has received back from farmers about 44,000 applications, and of those, has processed just over 42,000.

This means, Mr. Speaker, that SCIC (Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation) has paid out approximately 95 per cent of the applications they received back.

To date, just over \$175 million has been paid out to Saskatchewan farmers to help with this spring's seeding. This \$175 million is in addition to the \$40 million in tax cuts on farm fuel and education land tax, \$300 million available under the AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program, and \$400 million available under the spring credit advance program.

Mr. Speaker, the good news is that these programs that have been put in place as a lifeline for seeding the 2000 crop are working. Saskatchewan farmers have now seeded more than 80 per cent of the 2000 crop, which is ahead of last year and the five-year average.

Congratulations and best wishes to everyone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Swift Current Achievement in Business Excellence Awards

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Swift Current business community has many things going for it. It has a collective determination to successfully compete in a free market. It has diversified with strong retail, service, and manufacturing sectors, and its compassion for the community knows no bounds.

And, Mr. Speaker, it can also brag of the strongest business associations in our province — the Swift Current Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Speaker, last week I had the privilege of attending the second annual SCABEX (Swift Current Achievement in Business Excellence) awards, and I can assure that all of the qualities that I have mentioned above were clearly on display during those business excellence awards. All sectors of our business community were also represented in the award-winning categories.

Congratulations to 7th Heaven Hair Design for property appearance, Stark & Marsh for community involvement, Kurt's Take Out & Catering service for the heritage award. The new business award went to Legault Manufacturing. The customer service award, Mr. Speaker, resulted in a tie: the Pharmasave and Sentiments Gifts & Crafts.

And, Mr. Speaker, the business of the year in Swift Current last year was awarded to National Manufacturing. A hearty congratulations to Bill Medland and all of his staff at National Manufacturing, one of our country's largest fastener manufacturers. They successfully compete around the globe, Mr. Speaker, with both American and Far East firms.

And congratulations as well to all the businesses who were nominated and to the Swift Current Chamber of Commerce for the second annual SCABEX awards.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Weyburn Area Businesses

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan. It seems like we are always bringing good news into the House about the Saskatchewan economy and the Saskatchewan people.

Well here's another good bit of news, right from the backyards of the members of Weyburn-Big Muddy and Estevan. In the May 17 edition of the *Weyburn Review*, the title, "Rural business affected by seeding and oil activities: Sales average to above-average" appears.

The first paragraph goes on to say that businesses in the region surrounding Weyburn report that their activities have been average to above average compared to last year. This article credits seeding activities and a resurgence in the oil industry as contributing factors.

When business people in the area were interviewed for the article, they stated that they have noticed a definite difference in business compared to last year. One business person stated that:

It's been busy all winter, much better than last year. If I

had to compare it to a year ago, it's been substantially busier.

So much for gloom and doom, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatchewan economy is doing well. Most people in this province know that the sky is not falling, Mr. Speaker. They look at the positive things in our province, unless your name is Chicken Little of course, or you are a member of the Saskatchewan Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Highway Maintenance

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in this Assembly today to talk about an important improvement to the Arm River constituency. The recent announcement by the Minister of Highways to resurface Highway 15 from Kenaston approximately 20 kilometres west is welcome news, Mr. Speaker.

This stretch is long overdue for repair and has long been recognized as a hazard to motorists. It is good to see that this government has finally listened to my repeated requests that something be done to this maze of potholes and broken surface.

Mr. Speaker, the project is due for completion in mid-July and will employ about 45 people. I must remind the Minister of Highways that I've several other highways in my constituency that are in bad shape or worse, such as Highway 19 and Highway 44. I would hope the minister would strongly consider these and other Saskatchewan highways as a way to improve employment across Saskatchewan and providing safer highways.

Mr. Speaker, it is simply a matter of priorities as to whether or not our highway infrastructure is improved. These better highways will ensure economic benefit and employment and traffic safety. I remain strongly committed to a better highway system in my constituency, and for this province.

With the Highway 15 project underway the residents of Arm River can at least see a beginning to better a highway system. I will continue to press for larger commitment from this government to improve our provincial infrastructure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Teachers' Collective Agreement

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education. School teachers across this province have now rejected the tentative provincial collective agreement. Their federation will be meeting to determine whether or not they're going to go back to the bargaining table.

Teachers know this NDP (New Democratic Party) government has underfunded the education system in this province. They have to live with the results daily. They know school boards have had to pass on their budget shortfalls to taxpayers. So the teachers are going to test your mettle.

Mr. Minister, in light of the rejection of the proposed settlement, what is your next step in reaching a new contract with Saskatchewan school teachers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the member is correct that the tentative agreement was not ratified by 56 per cent.

Obviously we're disappointed. We recognize that negotiations have been going on since October; that many, many items have been negotiated and agreed to. Certainly the conciliation report where the member from the teachers' federation was an economist from the Canadian Teachers' Federation, all put forward unanimous endorsement of that conciliation board report, which was included in the tentative agreement.

We believe that 7.2 per cent over two years was a fair package — obviously teachers do not believe that. And what we're waiting to do now is to hear from the teachers' federation, and I'm hopeful that we can resume negotiations as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of people waiting for a decision on the teachers' contract. Teachers are questioning the government's commitment to education. And the school boards are holding their breath because they've already set their mill rate for the year, and they don't know what this final contract's effect will have on them.

Parents and students are wondering if the future holds strike action by the teachers. They are all at the mercy of you and your NDP government.

So now we're going to wait and see what your Liberal influence really has on the coalition caucus.

Mr. Minister, the teachers have rejected a 7.2 per cent contract proposal. Are you willing to up the ante in light of the settlements imposed by SaskPower workers and the nurses recently? And if so, how much?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly we believe in collective bargaining on this side. We believe that the process should occur at the table; that the government trustees' side and the teachers' side have been negotiating in good faith, and we're hopeful that this will continue.

We also recognize that funding is an issue. Certainly funding is something that we've looked at.

But we also recognize that in our budget we put forward 28.5 million, budget over budget — 18.5 million on the foundation operating grant. And we recognize that the members opposite had said that they would provide funding based on inflation. Our funding is two to three times the rate of inflation, and it's more than doubled over the last three to four years.

So what does that mean when they ask a question about what we would do? Well, we know what they would do — they would provide no funding for teachers or education in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association has released the 2000 mill rate set by school districts across this province. Out of 53 rural school divisions, 32 raised the mill rate. Out of 17 town and district divisions, 9 raised the mill rate. And out of 22 urban school districts, 16 have already raised the mill rate.

Mr. Minister, these increases do not include the final cost of the new contract for the teachers. Mr. Minister, school boards cannot go back to the ratepayers now. That deadline was May 5.

Who is going to pay for the teachers' settlement when it's finally reached?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly we recognize that school divisions have set their mill rates. But I think the members opposite — and I've answered this question on several occasions — don't understand the foundation operating grant.

And we must, we must recognize that it is an equalization formula. And the commitment from this government was to provide money in excess of any negotiated teachers' contract. And we will do that.

What we have also said though is that some school divisions, because of high assessments . . . and to give an example. Weyburn Central, which has an assessment of 730,000 per student, has significant resources within its own jurisdiction to fund its education system. So the money from the provincial government is an equalization formula. And the fact of the matter is that the external review committee, which included trustees, SASBO (Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials), teachers' federation, etc., agreed that the money should go into the pool on the foundation operating grant, not the way they would have it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, there are 35 school divisions in this province are getting less money from the government this year than they did last year. The minister claims there is lots of money for education in the provincial budget, but that rings as false as his comments on no-fault insurance last week.

We've all seen the effects of the budget of this year. Basically it was across the board increase for every taxpayer in this province. And we still don't have the teachers' contract settled yet. Mr. Minister, you've got a problem.

School boards have their fiscal belt as tight as possible. Their only other recourse is going to be to cut programs or to fire teachers.

School teachers are facing large class loads, classroom numbers, added responsibility, and no contract. And provincial taxpayers have had enough taxes and enough of you.

Mr. Minister, how are you going to meet the needs of the education system within the constraints of this provincial budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I've itemized that the foundation operating grant is an equalization formula and that the external review committee which presented its report this past February agreed that any increases by the provincial government to the foundation operating grant would be based on an equalization formula.

But I remind the members, I remind the members opposite that their program in the last election, their platform provided no funding. And the pamphlet from the Education critic did not even mention education.

Now the fact of the matter is we have their cousins in Ontario and Nova Scotia, and let me just read some things from *The Toronto Star* here:

Harris Tories heading for war with teachers.

Hundreds of Nova Scotia teachers lose jobs because their provincial government provided no new funding.

Our provincial government increased funding by \$18.5 million.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskEnergy Office Accommodation

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last answer just talked about so-called cousins. Well I would suggest that individual should realize he has no brothers or sisters left in his party anywhere in this province.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for SaskEnergy. Just the other day, Mr. Speaker, we learned that SaskEnergy customers will likely face another huge rate hike this fall. Meanwhile, what are SaskEnergy executives doing to control their own internal costs, Mr. Speaker? They're shopping around for more expensive office space in downtown Regina.

Mr. Minister, we understand that SaskEnergy is very close to approving a move to the Wascana Energy building. Some of the current tenants in the Wascana building have already received their notices to vacate to make room.

Mr. Minister, will SaskEnergy be relocating its head office to the Wascana Energy building?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to receive a question from that member about SaskEnergy that has nothing

to do with pipelines.

Basically SaskEnergy, last summer, put out a public request last July, about 10 months ago, saying that in the year 2002 they will be looking for corporate office space. And they made a request for proposals. That's a process that takes a long time and that's why they started three years before the end of their lease. They're still in that process and at this point there's nothing further to report. But the process will continue like it always does, in a fair, consistent manner. And that's what's going on.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well he talked a bit about process and I think there's a few more things we need to know and that he needs to report.

Mr. Speaker, we're wondering, why is it necessary to move in the first place? SaskEnergy has been in its current location for several years now. Why not just stay there? The move alone is going to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Why is that necessary?

Mr. Minister, how much will it cost to relocate SaskEnergy's entire head office to the new location? Why can't you just stay where you are right now?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this is a process that involves all of the people who have space available making proposals to this corporation, and I assume that would include the existing space. Nothing has been finalized at this point.

What I would say though is that one of the difficulties that we have had as a government over the last number of years, in fact since 1991, is sorting out all of the leases that the members opposite entered into. And we are in a situation where we don't want to be stuck with any of the kinds of things that we had in 1991.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Interesting comment about his problem that he had with sorting out leases. So part of his solution is to look for the most expensive lease in the city. Rather strange. Very troubling, Mr. Minister. At a time when SaskEnergy rates are on the rise, SaskEnergy executives are moving into some of the most premium office space in Regina. Obviously this is going to cost more than they're paying right now.

Mr. Minister, will you table the document to show how much SaskEnergy is currently paying for office space, and how much they will be paying once they move into the Wascana Energy building?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this is a process that takes some time and eventually there will be appropriate times to report all of the things that are being talked

about. But the importance is that we do this in a way where we look for requests broadly and not end up with some of the difficulties that we had from earlier this last decade.

And so what I would say is, that we in the Crown sector and especially in SaskEnergy are very proud of the fact that we're providing natural gas for the consumers in Saskatchewan, both residential and industrial, at rates which are the lowest in the country this year. We're looking at dealing with the sharp spike in prices for next year, but we have some great deal of confidence in the people who are working on this that they will both provide good natural gas prices and a fair and efficient system of managing it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister speaks of difficulties, well I'll tell you who's having difficulties. It's the people in this particular province.

SaskEnergy rates just went up and they're going to go up again this fall. You're creating most of the difficulties in this particular province.

And now we learn that Ron Clark and his boys are shopping around for more expensive office space. You'd think that would bother them a little bit, Mr. Speaker. But I'm sure they'll get over it as they relax in the sauna or work out in the state-of-the-art fitness room, Mr. Speaker, at the Wascana Energy building.

Mr. Speaker, the people at SaskEnergy will be paid well enough that I'm sure they could afford a membership at the Y. I don't think taxpayers should be paying to make sure they get a workout room and a sauna.

Mr. Minister, what's wrong with the current place where SaskEnergy is at? Why do they have to move to the new building?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the request for proposals for the initial process started almost a year ago. It's an ongoing process. All of these various factors are involved in the review of what decisions are made. At this stage they're still in the final parts of this process. At the appropriate time the results will be laid out.

I think the important thing to acknowledge is that we need to end up with the best, fairest administration of how these companies work. And that's what we seek to do. That will include reviewing all of the options that are available, because that's the best way to do business.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well maybe we should discuss the best way to do business. Those bids for the new location that he wants to move his company to were publicly requested. Therefore, Mr. Minister, will you table the proposals that you received?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the process that's arranged for setting all of this out proceeds in a fashion that includes the review of all of the information, and at the appropriate times in that process, whatever information that is supposed to be publicly available will be publicly available.

This is something that we have instituted as a government to deal with many of the problems that we inherited. And we're pleased to say that we've been able to develop processes that are fair to all of the people in the province in a way that allows us to provide the best for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, SaskEnergy's current home is moderate office space. Wascana Energy building, Mr. Speaker, is premium office space. Clearly it's going to cost a lot more money.

You're looking for about 130,000 square feet of space. If that extra cost was just \$10 a square foot more, that's \$1.3 million a year, Mr. Speaker; 10-year contract, that's \$13 million. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker, just so Ron Clark can sit in a sauna an open up his pores.

Mr. Minister, how much more will it cost SaskEnergy to move into the Wascana building? Will you table the current contract and the new contract so we can see what the difference really is?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, it always surprises me when the members opposite come out and attack competition. That's what a request for a proposal is, competition. What you have is a situation where you ask people to provide results. So I just don't understand what . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I was unable to hear the response.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the reason that we have been involved in providing the process that we have around office space is to deal with the kinds of issues that we inherited when we took over government.

We don't want to get in that kind of a mess again. And what we do want to have is a situation where the process will provide the kind of place that we need for this business.

Our goal is to provide safe, reliable natural gas for the people of Saskatchewan. Through SaskEnergy we're going to continue to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Safety of Water Supply

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Minister, people across this country are alarmed about the situation in Walkerton, Ontario. So far there have been five people die after the town's water supply became contaminated

with E. coli bacteria. Ten people are still in critical condition, and hundreds of people have been treated for symptoms.

Mr. Speaker, it has been confirmed today that the local treatment plant in Ontario knew of the contamination several days before they notified the public.

Mr. Minister, what testing and reporting procedure does the provincial government have in place to monitor the water quality and ensure that a Saskatchewan community does not have the same experience that has happened in Walkerton, Ontario?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan has a very good tracking system and a follow-up system. Municipalities are required by Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management to submit water samples to the provincial laboratory on a routine basis for testing. If the results have higher than acceptable levels of contamination, repeat testing is done as soon as possible. And SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) notifies the municipality and the local medical health officer if the repeat results are positive. And an appropriate action is initiated immediately, such as a boiling water advisory to the communities.

And SERM is also developing a mandatory program for water system operator certification that will be introduced this spring to enhance the current voluntary system of certification and provide more public assurance of a safe drinking water supply.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, this outbreak follows recent reports that water quality in Saskatchewan are below acceptable levels.

In 1999, 306 out of 528 municipal treatment plants tested positive for bacteria. Hans Peterson of the Safe Drinking Water Foundation in Saskatoon says overall drinking water quality in this province is quite poor. And he is deeply concerned about how water is being used and treated in Saskatchewan communities.

In fact the Saskatchewan Water Corp recently presented a study saying that 99 per cent of tested drinking water sources for individual use would fail one or more criteria set out in the Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines. Madam Minister, why are provincial drinking water sources failing common tests, and what are you doing about it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — As I said before, we do have a process in place that municipalities follow, and we do have follow-up and we do have tracking. And more detail on the actual process is when we do have positive results that show higher than normal contaminates, the testing is redone.

And then the municipality is sent back the positive results and the medical health officer gets involved. Our provincial medical health officer says we do have the lowest rates in the country. And we keep very current on our water testing. Each

municipality is mandated to follow those protocols and they do so, with the provincial lab.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that they're so busy looking at processes that they're failing to look at the reports. Mr. Speaker, we may not have suffered an outbreak of E. coli in Saskatchewan so far, but there are other health concerns that officials directly attribute to poor water quality.

The Safe Drinking Water Foundation believes unsafe drinking water is tied to the fact that Saskatchewan's infant mortality rate is twice as high as other provinces, and 50 per cent higher than the national average.

It is the responsibility of local communities and health districts to deliver and monitor the water in small towns. But that means quality varies widely across the province, and so may health symptoms caused by poor water.

Madam Minister, what is your government doing to monitor health problems that may be attributed to areas where drinking water is below standard?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, I'll repeat my answer from the last two times the question was asked.

We do have a very strong set of protocols that the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management and Sask Health and the districts participate in. And if there are . . . we do look at a case by case, risk-management approach and look at things like treatment, distribution systems, the water source, the connections. All those sorts of things are looked at in detail, and then we do follow the process.

If there are positive results coming back from the provincial lab, then the municipality is notified of that, the medical . . . local medical health officer is notified, and then certain processes do kick into place, like the boiling water advisory, and continuing on depending what the bacteria or what the contaminant is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister keeps giving the same answer for a different question, and I think that's where the problem begins.

Mr. Speaker, you have two government, two government departments overseeing water quality in this province. SERM says if you have a water system that is failing a bacteria test, you shouldn't panic. But what about over the long term — should you panic then?

In this province the last year about 60 per cent of water treatment plants failed bacteria tests. That doesn't sound like a very good record to me.

Sask Health says that they may be sure water quality meets provincial objectives. But do those objectives include passing

bacterial tests? Sask Health has also downplayed the seriousness of the number of water treatment plants that have failed bacteria tests.

Does your government have any plans to ensure safe quality, healthy drinking water for the rest of Saskatchewan people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. None of us are interested in panicking. What I have said is that Saskatchewan has a very good tracking system and follow-up.

Each municipality is . . . has the protocols that they should follow. Our medical health officers have protocols that they should follow. And people should be reassured that we are tracking this system and are keeping good watch on what is in our water and where it is and what the problems are and doing our best to fix them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding for Highway Maintenance

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Highways. Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan Party members are receiving ever escalating numbers of calls to their offices concerning the deplorable state of Saskatchewan highways. Your government simply isn't doing enough to ensure our highways are safe to drive on.

Last week the Canadian Taxpayers Federation released a nation-wide study comparing the amount each province collected in gas tax to the amount each province spent on fixing highways. And where did Saskatchewan rank? We ranked dead last.

Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan highways are a disaster. How can you say you are addressing the problem when the study shows that we're in dead last?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise the House and to inform the member that this year we'll be spending more than 80 per cent of the net revenue we take in from gas tax on the roads and highways, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — I can report to the House and inform the member, Mr. Speaker, that this year we'll be spending the highest amount ever on our roads and highways in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That's as a result of the budget that the members opposite voted against, Mr. Speaker. They voted against the investment in roads and highways that we know we have to make in this province.

And not only that, Mr. Speaker, what have they been calling

for? They've been calling for less money spent on roads and highways in the province because, Mr. Speaker, they've been calling for a reduction in funds available to fix the roads and highways. We're going to continue with the job of building the highway system, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

SaskPower and ATCO Power Partnership

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to announce an innovative new partnership that will generate electricity and jobs for the people of Saskatchewan and business opportunities within our Crown sector.

Mr. Speaker, SaskPower's development arm, SaskPower International, and ATCO Power of Alberta will be developing a world-class cogeneration facility in Saskatchewan. It will be built at the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan's Cory mine near Saskatoon.

SaskPower will produce . . . will purchase the electricity generated at the plant, while the Potash Corporation will use the resulting steam to help meet their energy requirements at the Cory mine. The plant will add 228 megawatts to Saskatchewan's power supply, Mr. Speaker, enabling SaskPower to help meet the future energy needs of our province and providing opportunities for export sales.

SaskPower's top priority is delivering safe, reliable, cost-effective power to the people of Saskatchewan and the corporation is committed to the highest standards of due diligence in developing new sources of supply.

This proposal, together with the upgrading of the Queen Elizabeth power station announced last week indicate the solid long-range planning that SaskPower has undertaken to meet the province's energy needs in the coming years. This cogeneration project, Mr. Speaker, is driven by a solid business case that offers both environmental and economic benefits to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we know that cogeneration is a very cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to generate electricity. Cogeneration captures waste heat from the generation process and uses that heat to produce steam for industrial use. Through this process, Mr. Speaker, less fuel is burned to generate electricity and the fuel that is burned is used more completely. These two factors reduce the volume of greenhouse gases vented to the atmosphere.

In addition to the environmental advantages, this cogeneration project offers important business benefits. By partnering with industry to build this cogeneration facility, SaskPower is delivering on its commitment to serve customers while sharing capital costs and generating economic spinoffs for the province. The Saskatchewan economy will benefit from an estimated 220 person years of work to build this facility as well as the work associated with its ongoing operation.

On a business level, this project also speaks to the value of the relationship between SaskPower and its subsidiary, SaskPower International. As the corporation's development arm, SaskPower International works to diversify and grow SaskPower's revenues. In keeping with its commitment to due diligence, SaskPower International has selected a project partner with impeccable credentials.

ATCO Power is an experienced developer of cogeneration projects. Together, both SaskPower International and ATCO worked diligently to determine the optimum site for this project. I'm sure my learned colleagues across the floor will agree with me, Mr. Speaker, when I say SaskPower International has taken the initiative to develop a world-class cogeneration project that we in Saskatchewan can be proud of.

This project, Mr. Speaker, is a first step in establishing what is hoped will become a long-term relationship between SaskPower International and ATCO. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all my colleagues will agree that this project is also a powerful example of how government and private sector can work together to invest in our province and achieve business success.

I congratulate all those involved on a collaborative effort and will watch with great interest as construction gets underway on the project, which is targeted for completion by November, 2002. I commend SaskPower and SaskPower International for their ongoing efforts on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan and wish you every future success in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well in the last decade or two, I think the concept of cogen has become more popular. I think it is something that everyone should be looking at. It's just highly unfortunate that it's taken this government this long to come up with the first two announcements on cogen.

For years, for decades, there's been all sorts of ideas and proposals put forward to the NDP government in this particular province on cogen. And time after time after time, they've turned those down. So it's good to see that they've finally seen a glimmer of light in this particular area and are now considering some cogen possibilities.

The other thing that's of concern in the statement that was just made, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that as they looked for groups to cogen with and take care of the project, they couldn't find anyone in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, to do the work for them. They had to look out of province.

And I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, the reason for that is that this NDP government in the past years has been so negative about cogen that all the cogeneration people essentially have left this province and they had to go looking outside of Saskatchewan to do that.

So the cogeneration concept is a great concept. This government is to be commended that they finally decided to take a step. It's too bad it's 10 years late. It's too bad they've chased out a lot of the other developers in that area who had to

go elsewhere to look for work and to look for other governments that were more receptive to cogeneration.

But we are looking forward to what's happening. I think the people of Saskatchewan are going to be pleased to know that there's going to be a larger supply of locally produced electricity in the province. That's good as well.

And on a last positive note, Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the statement that was made and I'd like to read that from the statement I've given, the statement the minister made where he says, I'll leave the technical aspects of cogeneration to the experts.

Mr. Speaker, that's just good news. We wouldn't want to hear about big parts and small parts again on how this cogeneration is going to work. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 71 — The Health Districts Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 71, The Health Districts 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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — Question no. 144 and no. 145 converted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 50 – The Interpretation Amendment Act, 2000 /Loi de 2000 modifiant la Loi d'interprétation de 1995

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of The Interpretation Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, The Interpretation Act, 1995 establishes rules that apply to the interpretation and application of all other Acts and regulations. It's being amended to clarify and codify the law respecting the ability of a minister to exercise powers and duties through his or her officials.

Mr. Speaker, the law respecting a minister's ability to carry out powers and duties through his or her officials is currently found in both The Interpretation Act, 1995 and the common law. Mr. Speaker, the 1995 Act for example expressly provides that a minister's powers, other than the power to make regulations, may be carried out by a deputy minister.

However, the common law, Mr. Speaker, has two inconsistent themes. In some cases the courts have acknowledged that the minister's responsibility is not to actually perform every duty imposed on him or her by the law, but to be responsible to the legislature for insuring that they are done properly. However, in other cases the courts have suggested that in naming the minister in the Act, the legislature has chosen him or her as the appropriate person to carry out the function and the power or duty cannot be delegated in the absence of express authority to do so.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment codifies the first theme. It will confirm the ability of all ministers to carry out their duties through appropriate departmental officials. It'll also confirm that ministers are responsible to insure that legislative duties are carried out by authorized and qualified persons.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment will eliminate the need for sub-delegation provisions in other legislation and accordingly, express powers of delegation currently found in some Acts and regulations will be consequentially repealed or amended in this Act and its companion Act, The Interpretation Act Consequential Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act to amend The Interpretation Act, 1995 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Bill in some ways codifies and in other ways changes a long-standing parliamentary tradition. The minister, when carrying out the duties of the minister in relationship to the Acts under that minister's control, is normally expected to perform those duties and has been delegating authority to the deputy minister and down the chain of command.

But as the minister said, in some cases the courts direct that those duties will be carried out by the minister in some cases that relate directly to that portfolio. And the minister is now going to change that with this particular Act so that a qualified person, the deputy minister or so forth down the line, may carry out any and all of those duties.

Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the minister didn't comment on on this particular Act was who is going to be responsible. In the changes that have happened in the last eight years, eight and a half years since this government has been in power, we have seen more and more of the ministers not accepting responsibility. The fact is the government refuses to accept responsibility for any of their actions for the last eight and a half years.

Here we're going to see in this particular Act the authority to delegate further responsibilities, further actions — not responsibilities — further actions within the departments. But in no place, Mr. Speaker, does it talk about responsibility — accepting responsibility for the actions carried out by that department or by that minister's delegate.

And we believe that's a serious failing, Mr. Speaker, that this government has practised to the nth degree — the denial of

responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill needs to be looked at to determine exactly what ramifications it's going to have on the parliamentary process and on the acceptance of responsibility by the ministers of the Crown. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

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

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — I'd like leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, over on your gallery, Speaker's gallery, I noticed that there's a special visitor to the legislature. Mr. Speaker, that happens — and all members — that happens to be Chief Pelletier from Cowessess. And along with Chief Pelletier is the young Vice-Chief there, Joey Pelletier. And as well, we have Eddie Charles, a nephew. Let's have all the members please welcome them to the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 51 — The Interpretation Act Consequential Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to move second reading of The Interpretation Act Consequential Amendment Act, 2000. The interpretation Act, 2000, Mr. Speaker, that I've just introduced introduces amendments that clarify and codify the law respecting the ability of the minister to exercise powers and duties through his or her officials.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments eliminate the need for subdelegation provisions in other legislation. Accordingly, express powers of delegation currently found in some Acts and regulations will be consequentially repealed or amended by this Act.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading of An Act to make consequential amendments arising from the enactment of The Interpretation Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a corollary piece of legislation with Bill No. 50, therefore the same comments, Mr. Speaker, apply. There is a need for the government to accept responsibilities for its actions. And we need to determine whether or not that is included as part of the Bill that the ministers are going to accept responsibility for themselves and their departments, and that somehow they're not simply trying to avoid accepting the responsibilities of the actions they carry out on behalf of the Crown.

Therefore I move adjourned debate, Mr. Speaker.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 63 — The Legal Aid Amendment Act, 2000

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of The Legal Aid Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission provides, as you know, legal services for criminal and family-run matters to people who are financially unable to secure those services from their own resources.

The current Legal Aid Act was proclaimed in 1983 and was last amended in 1989. The amendments being introduced today will help the commission to better address the evolving challenges and complexities of a changing legal aid plan — a plan that is an integral part of the justice system in this province.

Mr. Speaker, The Legal Aid Act currently includes the provision stating that the Legal Aid Commission's clients may choose any lawyer in Saskatchewan to represent them if they are charged with a Criminal Code offence that's punishable by life imprisonment — in other words, Mr. Speaker, in murder cases.

In the last . . . in the past, the federal government made this one of the conditions of their cost-sharing agreements. This condition has now been removed. As a result, the provision is to be removed from The Legal Aid Act.

Members, Mr. Speaker, will be interested to know that the reason the federal government changed the cost-sharing agreement was to provide provinces more flexibility to set their own policies respecting the types of cases where choice of counsel will be provided. The provision in the Act is deleted so that the lower . . . the Legal Aid Commission can, by policy, determine when the use of outside counsel is appropriate.

I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of other serious offences where no choice is provided, and it can be argued that providing choice only for murder draws an artificial line.

It should also be noted that without the proposed change, the costs associated with providing choice in all murder cases will continue to rise, resulting in less Legal Aid funding being available for family law matters.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the members that defence counsel have agreed to work with the commission in developing a new policy respecting the use of outside counsel.

Mr. Speaker, the role of Legal Aid and the role of the legal system itself in Saskatchewan continues to evolve as the province grows. The commission has grown and now employs 132 staff located in 15 offices throughout the province, and over 22,000 clients were served last year.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, the practice of law is becoming increasingly complex with restorative justice issues, sense — excuse me — sentencing circles, video and audio tape disclosure, Charter of Rights and Freedoms issues, conditional sentences, alternative dispute resolutions procedures, and so on.

The Legal Aid Commission must continue to evolve to meet these increasingly complex challenges.

Last fall, Mr. Speaker, a Saskatoon-based management consultant prepared a strategic needs assessment for the Legal Aid Commission. The report stated that, I quote:

In comparison to other provinces, Saskatchewan is generally receiving good value for the money spent on legal aid.

The key recommendations of this report, Mr. Speaker, known as the Rosten report, included the following: increased staffing, increase in the tariff to pay private lawyers, increased use of technology, implementation of a control and measurement system, and implementation of a quality control system.

Mr. Speaker, the report recognized that the organization has reached a level of complexity that requires administrative adjustments. To address the commission's growth, Mr. Speaker, the Bill proposes to separate the offices of chairperson and chief executive officer, and clearly the size and administrative challenges of this commission justifies a separation of the offices which will allow the chief executive officer to concentrate more fully on administration. This places the roles more in line with other public and private organizations.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also proposes a number of administrative and housekeeping changes. For example, gender neutral languages adopted, the pension provisions are amended to reflect the current pension arrangements for commission employees, the ability of the commission to ask a client to contribute to the cost of his or her legal services extended . . . is extended to one year after the legal matter ends.

And, Mr. Speaker, the federal government representative on the commission is removed at the request of the federal government to ensure a continuing dialogue amongst the jurisdictions of permanent working group on legal aid has been established and meets regularly. And it's composed of representatives from all legal aid plans in Canada, all departments of Justice, and, Mr. Speaker, the federal Department of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, these modifications to the Act will ensure that the Legal Aid system in Saskatchewan can continue to serve its clients efficiently and effectively, and that the people of Saskatchewan will continue to receive good value for the money spent on legal aid.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of an Act to amend The Legal Aid Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is of interest to us and the changes that is presented in Bill No. 63 here regarding Legal Aid, especially since there hasn't been any changes since 1989. So some of the changes I think are probably welcome.

We do have some concerns on some of them though, however, when you start talking about giving choice of lawyers and restricting the choice of lawyers through Legal Aid for a

particular client depending on their financial background. And I think we've had a number of cases in our province over the near future . . . recent future, that has really raised concerns in that area where whether the proper counsel was offered to people that were going through the court system. And it seems to be in the long-term, if proper counsel wasn't offered and proper defence wasn't put forward, that when things get turned around years down the road that it ends up costing our province just a whole lot more than it ever would have if we would have allowed proper counsel in the first place.

So there are some concerns with that area. And it seems like the Legal Aid issue comes up really quite often down to the lack of funding and whether there's enough money in there to provide certain clients with the legal aid that they need.

I think the other area that we have some concern of is when they talk about separating the chairperson and the CEO (chief executive officer) and separating it so one is more administrative compared to the other side. We have some concerns as to does that increase the staffing requirements because you're separating it? Will we have twice as many people employed? And what we then tend to do is take it away from the front-line services — that we so often seen done by the government; it's taken away from the front-line services, the lawyers that are actually defending the clients, and put in more into administration to supply two offices the proper framework that they need to operate properly.

So those issues are of concern to us on this side, and we'll be checking into them more as the time goes on. So right now I'd like to adjourn debate on this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

**Bill No. 54 — The Vehicle Administration
Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)**

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2). The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2) deals with the licensing and registration of motor vehicles and their operators. The first amendments are part of the government initiative to get tough on drinking and driving while also ensuring fairness for all Saskatchewan motorists.

Mr. Speaker, immediate licence suspensions have proven to be the most effective means of deterring drinking and driving. The first proposed amendment will implement a mandatory 90-day licence suspension for those individuals charged with operating a vehicle with a blood alcohol level over .08 and for individuals who refuse to provide a breath sample.

This new 90-day licence suspension will begin seven days following a charge. This pre-conviction suspension will ensure that the penalty for drinking and driving follows immediately upon the act. The amendment eliminates the opportunity for a driver charged with drinking and driving to delay a court proceeding, thus delaying the consequence of conviction. Strengthening the legislation regarding licence suspensions in this way provides a clear message to the public that drinking and driving is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation will also be fair and balanced. The amendment will provide an avenue of appeal to the Highway Traffic Board for those whose licences have been suspended after being charged with driving with a blood alcohol level over .08 or refusing to provide a breath sample.

The next amendment will bring Saskatchewan into line with federal drinking and driving legislation. On June 17, 1999, Criminal Code amendments received Royal Assent. This recent federal legislation increased the minimum mandatory suspension periods for individuals convicted of drinking and driving offences. For first-time offenders, the minimum sentence was set at one year. The federal legislation however allows for this minimum sentence to be reduced to three months if the first-time offender participates in an ignition interlock program.

An ignition interlock is a blood alcohol measuring device that attaches to a vehicle's ignition. Before the vehicle will start, the driver must pass the blood alcohol level test by blowing into the device. The program has already been implemented in Quebec, Alberta, Ontario, and the Yukon and has proven to be an effective way to reduce the numbers of repeat drinking and driving offenders, Mr. Speaker.

This government supports initiatives that work to reduce drinking and driving in the province. Adopting the ignition interlock program in Saskatchewan will help to meet that goal.

Another initiative to reduce the incidence of impaired driving is to target young drivers by implementing a zero tolerance policy for new drivers who drink and drive.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of new drivers, about 80 per cent, are under the legal drinking age of 19. Sixteen- to twenty-year-olds make up a tenth of the driving population, but are involved in over a quarter of the drinking and driving accidents in the province.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that new drivers who consume even a small amount of alcohol are at a high risk of being involved in an accident. Currently a 30-day administrative suspension is imposed on a new driver if found operating a motor vehicle with a blood alcohol reading of .04 or greater and a subsequent offence brings a 60-day suspension.

The proposed amendment would enable SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) to suspend a new driver if he or she has consumed any amount of alcohol before driving. This zero tolerance policy would mean a 30-day suspension for a first offence and 60 days for a subsequent offence.

The second component of the young driver strategy is the graduated licensing program. In 1996 a probationary driver program was introduced to monitor the driving record of new drivers. This program has not been successful in reducing the high accident rate or the traffic conviction rate of new or young drivers.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, SGI is proposing a graduated licensing program to replace existing programs for new drivers. A graduated licensing program phases in on-road driving allowing inexperienced drivers to gain experience under

low-risk conditions.

For example, Mr. Speaker, newly licensed drivers must abide by conditions such as zero blood alcohol content and restricted nighttime driving. These restrictions are lifted as experience is gained.

Mr. Speaker, British Columbia, Ontario, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec have all introduced graduated licensing programs. Alberta and the Yukon are currently developing such programs.

SGI anticipates that graduated licensing would reduce accidents and injuries involving new drivers by 10 to 20 per cent in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendment provides the necessary legislative authority to develop and implement a graduated licence program in Saskatchewan.

Another issue with implications for all Saskatchewan drivers is photo identification. SGI has had an optional photo identification program in place since 1990. Approximately 55 per cent of Saskatchewan drivers have purchased a voluntary photo identification card to accompany their driver's licence.

Mandatory photo licensing is in place in most Canadian and US (United States) jurisdictions. New Brunswick is the only province with a voluntary photo ID (identification) program like Saskatchewan's.

The proposed amendment would implement mandatory photo ID requiring all Saskatchewan drivers to have photo identification by June 1, 2003. The introduction of mandatory photo identification addresses concerns about fraud and underage drinking that have been raised by the Liquor and Gaming Authority as well as law enforcement agencies around the province.

The next amendments concern driver testing and training. As you're aware, Mr. Speaker, SGI is responsible for the regulation of driver training schools and driver instructors. These amendments will aid SGI in ensuring appropriate standards are being met. Proposed amendments will permit minimum standards for driver instructors to be set out in regulation, and allow SGI greater authority to revoke a driver school certificate or a driver instructor certificate.

Currently SGI can only suspend or revoke a driver training school certificate or a driver instructor certificate in cases where the individual or company is in violation of the Criminal Code, or has committed an offence under either The Highway Traffic Act or this Act.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, school boards or members of the public hesitate to issue a complaint or initiate a criminal charge against a driving school or driving instructor, even when there is evidence of wrongdoing. This means that SGI must hold off on a potential problem until the certificate of the school or instructor is up for renewal. This is not appropriate, Mr. Speaker, and has implications for public safety.

The amendment enables SGI to revoke a driver school or driver instructor certificate when appropriate. For example, Mr. Speaker, after warnings that performance standards or safety

requirements are not being met.

Another amendment deals with a public safety issue, the roadworthiness of vehicles driven on Saskatchewan roads. Under current legislation, Mr. Speaker, SGI is obligated to register vehicles even if they have been declared non-repairable by another province. The proposed amendment will give SGI the right to refuse to register vehicles deemed ineligible for registration in another jurisdiction.

The next amendments outline new licensing requirements for taxis and buses. The first amendment will require that bus operators obtain authorization from the city or municipality where they plan to operate before SGI will license them. Similarly, bus companies will have to obtain authorization from the city or municipality they plan to operate in before SGI will register them. These changes will create the same licensing requirements for bus companies as for taxi companies in Saskatchewan.

The next amendment will remove the requirement to file a certificate of good moral character before a taxi company can register a vehicle. SGI believes that it is the taxi company's obligation to ensure that they hire safe drivers. We know, Mr. Speaker, that many taxi operators already use character checks on their drivers.

The final change with respect to taxis and buses deals with liability coverage. Currently, taxis and buses must carry a liability insurance policy in the amount of \$10,000 to \$75,000 in addition to their plate insurance. Mr. Speaker, this amount is simply out of date. The proposed amendment will require both taxis and buses to obtain liability insurance in the amount of \$1 million.

The final amendments are concerned with driver assessment. Mr. Speaker, if SGI becomes aware of a possible medical or skill problem, drivers are requested to undergo a driver assessment. If the individual fails the assessment, his or her licence must be suspended. SGI does not have the option to downgrade the licence to a lower class without further testing that may be costly and inconvenient to the driver. This amendment allows SGI to issue the appropriate licence where it is warranted, eliminating unnecessary testing and red tape.

The second proposed amendment also deals with the medical testing of drivers. In 1996, Mr. Speaker, legislation was passed that requires SGI to pay for a driver to obtain medical information if SGI required that the driver undergo a medical as a result of safety concerns.

To date, however, the deficit in the Auto Fund has prevented SGI from paying for medicals. Mr. Speaker, the proposed change removes the obligation to pay for all medical reports and will allow SGI to target payments to those individuals most in need of financial assistance.

The final amendment, Mr. Speaker, deals with SGI's ability to exempt individuals from the strict interpretation of this legislation, where it is determined that not doing so would create an undue hardship and would be contrary to the public interest.

SGI and the provincial government understand that there are instances where the strict application of legislation creates a hardship for Saskatchewan residents. In the past, SGI has encountered situations where concerns for customer service or undue hardship to individuals have required SGI to act contrary to legislation. For example, SGI will occasionally issue a farm plate to individuals who do not strictly meet the criteria but can be considered to be legitimately farming.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, SGI will review an individual case before denying coverage where a policy has expired, and in some special cases new arrangements are made.

The proposed amendment will permit SGI to exempt an individual from meeting the strict requirements of the legislation if it is determined that it would create an undue hardship and would not be contrary to public interest to allow the exemption.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my outline of the amendments set out in this Act. I now move second reading of An Act to amend the Vehicle Administration Act (No. 2).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's with pleasure that I rise to make some comments in second reading debate on Bill 54, The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2).

Mr. Speaker, many of the issues that the minister outlined in some detail are issues and proposals that we, in the official opposition, can be very supportive of. Certainly looking at one — photo ID — we've been talking about the necessity for a proper photo ID system in this province for some time. And as I understood the minister to say that this would be a compulsory system, that that is going to have implications far more ranging than the specific licensing for driver purposes. But also have implications in terms of the right or the way of substantiating proper age for other issues like smoking and entrance to licensed beverage rooms, etc. So certainly the idea of that proposal is something that we've been talking about for a great deal of time and we understand that the technology and the security systems that are now available, in order to make sure that these IDs can't be forged, etc., are properly in place.

Mr. Speaker, as well it raises . . . this legislation raises other issues, as the minister outlined, talking about things like training standards and things of that nature and the ability for SGI to actually do proper evaluations of driver training schools and academies and making sure that the level of training that's occurring for our new drivers in this province is of the highest level.

Mr. Speaker, as well it addresses issues of the roadworthiness of vehicles. And I can understand why that's an important issue because the condition of Saskatchewan highways make almost any vehicle suspect as to its roadworthiness after just very few trips on the highways.

So I can see why you're very, very concerned. There's not that many of us that can afford Hummers in order to negotiate the kind of obstacles that the highway system provides. And so we

certainly hope that the roadworthiness testing is going to be done in a practical way, but probably should be focusing more on filling the potholes than assessing the damage that they're doing to our vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, as well they talk about taxis and buses and updating the legislation in that regard and putting more of the licensing responsibilities to the municipal jurisdictions. I would assume that buses that don't operate strictly in one municipal jurisdiction, that indeed are interjurisdictional, interprovincial, and international buses, that there would be a special licensing system for them. And indeed the requirement of liability insurance to be reviewed is appropriate.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, as well I understand that this legislation also deals with the issue of driver assessment. As we all well know, there's a number of dimensions to this. There's people that of course end up with medical conditions that require temporary reassessment of the appropriate licence level in regard to their health condition, if it's visual or other health conditions. And there also are other circumstances that can play into this situation, and certainly for many people as they mature in age that their skill levels may diminish to some extent.

And it really is bothersome for some people to face the prospect of sort of an all or nothing system, where either you have a licence that gives you all the privileges of driving anywhere or you have nothing. In many instances, a diminished or more restricted license may be appropriate to still allow people to have the flexibility of getting around their community and do it in a safe way, but may not be appropriate for that individual to move from their local community and drive in a large metropolis like Regina or Saskatoon or on the highways of this province indeed, Mr. Speaker, but they are quite capable of getting themselves to their place of residence, get to town to shop, get the mail, or seek medical attention. So I think that if that's the direction that this legislation is moving in, that is well . . . we think there is some merit that regard.

And overall I think that in terms of creating the opportunity to allow for SGI, under this legislation, to create exemptions whereby it's demonstrated that strict interpretation of the legislation will result in severe hardship on an individual is worthwhile. However I think that it has to be used with a great deal of discretion because you don't want to end up creating legislation that sets out a framework for appropriate comments and behaviour and then you create an escape clause to make the original legislation virtually meaningless. And so I think that we would see merit in having exemption but we would certainly caution that it's used appropriately.

Mr. Speaker, this is a pretty significant Bill in terms of its impact on SGI and on the system of licensing and driving in the province. And we have initiated discussion with people that have concerns about these issues and others, and we are beginning to get feedback from them, and we look forward to their detailed comments as they do respond to our inquiries. And so, Mr. Speaker, at this time awaiting that further comment, I would move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNED DEBATES

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 1

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

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I rise this afternoon to speak on Bill No. 1, The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, which unfortunately I find is a bit of an oxymoron from this NDP government since farm financial stability has never been high on their priorities and certainly doesn't exist in today's day and age.

But, Mr. Speaker, I guess what we need to do here is try to take a look at a Bill that is very much not onside with the reality of what is happening in rural Saskatchewan. Instead what we have, Mr. Speaker, is a Bill that is going to expand the powers of government to seize farmers property, even down to such a minute detail as someone who doesn't renew their membership in the New Democratic Party.

Instead what we have here, Mr. Speaker, is a Bill that again attacks free enterprise, again attacks those people who rise out of bed every day in order to create wealth in this province. What we need, Mr. Speaker, is opportunities for primary producers in this province to have the initiative to . . . in order that new wealth can be created in this province.

One of the problems of course in Saskatchewan today and under this government is a great fear that they have that we must share wealth. And with that kind of an attitude, Mr. Speaker, people begin to accept that if we try to share wealth, that must mean that wealth is a limited commodity. Mr. Speaker, we know that to be a falsehood.

The reality of it is that every day the people who rise out of bed, who form the initiative to try to create new wealth in this province and in this country, new wealth can be created. And unfortunately we do not see that in any of these Bills that are being presented this spring, Mr. Speaker, and certainly not in Bill No. 1.

In fact this Bill just further expands for us the initiatives of this government to attack the farm economy, to find new ways to further detract from any initiative that producers might have to want to create wealth and instead just form associations is what they're talking about to try to just hang on.

Mr. Speaker, we need to try to find better ways of creating wealth in the agricultural sector rather than trying to bring forward legislation that allows producers just to hang on. In fact, Mr. Speaker, here is a Bill that speaks directly to one of the areas of agriculture that seems to be, in spite of this NDP government, doing very well.

Now one of the things that we need to remember as we debate this Bill over the next several weeks, Mr. Speaker, is that of the many areas of agriculture that create opportunity and create jobs

and create wealth in this province, the one that is most least regulated is the livestock — cattle livestock sector, Mr. Speaker.

And that is the one that is doing the best in today's economic situation and fortunately, in Saskatchewan, is actually bailing out to a large degree some of the decline in agricultural income. Now that's unfortunate that we have to use one sector to offset all the other sectors that are really struggling along.

But, Mr. Speaker, we need to take a look at where we've been in this province, as to how this government has decided to get to this point where they need to start attacking one more of the agricultural industries in this province.

Just a little history lesson that they always like to remind us of, and certainly one of the great disasters of this government, was the breaking of the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts that would have allowed grain producers in this province to participate on a level playing field with other jurisdictions in the world and in this country and allow them the opportunity to be successful as the livestock producers, cattle livestock producers, Mr. Speaker, are doing at this time.

But instead what this government really felt was necessary in their drive to balance budgets was to steal back that money that belonged to the farmers of this province, to the grain producers of this province, so that they could balance the budget for one year in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, taking back that kind of funds from Saskatchewan producers just so they could balance the budget for one year certainly did not create the economic stability that this province needed at that time from this government. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, it turned out to be such a disgrace that they're still trying to recover.

And in fact if we look back to, just in the very near past, to September 16 when the voters of rural Saskatchewan passed judgment very clearly on this government. We're hoping that some day they'll try to understand that the things they've done in the past, that their policies of the past — such as the breaking of the GRIP contracts, tearing them up, throwing them out the window — actually is starting to catch up to them now.

And in fact, we're looking very much forward, Mr. Speaker, to — in the near future — to the day when the Saskatchewan Party will be able to form the government and get all these ills of the decade, of the 1990s, corrected so that we can start to move on into the new millennium.

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course we can keep going back into the . . . even farther into the near future when at one time a previous Agriculture minister stood up, proudly declared that the agricultural crisis in Saskatchewan is over. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that Agriculture minister is no longer able to sit in the government benches opposite. In fact, he's not even allowed to join any of the government benches and at only . . . any given time is allowed to sit behind the bar, which is probably about as much as he ever should have done at any given time considering the disasters that have been heaped upon the farmers of Saskatchewan.

Now in fact when the minister at that time said that there was no agriculture crisis in this province, Mr. Speaker, what there was was a full-blown crisis that the NDP government of the day, and the NDP government that still exists today under a somewhat significantly reduced mandate and was only able to achieve through backroom finaglings, is that the agriculture crisis existed then. It existed last fall; it exists this spring; it still exists in the coming summer; and it will exist next fall. And what are we getting from this government? More rhetoric.

The fact of the matter is on many occasions the Premier of this province has stood up and proudly announced that the farmers of Saskatchewan do not pay tax in this province and therefore it's just too much of a burden on Saskatchewan taxpayers to be able to help them out in this terrible economic downturn.

Now I'm not sure where he got those figures from, Mr. Speaker, when it's a well-documented fact, Mr. Speaker, that the fertilizer industry alone, the final price that the farmer has to pay at the gate so he can have the fertilizer to produce the crops, produce the crops, Mr. Speaker, that feed the world — and that's what Saskatchewan does, Mr. Speaker, it helps to feed the world — that 33 per cent of the gross farm gate costs for fertilizer is tax.

Provincial tax, Mr. Speaker, in fact. So that is a terrible state that it's put farmers in. This huge tax burden on just one product that is a tax that farmers must pay every year and they pay it faithfully so that they make sure that they are carrying out their responsible duties to help feed the world.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are many areas of the farm economy that suffer the same fate for grain farmers and their input costs. One of the things that we've been trying to propose here with limited success — in fact the Minister of Finance has even admitted that he's not even willing to talk to his federal counterpart about it — was an initiative by the federal government to help reduce fuel costs throughout the country, should provinces wish to participate.

In fact, what we heard from the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker, was that this province is not willing to participate to help lower fuel costs — whether it's for the farmers at the farm gate in the putting in of crops or for any of the consumers in this province who are trying to feed their families on a daily basis, and are trying their darndest, Mr. Speaker, to create the wealth that is necessary to maintain our infrastructure.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the continued disrespect that this government continues to show for rural Saskatchewan is one of the most despicable acts that we've seen in a great long time here, whether it's in Canada or Saskatchewan or even in the world.

In fact their disrespect for rural Saskatchewan rose to such a level, Mr. Speaker, that last fall they called a provincial general election in the middle of harvest which is unheard of in the annals of Saskatchewan history, Mr. Speaker. It shows to us, Mr. Speaker, the level of respect, how much they actually care for those people who actually rise out of bed everyday just so that they can feed the world.

We here on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, the loyal

opposition, care about feeding the world, but the attitude of the provincial government, of the NDP government, is that feeding the world is of a low priority to them. And as we look through their budget, it was a very, very low priority.

And that's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because in the '50s the government of the day — and we don't need much of a history lesson in this province to know who was the government of the day at that time — commissioned a report as to the ability of this province to be able to produce economic wealth.

And that report stated, Mr. Speaker, that this province has the ability to sustain life on this planet for 800 million people, Mr. Speaker, 800 million people. That's a terrific amount of population on this earth that could be taken of by the generous wealth that we've so fortunately been given on this God's green earth.

But what has happened, Mr. Speaker, is that the government of the day and the government of the '70s and government of the '90s can certainly look back and say, well we know we can't have that, Mr. Speaker. What we need instead is to be able to preserve that for a rainy day.

(1515)

Well that maybe sounded like a pretty good political rhetoric in the 1950s, Mr. Speaker, but we're now moved into the new millennium. It's almost 50 years later. It's still raining. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a downpour in this province of economic depression.

And this government is simply carrying on what they've normally done through the last 60 years, bury their head in the sand and hope it will all go away, blame it on somebody else. It's always the federal government's fault, it's Europe's fault, it's the fault of the United States government. But it's never their fault that their policies and their initiatives or lack of initiatives have any detrimental effect upon the people of Saskatchewan and on the Saskatchewan farm economy and the farming community.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has tried to bring forward many initiatives on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan and the farm community. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's been clear out there, we've seen it in the headlines, that the Saskatchewan Party is driving the agenda of this province.

Now it seems rather odd that never has that happened before in the history of this province that the opposition starts to drive the agenda. As an example, Mr. Speaker, for quite some time up until last fall, the Saskatchewan Party was calling for a special debate in this House to deal with the farm economy. The provincial government of the day, the NDP government, said no, no, we don't need that; we know what we're doing; there's no crisis out there.

And then when they almost lost the election, they woke up and thought, oh well, just a minute here, maybe we should pay attention to what the people of Saskatchewan are actually saying out there — which was kind of a bit of a new phenomenon for the NDP Party to actually listen to somebody. They kind of preferred actually to sit up on their pedestals and

give out their wisdom of the day, which kind of varies from day to day, and tell people what it is that they want rather than listen to what the people of Saskatchewan actually need.

But fortunately for the farm community, to some small degree, Mr. Speaker, September 16 changed that a little bit. We called for a special sitting of the House, for the House to sit early last fall so that we could start to deal with the farm economy.

The government, they hedged and hedged and hedged, but there was so much pressure from the Saskatchewan Party and from the people of Saskatchewan they finally relented, which was not very common if you look back in the history of Saskatchewan, for an NDP government to have a fall sitting. So that it was a historic sitting in itself.

But what they did, Mr. Speaker, was even more historic, when we had a special debate, inviting 17 special interest groups to be able to come in here and expound to us very clearly and very enthusiastically the problems in the agricultural industry.

But what it also provided, Mr. Speaker, was the opportunity for the NDP government in December to hear for the first time that yes, there is a problem in rural Saskatchewan and there is a problem with the farm economy in Saskatchewan; that yes, the provincial government does have a lot of responsibility in this area.

So at our suggestion, and again, Mr. Speaker, to elucidate, it was a suggestion of the Saskatchewan Party, that we put together a coalition of interest groups that would be non-political, whose specific agenda was to go to Ottawa in order to attain financial assistance from the federal government for the Saskatchewan farm economy, who was in the doldrums because of the lack of attention from Ottawa — but also the lack of attention from the Saskatchewan government — that had some modest success in Ottawa. We have to give him credit for that.

But, Mr. Speaker, we also need to remind ourselves, and we do here on a regular basis and we certainly hear it in our constituencies, Mr. Speaker, that it was the Saskatchewan Party that drove the agenda. These were our ideas. And they are very proud of us and very pleased that we were able to at least attain some measure of satisfaction in dealing with the federal and the provincial government.

But, Mr. Speaker, the plight of the Saskatchewan farmer carries on. In fact what we know from the help that is being doled out on a minute basis, Mr. Speaker, is that all we're being able to do in the short term is help farmers get through the seeding season.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the farm economy in Saskatchewan will last more than the spring of the year 2000. We need to start thinking about spring of the year 2001, 2002, 2003. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are enthusiastically looking forward to those years because they know that there's going to be another provincial election and will be able to toss this government out on their ear and bring in a common sense government which we haven't had in this province for quite some time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we hear quite often that the members on the other side are always able to bring good news forward for us. We always look forward over on this side to good news Friday, and in fact they've even started to expand it into good news Thursday, which provide us with a great deal of humour, and certainly provide the press with a great deal of fodder in order to print up, where did these guys come up with all this ridiculous ideas and comments.

But anyway, what it does, Mr. Speaker, is it highlights the fact that this government has so little good news going on in Saskatchewan and in their party that they actually have to try to invent some of these ideas. When they start talking about 250 new part-time jobs in the city of Saskatoon, I'm not sure how this is going to help create financial stability for the families of Saskatoon when we've got part-time jobs.

What is needed, Mr. Speaker, is a government with ideas to create 250 full-time jobs and maybe even 2,500 full-time jobs or maybe even 25,000 full-time jobs that will keep the kids of Saskatchewan in our communities. Not having to buy them with minute bribes such as they've come up with in post-secondary education — give them a couple of hundred bucks if they'll stay in Saskatchewan.

Actually what is needed, Mr. Speaker, is long-term job security and a long-term economic plan for Saskatchewan. And we certainly do not see that in Bill No. 1, Mr. Speaker. In fact what we see is an opportunity for this government to further attack the farm communities of Saskatchewan and attack those producers who are bound and determined that they're going to fight their way through this NDP government.

Now one of the problems . . . I was looking at the Bill, Mr. Speaker, and was looking at section 54 where the government of the day over here, the NDP government — I know they like to call themselves the coalition government but they're certainly not much of a coalition, it's strictly the NDP government and the NDP policies — where if a group of producers through some fault that could arise through any given situation, from no fault of their own, would lose the opportunity to be able to have their loan guarantees carried on for any length of time.

In fact what this clause talks about, Mr. Speaker, that if one or two or three members of a producer association decide not to renew their membership in the NDP party, Mr. Speaker, they could have their loan guarantees removed. I wish, Mr. Speaker, that when they bring Bills like this forward that they would be clear that these Bills have more to do with economic stability of producer organizations and they have more to do with ensuring that government guaranteed loans were going to be secured.

And no, this clause does not speak about that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what it talks about is the opportunity for the government to carry out retribution on those organizations that may speak out against the government or even be so bold as to cancel their NDP party membership.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's even . . . this piece of legislation is even so bold to talk about having provincial supervisors that would have kind of an all-consuming power over the producer organizations that remind me of a draconian age that ended in

Europe in the late 1980s, in Eastern Europe. And now instead, what we see that happened there, that the people were able to overthrow that kind of a draconian government is starting to show up here in Saskatchewan. It's a tyranny that we really do not need in this province. In fact what we need is initiatives from a government that promotes economic development and not initiatives from a government that slow down and halt economic developments.

In fact what this . . . there's one clause here under section . . . new section 60 talks about having a provincial supervisor with such all-encompassing powers that he does not even need the authorities of courts in order to deal with delinquent loans or someone, heaven help us, Mr. Speaker, who should happen to cease and desist his membership in the NDP Party. This provincial supervisor can simply come onto property without the authority of the courts and remove the commodities that have been guaranteed by the provincial government.

But now, Mr. Speaker, because of some of the problems we have with this Bill and the fact that we need to debate it some more, and the fact that we'd like to see where this Bill . . . the intention of this government with all of these clauses are in here, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

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

Mr. Kowalsky: — A point of order before you take the vote, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Briefly state your point of order, please.

Mr. Kowalsky: — As I was listening to the member speak, he was drawing an allegation between the . . . between maintaining a membership in the NDP Party on the part of some individual who was dealing with crop insurance.

I was wondering if the member would clarify it for the record, Mr. Speaker; otherwise I'd have to wait till I see it in *Hansard*. But if the member would clarify it at the record, because I believe the allegation is very not well thought of and a very serious allegation.

The Speaker: — I would allow the hon. member to respond to the point of order.

Mr. Wiberg: — Mr. Speaker, I wasn't talking about the crop insurance. In fact this Bill has nothing to do with crop insurance. I'm not sure what the hon. member was even listening to or was even being able . . . participating in this debate at all. We are allowed to debate enthusiastically.

The Speaker: — Hon. members, I would appreciate the opportunity to review the record and come back to this House to deal with that particular point of order raised by the Government Whip.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 5

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Belanger that **Bill No. 5 — The Parks**

Amendment Act, 1999 be now read a second time.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in this Assembly to talk a bit about Bill No. 5, The Parks Amendment Act, 1999.

And I would like to point out to all members that in the province of Saskatchewan we are blessed with the most beautiful parks anywhere in this country. And being from the constituency of Shellbrook-Spiritwood, which is, I believe, home to the parks, the most beautiful parks in the province, the people around there are quite concerned as to what has come out of the legislation of late regarding the budget in regards to the parks, the increases in the park fees and whatever.

I know in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, it talks about the Buffalo Pound Provincial Park, the Good Spirit Provincial Park, and it only covers a few technical changes to the legal and description over the parks. The issue in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is concerning the designation of portions of land which is to do with all these parks, especially the Good Spirit Lake.

I just got a news release today; it's dated May 25 where it says, "the Saskatchewan provincial parks are expecting light to moderate camping activities". Well, Mr. Speaker, the parks are light due to somewhat of the weather, but it's not only the weather that's causing the light activity at the parks. The weather causes some of the problems but also the cost going to these parks has caused a great deal of concern.

(1530)

On the weekend past, which was a long weekend for most of us, I had the privilege of talking to some people in the good town of Spiritwood where I come from. And these people had licence plates from Alberta and they were all coming up to the Chitek Lake area to go fishing. In Saskatchewan, because we have a great abundance of lakes and beautiful provincial parks and regional parks as we do, there's a number of Albertans coming to this province to take in our parks.

Their concerns were valid. One of the reasons that . . . or one of the main concerns they had was that coming from Alberta through Lloydminster to Spiritwood, the highways were in such terrible conditions that they had many problems getting here with their boats, their campers, and their motorhomes.

Then when they get into Saskatchewan they have to deal with the high price of fuel, Mr. Speaker. As you know the price of fuel keeps going up and up and when you compare the fuel prices in Saskatchewan versus the fuel prices of Alberta, it is understandably why less and less people are going to be coming from areas in Manitoba and Alberta, coming to Saskatchewan because of the fuel costs.

Then when they get to Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, then they got to contend with the raising costs of provincial parks. All costs have gone up and this is going to be a debt load on all managers of the regional park system. They know it's going to be a concern. People are not going to come to camp in Saskatchewan at the regional parks because of the high costs and therefore it's going to be a detriment to Saskatchewan in that way.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, one of our great assets that the province of Saskatchewan has is tourism. And in Spiritwood and surrounding areas, Big River areas, and Shellbrook areas, we have an abundance of renewable resources sitting there. But if we can't get these people to these areas to take advantage of these areas, then it's going to hurt us. It's going to hurt business in all the communities around there and definitely will show up.

Mr. Speaker, I also had the privilege of talking to a person that came from Manitoba this weekend. And he came up to visit relatives in this area. His concerns also were as the ones from Alberta — the bad highways, the costs of gasoline, and the costs of getting into the parks is a detriment to his coming to Saskatchewan. And therefore he feels that he'll only make one trip this year coming to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite there are saying that we're giving him a hard time because of the extra costs. Well in the budget, Mr. Speaker, that was put forth here some time ago, it was amusing to listen to the Minister of Finance talk about the budget and how it's going to affect tourism and the parks in this area.

And then the minister from SERM comes up and adds all these extra costs, and these extra costs that keep coming up, popping up. And it is our job as the opposition party to stand up and find out where these extra costs are and bring them forth to the members.

The budget that was brought out some while ago, Mr. Speaker, was not a good budget for the parks association people — whether it be provincial parks or regional parks — and therefore it's going to hurt them.

Mr. Speaker, we have . . . however, we've had a great deal of concern expressed to us from people throughout the province and even outside the province, about the government's decision to jack up the fees on provincial parks.

I also have a report on the May 25, it just came out today, that the northern zone, management zone, opened today for fishing. And I can assure the members opposite that when the zone opened today that there will be few people travelling up there. As I've heard the Minister of Northern Affairs talk many times, the highways up to the North are terrible shape; and you couple that with the increasing cost of the parks, and it will show that the tourism people up there will suffer and that the people will not take the time out to go north where our fishing is excellent and the beauty of our land is so extravagant up that area.

The members opposite are saying that the parks were all full. I'd like to know where they get their information from because I was up at the parks this weekend and they were very empty. And it wasn't because of the cold weather, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I've been surprised by the number of phone calls to my office in Spiritwood, my constituency office, with concerns surrounding the parks — the massive fee increases to most services and charges connected to the provincial parks. Well there were sometimes like 45 separate fee increases imposed on this budget but it was never mentioned by the Minister of Environment. The NDP's policy of do-it-and-don't-tell policy is proven not only with the park

situation and SERM, it's with everything else.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to say that in the northern areas of the province where we have all our beautiful parks and stuff, that I really believe that the provincial park association will hopefully write letters to our government to tell them that they should really look at our park situation and the costs that have been increasing and increasing. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 38

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 38 — The Electronic Information and Documents Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm rising today in this Assembly to talk about Bill No. 38, The Electronic Information and Documents Act, 2000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in his opening remarks on this piece of legislation, the hon. Justice minister spoke about the speed of which new methods of communication are being developed and how quickly they're becoming an integral part of how we communicate.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are indeed in a brave new world; more people than ever before are getting on board the information superhighway. And hopefully, Mr. Speaker, that road will one day have less decay and potholes than the highways in this province are experiencing right now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an important Bill, one that still requires a lot of study. It needs to be put under a microscope because while it is a good step forward, the two main concerns our office is hearing about in this piece of legislation are privacy and security. These could be two major stumbling blocks and fundamental flaws with this proposal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members on this side, and I'm sure all of the members in the Assembly, want to make sure that this Bill protects our citizens who are on-line and making transactions. We want to make sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that when someone goes onto the Internet to take care of business they can do it with complete confidence that no one is lurking in the virtual bushes waiting to steal vital, personal information.

There has to be a way of verifying that. There has to be a way that when an electronic transaction is made, the transaction is totally, absolutely secure. We need that assurance of security and right now we don't know if it's there in this Bill and that's why it needs to be studied a little farther.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this could open up all avenues for fraud if these electronic transactions are not in total confidence between two parties. How easy could it be for someone to pry in and steal personal information? And that just opens a whole new

can of worms for everybody.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to read from an article in *Privacy Times*, it's entitled, and I quote: "Internet Privacy, the Oxymoron on Progress." The document states that:

A swirl of recent events only seems to confirm fears that consumers cannot trust their privacy to the Internet. There are many sources of the problem: data-hungry Internet firms bent on exploiting personal information, inattention to security and persistent technological glitches, and a growing number of hackers who are willing to take advantage of the situation.

The column goes on to state that:

An Internet chat room where carders buy and sell credit card numbers stolen from the Internet, the electronic scene resembles a combination of a commodity trader's floor and a street corner of drug dealers.

Typically a carder posts a claim that they have a fresh list of cards, and then to protect it, he posts a sample card, including a billing address, phone number, etc., into that open chat room. Then a feeding frenzy follows.

A participant reports that a sample card is maxed out within 10 minutes. The column also states that there is a great deal at stake. For VISA alone there was \$487,000,000 in fraudulent charges reported last year.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you can see there are a lot of room out there for people to steal information on the Internet. As I stated in the onset, this Bill is a good step forward, but from what we are hearing there are two fundamental flaws within it and that would be in the area of privacy and security. These are huge issues.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I still think that it needs to be studied a little farther. And I now move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

Bill No. 30

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Ms. Junor that **Bill No. 30 — The Vital Statistics Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to rise to comment briefly on the proposed legislation which, when you look at it, seems very straightforward and quite simplistic in that it would codify and redefine the definition of stillbirth to be in compliance or at least in similarity to definitions across the country.

It's important that this happens so that proper comparisons for statistical purposes can be maintained, and from that respect we certainly do not have any problem with this issue. We did, as is our purpose to, invite people to make comment on this and other legislation when it was presented to the House. And I have to report to the House that we did have a concern expressed coming from various pro-life organizations in the

province of Saskatchewan in regard to some of the specific wording in the clause.

Under the existing legislation or the existing definitions, there is a reference to a fetus as part of the definition. And in the new legislation that is removed and the new definition talks about a product of conception.

And the concern that was raised by pro-life associations is one that this tends to further dehumanize the whole issue of unborn fetuses. And they expressed concern that they saw no need to change the definition of a fetus to a product of conception, and that would still comply with the gram size weight definition of stillbirths that are required in order to have the uniformity with the legislation across the country for statistical comparisons.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we certainly have raised that as we have now and we will raise it as well in committee, but at this point we see no further reason to hold up this legislation and would be prepared to see it move to committee.

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

Bill No. 28

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Axworthy that **Bill No. 28 — The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Amendment Act, 2000** be now read a second time.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak on this Bill and to debate and to provide some comments on the changes to The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act, Bill No. 28.

It's interesting that this piece of legislation is coming forward so soon after the Child's Advocate has presented a report dealing with the many inadequacies in the Social Services department. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is a very scathing report, one that has caused great alarm throughout the province.

(1545)

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting also that the government would be bringing in amendments to the Act that allow the government to set salaries by order in council. This is presently not the way it is handled and we have grave concern about why this is happening.

The salary now is set independently of this Assembly. It's set in accordance with the salaries outlined for Provincial Court judges and now that it is being changed under this particular Act . . . this particular amendment, I should say, so that the salary is set by the Board of Internal Economy on which sits four government members and two members of the opposition.

We wonder why it was necessary, Mr. Speaker, or Deputy Speaker, to take place at this particular point in time. And why, if that was the proper manner in which the salaries should be set, was it not done this way in the initial legislation?

I guess it's really important to question the minister as to why

the initial legislation set out the salary levels to be tied to provincial court judges which is independent of this Assembly, and why now they have decided, his department has decided that this should be changed?

So we wonder why these changes are necessary and is there something happening that should be debated dealing with these particular issues in the House?

We also find it interesting, I guess we would say, that the Child's Advocate was being reappointed. We did not follow the process that was set out in The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act, and now they're bringing in legislation to change that Act. When we wished to have the process followed according to that, it was voted down by members opposite in this House.

Now they're also changing the Act to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council — which is really the Premier and his cabinet — to be able to remove the Child Advocate for various reasons. They can suspend or remove her from office for matters of incompetence.

Who makes the decision on whether the Child's Advocate or the Ombudsman are incompetent? Is it the Assembly or is it the Lieutenant Governor? Or is it the Premier? Or is it the cabinet? Who makes that determination?

When a report comes down that is scathing of the government, does that mean that the officer of this Assembly is carrying out their duties in the proper manner with proper competence, or does the Premier and cabinet judge it to be otherwise?

I think we are walking on very dangerous ground here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these particular amendments, especially when this piece of legislation would now allow the Premier and cabinet to make direction in this area.

We believe that these offices should be independent and be able to make investigations and report on whatever issues they feel are important and need to be investigated. There should be no control and no limit on this by cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen this government has been failing drastically in the area of protecting children in this province. Three thousand children, Mr. Speaker, in the foster care program, and we are having as many as 70 per cent failure to comply with the rules that the Social Services department has put in place.

There are a number of third parties that are also very interested in this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and how it is going to affect the working of their offices and in particular the children that they are responsible for in this province. There are also citizens at large that are interested in this new legislation. They feel caught and they are looking at the Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate to be their voice and they're wondering if they still will be independent and be able to give them genuine help.

We hope that when this Bill is in Committee of the Whole, that the minister will be able to explain exactly what his intentions are and what is the real goal of this government.

I think these are very, very serious matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that need to be seriously considered before this particular piece of legislation moves forward. And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund Energy and Mines Vote 23

The Chair: — Before I call the first subvote, I wish to remind committee members that this Energy and Mines was last here on May 5, and then before I call the first subvote, I'll invite the minister to re-introduce his officials.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To my right is Deputy Minister Ray Clayton; to my left is Bruce Wilson, who is the executive director of petroleum and natural gas; and immediately behind me is Donald Koop, who is the assistant deputy minister of finance and administration; beside him is George Patterson, who is the executive director of exploration and geological services; and just behind me as well is Lynn Jacobson, who is the director of corporate service.

Subvote (EM01)

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to welcome the departmental officials again. They were certainly a great help on May 5 when we last met in this forum, and I'm sure they will be again.

If I can proceed. When we last spoke on May 5, we had a discussion about the expanded PST (provincial sales tax), Mr. Minister, and its effects on your particular portfolio and the industries involved. Since that discussion, Mr. Minister, have you had contact with any companies about the PST exemption?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I can say that I've met with a number of oil and gas producing companies that are operating in the province of Saskatchewan, both here and in Calgary.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, our office still gets calls, letters, e-mails, faxes, about this PST expansion and how it will affect their industry. Many still don't understand how it will affect them.

What have you and your department done to alleviate this lack of communications that seems to be out there?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well firstly, Mr. Chair, I would certainly appreciate if the member would ask his caucus members to pass on inquiries to the Department of Finance, either to the minister's office or to the department directly. My office also has some information. They're certainly more than willing to pass on any inquiries that they have that they can't answer to us.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr.

Minister, we'll certainly do that. We assume that your department had received them before we had in fact. What kind of revenues will the expanded PST bring in from Energy and Mines? Or maybe the question should read, how much will the PST expansion affect the revenues within your portfolio? And has your department concluded how much more companies will be paying?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, it won't affect the revenue within our portfolio. That revenue would go to the Department of Finance through the normal remittance process.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers states that one of the problems they have in Saskatchewan is dealing with the bureaucracy involved in your administration. When we spoke last on this, you stated that CAPP (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers) is very, very satisfied with the access they have, and they go on to say that they wish Alberta was as accessible as Saskatchewan.

My question is, Mr. Minister, if that is true, why do oil and mining company vehicles in this province choose to operate on Alberta licence plates? If dealing with this government is so easy, why can't they negotiate some sort of a deal through you to make it easier to plate their vehicles in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I would certainly hope that the member's not arguing with CAPP's impression that the Department of Energy and Mines is easy to access, because I believe they are. We're a relatively small department. The officials within this department know the industry players well. They are professional people who have been working for this government for many decades, some of them for two and possibly three decades. I should have said many years because I certainly wouldn't want my officials to be feeding me bad information here, after a comment like that. But they are professional people who know the industry, who know the players, and they do a very good job on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

With respect to licensing out-of-province vehicles, that too is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Finance. But I can say to the member that vehicles that operate in Saskatchewan, there is a process where they remit a portion of the licence fee through the Department of Finance if they are an out-of-province vehicle operating in the province. We don't do that work; that's not under the purview of my department.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I'm curious about how that remittance system works and how it's policed. How do they keep track of the amount of time the vehicles operate in the province of Saskatchewan and how is that policed?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — That question would be best posed to the Minister of Finance under his estimates. Those are his issues and his initiatives.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, has this issue been raised to you and your department officials by energy, oil and gas, and mining companies?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I can certainly say that in areas along the border where there is cross-border activity, it has . . . you know, when local people see out-of-province vehicles on job sites, certainly there's curiosity raised by that.

With respect to the oil and gas companies raising it with me, no, I can't say it is. But I can say to the member opposite that we certainly encourage the resource sector developing companies to hire and employ Saskatchewan companies and Saskatchewan people. And I think that they do that when they can. And we do expect co-operation from them in that regard, and I believe for the most part they attempt to do that inasmuch as it's possible for them to.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I also point to an article in Wednesday, May 24 edition of *The Leader-Post* which makes my point. It states, "Government has to cut its royalties and red tape if it wants to see more mines . . ." This is from the president of the Saskatchewan Mining Association.

Mr. Minister, what is being done in this regard?

(1600)

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I can say that we have worked very closely with the resource sector over the last number of years. There are a number of initiatives that have taken place in the past and there will be some in the future. With respect to royalties, it's an ongoing situation where we're reviewing the royalty and taxation structure in the province.

We made in . . . I believe the budget before last, we made some announcements in terms of base metals and gold royalty on new production that dramatically decreases the cost for those. We have made some changes to the potash royalty structure. We've made some changes to the heavy oil royalty structure over the years. And certainly our goal is to ensure that Saskatchewan is competitive with respect to royalties and taxation.

You raised the issue of, I guess, red tape. And we too are working within the department to eliminate regulations wherever possible to bring together a process that will make it quicker to access information and to access licences to operate.

And I think what I'd like to do today is clarify what I believe the president of the SMA (Saskatchewan Mining Association) was referring to with respect to duplication of regulations. The Atomic Energy Control Board of Canada is involved in the uranium industry in that they are part of the process that monitors and that approves environmental activities in the development of a mine.

That is the only area in the mining sector in Saskatchewan where that happens. It doesn't happen in potash, it doesn't happen in base metals, and frankly this province . . . this government is of the opinion that it's unnecessary.

We have, in the Department of Energy and Mines, a group of men and women who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that mining activities take place in an environmentally friendly way. And we believe that this duplication is unnecessary and it's very costly to the uranium industry in

particular.

We have been working very closely with the industry in approaching Minister Goodale, who's responsible for the activities of the AECB (Atomic Energy Control Board), which is an arm's-length body from government, to bring our case to the federal government in terms of duplication and overlap in hopes that they will agree with us that the work of that federal administration is unnecessary.

We believe that there can be speedier environmental approval processes if done by the province of Saskatchewan, at the same time still ensuring that we are guaranteeing that we have the best environmental practices that are possible with respect to the development of that area of mining.

I think that we have some movement forward. It's been a long process. These discussions have been going on for a long time, but I do think we have the attention of the federal government in regards to duplication. And I'm very hopeful that we will be able to streamline that process, but at the same time ensuring that we do the appropriate environmental mitigation initiatives that surround the mining activity.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I certainly hope that you have the attention of the federal government and I wish you well in streamlining approval processes.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I'm wondering, does the department take any leadership role in coordinating with resource management, SERM, the approval process for oil and gas and mining enterprises?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, in answering the question, I would want to say that we have periodic meetings at a ministerial level but also at the department level. The Department of Energy and Mines does have certainly good access to environment and resource management. We have contact with industry on a regular basis, so we get feedback through that process that we pass on.

And as you will know, there are responsibilities of all the government departments. Certainly Energy and Mines is that of a regulatory and a licensing body. As well, it's our responsibility to ensure that we are maximizing the activity in the resource sector — both oil and gas, and mining.

On the other hand, SERM has a responsibility to ensure that the activities take place in an environmentally friendly way, that mitigation work is done when pipelines are laid to restore the area that has been disturbed. Those are all important things as part of the operations of the resource sector.

I think it's fair to say that the resource sector has been very responsive in changing practices that were maybe in place in the 1960s and the early 1970s that were not totally environmentally friendly and have certainly been working very close with my department and with SERM to improve those practices. And I think it's fair to say that they have a very good track record in the province.

There are, I think, times when companies will maybe not do their job. But we have . . . I think for the most part we can say

that the activities of the oil and gas sector are done in a very community responsive and positive way. And I really do appreciate that approach that the energy sector is taking.

You know, as I said, there are always areas where some activities will take place and the appropriate procedures are not done. When those are reported to my department, we ensure that the cleanups take place and the appropriate measures are taken.

But I would want to say for the most part we do get very good co-operation from industry. And we will continue to work with them and to share information between my department and the department of SERM because it's really important. I think good business in the 1990s and in this new millennium mean good environmental practices and I think industry fully understands that.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I'm wondering: has any effort been made to establish a sort of joint body composed of officials from your department and officials from SERM that could review these applications by the energy . . . or the oil and gas companies and the mining companies jointly so as to speed up the approval process?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Yes, Mr. Chairman, I think I'd like to give the member a bit of a report in terms of what is taking place right now.

The Department of Economic and Co-operative Development is chairing an initiative that brings together all of the different regulatory bodies within government — the SERM, Energy and Mines, Municipal Government — in terms of attempting to identify problems and identify areas where we can make our processes more user friendly.

I'm told by my deputy that there will be a meeting in June with industry to try and bring all of this together so that we can make our operations more efficient than they are now.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll certainly look forward to that.

It's very disconcerting for those of us who are interested in the development of our economy, and particularly the mining and the oil and gas industries, to hear the president of the Saskatchewan Mining Association making a comment like the one where he said, the industry is losing interest in Saskatchewan.

That newspaper report goes on to state that, "The industry is losing interest in development". It seems, Mr. Minister, that some things have to change. What steps are you taking to address this?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I too have read the article and I've spoken with the executive of the Saskatchewan Mining Association. As a matter of fact we met, I believe, it was yesterday afternoon. Was it yesterday afternoon . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The day before.

But anyway we met with their executive and we talked about some of these issues. And certainly there is some concern by

industry with respect to the level of royalties and taxation. It's an ongoing thing and it's a natural thing, quite honestly, because it's their responsibility to maximize their return for their shareholders.

On the other hand, it's my responsibility and the responsibility of my department to maximize the return to the people of Saskatchewan for their resources. And what the attempt is, what the attempt needs to be, is to find that balance; find a balance where the competitiveness of this province is on par with other jurisdictions that they have opportunity to invest in. And that's always the goal that we attempt to achieve. That's why I indicated earlier this afternoon that we, on a regular and on an ongoing basis, review royalties and taxation.

But I mean there are certainly other things that are impacting on industry at this point, whether it's the mining industry or whether it's the oil and gas industry. As you will know in some of the mineral development areas, there are some very, very low commodity prices. Uranium is an example. It's much lower than I think industry would like to see, and that's certainly impacts on the profitability. Base metals are not, anyone could argue, are certainly not at a record high level.

And the other component of this, I think, has been the activity within the equity markets. These initiatives whether it's oil and gas or whether it's mining development, take hundreds of millions of dollars and a lot of that capital has historically been raised through the equity markets which right now have been very much shying away from the resource sector as you will know.

All one has to do is read *The Globe and Mail*. Certainly one would want to read *The Globe and Mail* and maybe shy away from the Hollinger paper, but certainly, if one reads *The Globe and Mail* it becomes very clear that the equity markets are very much interested in high-tech stocks and have not been putting the kind of money that they historically have done into the resource sector, which is a problem. It's a problem for development of new mines; it's a problem for investment in terms of developing new oil and gas resources.

But I want to say, Mr. Chairman, in spite of that, this year in our province we will be opening three new mines — McClean Lake, McArthur River this weekend, Konuto in the Creighton area was opened just a few months ago. So I guess we have been doing our job to a degree.

It takes a long time to put these mines on stream. It takes one big, big, big, massive investment. So there are a number of things that create, I guess, investor climate. Royalties and taxation are just one component of that. And our commitment has been and will continue to be that we're going to work with industry to ensure that this province is competitive.

(1615)

We're the largest producer of uranium in the world and we're going to continue to be.

We're the largest producer of potash in the world and we're going to continue to be, but in order to do that we've got to be competitive and we've got to be out there having our companies

that are operating here in Saskatchewan able to access the markets and be in the price range that those commodities will sell.

So this is an ongoing process. I wouldn't want you to be overly concerned. I want to assure you that we're doing our job. This department has been doing its job and we will continue to make Saskatchewan competitive — whether it's oil, gas, or whether it's mining.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I am certainly appreciative of the new mines that are opening in Saskatchewan as well. I've had an opportunity to tour a couple of them and they're very impressive facilities. It's amazing the investment that's come to this province from the mining industry.

But while we're speaking of the royalty regime which we brought up a moment ago, this newspaper article that I referred to, it's a *Leader-Post* article on May 24 by Mr. Bruce Johnstone. And it goes on to state that Saskatchewan has one of the most onerous royalty regimes in the world. Last year you collected close to a billion dollars.

Are you going to make any changes to this in the foreseeable future to make Saskatchewan a more attractive place for the mining and the oil and gas industry to invest?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I think it was also in that same article, indicated through a comment that I made, that yes we will be reviewing the uranium and royalty taxation structure. That process is taking place. We have done, in the past, reviewed the potash. And that process will take place again in the future.

What I can guarantee the member opposite is, is that we will maximize the return for our shareholders as well. Those are the people of Saskatchewan. And I must say to the member opposite that I certainly don't apologize for the fact that almost a billion dollars in revenue from resources came into the provincial coffers. I would not apologize for that because that's a responsibility of all of us as legislators to ensure that we maximize the return for our investors who are the people of Saskatchewan.

But in order to do that, you have to have the developmental activity. So as I've said a little earlier, there needs to be a balance between the requirements of the investment community and those who invest in these companies so that they get a reasonable rate of return on their investment, and that we're competitive with other jurisdictions.

On the other hand, the billion dollars, as you will know, goes into the Consolidated Fund through my department and is spent on initiatives like roads and like highways, health care, and education. Part of that resource revenue gave us the ability to totally eliminate, this year, the tax on farm fuel.

And so, you can't have it one way where you don't generate the revenue; but on the other hand, you're able to reduce taxes in, you know, in specific areas. So, the goal is to try and find the balance to ensure that we have that investment and on the other hand, to ensure that we get a reasonable rate of return for the

people who vote for you and vote for me because that's why they send us here.

Mr. Stewart: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, and Mr. Minister, the last time that we spoke in this forum on May 5 I think, I believe you confirmed that Energy and Mines is going to digital mapping for mining claims for the entire province. Do I have that correct, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — That's correct, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, what are the perceived advantages of a digital mapping system over the drafted sort of mapping system that we've had previously?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, there are a number of reasons why one would prefer digital mapping. First of all, the cost is less onerous than the old system. We're able to deliver more detail. We're certainly able to update the information quicker than we could before.

And for the resource sector, whether it's mining or whether it's the oil and gas sector, information is very valuable. That is part of what, as well, this department does, is we store information whether it's core samples or whether it's information on . . . you know and through digital mapping.

But it's very much a priority of our department to ensure that we're right up to date in terms of the best technology that is available to ensure that we can attract industry investment through the knowledge and the database that we've put together within the department.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, do you know yet or do you have a projection yet of how much money will be saved this coming year through the digital mapping?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I'm told by my officials that the amount of saving is relatively small. It's not really a large amount that they'll be saving, and in this year probably nothing because of the production of all of the maps for this year.

But in terms of the dollar amounts, I don't think I can give you an exact amount. I mean I could throw a figure into the air of maybe 10 or \$15,000, but we're not talking millions is what I'm saying.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, how many people will be laid off in your department as a result of this change?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, none.

Mr. Stewart: — Well, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, what function will the drafting employees perform now?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I am told that the elimination of the drafting division would call for the reduction of four employees and that that was part of this budget initiative.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Will, Mr. Chair, or, Mr. Minister, will going to the digital mapping make any difference in the actual physical staking of claims in the North and the employment in . . .

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I'm told by my officials that there will be no difference.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, or, Mr. Minister, of the four drafting employees laid off in your department, how many have been placed in other similar type jobs within the government service?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I am told that the bumping process that's been negotiated with the collective agreement that they work under has not been concluded, but that that process is taking place.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, or, Mr. Minister, have early retirement packages been offered to any of the four?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, there is no early retirement package between executive government at this time.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, or, Mr. Minister, can you tell us how many new oil wells were drilled in Saskatchewan in 1999?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, and to the member, in 1999 there were 1,397 oil wells drilled, and in . . . I can give you '98, it was 1,064.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. How many gas wells in '99?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, in 1999 there were 1,021 gas wells drilled, and in 1998, there were 634 gas wells drilled; 1999 was an all-time record year with respect to the number of gas wells drilled.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, can you give us a number of . . . a total number of oil wells in production in 1999 and 1998?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the numbers are 18,979 for 1999, and for 1998, there were 17,319 producing wells.

That's for oil alone. Do you want gas as well? In 1999, the number of gas wells was 9,319, and in '98, it was 8,385.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, do you have a forecast for the coming year for both oil and gas, new oil wells and gas wells?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chair, we don't release forecasts, you know, in terms of the year coming. But our folks tell us just based on what is happening thus far this year, we think we can expect about 1,000 gas wells and around 2,000 oil wells.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr.

Minister, can you give us an indication of how many people were employed in Saskatchewan in the oil and gas industries in 1999. Excuse me, I mean in 1998.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chair, the numbers for both '98 and '99 are fairly similar. And I'm going to give you direct and indirect.

In 1999, it would have been about 15,900; in 1998, it would have been about 15,538, by these figures. So did you want the direct and indirect as well?

Mr. Stewart: — Please.

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Okay, for 1999 the direct employment was 6,360; indirect at 9,540; for '98, the direct employment was 6,215; and for '98, the indirect was 9,323. And that gives you the aggregate totals that I gave you a little earlier.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I assume this projection is based on applications for drilling. But can you tell . . . can you give us a firm number on how many drilling applications you received for the coming year?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to share with the member, and this is as of May 12, the total number of wells drilled cumulative to . . . I'm sorry, May 14, 1999, totalled 266. The cumulative number May 12, 2000 — 856.

The number of licences issued to May 14, 1999 is, I believe, 569, and to date the number of licences issued is 1,428.

So I think it gives you a pretty clear indication that the amount of activity is somewhat related to the price of oil.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, does your department do price projection research for gas and oil? And if so, do you have projections based on world supply and demand for natural gas for the year 2000?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, in the budget forecasts . . . And at that time, the best knowledge that we could compile would suggest an oil price of about \$20 WTI (West Texas Intermediate), and that's what we put into our estimates at that time. And natural gas was at about \$2.49 an mcf (million cubic feet).

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm tempted to say guess again. But in any event if we can back up a little bit, the previous question I asked you was how many applications for drilling. I wonder if you could tell us how many of those applications came from Saskatchewan-based oil and gas companies.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the department doesn't break them down by Saskatchewan based or Alberta based. But, you know, I think it's fair to say that the majority of them would be Alberta based, because that certainly is where

the vast majority of oil and gas companies in Western Canada are headquartered.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, would it be possible to have a breakdown prepared? We really believe it's an important thing to know, to sort of measure the direction that this industry is going in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm told by my officials that . . . I mean you can compile the numbers depending on I guess the amount of time and effort that you want to put to it. I think what is important is that we are able to show growth in this industry year over year.

I certainly understand what you are saying with respect to Saskatchewan-based companies and the desire to have businesses grow here in Saskatchewan. And we are certainly attempting to do that. And we certainly do encourage that.

But I think really what's important is the number of people that are working in this industry continues to grow here in Saskatchewan, the amount of production continues to grow, the exploration dollars are being spent, and the royalties and the taxation are available to Saskatchewan people for services in this province. So I guess anything is possible.

It's not really something we've focused on. I can say to you that we have a good working relationship with the Saskatchewan-based producers. They have open and very easy access to my department, but we don't separate the activities in terms of whether it's an Alberta-based or a Saskatchewan-based company.

But I mean it would just stand I think to reason, the fact that the nucleus of the oil and gas sector in Western Canada is Calgary. It's got the vast majority, that province has a vast majority of the reserve. They were developed certainly much sooner than we were here in Saskatchewan. And that's where a lot of these companies tended to headquarter. And a lot of the services they use have grown up around them and so there's a critical mass built.

Now I think there are some things that we need to encourage and will encourage, and that's Saskatchewan-based growth. But I think overall you will have to agree with me that the investment that has taken place in Saskatchewan, the number of jobs that have been created by industry, is a pretty impressive record.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I really do think this is an important figure to have. I don't think it should be too onerous to get the address off the applications and thereby achieve sort of a yardstick of which way the industry is going in this province.

I don't know if you have any further comment on that, Mr. Minister, but I believe that it's a very important thing to know.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I will say we'll put those numbers together as best we can. I want the member to know this is a small department and they're very busy because of the activity. And we can focus on ways to create wealth and

create job opportunities for Saskatchewan people, but we will certainly allocate some time within the department to put those numbers together for the member.

Mr. Stewart: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, does the Saskatchewan government have any plans to encourage increased investment in Saskatchewan in the oil and gas sector in the foreseeable . . .

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, I think that's what we've been talking about for the last little while. We want to and we plan to maintain competitiveness in this province with other jurisdictions. We plan to maintain and encourage easy access to information so that they can develop business plans that will allow them to be active here in Saskatchewan.

I've said that we plan to continue to be the largest producer of potash in the world and we will have the structures in place to allow that to happen. We're the largest producer of uranium in the world and we're going to have the structures in place to allow that to happen as well.

Mr. Stewart: — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. What are the government's latest projects as far as oil and gas reserves . . . or projections, I should say, as far as oil and gas reserves that we currently have in this province?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, the most up-to-date numbers that I have are as of December 31, 1998, and we have in reserve 1.108 billion barrels of oil and two thousand, six hundred trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. What were the revenues that the province took in in oil and gas royalties in '99; and projections for 2000, please?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Chairman, these are in the budget address, March 2000; they're on page 64. We haven't finalized the 1999-2000, but our forecast for natural gas are 83.7 million; for oil, 610.5 million.

So you've got 610.5, I guess it would be, million for oil, and 83.7 million for gas; and we're forecasting for 2000-2001, 447.4 million for oil and 66.5 million for natural gas.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

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